

# *Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet*

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In my young years growing up in Logan, Utah, I was part of a musical family. My grandfather, Francis H. Baugh Jr., affectionately known in the community as Frank Baugh, was the director of music for nearly thirty years in the Logan City School District, where he directed the high school choral groups and musical productions in addition to supervising music education in the junior high and elementary schools. He was Logan's own music man.

By the time I was in elementary school he had retired from teaching in the public system, leaving him time to teach my siblings and me the piano. Not too many people can say they took piano lessons from their grandfather, but I did—he was my one and only teacher.

Every piano lesson included playing hymns from the LDS hymnal. Grandfather would have me go over each hymn several times while he pointed out fingering and dynamics and told me to “make the long notes longer and the short notes shorter.” And since Grandfather was a choral director and a singer—a beautiful tenor, I might add—he would sing the hymns, every verse, as I would play them. By the time I was a teenager I could play many of the hymns, but surprisingly I

could also sing the words of those hymns by heart because I had heard my grandfather sing them so many times.

Around the time I was in junior high school, my grandfather must have felt I was ready to take on the longest hymn in the hymnal: number 296, which was titled “The Seer, Joseph, the Seer,” a poem written by John Taylor and later set to music by Ebenezer Beesley. Fortunately for me it was in the key of C, but it was *four pages long*, not to mention it was a choir number. I can't play it today, but I can still hear my grandfather's clear tenor voice singing the words:

*The Seer, the Seer, Joseph, the Seer!  
I'll sing of the Prophet ever dear . . . ;  
His equal now cannot be found  
By searching the wide world around.  
With Gods he soared in the realms of day,  
And men he taught the heavenly way. . . .  
The earthly Seer! the heavenly Seer!*

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*I love to dwell on his memory dear;  
The chosen of God and the friend of man,  
He brought the priesthood back again;  
He gazed on the past and the future, too,  
And opened . . . the heavenly world to view.*<sup>1</sup>

Looking back, I think I can say that it was while I was learning to play that number and hearing my Grandfather Baugh sing the words that I felt the first feelings of a testimony in my heart concerning the life and mission of Joseph Smith. However, for many years I was puzzled as to why the text referred to Joseph Smith as a seer, a title I was not altogether familiar with. It was not until I read the Book of Mormon that I learned that perhaps the greatest designation Joseph Smith could have been given was that of a seer.

Today I would like to address four titles or roles given to Joseph Smith in the revelations, namely that of seer, translator, revelator, and prophet (see D&C 107:92; and D&C 124:125).

### **Joseph Smith as Seer**

In the Book of Mormon, Ammon defined a seer as one who possessed “a gift from God” to translate ancient records (Mosiah 8:13; see also Mosiah 28:11–16). However, the seeric gift was not limited to translation, hence Ammon’s additional statement “that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also” (Mosiah 8:16). Ammon further taught that “a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come,” noting further that the gift of seership includes being able to understand mysteries and know all things, including that which is hidden or secret (Mosiah 8:17). In reality, the gift of seership is the greatest spiritual gift a person can have. It is no wonder that when Ammon explained to King Limhi what a seer was, the king responded “that a seer is greater than a prophet” (Mosiah 8:15).

Joseph Smith’s role as a seer was known and prophesied of anciently. Joseph of Egypt, himself a gifted seer, prophesied that in the

last days “a choice seer” would come through his lineage (2 Nephi 3:7; and Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:27; see also verse 28). “That seer will the Lord bless,” Joseph prophesied, specifically indicating that “his name shall be called after me” (2 Nephi 3:14–15; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:33).

In actuality, a seer is a *see-er*, particularly one who is entitled to see visions. Visions can take various forms, including a personal visitation or the appearance of deity or heavenly angels. In another type of vision, the veil is lifted from a person’s mind and their spiritual eyes behold the things of God. This type of vision might be called a mind vision.<sup>2</sup> Finally, visionary experiences can also be conveyed through spiritual instruments, such as the Nephite interpreters, or, in the case of Joseph Smith, through a small, unusual stone often referred to as a seer stone, which he had in his possession.

A number of years ago I decided to explore the types of visions Joseph Smith had—as well as how many—and I was rather surprised when I discovered that documentation exists to show he had over *seventy* visions. Most of these visions are not found in the standard works, but they pervade the Prophet’s own history and the records kept by contemporaries who were present when a vision was received or when Joseph Smith spoke about his sacred communications.<sup>3</sup>

### **Visitations of Heavenly Beings**

Joseph Smith may have received more visitations of heavenly personages than any other prophet in the history of the earth. Certainly his most magnificent and doctrinally significant theophany occurred in the Sacred Grove in the spring of 1820, when the Father and the Son appeared and ushered in the opening of the latter-day dispensation. Three years later young Joseph was visited for the first time by the resurrected angel Moroni, the last known survivor of the Nephite nation. Thereafter, for

a period of nearly six years, from September 1823 until July 1829, when Joseph Smith returned the plates, Moroni appeared numerous times to the Prophet—twenty-two of which can be documented—to help prepare him to receive the plates and later to provide additional instruction during the course of the translation.<sup>4</sup>

But Moroni was not Joseph's only spiritual teacher during those preparatory years. Statements made by some of the Prophet's contemporaries reveal that during his annual interviews with Moroni the young seer was visited and taught by numerous ancient prophets and apostles. Joseph never mentioned who those angelic ministrants were, but John Taylor provided a few possible identities. He reported: "When Joseph Smith was raised up as a Prophet of God, Mormon, Moroni, Nephi and others of the ancient Prophets who formerly lived on this Continent . . . came to him and communicated to him certain principles pertaining to the Gospel of the Son of God."<sup>5</sup>

Elder Taylor also said:

*The principles which he had placed him in communication with . . . the ancient apostles and prophets; such men . . . as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Adam, Seth, Enoch, and . . . the apostles that lived on this continent as well as those who lived on the Asiatic continent. He seemed to be as familiar with these people as we are with one another.*<sup>6</sup>

In the Wentworth letter, published in 1842, the Prophet stated, "After having received many visits from the angels of God . . . , the angel of the Lord delivered the records into my hands."<sup>7</sup> So although Moroni was Joseph's main instructor during the annual interviews at the Hill Cumorah, the ancient Book of Mormon prophet also invited a number of very special guest visitors.

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery also testified of the personal appearances of John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Moses, Elias,

and Elijah, who appeared to confer priesthood authority and keys. The fact that both Joseph and Oliver were coparticipants in these visitations gives additional testimony and credibility to the reality of these visionary experiences.<sup>8</sup>

### *Mind Visions*

A second category or type of vision is that of a mind vision. A distinguishing difference between a visitation vision and a mind vision is that in a visitation manifestation a heavenly personage (or personages) is actually present. However, in a mind vision no divine personages are present, even though they might be seen. A mind vision might also include being able to see scenes of heaven or past, present, and future events.

The revelation that is now Doctrine and Covenants 76 is an example of this type of manifestation. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon testified that in a vision they saw God the Father and Jesus Christ, but neither the Father nor the Son was actually present in the room when the Prophet and Sidney were experiencing the vision. The two men also saw Lucifer's premortal rebellion and the conditions associated with future inhabitants of each of the kingdoms of glory.

What is interesting is the description given by the Prophet and Sidney of *how* the vision was received. They recorded: "The Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about" (D&C 76:19). What they were saying was that they saw things with their spiritual eyes as though they were literally seeing and experiencing them; the vision was so real to them that it was as though they were actually there. It would be something similar to what people experience when they watch a 3-D movie in an IMAX theater—times one billion! Several years ago I saw the IMAX movie *Space Station 3D*, and for forty-seven minutes I sat mesmerized. The imagery was so

real; it was almost as if I had been transported into space and was onboard the International Space Station, approximately 220 miles above the earth. It wasn't until the credits appeared and the lights went up that I gained my senses and became aware that I was sitting in a movie theater.

An impressive example of a mind vision comes from Zebedee Coltrin, an early Church member, who experienced an unusual vision with Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. In 1834, while in New Portage, Ohio, the Prophet requested that Oliver and Zebedee go on a short walk with him. After finding a suitable place, Joseph requested that they kneel and each pray in turn. After praying the Prophet said, "Now breth[r]en . . . we will see some visions." Joseph laid himself on the ground, and Oliver and Zebedee rested their heads on his outstretched arms. "The heavens gradually opened," Coltrin recalled, and we "saw a golden throne, . . . and on the throne were two aged personages, having white hair, and clothed in white garments." These personages were "the two most beautiful and perfect specimens of mankind" he had ever seen. Joseph said they were "our first parents, Adam and Eve."<sup>9</sup>

Other examples of mind visions received by the Prophet Joseph Smith include a vision of the temple location in Jackson County, Missouri; visions of the general features and designs of the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples; a vision of the pattern and organization of Church councils and quorums; a visionary understanding of the ancient warrior Zeph; a vision of the postmortal condition of the men who died on Zion's Camp; a vision of the Christian martyrs; and a vision of the common progenitors of a number of early Church leaders.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Visions Through Divine Instruments*

Several examples in the scriptures demonstrate that ancient holy men often used divine instruments to receive revelation, including

visions. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that the religious leaders of the Jaredite and Nephite civilizations possessed sacred interpreters (see Ether 4:5; Alma 37:21), which were originally given to the brother of Jared. Moroni, the last Book of Mormon prophet to possess the interpreters, included his instrument in the stone box along with the plates and the sacred breastplate to assist the future translator (see D&C 17:1).

In addition to the interpreters, Joseph Smith also had in his possession what is generally referred to as the seer stone.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, a passage in Alma 37 suggests that the future translator would use both the Nephite interpreters and a sacred stone to translate the Book of Mormon (see Alma 37:23–25). From statements made by eyewitnesses to the translation, it appears that Joseph Smith used the Nephite interpreters to translate the first 116 pages; thereafter, for convenience, he used the seer stone to complete the rest of the translation. Both objects functioned in much the same manner, both instruments conveyed visionary transmissions, and both were later referred to by Joseph Smith as the Urim and Thummim.

A number of Joseph Smith's earliest seeric visions were received by means of the seer stone. Joseph Knight Sr. remembered the Prophet sharing an incident regarding the seer stone that took place in September 1826 during the Prophet's third annual visit to the Hill Cumorah. Knight indicated that during the 1826 interview with Moroni, Joseph was told that he would receive the plates the following year if he brought the right person with him to the hill.

Confused, Joseph asked Moroni, "Who is the right Person?" The answer was you will know. Then he looked in his [stone] and found it was Emma Hale."<sup>12</sup> Joseph understood what he needed to do. A few weeks later he traveled to Harmony to request Emma's hand in marriage from her father, Isaac Hale. However, Isaac opposed the marriage, and because of his

opposition, Joseph and Emma eloped and were married in January 1827.

In accordance with Moroni's instructions, the following September when the Prophet went to retrieve the plates at the hill, Emma accompanied her husband in the wagon. The account given by Knight illustrates that it was made known to Joseph Smith by means of a visionary experience using the seer stone that he was to marry Emma.<sup>13</sup>

Upon receiving the plates, breastplate, and Nephite interpreters in September 1827, Joseph developed a special affinity for the interpreters, which he called spectacles. Knight was at the Smith home in Palmyra when Joseph returned from the Hill Cumorah, and Knight remembered conversing with the Prophet about the sacred relics the morning after he had obtained possession of them.

"It is ten times Better then I expected," Knight remembered the Prophet saying. "He seemed to think more of the glasses . . . [than] he Did of the Plates, for, says he, 'I can see any thing; they are Marvelus.'"<sup>14</sup>

David Whitmer recalled that when Joseph first put on the spectacles, "he saw his entire past history revealed to him." This experience, Whitmer believed, helped the young seer recognize the greater supernatural power God had given him.<sup>15</sup>

### Joseph Smith as Translator

When discussing Joseph Smith's role as a translator, many only associate the Prophet with his role in the translation of the Book of Mormon. However, he successfully translated at least three additional ancient texts.

### *The Book of Mormon*

In discussing the translation of the Book of Mormon, many individuals have questioned how Joseph Smith was able to translate the gold plates. After all, he had no understanding of reformed Egyptian—no one did—yet he successfully dictated a remarkably coherent

and inspiring text. Although a number of eyewitnesses to the translation process left statements regarding what they observed of the mechanics of the translation, the Prophet remained silent on how the interpretation of the Egyptian-like characters was actually transmitted. In an 1831 meeting, Hyrum Smith requested that the Prophet tell some of the details regarding the translation and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, but Joseph announced "that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon [and] that it was not expedient for him to relate these things."<sup>16</sup> On other occasions, when questioned on the subject, Joseph Smith replied that the translation was done "by the gift and power of God."<sup>17</sup> What did he mean? Simply put, the Book of Mormon translation was revealed to him by divine revelation; it was a revelatory experience—one that for him was difficult to put into words.<sup>18</sup>

Some might question whether or not the translation provided by Joseph Smith is accurate or even true. In response to that inquiry, I cite the following statement from a revelation directed to David Whitmer in June 1829. It is one of the most powerful declarations in all scripture: "And he [that is, Joseph Smith,] has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and *as your Lord and your God liveth it is true*" (D&C 17:6; emphasis added).<sup>19</sup>

On November 28, 1841, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal that Joseph Smith said that "the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any Book on Earth & the key stone of our religion & a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than any other Book."<sup>20</sup> But what did the Prophet mean when he said that the Book of Mormon was the most correct book? Many have interpreted that to mean that the Book of Mormon is the most correct book in terms of doctrine. Let me suggest that what the Prophet might have actually been saying was that the English translation of the Book of



Mormon was the most correct of any translated text. Why? Because the translation was given by revelation, and if it was given by revelation from God, it was correct.

#### *Ancient Writings by John the Revelator*

In discussing Joseph Smith's role as a translator, it appears he also translated an ancient New Testament text written by John the Beloved. While the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery were engaged in the translation of the plates, they frequently conversed on a number of subjects. On one occasion they reported that "a difference of opinion" arose regarding whether John the Beloved had died or whether he had been permitted to remain on the earth—a subject not clarified in the last verses of the last chapter in John.<sup>21</sup> To settle the matter, the Prophet inquired and received Doctrine and Covenants 7. Significantly, the heading to this revelation in the 1833 Book of Commandments states that the revelation was "*translated from parchment, written and hid up by himself,*" namely John.<sup>22</sup> The English text that Joseph Smith received on this occasion was likely received in a manner similar to the Book of Mormon translation and could therefore be considered another translated work provided by the Prophet.

#### *Joseph Smith Translation*

Three months after the organizational meeting of the Church, Joseph Smith began what would be one of his most significant contributions to the Restoration: the production of an inspired revision of the Bible, or what is now known as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. This endeavor occupied much of his time from June 1830 until July 1833—a period of just over three years. The process of revising the text of the King James Version of the Bible constituted what Joseph Smith considered to be the means by which "many plain and precious things" (1 Nephi 13:28) that had been incorrectly translated, excluded, or extracted from

the Bible would be restored. While the Joseph Smith Translation is not a translation from one language to another in the common use of the term, it can nonetheless be considered a translation, since the Prophet provided a new and different text than that of the King James Version's translators.

Joseph Smith made changes, additions, and insertions to approximately 3,400 verses, or roughly 11 percent of the 31,100 verses that make up the biblical text.<sup>23</sup> The 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible included approximately 600 Joseph Smith Translation verses or passages. Most appeared in the footnotes, while longer passages were located in the appendix. It should be noted that a few additional Joseph Smith Translation entries that were not included in the 1979 edition have recently been added to the 2013 edition.<sup>24</sup>

However, the 600 Joseph Smith Translation entries in the 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible do not include the 356 verses that make up the book of Moses (i.e., the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 1–6:13) or the fifty-five verses that comprise Joseph Smith—Matthew in the Pearl of Great Price, which total an additional 411 verses. If we include the Moses and the Joseph Smith—Matthew texts, more than 1,000 Joseph Smith Translation verses or passages are included in our scriptures, representing roughly 30 percent, or just under one-third, of the complete Joseph Smith Translation text.

Mention could be made of literally hundreds of contributions made by the Joseph Smith Translation. Following are a few examples from Genesis.

In the Bible the Genesis material on Enoch covers a mere six verses (see Genesis 5:18–19, 21–24). However, the Joseph Smith Translation includes 117 verses on Enoch (see Moses 6:21–7:69), adding numerous important details about Enoch's life and ministry—what he preached (including an account of Adam's baptism), the righteousness of the city of Zion, and the fact

that the inhabitants of the holy city were translated, or taken up into heaven.<sup>25</sup> Joseph Smith's added knowledge and understanding of Enoch affected him profoundly, as evidenced by the fact that one of his main lifetime objectives was to gather the Saints and establish a latter-day Zion community and society patterned after that of the ancient noble patriarch.

Joseph Smith also made a significant addition to the scriptural text in Genesis 14, adding sixteen verses about Melchizedek and the powers associated with the higher priesthood—information not found elsewhere in the Bible or in the Book of Mormon (see Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:25–40). A similar contribution appears in Genesis 50, in which the Prophet added fifteen verses containing a marvelous prophecy of Joseph of Egypt that describes the future missions of Moses, Aaron, and Joseph Smith and even mentions each one by name (see Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:24–38).

### ***Book of Abraham***

The text known as the book of Abraham is another translated work produced by Joseph Smith. In July 1835 Church leaders in Kirtland purchased four Egyptian mummies, two scrolls, and several papyrus fragments from Michael Chandler. Joseph Smith's interest in the collection stemmed from his observation that "one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt."<sup>26</sup> During the next five months the Prophet translated the majority of what became the book of Abraham, although he may have provided some additional translation to the text prior to its publication in three installments in the *Times and Seasons* beginning March 1842.

Just think about what we know as a result of Joseph Smith's production of the book of Abraham: Abraham's early life in the land of Ur of Chaldea, including the attempt made on his life by the priest of Elkenah and his

miraculous deliverance; his revealed understanding and knowledge of the planetary systems; and his vision of the premortal Council in Heaven and Jesus's foreordination to be the Creator and Redeemer of the world—all of which are completely absent from the biblical text. While some debate whether the Prophet translated the book of Abraham from the characters found on the Egyptian papyrus he had in his possession or by direct revelation independent of the papyrus itself, the fact remains that the remarkable text that makes up the book of Abraham provides a convincing witness and testimony that Joseph Smith was indeed an inspired translator of ancient texts.

### **Joseph Smith as Revelator**

In discussing Joseph Smith's role as a revelator, I do so in the context of the revelations that were actually written down or transcribed and identified by him as being revelatory documents.

The earliest surviving transcribed revelation by Joseph Smith is Doctrine and Covenants 3. The revelation is dated July 1828 and was received after Martin Harris lost the 116-page manuscript of the Book of Mormon. The transcription of this revelation, clear and powerful in content and tone, must have bolstered the twenty-two-year-old Prophet's confidence that he could indeed receive and record divine instruction. Thereafter, until his death in June 1844, Joseph Smith was the recipient of a steady and continuous flow of divine revelatory communication.

The Doctrine and Covenants contains 138 sections. All but four sections bear the revelatory stamp of Joseph Smith (see D&C 134, 135, 136, and 138). Four sections are composite revelations, originally composed of two to five separate revelations (see D&C 23, 30, 42, and 88). Five sections were extracted from letters dictated by the Prophet (see D&C 121, 122, 123, 127, and 128). At least eight sections were given through the Nephite interpreters or the seer

stone (see D&C 3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, and 17), and one section was given by means of an audible heavenly voice (see D&C 87; also 130:12–13). Two sections contain answers to questions about passages in the books of Revelation and Isaiah (see D&C 77 and 113, respectively, although D&C 74 and 86 could also fall under the category of receiving answers to questions asked about biblical passages). One section is the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple (see D&C 109), while another describes the appearances of Christ, Moses, Elias, and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple the week following the dedication (see D&C 110). Two sections are visions of heavenly realms (see D&C 76 and 137). Two sections are designated as “items of instruction,” given in separate public meetings (D&C 130; see also D&C 131). With the exception of section 102, which is composed of the minutes of the first high council meeting, the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants are similar in spiritual voice and expression.

Regardless, all could be considered revelations. Some are more doctrinally significant than others, but taken together they form a collection of doctrines, teachings, principles, prophecies, and commandments that are heart penetrating and mind expanding. Considering the spiritual magnitude of these revelations helps explain why the Prophet remarked that it is “an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord.”<sup>27</sup> Yet Joseph Smith also understood that the source for the revelations was Jesus Christ. Speaking of the revelations, the Lord said:

*These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; wherefore, you shall testify they are of me and not of man;*

*For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you. [D&C 18:34–35]*

Such a statement explains why the Prophet said, “I never told you I was perfect; but there

is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”<sup>28</sup>

Given that the source of Joseph Smith’s revelations was Jesus Christ, it would be virtually impossible for any uninspired person—one not endowed with the gift of the Holy Ghost—to produce anything comparable to the Prophet’s collective revelations. It cannot be done, even if that individual were the most gifted, intelligent, or knowledgeable cerebral theologian, religious scholar, or academic. They could not do it.<sup>29</sup>

Some have assumed that the Doctrine and Covenants constitutes all of Joseph Smith’s known revelations, but such is not the case. In fact, there are a few dozen revelations received by the Prophet that are not included in the canon of scripture. The main reason these revelations were not included in the early editions of the Doctrine and Covenants is because the content was not considered to be relevant to the Church at large. One very important aspect of the Joseph Smith Papers Project will be the publication of all existing transcribed revelations received by the Prophet, including those not found in the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>30</sup>

### **Joseph Smith as Prophet**

In Latter-day Saint terminology we generally refer to the president of the Church as the prophet, signifying that he is the highest governing officer in the Church and the Lord’s spokesperson on earth. However, the word *prophet* has a much broader fundamental meaning.

Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote:

*A prophet is a teacher. That is the essential meaning of the word. He teaches the body of truth, the gospel, revealed by the Lord to man; and under inspiration explains it to the understanding of the people. He is an expounder of truth.*<sup>31</sup>

In Joseph Smith’s day, those not spiritually discerning might have been unimpressed by



his demeanor or discourse, but to the faithful and God-fearing, his private counsel comforted their souls and his public sermons stirred their hearts. On April 6, 1837, Wilford Woodruff, upon hearing the Prophet preach in the Kirtland Temple, wrote the following entry in his journal:

*President Joseph Smith Jr. arose and addressed the congregation for the term of three hours clothed with the power, spirit, and image of God. He unbosom'd his mind and feelings in the house of his friends. He presented many things of vast importance to the minds of the elders of Israel.*

*O that they might be written upon our hearts as with an iron pen to remain forever that we might practice them in our lives. That fountain of light, principle, and virtue that came forth out of the heart and mouth of the Prophet Joseph, whose soul like Enoch's swell'd wide as eternity. I say such evidences presented in such a forcible manner ought to drive into oblivion every particle of unbelief . . . from the mind of the hearers, for such language, sentiment, principle, and spirit cannot flow from darkness. Joseph Smith Jr. is a prophet of God raised up for the deliverance of Israel as true as my heart now burns within me while I am penning these lines which is as true as truth itself.<sup>32</sup>*

The Joseph Smith Collection in the Church Archives and a number of other repositories contain a significant body of documents that has been preserved relative to Joseph Smith's life. These records include his personal journals and histories, letters, newspaper reports, editorials, and various other primary source materials. In addition, Church members and other contemporaries of the Prophet recorded events and experiences associated with his life, including what they heard him discuss in his public sermons as well as in private conversations. From these sources has emerged a collection of many of the Prophet's teachings and his views on a number of subjects and topics.

Joseph Smith's life exemplified the role of what a prophet was, is, and should be. And he was not shy or reserved in letting others know that he was indeed a genuine prophet—one called and appointed by the very God of heaven Himself. His doctrinal teachings are profound, far-reaching, and all encompassing, and to those seeking additional light and truth, his inspired instructions and concepts are comparable in many instances to the eternal truths revealed in the canon of scripture. Here are just three examples:

*Hell may pour forth its rage like the burning lava of Mount Vesuvius or of Etna or of the most terrible of the burning mountains, and yet shall Mormonism stand. . . . Truth is Mormonism. God is the author of it. He is our shield. It is by Him we received our birth. It was by His voice that we were called to a dispensation of His gospel in the beginning of the fulness of times. It was by Him we received the Book of Mormon, and it was by Him that we remain unto this day; and by Him we shall remain if it shall be for our glory. And in His almighty name we are determined to endure tribulation as good soldiers unto the end.<sup>33</sup>*

*Happiness is the object and design of our existence, and will be the end thereof if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. But we cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know, unless we comply with or keep those we have already received. That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be and often is, right under another. God said thou shalt not kill—at another time he said thou shalt utterly destroy. This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.<sup>34</sup>*

*The things of God are of deep import, and time and experience and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man, . . . must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of eternal expanse, [and] commune with God.*<sup>35</sup>

I give you my testimony that Joseph Smith's mind did indeed "stretch as high as the utmost heavens" and that he did indeed "commune with God" as a seer, translator, revelator, and prophet.

*The Seer, the Seer, Joseph, the Seer! . . .  
He gazed on the past and the future, too,  
And opened . . . the heavenly world to view.*

Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. "The Seer, Joseph, the Seer," *Hymns*, 1948, no. 296. This hymn was adapted with minor changes from John Taylor, "The Seer: Written for the Dedication of the Seventy's Hall and Dedicated to President Brigham Young," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 24 (1 January 1844): 767.

2. The scriptural record illustrates that dreams, such as Lehi's vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8) or Peter's dream of the clean and unclean beasts (see Acts 10), are also visions and could be classified as mind visions.

3. See Alexander L. Baugh, "Parting the Veil: The Visions of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 22–69; and Baugh, "Parting the Veil: Joseph Smith's Seventy-Six Documented Visionary Experiences," in John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson, eds., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 265–326.

4. See H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni—Joseph Smith's Tutor," *Ensign*, January 1992, 22–29; and

Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," in Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman Jr., and Susan Easton Black, eds., *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History, New York* (Provo: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 49–70; see also Robert J. Woodford, "Book of Mormon Personalities Known by Joseph Smith," *Ensign*, August 1978, 12–15; and Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, 1983).

5. John Taylor, *JD* 17:374 (8 April 1875).

6. John Taylor, *JD* 21:94 (13 April 1879).

7. Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 707; emphasis added. See also Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 495 (hereafter cited as *JSP*, H1); and "The Wentworth Letter," *HC* 4:537.

8. Orson Pratt stated that beginning in 1823, young Joseph was "ministered to by the angels of God, and received instruction concerning the work that was to be performed in the latter days" (*JD* 15:185 [22 September 1872]).

On another occasion Orson Pratt stated, "After having received from time to time, visits from . . . glorious personages, and talking with them, . . . he was permitted to go and take [the] plates from the place of their deposit" (*JD* 13:66 [19 December 1869]).

George Q. Cannon taught that during these preparatory years Joseph "was visited constantly by angels. . . . He had vision after vision in order that his mind might be fully saturated with a knowledge of the things of God, and that he might comprehend the great and holy calling that God has bestowed upon him" (*JD* 23:362 [29 October 1882]). For additional statements concerning the heavenly beings who

appeared to Joseph Smith, see *JD* 13:47; 18:326; 20:174–75; 21:65, 161–164; and 23:48–49.

9. From the minutes of a meeting held October 11, 1883, in “Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 1883,” Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 67; and in *Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 1883* (Palm Desert, California: ULC Press, 1981), 45; Zebedee Coltrin also remembered Adam being “a large broadshouldered man, and Eve as a woman . . . as large in proportion.”

The Prophet’s manuscript history is the source for the date of the conference, which took place April 21, 1834, in the area of New Portage, Ohio (see Manuscript History of the Church, vol. A–1, 459–65, Church History Library; and *HC* 2:50, 52).

10. For descriptions of these mind visions, in addition to several others, see Baugh, “Parting the Veil,” 32–48.

11. Joseph Smith obtained the stone, described as dark brown in color, while digging a well for Willard Chase around 1822 (see Willard Chase, “Testimony of William Chase,” in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* [Painesville, Ohio: Eber D. Howe, 1834], 240–41). This discovery occurred only two years after the First Vision but five years before Joseph obtained the plates and the interpreters from Moroni in 1827.

12. Joseph Smith, quoted in Joseph Knight Sr., “Manuscript of the Early History of Joseph Smith Finding of Plates,” Church History Library; see Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (1977): 31.

13. See Knight, “Manuscript of Early History”; and Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection,” 31. For additional examples of Joseph Smith’s use of the seer stone see Baugh, “Parting the Veil,” 29–30.

14. Knight, “Manuscript of Early History”; and Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection,” 33.

15. David Whitmer, quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A*

*Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 150. Joseph Smith returned the Nephite interpreters to Moroni at the completion of the translation (see Joseph Smith—History 1:60). It appears that following the completion of the Book of Mormon translation, the Prophet’s use of the seer stone also declined. “Soon after the translation of the Book of Mormon was complete, Joseph Smith gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery, who possessed the stone until his death in 1848. That same year Phineas Young visited Oliver’s widow, Lucy Cowdery, and persuaded her to give it to him. He returned to Salt Lake City and presented it to his brother, Brigham Young. The stone has remained in the possession of the Church since that time” (Baugh, “Parting the Veil,” 52, note 35).

16. In minutes of a general conference in Orange, Ohio (25 October 1831), in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 23.

17. Smith, “Church History,” 707; and *JSP*, H1:495; see also “The Wentworth Letter,” *HC* 4:537. See also letter from President Joseph Smith to James Arlington Bennet, 13 November 1843, in Manuscript History of the Church, vol. E–1, 1775 (Bennet is spelled with one *t*); also in *HC* 6:74 (in which Bennett is spelled with two *ts*).

18. For an examination regarding how Joseph Smith possibly translated the Book of Mormon, see Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), 61–93; see also Royal Skousen, “Translating and Printing the Book of Mormon,” in John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris, eds., *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2006), 75–101.

19. Within days after this revelation was given, the three witnesses were privileged to receive a divine manifestation in which they saw Moroni, the Book of Mormon plates, and the sacred Nephite-Jaredite artifacts. Following their vision the witnesses transcribed a written testimony about their experience. In that testimony the three men stated that they knew the Book of Mormon had “been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true” (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, “The Testimony of the Three Witnesses,” introduction to the Book of Mormon).

20. Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 2:139. Woodruff’s entry was included word for word in Joseph Smith’s manuscript history under the date of November 28, 1841 (see *Manuscript History of the Church*, vol. C–1, 1255; and *HC* 4:461; see also the introduction to the Book of Mormon).

21. *HC* 1:35–36.

22. Heading to chapter VI [D&C 7], *A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Zion [Independence, Missouri]: W. W. Phelps and Company, 1833), 18; emphasis added.

23. Of the 3,400 verse changes made by Joseph Smith, approximately 1,300 were in the Old Testament and 2,100 in the New Testament (see Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* [Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004], 5).

24. One example of a Joseph Smith Translation change that was not in the 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible but was included in the 2013 edition comes from a passage from the

Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:21–23. The passage in the 1979 edition reads:

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

Now note the following change rendered by Joseph Smith to verse 23 (verse 33 in the Joseph Smith Translation) in the 2013 edition:

*And then will I say, **Ye never knew me; depart from me ye that work iniquity.*** [Emphasis added]

Although the change is a small one, it provides an insightful and completely different meaning to the passage.

25. For a scholarly analysis of the Enoch passages in the book of Moses, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 33–196.

26. *Manuscript History of the Church*, vol. B–1, 596; see also *HC* 2:236. The *Manuscript History of the Church* entry is under the date July 6, 1835, whereas the *History of the Church* gives the date July 5, 1835.

27. *Manuscript History of the Church*, vol. A–1, 162; and *HC* 1:226.

28. *Manuscript History of the Church*, vol. F–1, 21; and *HC* 6:366; see also D&C 67:9.

29. During a November 1831 conference at Hiram, Ohio, the decision was made to publish in book form a selection of Joseph Smith’s revelations, but some of the elders expressed concerns over the wording, language, and phrasing of the revelations. To satisfy their



concern, a test was proposed that basically consisted of composing a revelation. If the brethren could come up with a revelation equal to that of which they considered to be the least of any of the Prophet's revelations, they would be justified in condemning them for not being genuine. However, if they failed in their attempt, they were to "bear record" (i.e., compose a written testimony) that Joseph Smith's revelations were true and came from God (D&C 67:8; see also verses 1–8).

The elders who questioned the veracity of the revelations ultimately failed in their attempt to compose a comparable revelation (see Manuscript History of the Church, A–1, 162–63; and *HC* 1:226).

In accordance with the divine instructions, Sidney Rigdon, Orson Hyde, William E. McLellin, Luke Johnson, and Lyman Johnson's names were attached to a document wherein they testified that the revelations were "given by inspiration of God & are profitable for all men & are verily true" (Revelation Book 1, in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman [Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011], 165–66).

Thirteen additional signatories, each of whom were living in Missouri, later attached their names to the document (see *JSP* RT1:167).

30. The following is an example of a non-canonized revelation given by Joseph Smith to Brigham Young:

*Revelation given to Brigham Young at Far West April 17th 1838. Verrily thus Saith the Lord, Let my Servant Brigham Young go unto the place which he has bought on Mill Creek and there provide for his family until an effectual door is op[en]ed for the suport of his family untill I shall command [him] to go hence, and not to leave his family untill they are amply provided for Amen.* [Joseph Smith journal, 17 April 1838, 32, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library; published in Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 257–58]

31. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 257.

32. Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:133–34; spelling and punctuation standardized.

33. Letter from Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail to the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March 1839, Church History Library; in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, revised ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 438; spelling and punctuation standardized.

34. Letter from Joseph Smith, possibly to Nancy Rigdon, circa January 1842, quoted in the sixth letter from John C. Bennett to the editor of the journal, in "Letters from Gen. Bennett," *Sangamo Journal*, 19 August 1842, 2; also in Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 538; also "Happiness," in *HC* 5:134–35.

35. Letter from Joseph Smith to the Church at Quincy, 20 March 1839; in Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 436; spelling and punctuation standardized.