



*Reading the scriptures led young Joseph Smith to inquire of the Lord about which church was right.*

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# The First Vision

## **The Need for a Restoration**

After the death of Jesus' Apostles, the power of the priesthood and many of the truths of the gospel were taken from the earth, beginning a long period of spiritual darkness called the great Apostasy. The prophet Amos had prophetically foreseen this loss and pronounced that the time would come when there would be "a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). During the long centuries of the Apostasy, many honest men and women sought the fulness of gospel truth but were unable to find it. Clergymen of many faiths preached differing messages and called on men and women to join with them. Although most were honest in their intent, none had the fulness of the truth or the authority of God.

However, the Lord in his mercy had promised that his gospel and priesthood power would one day be restored to the earth, never to be taken away again. As the nineteenth century dawned, his promise was about to be fulfilled and the long night of apostasy was about to end.

## **The Courage of Young Joseph Smith**

In the early 1800s, the family of Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith lived in Lebanon, New Hampshire, in the United States of America. They were humble, obscure people who earned a meager living by their hard labor. Their fifth child, Joseph Jr., was seven years old when he survived a typhoid epidemic that caused more than 3,000 deaths in the New England area. As he was recovering, a severe infection developed in the marrow of the

bone in his left leg, and the almost unbearable pain lasted for more than three weeks.

The local surgeon decided that the leg would have to be amputated, but at the insistence of Joseph's mother, another doctor was sent for. Nathan Smith, a physician at nearby Dartmouth College, said that he would try to save the leg using a relatively new and extremely painful procedure to remove part of the bone. The doctor brought cords to bind the boy, but Joseph objected, saying that he would bear the operation without them. He also refused brandy, the only form of anesthetic available to him, and asked only that his father hold him in his arms during the operation.

Joseph endured the operation with great courage, and Doctor Smith, one of the most knowledgeable physicians in the country, was able to save Joseph's leg. Joseph suffered for a long time before his leg healed and he could walk without pain. After Joseph's operation, the Smith family moved to Norwich, Vermont, where they suffered three successive years of crop failure, and then moved to Palmyra, New York.

### **The First Vision**

As a young man, Joseph Smith assisted his family in clearing land, hauling rocks, and performing a multitude of other duties. His mother, Lucy, reported that the boy Joseph was given to serious reflection and often thought about the welfare of his immortal soul. He was especially concerned about which of all the churches proselyting in the Palmyra area was right. As he explained in his own words:

"During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a

person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. . . .

“While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

“Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.

“At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God” (Joseph Smith—History 1:8, 11–13).

On a beautiful spring morning in 1820, alone in a grove of trees near his home, Joseph Smith knelt down and began to offer up the desires of his heart to God, asking for guidance. He described what then happened:

“Immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction” (JS—H 1:15).

The adversary of all righteousness knew that Joseph had a great work to do and attempted to destroy him, but Joseph, exerting all his powers, called upon God and was immediately delivered:

“At this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

“It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (JS—H 1:16–17).

As soon as Joseph gained possession of himself, he asked the Lord which of all the religious sects was right and which he should join. The Lord answered that he must join “none of them, for they were all wrong” and “all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.” He said that they had a “form of godliness,” but they denied “the power thereof” (JS—H 1:19). He also told Joseph many more things.

After the vision ended, Joseph found that he was lying on his back, still looking into heaven. He gradually recovered his strength and returned home.

When the sun rose on that morning in 1820, Joseph Smith could scarcely have imagined that with the coming of twilight, a prophet would once more walk the earth. He, an obscure boy living in western New York, had been chosen by God to perform the marvelous work and wonder of restoring the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ to the earth. He had seen two divine personages and was now uniquely able to testify to the true nature of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. That morning was truly the dawning of a brighter day—light had flooded a grove of trees, and God the Father and Jesus Christ had called a 14-year-old boy to be their prophet.