

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

How choice a seer!

From 1820 on, Joseph Smith was steadily attacked in a pattern of accusations—followed by eventual vindications. The pattern continues.

Just as prophesied, fools deride him, hell rages against him, and his name is “both good and evil spoken of” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). This swirl needlessly preoccupies a few who seem to prefer chewing on old bones in the outer courtyard instead of coming inside to the resplendent, revelatory banquet, thus diverting them from giving due attention to Joseph’s mission as “a choice seer” (see 2 Nephi 3:6–7).

As Ammon’s experience taught, a seer has the power to translate ancient records, and “a seer is greater than a prophet.” But, said Ammon, “a seer is . . . a prophet also” (see Mosiah 8:11–16). Thus called, Joseph has become “a great benefit to his fellow beings” (Mosiah 8:18).

The “choice” translator brought forth—“by the gift and power of God” (D&C 135:3)—the Book of Mormon, something tangible and verifiable. For all who heed it, the Book of Mormon is like the flinging open of long-closed doors on what was assumed to be a complete canon of scripture.

Noted on the very title page is the book’s special role in “convincing” mortals “that Jesus is the Christ” (see also 2 Nephi 25:18). In a day of disbelief and equivocation regarding this preeminent fact, this “convincing” effect is so needed! How sharp-edged that promise!

The Book of Mormon will be “read upon the housetops” (2 Nephi 27:11). Even if neglected, it will constitute a lingering invitation for “as long as the earth shall stand” (2 Nephi 25:22).

No wonder “the ends of the earth shall inquire after [Joseph’s] name” (D&C

122:1). Reassuring prophecies further declare that Joseph’s enemies “shall be confounded” and that the Prophet’s people will not be “turned against [him] by the testimony of traitors” (see 2 Nephi 3:14; D&C 122:3).

As President Faust reminded us yesterday, of his own imperfections, Joseph said, “I never told you I was perfect—but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught” (Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* [1980], 369).

Abundant and stunning revelations

Ironically, young Joseph Smith went into the grove merely wanting to know which church to join—not seeking to be called as a seer, revelator, translator, and prophet (see D&C 21:1). In the grove and subsequently, there came sunbursts of serendipity! The resulting revelations and translations were not mere speculations, thoughts for the day, or even epigrams, but instead they were divine, declarative disclosures.

The volume of resulting revelations and translations is enormous, underscoring the words “choice seer.” But it isn’t just the sheer volume of what Joseph received which is now being shared with mankind; it is also the existence of “stunners” in the midst of such abundance.

Revelations about a vast universe

Through multiple revelations and translations, for example, came a description of a universe far, far exceeding the astrophysics of the 1830s, a cosmos containing “worlds without number” and advising us further that the “inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters [of] God” (Moses 1:33; D&C 76:24).

Anciently, the vastness of Abraham’s eventual posterity was compared to the

sand of the sea, a staggering promise (see Genesis 22:17). The Restoration's revelations and translations accommodate a vast universe; thus it is no surprise to us that scientists' latest estimate of the number of stars in the universe is approximately 70 sextillion—"more stars in the sky," scientists say, "than there are grains of sand in every beach and desert on Earth" (Allison M. Heinrichs, "The Stellar Census: 70 Sextillion," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 2003; see also Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* [1980], 196).

Revelations about God's central purpose

Revelations and translations also came regarding God's central purpose "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man," giving us divine, succinct reassurances (Moses 1:39). God's plans for the development of souls have not changed. They were described to ancient Israel, whose 40 years in the wilderness were "to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deuteronomy 8:2). Therefore, disciples today can understand why our faith and patience are tried at times—so we can be prepared to go Home (see Mosiah 23:21).

Brothers and sisters, we do not go many hours in our lives without having to decide again "which way do we face" and whether we will pitch our tents facing Sodom or the holy temple (see Genesis 13:12; Mosiah 2:6).

God has no distracting hobbies off somewhere in the universe. We are at the very center of His concerns and purposes. What a sharp contrast to those who believe that man lives in an "unconscious universe" (Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* [1917], 50), a "universe . . . without a master" (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien [1955], 123).

Revelations about us as God's children

Revelations likewise came about our longevity as God's spirit children, since "man was also in the beginning with God"—a declaration accompanied by even further glimmers about man's eternal nature (D&C 93:29). These enunciations with their profound implications are major—challenging, for instance, the teaching that man was created in an instant "out of nothing."

A further reality of our being with God "in the beginning" means that you have been you for a long time. Hence, the Apostle John correctly wrote that "[God] first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Likewise, amid the mortal turbulence, we learn who other mortals really are—our spiritual brothers and sisters, not functions, rivals, or enemies. Moreover, we should have a special sanctity and regard for human life.

Revelations respond to deepest yearnings

"Stunners" all, these three revelations and translations are especially responsive to the deepest human yearnings and puzzles. They restructure our understanding of the nature of God, of the universe, and likewise of our personal identity and of life's meaning! What could be more personal than these brief but encompassing declarations?

If Joseph Smith had been the conduit for only one such divine revelation, it would be, standing alone, sufficient to ensure his prophetic greatness. Yet even though God wants to give us "all that [He] hath," we suffer from a poverty of perceptions! (D&C 84:38).

Little wonder that Paul commended Abraham, who "staggered not . . . [in] unbelief" (Romans 4:20). There is a risk when we contemplate the doctrines of the Restoration that we might "stagger" in the face of such bold and promising truths.

Given such breathtaking revelations and translations, let us, therefore, heed King Benjamin's counsel: "Believe in God; . . . believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend" (Mosiah 4:9).

Many are strangers to the Savior

An omniscient God leaves all mortals free to choose, but how grateful we should be that God chose long, long ago to rescue and to resurrect all His children through the Atonement of His Son. Nevertheless, some reject and many are indifferent to these and other divine beckonings, mostly because they are too caught up in the cares of the world. They are strangers to the Savior, who is far from the thoughts and intents of their hearts (see Mosiah 5:13).

In the midst of God's plan and the universe's incredible vastness is incredible personalness. For example, "[God] looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Alma 18:32; see also Isaiah 66:18).

Since we are thus fully accountable to Him, on Judgment Day we cannot invoke the Fifth Amendment!

The preeminent revelation

I have saved for last the preeminent revelation that truly ranks first: the theophanies showing the reality of the resurrected Jesus Christ, who is our Savior! Beginning with the Sacred Grove, other confirming appearances soon followed in obscure locations like Kirtland and Hiram, and all mankind thereby received this desperately needed confirmation.

Alas, in a secular world Jesus is regarded by many, at best, as a distant figure; He is even denigrated. How transcendently special, therefore, that the revelations of the Restoration confirm this cosmic fact:

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

Jesus, who performed the "infinite atonement," thereby suffered infinitely and is a fully comprehending Savior, having "descended below all things" and "comprehended all things" (2 Nephi 9:7; D&C 88:6). Yes, as in the lyrics of the moving spiritual of yesteryear, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus."

Many need these rescuing revelations

Brothers and sisters, the cast of players on this planet for whom the revelations and translations are so pertinent includes those who, in that familiar phrase, are living "lives of quiet desperation" (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* [1965], 7). They have now been joined by those living lives of noisy, slurping indulgence, wrongly celebrating their capacity to feel so that they finally lose their capacity to feel and become "past feeling" (Moroni 9:20; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Nephi 17:45). Hence they lick their particular platters in a desperate search for more sensations. Such individuals, however, are still not a majority but a "lesser part" of the people (see Mosiah 29:26–27).

Notably, at the last day the adversary "will not support" those who followed him anyway (Alma 30:60). He cannot. Jesus will triumph majestically, and the adversary's clever constructs, "pleasing [to] the carnal mind," will also collapse, and "the fall thereof [will be] exceedingly great" (Alma 30:53; 1 Nephi 11:36). Even now, one can see in the lives of those prodigals who come to themselves the devil's doctrines dripping in early meltdown (see Luke 15:17). Many, having experienced the utter emptiness of the lower ways, are "in a preparation to hear the word" and now await being informed of the rescuing revelations and translations (Alma 32:6).

Do not hold back these revelations

Brothers and sisters, we dare not hold back the restored gospel's declaratives! We dare not hold back the reassuring revelations and truth-telling translations about "things as they really are, and . . . things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13). These are so needed by those whose weary hands hang down because they suffer from doctrinal anemia, which can best be treated by the red blood cells of the Restoration. To hold back would be to restrain repentance and to obscure the beckoning spiritual alternative, which will become "fair as the sun, and clear as the moon" (D&C 105:31).

Meanwhile, let us expect that many will regard us indifferently. Others will see us as quaint or misled. Let us bear the pointing fingers which, ironically, belong to those finally who, being bored, find the "great and spacious building" to be a stale and cramped third-class hotel (see 1 Nephi 8:31–33). Let us revile not the revilers and heed them not (see D&C 31:9). Instead, let us use our energy to hold up the shield of faith to quench the incoming fiery darts—aided perhaps by a touch of spiritual Teflon (see 1 Nephi 15:24).

Brothers and sisters, given all of the foregoing, "what can I say more" except "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!" (Jacob 6:12; "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen!

The choir sang "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need."

President Faust

The choir has just sung "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need."

Before President Hinckley addresses us, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the single adult choir from the Utah South Area, and the priesthood choir from the Provo Missionary Training Center and their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given, the doctors, the Church health unit nurses, and ambulance services which have been on hand to render assistance, the ushers and interpreters, and those who are responsible for the beautiful flowers on Temple Square and in the Conference Center.

We also express appreciation to the local and national media representatives for their coverage of the conference and to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations, satellite and cable systems, and the Internet service providers who have given time and made facilities available to carry sessions of this conference in many countries.

As you travel home from this conference, we ask you to obey traffic rules, use caution, and be courteous in driving.

We shall now be pleased to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "Come, Let Us Anew." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Douglas L. Callister of the Seventy, and this conference will then be adjourned until April 2004.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Let us live the gospel more fully

What a glorious time we have had together, my beloved brethren and sisters.

It is truly a wonderful thing to step out of the world, as it were, and set aside two days to reflect on things divine.