

"A Choice Seer Will I Raise Up"

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Because Joseph was a prophet, we have more than a window into heaven—the very doorway to the eternities is open to us.

When Moroni first came to Joseph Smith, he warned that Joseph's "name should be had for good and evil among all nations."¹ We have seen the fulfillment of that prophecy. In the war between good and evil, the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith has both inspired believers who follow him and also provoked antagonists who fight furiously against the cause of Zion and against Joseph himself. This battle is not new. It began soon after young Joseph walked into the Sacred Grove and continues today with added visibility on the internet.

The Lord personally declared to Joseph Smith:

"The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name, and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee;

"While the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous, shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under thy hand."²

Today I offer my testimony to all who seek to better understand the sacred mission of Joseph Smith Jr., the Prophet of the Restoration.

We need not be timid about testifying of Joseph's mission as prophet, seer, and revelator, for the Lord has always worked through prophets.³ Because of the truths restored through Joseph Smith, we know much more about our Heavenly Father and the Savior Jesus Christ. We know of Their divine attributes, Their relationship to each other and to us, and the great plan of redemption that allows us to return to Their presence.

Of Joseph, President Brigham Young declared: "It was decreed in the councils of eternity, long before the foundations of the earth were laid, that he should be the man, in the last dispensation of this world, to bring forth the word of God to the people and receive the fullness of the keys and power of the Priesthood of the Son of God. The Lord had his eye upon him ... [for he] was foreordained in eternity to preside over this last dispensation."⁴

In preparation for this great work, Joseph Smith was born into a loving family who experienced many of the everyday burdens and trials of life. As Joseph began to

mature, his feelings toward God "were deep and often poignant,"⁵ yet he was confused by conflicting religious ideas taught by the preachers of his day. Fortunately, young Joseph did not let his questions paralyze his faith. He sought answers in the Bible and found this counsel: "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."⁶

Joseph recalled: "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."⁷

With simple faith, Joseph acted on these spiritual feelings. He found a secluded place, knelt down, "and began to offer up the desires of [his] heart to God."⁸ There is great power in Joseph's description of what happened:

"I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

"... 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!*"⁹

Joseph Smith saw God, the Eternal Father, and Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. This was Joseph's *First Vision*. In the years that followed, Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. Numerous other heavenly beings visited him, restoring truths and authority that had been lost for centuries. These divine communications to Joseph Smith opened the windows of heaven and the glories of eternity to our view. Joseph's life stands as a testimony that if any of us lack wisdom, we can ask God in faith and receive answers—sometimes from heavenly beings but more often by the power of the Holy Ghost, who speaks to us through inspired thoughts and feelings.¹⁰ It is through the Holy Ghost that we can "know the truth of all things."¹¹

For many of us, a witness of the Prophet Joseph Smith begins as we read the Book of Mormon. I first read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover as a young early-morning seminary student. With my vivid boyish imagination, I decided to read as if I were Joseph Smith, discovering the truths in the Book of Mormon for the very first time. It had such an impact on my life that I continue to read the Book of Mormon in that way. I often find that doing so deepens my appreciation for the Prophet Joseph and for the truths restored in this precious book.

For example, imagine Joseph's feelings as he translated passages about baptism for the remission of sins. Joseph, who had been told not to join any of the existing churches, naturally had questions about this saving ordinance. His questions led him, once again, to pray, and that prayer led to a visit from John the Baptist, who restored the Aaronic Priesthood and the authority to baptize.¹²

Or consider how Joseph might have felt when he learned for the first time that Jesus Christ visited the people of the Western Hemisphere—that He taught them, prayed for them, healed their sick, blessed their children, conferred priesthood authority, and administered the sacrament unto them.¹³ Joseph may not have realized it at the time, but what he learned about the ordinances and organization of Christ's ancient Church prepared him to later assist the Lord in restoring that same Church to the earth.

During the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph and his wife Emma mourned the death of their infant son. In those days preachers commonly taught that children who died without baptism would be condemned forever. With this in mind, imagine how Joseph must have felt as he translated these words from the prophet Mormon: "Little children need no repentance, neither baptism. ... [For] little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world."¹⁴

Perhaps the most stunning passage in the Book of Mormon to young Joseph may have been the third chapter of 2 Nephi. This chapter contains an ancient prophecy about a "choice seer" whom the Lord would raise up in the latter days—a seer named Joseph, named after his father. This future prophet would be "esteemed highly" and would do a work "of great worth" unto his people. He would "be great like unto Moses" and would be given "power to bring forth [God's] word."¹⁵ Consider how Joseph Smith must have felt as he realized that this prophecy was about *him*! He was not just translating history; he was translating a vision of the last days, of the miraculous Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ—and *Joseph himself would help fulfill it!*

Today, almost 200 years later, it's easy to see how this prophecy has been realized. We know about the great things Joseph accomplished as the Lord's prophet. But remember that when Joseph translated this prophecy, he had done few of the things the prophets foretold. He was still a young man in his early 20s. The Church had not yet been organized. There were no wards or branches, no missionaries, and no temples. Hardly anyone had heard of Joseph Smith, and some of those who had, actively opposed him. Now look at the great work the Lord has wrought by the hand of His servant Joseph, notwithstanding the opposition against him. Is not the fulfillment of this prophecy compelling evidence of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith?

To any who may be questioning their testimony of Joseph Smith or are struggling with erroneous, misleading, or superficial information about his life and ministry, I invite you to consider the fruits—the many blessings that have come to us through the miraculous mission of Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration.

Because Joseph was a prophet, revelations and prophets are no longer a thing of the past. The "day of miracles"—of visions, healings, and ministering of angels—has not ceased.¹⁶

Because Joseph was a prophet, each of us has access to the power and blessings of the holy priesthood, including baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the sacrament.

Because Joseph was a prophet, we have the blessings and ordinances of the temple that bind us to God, make us His people, and manifest to us "the power of godliness," making it possible one day to "see the face of God, even the Father, and live."¹⁷

Because Joseph was a prophet, we know that marriage and family are an essential part of God's plan for our happiness. We know that through temple ordinances and covenants, our cherished family relationships can endure eternally.

Because Joseph was a prophet, we have more than a window into heaven—the very doorway to the eternities is open to us. We can know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [He has] sent."¹⁸ Eternal life can be ours.

Most of all, because Joseph was a prophet, we have witness upon witness, testimony upon testimony, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world. We have an unbroken chain of special witnesses of Jesus Christ, including our prophet today, President Thomas S. Monson; the counselors in the First Presidency; and the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. To their witnesses, I add my humble yet certain testimony: Jesus Christ lives and leads His Church. Joseph Smith was and is the Prophet of the Restoration. The priesthood and authority of God are again on the earth. May we fearlessly declare our witness and our gratitude for this wonderful prophet, seer, and revelator of the Lord is my prayer in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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