



By Elder
Quentin L. Cook

Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

How Merciful the Lord Has Been

The new multivolume history of the Church will help us keep our covenants by enlarging our memory of what the Savior has done for us.

For the first time in nearly a hundred years, a new multivolume history of the Church is being published under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Titled *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, this narrative history tells the true story of ordinary people who became Saints through the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 3:19). The first volume, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846*, is now complete and has been translated into 14 languages for distribution to many areas of the world.

Saints is the story of how God restored His everlasting covenant because of His love for His children. It shows how the Lord restored His gospel to provide hope and peace in times of tumult, trial, and suffering. It also shows how restored covenants lead to exaltation through Jesus Christ.

You might expect the story to begin with Joseph Smith, but *Saints* begins in 1815 with the explosion of a volcano in Indonesia, which caused widespread death,



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disease, and disruption. This beginning point was chosen in light of what the Lord revealed about how He restored covenants that bind us to the Savior and enable us to overcome all of life's problems:

"I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; . . .

"That mine everlasting covenant might be established" (D&C 1:17, 22).

From its opening scene to its worldwide distribution, *Saints* signals to God's children everywhere that it is the story of their covenant with God, who knows their hardships. Through His prophet, God renewed covenants that do not eliminate evil, sorrow, suffering, and separation at death but do promise healing through the Savior's Atonement, sanctify and endow our lives with transcendent meaning, and assure us that relationships we cherish here on earth can endure in eternity, "coupled with eternal glory" (see D&C 130:2).

The first eight chapters of *The Standard of Truth* have been published in issues of this magazine throughout the



year. This month's issue concludes the serialized chapters from *Saints*, but the story continues at **saints.lds.org**, in the Gospel Library app, and in print (order at **store.lds.org**). I invite you to continue reading it in any of these channels.

A Divine Pattern and Plan

Saints continues a divine pattern in which prophets, as part of their ministry, use the past to help us learn who we are and see God's purposes in our lives. In the scriptures, many prophets begin their teaching by recounting

stories of the Lord's mercy to their forefathers.¹ Moroni exhorted readers of the Book of Mormon to "remember how merciful the Lord hath been" throughout history "and ponder it in your hearts" (Moroni 10:3). Reflecting on God's goodness prepares us to receive the witness of the Spirit, which teaches us "of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13; see also Moroni 10:4–5).

Knowing that our Heavenly Parents planned for our ultimate happiness and exaltation provides us with perspective, gives us identity as beloved children of divine parents, and increases our confidence in the Lord, even in times of adversity. Remembering the Lord's goodness can also protect us against pride and the perils of prosperity. Mormon wrote about a time when the Nephites "began to grow exceedingly rich." But unlike other periods in the Book of Mormon when the people allowed pride and riches to bring their downfall, they followed a different path this time: "But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him." They kept their covenants and remained righteous because "they did remember how great things the Lord had done for them" (see Alma 62:48–50).

Saints teaches lessons like these and many more. It will help you see the Lord's hand in your life as you vicariously experience the trials of faith, the heartaches and joys, the revelations and resolve of imperfect people who loved the Lord and who felt His love.

As you read, you will discover new insight and meaning even in stories you have heard before. No scene in Church history is better known than Joseph Smith's First Vision, but *Saints* helps us better understand how Joseph struggled to reconcile what he felt in his heart with what he thought in his mind.

Joseph's heartfelt desire to feel the Savior's forgiveness had gone unfulfilled because he observed that none of the existing churches taught "the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament."² In his mind Joseph pondered which church was right or if they were all wrong. In his heart he desperately hoped that one of them was right so he could find the peace he sought. With his head and his heart at odds, Joseph discovered that he could ask of God. He went to the woods to pray. There he saw the Father and the Son, who forgave him and resolved his dilemma in a way he had never imagined.³



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Joseph, his family, and the many other people who embraced the Lord's restored covenant wanted to feel God's love for them, learn how they could draw closer to Him, and heal relationships with loved ones. *Saints* tells their stories.

Trusting the Lord during Trials

Volume 1 of *Saints* includes the heart-wrenching story of Amanda Barnes Smith and her family, who obeyed the Lord's commandments and were doing His will.⁴ Amanda's husband and one of her sons were brutally killed along with 15 other Latter-day Saints camped at a small settlement on Shoal Creek in Missouri. The Lord sustained Amanda through the awful experience, answered her prayers, gave her courage, and enabled her to heal her severely wounded son.⁵

Saints shows how Amanda learned to trust in the Lord through extreme adversity. It also tells what Joseph Smith learned about God's goodness even in times of suffering. It shows that knowing the dealings of the Lord gives us eternal perspective, helps us see things as they really are and will be, and helps us exercise faith that the Lord will see us through hard times.

When the Prophet Joseph learned what had happened to Amanda's family and others on Shoal Creek, he felt he



would rather go to prison or be killed than let the Saints be slaughtered. The next day he attempted to negotiate a peaceful solution with the Missouri militia, which was poised to attack the Saints' main settlement of Far West. Instead, Joseph was captured and held as a prisoner.

Nearly five months later, Joseph remained in custody, confined in a cold, cramped underground cell in Liberty, Missouri. He wondered where God was hiding and how long He could stand to listen to the cries of widows and orphans. He prayed, "O Lord, how long shall they suffer

these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened toward them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion?" (D&C 121:3).

Saints teaches us that adversity is not evidence of the Lord's disfavor, nor a withdrawal of His blessings. Opposition is part of God's plan to refine us and prepare us for an eternal, celestial destiny (see 2 Nephi 2:11). Joseph learned that the Savior's infinite suffering enables Him to succor us when we suffer and eventually to exalt us (see Alma 7:11–13). In answer to Joseph's anguished cry, the Lord listed all kinds of challenges before concluding:

"If the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

"The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:7–8).

Experiencing *these things* ourselves can endow us with Christlike empathy for those who are afflicted. "My heart will always be more tender after this than ever it was before," Joseph realized while in jail. He wished he could be with the Saints to comfort and console them. "I never could have felt as I now do," he explained, "if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered."⁶

One reason the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles commissioned and approved *Saints* is that it can help each of us experience *these things* through the stories of others. We can learn from Amanda that even when God sees fit in His infinite wisdom not to prevent evil or suffering, He loves us and He is mindful of us. He hears our prayers and is merciful and kind.

Restored Temple Blessings

Nowhere is that mercy and kindness shown to us better than in the temple. At its heart, *Saints* is the story of restored temple blessings. The first volume ends as thousands of Latter-day Saints receive sacred ordinances in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846. The second volume will culminate in the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple and the Saints beginning to receive ordinances there in 1893. The third volume will

conclude with European Saints beginning to gather to the temple in Switzerland in 1955. The fourth volume will bring the story up to the present, when temples dot the earth and Saints all around the globe receive the ordinances of exaltation, as the prophets envisioned long ago.

In the Lord's house we make covenants and are endowed with the power to overcome the effects of the Fall, including evil and suffering in this world. We receive protection and ultimately power to come forth in the Resurrection, sealed to loved ones forever.

Saints will help us keep covenants by enlarging our memories in sacramental ways. It will help us to always remember what the Savior has done for us. Without records of God's dealings in the past, we could not "remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men" (Moroni 10:3). For these reasons we are indebted to the Lord and to the Saints who recorded their experiences of His love for them. The Lord commanded Joseph Smith to record his experiences (see D&C 21:1). He commanded a Church historian working under Joseph's direction to "keep the church record and history continually" (D&C 47:3). He commanded that the history include "all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations" (D&C 69:8).

With these revelations and the covenant promise to always remember the Savior in mind, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles began planning *Saints* 10 years ago. Now we encourage you to read it, trusting that it will assist you in understanding God's plan, seeing how merciful the Lord has been, enduring faithfully in good times and bad, gaining Christlike empathy for others, and keeping the covenants leading you to exaltation. ■

NOTES

1. Examples include Nephi (1 Nephi 17:23–43), King Benjamin (Mosiah 1), Limhi (Mosiah 7), an angel of the Lord to Alma (Mosiah 27), Alma (Alma 9:10), Mormon (Mormon 3:17–22), and Moses (Exodus 13:3).
2. Joseph Smith, in "History, circa Summer 1832," 2, josephsmithpapers.org.
3. See "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," 3, josephsmithpapers.org.
4. See "Revelation, 12 January 1838–C," [1], josephsmithpapers.org.
5. See *Saints*, volume 1, chapter 30, "Fight Like Angels."
6. "Letter to Presendia Huntington Buell, 15 March 1839," [1], josephsmithpapers.org.