

THE JOSEPH SMITH LECTURE SERIES

Lecture 1: The First Vision and Its Aftermath

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Years ago I prepared a paper titled “Joseph Smith Among the Prophets.”¹ It attempted to present ten characterizations of prophets that are typical in Judeo-Christian literature. For instance, a prophet is a foreteller; he has prophetic access to the future. Also, prophets have been called “forth-tellers,” meaning that they speak forth boldly in judgment and in recommendation as to their own time. A prophet too is a man who has authority, who speaks with more than human sanction. He is a recoverer or discoverer of truth. He is an advocate of social righteousness. He is a charismatic, one whose personality manifests something that attracts in a spiritual sense. He is one who endures suffering, and does so radiantly. He is an embodiment of love. He is a seer, meaning that he has the capacity to clearly understand and reveal truth. Finally, among the great prophets of the past, many have been martyrs.

In that presentation I showed that, under each of those heads, Joseph Smith qualifies as a prophet. If we can use any one of them to characterize a prophet, what can we say of a man who manifests them all?

More intimately than in the Judeo-Christian captions above, we come to a subjective approach to Joseph’s glorious first vision.

In 1969 *BYU Studies* published a collection of the four known written accounts of the First Vision.² One was first recorded in 1832; another in

1835, after a visit Joseph had with a Jewish visitor named Matthias; there is the 1838 statement, which has been published to the world in the *Pearl of Great Price*; and finally, the well-known Wentworth letter written in 1842 to the *Chicago Democrat*, in which the Prophet briefly recapitulated his first vision. What was intended by the *BYU Studies* publication was not only to give, as was done, the actual holographs—the handwritten accounts from his different scribes—as he dictated them, but also to provide articles on the context by some of the best LDS scholars.³

In the earliest account, Joseph speaks of his days in Vermont. There and later in New York Joseph would look up at night and marvel at the symmetry and the beauty and the order of the heavens. Something in him said, “Behind that there must be a majestic creator of the heavens.”⁴ The contrast between his boyhood awareness and the confusion he saw on this planet was not just difficult; it seared his soul.⁵ The divisions he laments in Palmyra were not just among and between others, neighbors and friends; they were in his own family. He had at least one relative in every church in Palmyra, so that his family was

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utterly spread. Order in heaven, disorder on earth. How could God be responsible for both?

The record makes it clear that before the sacred experience in the Grove it had never occurred to Joseph that all the influential churches were in error. The question he put to Jesus Christ when he recovered himself was not, "Is there a true church in the world?" The question was, "Which church is true?" He assumed that at least one had to be true. The answer therefore was all the more striking and startling: "Join none of them."⁶

By reading in the Bible Joseph had been "struck"—in fact he says, "Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine."⁷ The Reverend George Lane may have been the man who first recommended in Joseph Smith's hearing, "Let him ask of God." That specific passage in James 1:5 was mentioned in some of the minister's sermons. A Methodist, he was associated with revivals in western New York.⁸ Joseph later talks of a Methodist preacher he was with soon after the vision, a person who was, he says, "active in the before mentioned religious excitement." Imagine (and this to me is poignant) Joseph at age fourteen—full as he was of the glory, the remarkable experience, and the excitement of it—recounting his experience to this man. And the man's response was, "Oh no, that could not be of God. Those things don't happen anymore."

So one lacking wisdom ought to go and pray about it. By all means let him ask of God. But to this man the answer seemed . . . well, too much. Heaven had come too close. We can almost visualize the boy—pure-minded, spontaneous, even a little unrestrained, as teenagers are—being struck by the wonder of this marvelous answer to prayer. "Wow! It worked! You told me to do it. I did it." And the response was, "Shucks, boy, it's all of the devil."⁹ The boy's smile slowly disappeared. And he learned early that to testify of divine manifestations was to stir up darkness and to call down wrath. That wrath finally evolved into bullets.

The enemies of Joseph Smith have made out over and over that he was shiftless, lazy, indolent, that he never did a day's work in his life.¹⁰ But a

document exists that contains reported recollections about Joseph Smith as recorded by Martha Cox. One of these comes from a woman, identified as Mrs. Palmer, who knew him in his early life when she was a child.¹¹ As a girl—years younger than him, apparently—she watched him with others of the boys working on her father's farm. Far from his being indolent, the truth is that, according to this account, her father hired Joseph because he was such a good worker.¹²

Another reason was that Joseph was able to get the other boys to work. The suspicion is that he did that by the deft use of his fists. It is my belief that one of the feelings he had of unworthiness, one of the things for which he asked forgiveness (and his account shows that he did pray for forgiveness prior to the visitations of Moroni), was this physical propensity. He was so strong, so muscular, so physically able, that that was one way he had of solving problems. This troubled him. He did not feel it was consonant with the divine commission he had received.¹³

Mrs. Palmer's account speaks of "the excitement stirred up among some of the people over [Joseph's] first vision." A churchman, she recalls, came to her father "to remonstrate against his allowing such close friendship between his family" and the boy Joseph. But the father, pleased with Joseph's work on his farm, was determined to keep him on. Of the vision, he said that it was "the sweet dream of a pure-minded boy." Later, the daughter reports, Joseph claimed to have had another vision; and this time it led to the production of a book. The churchman came again, and at this point the girl's father turned against Joseph. But, she adds significantly, by then it was too late. Joseph Smith had a following.¹⁴

The first members of that following were his family, who supported and loved him with great constancy. In fact there is no greater example of total familial endurance in history than that of the Smith family. It is true that they had their ups and downs and that William Smith was almost as insecure and unsteady as Hyrum Smith was loyal and unyielding. But from an overall perspective, one of the strengths of the history of the Church

is that the first family held true to each other.¹⁵ Even in the early days of Joseph's revelations, the father would counsel him not to be disobedient to the heavenly vision.¹⁶

The 1838 account of the First Vision describes the struggle Joseph had with the adversary. At crucial turning points in the Restoration, Beelzebub, the enemy of righteousness, the prince of darkness, has made his power felt.¹⁷ The First Vision was a natural point of attack. The devil has not, like the rest of us, lost his memory of premortal life. He has not been placed in a physical body and had the veil drawn. He therefore knew Joseph Smith. Later in his life Joseph would say, "Every man [and that would include himself] who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was."¹⁸ It is no surprise, then, that the adversary would wish to thwart the earnest supplications of the boy Joseph in the Sacred Grove. It was not the first time someone had prayed for the Lord to answer the hard question, "Where is the truth?" The response that came to Joseph was an answer, I believe, to millions of prayers offered down through the centuries on both sides of the veil.

How strong was the dark influence on that occasion? In the Pearl of Great Price account Joseph makes clear that it was no imaginary thing. For a time it seemed as if he would be destroyed.¹⁹ In an earlier account he adds that for a time he could not speak, as if his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth.²⁰ He exerted faith and was released from the evil power.

Throughout his life the Prophet had important things to say about the power of the evil one, but he never said the evil one was as powerful as the living God. He knew both. Like Moses of old,²¹ he was not confused when once he had experienced both and felt their influence. Speaking of the kind of power that we call possession, he taught the Saints that "the devil has no power over us only as we permit him."²² He said elsewhere that all men have power to resist the devil. All, in short, is voluntary.²³ But whether we are righteous or not, we do not escape the attacks. And they can come

from the outside, as in Joseph's case in the Grove, or, if we yield, they can become interior and we ourselves can become the very puppets of the evil one. A healthy respect, if I may put it so, for the power of darkness arose from Joseph Smith's early vision, as did a glorious respect for the power that overcomes darkness.²⁴

Joseph described the descending light. In dictating the account, he sought the proper word. He first used the word *fire*. That is crossed out in favor of *spirit* or *light*. The word he finally settled on and used most often was *glory*. It refers to the emanating and radiating spirit and power of God.²⁵ But the word *fire* is important to notice. Orson Pratt, in his book *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*—published in 1840, two years before the Wentworth letter, and circulated widely in the missions in Great Britain and Europe—says that the young prophet expected to see "the leaves and boughs of the trees consumed."²⁶ In other words, he thought he was seeing descending fire, the kind that burns and consumes. Was that detail something Orson Pratt had learned from conversation with the Prophet? Or was it an inference from the statement Joseph makes that the "brightness and glory defy all description"? The Prophet indicates in the 1835 account that he was filled with that light, but also surrounded by it, that it filled the Grove. Then he adds, "Yet nothing consumed," perhaps indicating that he expected it to be.²⁷

The Prophet was not harmed by the experience; he was hallowed by it. Having seen the light, he now saw in it two personages, one of whom said to him, indicating the other, "This is my Beloved Son." In the Wentworth letter the Prophet adds, speaking of the two, that they "exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness."²⁸ Notice they not just resembled—they *exactly* resembled each other in features and likeness. We speak of a family resemblance: "Like father, like son." The Son looked like his Father. Philip asked, "Show us the Father." The Master replied, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."²⁹ This is not because they are identical

but because they are, in appearance as well as in nature, exactly similar.

This circumstance may give further insight into the phrase Alma used in his familiar set of questions about our spiritual progress: “Is the image of God engraven upon your countenances?”³⁰ It may also give greater meaning to a favorite story of President David O. McKay’s about the great stone face: in the very loving of a countenance one may eventually take on the character of what one loves.³¹ It gives further confirmation of the Prophet’s later vision of the Twelve while in Kirtland—a disparate group of men from a variety of backgrounds whom he saw in vision, through their flounderings and struggles, until he saw them glorified. He saw them welcomed by father Adam, ushered to the throne of God, greeted and embraced by the Master, and then crowned. “He saw that they all had beautiful heads of hair and *all looked alike*.”³² This should not be pushed to mean that the Twelve had absolutely similar features, but rather that in glory, “in bloom and beauty”—and the Prophet uses the word *beauty* to describe the glory of a resurrected man as well as of a woman—they were similar.³³

Young Joseph Smith learned in the Sacred Grove that to see the Father is to see the Son, and vice versa.

A deeper point is the relationship of these two beings. Joseph taught in the 1840s—and I think it was an extension of what he learned in the Grove that morning—that the statement of the Master about his doing nothing but what he had seen the Father do has infinite implications.³⁴ How could Jesus have seen the acts of the Father as a witness? President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “The statement of our Lord that he could do nothing but what he had seen the Father do, means simply that it had been revealed to him what his Father had done. Without doubt, Jesus came into the world subject to the same condition as was required of each of us—he forgot everything, and he had to grow from grace to grace.”³⁵

Again, the relationship is exact. If Christ himself was uniquely begotten and was the firstborn in the spirit, and if he was the Christ not only of

this earth but also, as the Prophet taught later, of the galaxy, so before him the Father himself was a Redeemer, having worked out the salvation of souls of whom he was a brother, not a father. This is deep water. The conclusion is drawn by Joseph Smith in his King Follett discourse.³⁶ Whatever else it may mean, and it is mind-boggling, it at least means this: The Father, by experience, knows exactly what his Son has been through. And the Son, by experience, knows exactly what the Father has been through. Therefore, when he says, “I and my Father are one,” he is not expressing a metaphysical identity. He is speaking of oneness of spirit, harmonic throbbings of love and insight that can come only in the patterns of eternal redemption. Sown in the mind of a fourteen-year-old boy, that seed of insight blossomed and grew.

Though we do not know how long the Prophet Joseph was in the Grove that day receiving instructions, it probably was longer than is suggested by the outline we have. We know, for example, that he wrote, “Many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time.”³⁷ So far as I know, he never did commit them to paper. Some critics have pointed out that the Prophet spoke of the visit of angels in connection with his first vision. Some have theorized that he began by asserting that he saw an angel and ended by embellishing it with the claim that he saw the Father and the Son. The truth is that, having described all that we are familiar with about the visitation of the Father and the Son, he says in the closing words of the 1835 account, “I saw many angels in this vision.”³⁸ It is an enforced either-or to say that he either saw the Father and the Son or saw angels. What he saw was both.

Who would have been permitted to be with him in that theophany—what angels were present? This is an unanswerable question. We have Joseph Smith’s teaching that angels are either (1), resurrected personages who have lived upon this earth, or (2), the spirits of the just who have lived here and will yet be resurrected, or (3), as in the rare cases in the Old Testament, not-yet-embodied persons who come in anticipation. “There are no

angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it."³⁹

Joseph was wearied with his experience in the Grove. The encounter, however long or short, demanded much from him. He says, "I came to myself."⁴⁰ I think it inappropriate to say that he had been in a trance or a mystic state. The clearest parallels come from the ancient records of Moses and Abraham and Enoch. Like those prophets of old, Joseph was filled with a spirit which enabled him to endure the presence of God.⁴¹ Is that spirit enervating or is it energizing? My considered answer is, "Yes." It is both. It demands from us a concentration and a surrender comparable to nothing else possible in this life. But it also confers great capacities that transcend our finite mental, spiritual, and physical powers.

In 1832, emerging from the vision on the three degrees of glory (Doctrine and Covenants 76) with his companion in the vision, Sidney Rigdon, the Prophet looked strong, while Sidney was limp and pale. To this the Prophet, with a certain humility as also perhaps with a little condescension, said, "Sidney is not as used to it as I am."⁴² But after the First Vision, he was feeble. It was difficult for him to go home. Similarly, in his 1823 encounter with Moroni, the repetitive encounter, he was left weak, and his father sent him home. He couldn't even climb the fence, though he was usually a strong and vigorous boy. Neibaur reports him saying of his condition immediately following the First Vision, "I . . . felt uncommon feeble."⁴³

We now turn to some of the theological extensions of this initial insight of the First Vision as the Prophet later taught them. "It is the first principle of the gospel," he said, "to know for a certainty the character of God." That is more than saying it is the first principle to know *that* God exists. He doesn't use the word *existence* at all in this context. You can't find one argument in Joseph Smith for the existence of God. Why not? One answer: Because one does not begin to argue about a thing's existence until serious doubts have arisen. The arguments for God are a kind of whistling in the dark. In the absence of experience with God, men have invented arguments to justify

the experience of the absence of God. They have built a rational Tower of Babel, from which they comfort themselves with, "We haven't heard from God, but he must still be there."

But Joseph wasn't speculating. He was reporting his firsthand experience. Prophets always have. On the other hand, the philosophers have expended some of the greatest ingenuity of the western world in inventing what turn out to be specious and invalid arguments for the existence of God. No. "It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character [the personality, the attributes] of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another."⁴⁴ That is the testimony of Joseph Smith from beginning to end. He is talking about all of us, now. A man, a woman—it is the first principle for any of us. That is where we begin.

And lest we should say, as occasionally we do, "But his remarkable life and experience is utterly beyond my own," we should note that Joseph said in 1839: "God hath not revealed anything to Joseph [calling himself by name], but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them." Even the least Saint, I repeat. The Prophet continued: "For the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye the Lord; for all shall know Him (who remain) from the least to the greatest."⁴⁵ Note that "all shall know him" is different from knowing *about* him.

That same year Joseph delivered a marvelous discourse in which he expounded on the fourteenth chapter of John, that masterful sermon of the Savior's in which he said that he and the Father would "make their abode" with faithful Saints. In this address the Prophet in effect readdresses that sermon to us. It is as if he said, "It is not enough for you to say, 'Ah, Brother Joseph is in charge, and he knows.' You must know." He says it in ten different ways. Then in the final part he says, "Come to God." These blessings are intended for his Saints, so ask him.⁴⁶

"Well," one might feel, "I don't want to overdo it. I don't want to ask for things I shouldn't ask for." Of course, as a general principle that

represents a genuine, discerning wisdom—we should not ask for what we should not seek from him. But when the Lord has commanded us to ask, it is appropriate. This is illustrated in the Savior’s parable of the unjust judge and the importunate widow, which is preceded by the reason it was given—to show “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” It told of the widow who repeatedly came to the judge to plead her case. Always he refused to heed. But because she came back so often, in order to be permanently rid of her the judge said, “All right! Give her what she wants and end her clamoring.”⁴⁷

My rendering is a crude paraphrase of the parable. But what is the point of the story? Why would the Savior teach a parable like that? The point is, pray and don’t faint; or, in the words of Joseph Smith, “Weary [the Lord] until he blesses you.”⁴⁸ There are places in modern scripture where the Lord commands someone not to pray further on a particular matter, where he says, “Trouble me no more.” But in each case the context shows he had already given the answer, and he is saying, “Please take no or yes for an answer.”⁴⁹

So it is. We have the privilege to recapitulate the experience of the Prophet.

That leads to my final point. So often we are haunted not only with the question of whether we have gone far enough in our own religious experience but also whether we can rely on some things we have previously trusted. Acids eat away at us. Sometimes it is the taunting of other voices; but sometimes it is nothing more profound than our own sins and weaknesses, and the betrayals of the best in ourselves. Doubt naturally follows.

The Master made a strange statement to Thomas. Thomas is categorized as a doubter because he said what the others had said earlier: “I will believe when, and only when, I see.”⁵⁰ According to Luke, the others virtually rubbed their eyes in disbelief when they did see. It is a beautiful phrase: “They yet believed not for joy.”⁵¹ Meaning what? Meaning it was too good to be true. Within days they had seen their Lord crucified, and now he stood before them! So they too had impending doubts, as did Thomas. The

strange words of Jesus are reported by John: “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”⁵²

On the surface this statement seems to put a premium on secondhand or distant awareness, almost as if unsupportable faith is more commendable than faith resting on the knowledge of sight. That, I think, is a mistake. What is involved in the statement is the recognition by the Lord and by his prophets that the most penetrating of assurances—the one power, even beyond sight, that can burn doubt out of us and make it, as it were, impossible for us to disbelieve—is the Holy Ghost.⁵³

Recording the feelings he had on leaving the Grove and on the subsequent days, Joseph left on record this sentence: “My soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me but [I] could find none that would believe the heavenly vision.”⁵⁴ This is one of the rare insights he gives as to what went on inside as distinct from outside him in that experience. Joy, love. And no doubt. Others, of course, doubted. He did not.

The devil is shrewd with the stratagems and with the Satanic substitute, but one thing he cannot counterfeit is the witness and power of the Holy Ghost. When that is upon us there is assurance—and, I repeat, even greater than that of sight. It is of course possible to have both, and that is precisely what Joseph Smith had. He saw, as a later revelation explains, not through the natural or the carnal mind⁵⁵ but with the spiritual. He saw with his own eyes, but he also was enveloped in that radiating power which has been commissioned to bear witness of the Father and the Son. Without having open or remarkable visions, we all can have the same glorious and glorifying certainty about the reality of the Father and the Son; and that comes by the Spirit, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Often we are confronted in the world by those who want to believe in God without believing in God.⁵⁶ They are willing to affirm that there is something—and that’s about the strongest word

they are willing to use—that there is something out there that accounts for things: a principle, a harmonic force, or an ultimate cosmic mystery. How rarely is the testimony welcomed that the Father is in the likeness of the Christ! One reason—and Latter-day Saints can testify of this—is that such personal beings can get involved in your life, changing it, giving specific commandments and counsels, rebuking, approving, or disapproving. A God who is utterly distant stays out of your hair.⁵⁷

It is unlikely that the Prophet fully anticipated the consequences of his prayer in the Grove, but he nevertheless fully measured up to those consequences. He never wavered. On one occasion he said, “If I had not actually got into this work and been called of God, I would back out.” But he added—and this shows his integrity—“I cannot back out: I have no doubt of the truth.”⁵⁸ (Some men having no doubt of the truth have nevertheless backed out, but he did not.) From the Grove experience on throughout his life he knew and welcomed into his life the Father and the Son, “even,” as he was commanded in 1829, “if [he] should be slain.”⁵⁹ He was true unto life and unto death. To use the word that he re-revealed in our generation, that seals the power of his first and subsequent visitations. Anyone who has enough of the Spirit of God to know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, by that same spirit will be brought to recognize that one of the prophets called by the Father and the Son was Joseph Smith.

Notes

1. Published under this title as a pamphlet in 1966 by Deseret Book Co.

2. *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 278–81, 284–85, 287–93, 296. All four of the Prophet’s written recitals of the First Vision along with contemporary accounts given by others can be found in Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, pp. 151–81.

3. See, for example, Lyon, “How Authentic Are Mormon Historic Sites in Vermont and New York?” pp. 341–50; Jessee, “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” pp. 275–94; and

Anderson, “Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences,” pp. 373–404.

4. The 1832 account provides the most extended passage on the influence of the vaulted heavens on Joseph’s convictions concerning God. See Backman, *First Vision*, pp. 156–57.

5. “This was a grief to my Soul,” he said in 1832. Further, his reflections on the heavens and his searching the scriptures led him to become more conscious of his own sins, and he felt to mourn for them. See Backman, *First Vision*, p. 156.

6. See Backman, *First Vision*, p. 163. He says that “it never entered into [his] heart” that the churches were all in error, but it may have entered his head. In his youth he leaned toward Methodism, and his mother was a Presbyterian Seeker. Yet he said in 1838, describing his earlier dilemma, that he asked himself, “Are they all wrong together?” (Backman, *First Vision*, p. 162.) But even after his first vision he never said that all the churches were *all* wrong. “Have the Presbyterians any truth?” he later asked. “Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists, etc., any truth? Yes.” He added that Latter-day Saints must “gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up” or they would not be “true ‘Mormons.’” (*TPJS*, p. 316; *WJS*, p. 234.)

7. Backman, *First Vision*, p. 162.

8. See Porter, “Reverend George Lane,” pp. 321–40. Another source reports that Joseph made his report to a Methodist. See Backman, *First Vision*, p. 177.

9. The 1838 account reports the man “saying it was all of the Devil, that there was no such thing as visions and revelations in these days” (Backman, *First Vision*, p. 164).

10. It has been pointed out that these stories radically contradict each other. On the one hand we read of a shiftless person who is always aimlessly telling stories and never doing a decent day’s work, and on the other hand we read that every night at midnight he’s out with a crew digging for silver or buried treasure and never finding it. That is hardly indolent. See Nibley, *The Myth Makers*, pp. 91–190.

11. See reported recollection of Mrs. Palmer in Cox, "Stories from Notebook of Martha Cox, Grandmother of Fern Cox," p. 1; also Madsen, "Guest Editor's Prologue," p. 235; Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet*, pp. 1–2.

12. The document says that "the boy was the best help he had ever found. . . . When Joseph Smith worked with them the work went steadily forward, and he got the full worth of the wages he paid." (As reported in Cox, "Stories from Notebook," p. 1; Madsen, "Prologue," p. 235; Andrus, *They Knew*, p. 1.)

13. Allen J. Stout recalls that as a member of the Nauvoo Legion he lamented to Joseph that he was quick to fight. The Prophet responded by speaking of his own youth and of learning to fight "much against his own will." His parents, Joseph said, had taught their family that quarreling and fighting are beastly sins. Whenever he "laid his hand in anger on a fellow creature it gave him sorrow and a feeling of shame." He added, however, that in the defense of righteousness or of the innocent, he could "fight to the death." (Reported recollection of Allen J. Stout in Lee, Notebook, pp. 7–8.)

14. Mrs. Palmer recalls that the man who asked her father to break his ties with Joseph after he claimed a vision was "one of [our] church leaders," presumably a minister. She was a Presbyterian; presumably so was the leader. In any case, after the second vision she too turned against Joseph and her family "cut off their friendship for all the Smiths, for all the family followed Joseph. Even the father, intelligent man that he was, could not discern the evil he was helping to promote." (As reported in Cox, "Stories from Notebook," p. 1; see Madsen, "Prologue," p. 235; Andrus, *They Knew*, pp. 1–2.)

15. "I was afraid my father would not believe me," Mother Smith recalls Joseph saying of Moroni's visits (*History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, p. 79). Instead, as Joseph recalled in 1840 at his father's death, "He was the first person who received my testimony after I had seen the angel, and exhorted me to be faithful and diligent to the message I had received" (HC 4:190). Joseph was

the fourth child, and yet the older brothers and his sisters Catherine and Sophronia sustained him. Samuel, who contracted a fever after being pursued by a mob on the night of the martyrdom, lost his life just thirty-three days after Joseph and Hyrum. Even many of Joseph's uncles and cousins, though not all of them, became dedicated members of the Church.

16. Joseph wrote of his father's response to Moroni's visitations: "He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger" (Joseph Smith—History 1:50).

17. "It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?" (Joseph Smith—History 1:20.)

18. *TPJS*, p. 365; *WJS*, p. 367.

19. At this point he was, he wrote, "ready to sink into despair . . . not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world" (Joseph Smith—History 1:16).

20. In the 1835 account he says, "My tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth" (Backman, *First Vision*, p. 159). See also Joseph Smith—History 1:15.

21. See Moses 1:12–16.

22. *TPJS*, p. 181; *WJS*, p. 60.

23. *TPJS*, p. 187; *WJS*, p. 72.

24. Joseph taught that it is a mistake to underestimate the power of the evil one, as also to overestimate it. "Unless we in our hearts consent and yield—our organization [is] such that we can resist the devil. If we were not organized so, we would not be free agents." (*WJS*, p. 65.) Yet so powerful and pervasive has been the adversary's influence that, as the Prophet taught John Bernhisel, "in every previous dispensation, Lucifer had prevailed and driven the priesthood from the earth. But in this last dispensation the reign of the Son of God and His priesthood was firmly established, nevermore to depart; thus all the inhabitants of the world might partake of the gifts and blessings of God." (Andrus, *They Knew*, p. 177.)

25. See, for example, his change from the word *fire to light* in the 1832 account (Backman, *First Vision*, p. 157).

26. P. 5.

27. See Backman, *First Vision*, p. 159.

28. See Backman, *First Vision*, p. 169.

29. John 14:8–9.

30. Alma 5:14, 19.

31. In *Conference Report*, October 1926, p. 112; *Gospel Ideals*, p. 355.

32. Recollection of Heber C. Kimball in Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, p. 94; italics added.

33. *TPJS*, p. 368; *WJS*, p. 369.

34. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

35. *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:32–33.

36. The Prophet stated in this discourse: “What did Jesus do? ‘Why, I do the things that I saw the Father do when worlds came into existence. I saw the Father work out a kingdom with fear and trembling, and I can do the same.’” (*WJS*, p. 358.) In his final discourse in the Nauvoo grove he said: “The Savior says, ‘The work that my Father did do I also.’ And those are the works. He took himself a body and then laid down his life that he might take it up again.” (*WJS*, p. 382.) Joseph spoke of these as “first principles of the gospel” (*WJS*, p. 358).

37. Joseph Smith—History 1:20. Compare his comment on the visit of Moroni: “He quoted many other passages of scripture, and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here” (Joseph Smith—History 1:41). Oliver Cowdery records that “our brother was permitted to see and understand much more full and perfect than I am able to communicate in writing” (*MA* 1 [April 1835]: 112).

38. Backman, *First Vision*, p. 159.

39. D&C 130:5.

40. “When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven” (Joseph Smith—History 1:20).

41. “For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God” (D&C 67:11). “Flesh and blood cannot go there; but flesh and bones, quickened by the Spirit of God, can” (*TPJS*, p. 326).

42. “Joseph appeared as strong as a lion, but Sidney seemed as weak as water, and Joseph, noticing his condition smiled and said, ‘Brother Sidney is not as used to it as I am’” (recollection of Philo Dibble in *Early Scenes in Church History*, p. 81).

43. “Comforted, I endeavored to arise but felt uncommon feeble.” So Joseph told convert Alexander Neibaur, who conversed with the Prophet about the First Vision on May 24, 1844. (See Backman, *First Vision*, p. 177.)

44. *TPJS*, p. 345. In Joseph Smith’s translation of the New Testament, the Master’s pronouncement “I never knew you” is changed to “Ye never knew me” (compare Matthew 7:23 and JST Matthew 7:33). See also JST Matthew 25:11, wherein the Lord tells the five foolish virgins, “Ye know me not.”

45. *TPJS*, p. 149; *WJS*, p. 4.

46. See *WJS*, pp. 13–15.

47. “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (see Luke 18:1–8). The admonition to “pray always” occurs eight times in the Doctrine and Covenants.

48. *WJS*, p. 15.

49. The phrase “nor trouble me any more concerning this matter” follows a rebuke to Martin Harris (D&C 5:29). “Let this suffice” are the Lord’s words following a partial answer to Joseph’s concern to know the time of the Second Coming (see D&C 130:14–17). “Trouble me no more,” the Lord says after detailing the purposes of the Sabbath (D&C 59:22).

50. See Luke 24:11. The Joseph Smith Translation suggests that all the disciples had spoken ill of Jesus when under pressure and that all had doubts and fears. “They had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men.” After the Master’s remarks about sin and forgiveness, they said among

themselves, “We shall not be forgiven.” But Jesus replied: “Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, and repenteth, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him who blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him.” (See JST Luke 12:10–12.)

51. Luke 24:41. The word for *joy* in Greek carries connotations of delight and gladness.

52. John 20:29.

53. It is taught frequently that the influence of the Holy Ghost is the ultimate source of assurance and certitude. The forces of evil simulate light; but their light is, comparatively speaking, darkness. See, for example, Brigham Young’s remarks that “the spirit of truth will detect everything, and enable all who possess it to understand truth from error, light from darkness, the things of God from the things not of God” (*JD* 13:336).

54. From the 1832 account as found in Backman, *First Vision*, p. 157.

55. “For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God. Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God, neither after the carnal mind. Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither

the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected.” (D&C 67:11–13.)

56. “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol” (D&C 1:16).

57. A “principle of harmony”—an impersonal abstracton—can always be vaguely defined as forestalling any specific counsels, commandments, or corrections. It is a middle ground between a universal negation (“There is no God”) and a personal affirmation (“There is a living and commanding God”). Advocacy, even worship, of such a principle is religion without costs.

58. *TPJS*, p. 286; *WJS*, p. 179. This statement was made on the thirteenth anniversary of the organization of the Church. The Prophet may have been contemplating how much turbulence had been crowded into those thirteen years.

59. D&C 5:22.

For full citations see “Author’s Note on Sources, Abbreviations, and Bibliography” in the Joseph Smith Lecture Series.