

“A Choice Seer”

NEAL A. MAXWELL

I am aware that my wise and gentle friend Elder David B. Haight spoke about the Prophet Joseph a month ago. Please bear with me, therefore, as I seek to place the spotlight on the Seer in yet a different way on this Easter Sunday, during which our rejoicing is made more resplendent by the revelations and translations concerning Jesus that came to us through Joseph.

My appreciation is expressed to President Jeffrey Holland, Dean Robert Matthews, Professors Hugh Nibley, Jack Welch, Truman Madsen, Richard Anderson, Dean Jessee, and others for sharing knowledge with me that has been so helpful. These men do their part to slow the process of my becoming intellectually arthritic.

The Prophet Joseph Smith

Whenever we talk about the Prophet Joseph Smith, it is important to remember what he said of himself: “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught” (*Teachings*, p. 368). He was a good man, but he was called by a perfect Lord, Jesus of Nazareth! Joseph received his first counsel from God the Father, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (JS—H 1:17). Joseph Smith listened carefully to Jesus then and ever after.

Ages ago in the Great Council, Jesus was the prepared but meek volunteer. As the Father described the plan of salvation and the need for a Savior, it was Jesus who stepped forward and said humbly but courageously, “Here am I, send me” (Abraham 3:27; see also Moses 4:2). Never has anyone offered to do so much for so many with so few words!

It is through the Prophet Joseph Smith, whom the resurrected Jesus called, that we learn these things, and so much more, about Jesus—long before Bethlehem and well beyond Calvary. Whenever we speak of the Prophet Joseph Smith, therefore, it should be in reverent appreciation of the Lord who called him and whom Joseph served so well.

From Joseph Smith, one unlearned and untrained in theology, more printed pages of scripture have come down to us than from any other mortal—in fact, as President Holland has pointed out, more than the combined pages, as available at present, from Moses, Paul, Luke, and Mormon.

Neal A. Maxwell was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 30 March 1986.

But it is not only a matter of impressive quantity, it is also a qualitative matter, since dazzling doctrines came through the Prophet, including key doctrines previously lost from the face of the earth, a loss that caused people to “stumble exceedingly” (1 Nephi 13:34). “Plain and precious” things, because of faulty transmission, were “kept back” or “taken away” (see 1 Nephi 13:34, 39–40), and thus do not appear in our treasured Holy Bible.

What came *through* Joseph Smith was *beyond* Joseph Smith, and it *stretched* him! In fact, the doctrines that came through that “choice seer” (2 Nephi 3:6–7) by translation or revelation, are often so light-intensive that, like radioactive materials, they must be handled with great care!

By the way, it appears that in the process of translating the Book of Mormon in the spring of 1829, Joseph was moving along at the rate of seven to ten current printed pages a day. This is but one illustration of how blessed that “choice seer” was. Although Joseph could translate the words of the Book of Mormon, “The learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them” refers to a mind-set that is with us to this day, belonging to more than Professor Anthon (see 2 Nephi 27:20 and JS—H 1:64–65). In contrast, among an increasing number of mortals, Joseph is, as foreseen, “esteemed highly” (2 Nephi 3:7).

In 1833 Joseph was told not only that Jesus was with God premortally, but that:

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. [D&C 93:29]

What a stunning parting of the curtains so that man could have a correct view of himself! The silence of centuries was officially broken. As the morning of the Restoration began to break, the shadows of false doctrines began to flee. Man’s view of himself could become clearer, unimpeded by the overhanging of “original sin.” We are accountable to a just God for our actual and individual sins—not for Adam’s original transgression.

And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. [Moses 6:53–54; see also D&C 93:38 and Articles of Faith 1:2]

A stretching view of the universe was also made possible. Note what accompanied a wondrous witnessing of the resurrected Jesus:

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. [D&C 76:23–24]

In June 1830 came “this precious morsel,” which expands our perspective about this planet, described by Maimonides as “a speck among the worlds” (see Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], p.139).

And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten. . . .

For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. [Moses 1:33, 39]

Even as our view of the universe was greatly enlarged, our view of human history was made much more intimate and familial:

Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called . . . the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing.

And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the prince, the archangel.

And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever.

And Adam stood up in the midst of the congregation; and, notwithstanding he was bowed down with age, being full of the Holy Ghost, predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation.

These things were all written in the book of Enoch, and are to be testified of in due time. [D&C 107:53–57]

This startling and informing revelation came, by the way, in the midst of verses otherwise concerned with chronologies, genealogies, and duties.

Let others, if they choose, make jokes about our first parents, Adam and Eve, or regard them as mere myths. As a result of the Prophet Joseph Smith's revelations, we are blessed to know much more about "things as they really were, are, and will be" (see Jacob 4:13 and D&C 93:24)!

Latter-day Saints expectantly await the book of Enoch as being among the "many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" that God "will yet reveal" (Articles of Faith 1:9). As Professor Robert Matthews has observed, through Joseph Smith we received eighteen times as much as is in the Bible concerning Enoch. Without the Restoration, we would not even know there was a City of Enoch!

While others wonder if their mortal existence is absurd and pointless, we know otherwise about God's purposes, which he described before declaring, "This is the plan of salvation unto all men" (Moses 6:57–63). The process is a stern test:

And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them. [Abraham 3:25]

Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith. [Mosiah 23:21]

How marvelous it is that these and so many other precious truths, just as prophesied, are "had again" among the children of men (Moses 1:41). No wonder there can and should be times for openly *enjoying* the faith as well as *defending* the faith.

These restored truths came fully formed. Joseph Smith did not receive such truths through Solomon Spaulding, Ethan Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, or any others to be advanced by those desperate for any explanation other than the correct one. In 1850 Joseph's devoted helper, Phineas Young, wrote to Brigham Young in praise of Oliver Cowdery. Phineas wrote that the rebaptized Oliver Cowdery was now dead, but no one should forget his last testimony in which he said of Church headquarters in the West, "There was no salvation but in the valley and through the priesthood there." Oliver knew the source of the truths and priesthood which were restored through Joseph and the later *locus* of the presiding priesthood power. (see Phineas Young to Brigham Young, April 25, 1850, Brigham Young Collection, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

There is a legal doctrine meaning "the thing speaks for itself." The Everest of ecclesiastical truth built from the translations and revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith speaks for itself as it towers above the foothills of philosophy. Even so, most will ignore it. Still others will reject the Restoration, supplying their own alternative explanations, just as some did who once heard thunder instead of the voice of God (see John 12:27–30). However, in a happy day ahead, "They that murmured shall learn

doctrine” (Isaiah 29:24; 2 Nephi 27:35). This suggests that doctrinal illiteracy is a significant cause of murmuring among Church members.

The Restoration responds resoundingly and reassuringly to the key human questions and provides the firm framework of our faith. Do we actually live in an unexplained and unexplainable universe? Is there really purpose and meaning to human existence? Why such unevenness in the human condition? Why so much human suffering?

The marvelous truths of the Restoration respond to these questions and are highly global, highly personal, and even galactic in their dimensions! Identity exists amid immensity. We are enclosed in divine purposes! There is no need for despair! No wonder the restored gospel is such “good news.”

These and other revelations came to us through an inspired prophet, Joseph Smith. His spelling left something to be desired, but how he provided us with the essential grammar of the gospel!

The Restoration

Our present appreciation of the restored gospel lags embarrassingly far behind the stretching significance of its doctrines and theology. So far as our exploring the terrain of truth opened up to us by the Prophet Joseph is concerned, we have barely reached the Platte River, and it is time for us as a people to move on!

The Prophet is that “choice seer” of whom ancient Joseph spoke (2 Nephi 3:6–11), a major spiritual benefactor of the world. His salvational impact ultimately will be enormous, as the demographics of this dispensation alone assure (see D&C 135:3).

Like another prophet, Joseph served “notwithstanding [his] weakness” (2 Nephi 33:11). “Out of [Joseph’s] weakness he [was] made strong” (2 Nephi 3:13). At one point, when he was translating the fourth chapter of 1 Nephi, Emma was acting as his scribe.

Joseph reportedly encountered the words about the wall around Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 4:5). He apparently paused and asked Emma if, in fact, there was a wall around Jerusalem. She replied in the affirmative. Joseph hadn’t known (see *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 1896, reprint [Independence, Missouri: Board of Publication, 1967], 4:447). According to Emma, when she and Joseph were interrupted during his translating, Joseph would later resume on the very sentence from which he had left off (see *Saints Herald*, 1 October 1879, pp. 289–90; see also Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 62).

We naturally would like to know about that process of translation. In October 1831, Joseph Smith was asked by his brother Hyrum, at a conference held in Orange, Ohio, to give a first-hand account concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The Prophet replied “that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and. . . it was not expedient for him to relate these things” (*HC* 1:220). Since Joseph, who knew the “particulars,” chose not to describe them in detail then, we cannot presently be definitive about methodology. But we can and should savor the supernal substance of the revelations and translations, which combine to prove to the world “that the holy scriptures are true” (D&C 20: 11; see also 1 Nephi 13:39–40).

Joseph Smith’s time and place was one of religious fervor: “Lo, here!” and “Lo, there!” is Christ (JS—H 1:5). Ours is an age when, instead, the historicity of Christ is increasingly questioned. This condition only increases the relevance of the Restoration with its affirmation of Jesus’ reality and his resurrection.

While Jesus declared that the scriptures “testify” of him (John 5:39), he neither expected nor received much coverage in secular history. Therefore, it is no surprise for

studious Christians to learn that the secular history of that meridian period is nearly silent about the ministry of Jesus. Three secular writers, each writing after Jesus' crucifixion, touched slightly upon Christ. Tacitus (about A.D. 55–117), thought by many to be the greatest Roman historian, wrote only this: "Christus . . . had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus" (*Annals of Tacitus* 15:44).

Suetonius (about A.D. 70–140), a Roman who wrote about the lives of various Caesars, called Jesus "Chrestus" and provided a sentence linking Chrestus to civil disturbance. Yet even this brief mention may contain a possible chronological error. (see *The Lives of the Caesars*, trans. J. C. Rolfe [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1914], 5:51–52).

Josephus (about A.D. 37–95), in his *Antiquities*, wrote a few lines about the founder of Christianity, but later interpolations may cloud his meager lines (see, for example, 18:3). How important it is, given these conditions, that the New Testament not stand alone as evidence for Christ!

Joseph Smith was also an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. Yet, as with all true disciples, Joseph went through a process of *proving*, *reproving*, and *improving*, while simultaneously serving as the human conduit through whom God chose to give his word to this generation (D&C 5:10).

The period of adversity commencing in Richmond Jail and continuing in Liberty Jail from 1 December 1838 until the first week in April 1839 provides a special window through which we can see the process of revelation and personal consolidation under way. Elder B. H. Roberts called the jail the "prison temple" (B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church* [Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930], 1:526). Ironically, this period of enforced idleness, grim though the conditions were, was perhaps the

only time in the Prophet's often hectic adult life when there was much time for reflection.

The dungeon at Liberty Jail had inner and outer walls which, combined, were four feet thick. Loose rocks were placed between the walls to thwart any attempt at burrowing through. Unjustly arrested and unjustly confined, Joseph and his companions tried twice to escape but failed. As thick as those walls and that door were, and as securely as they kept the Prophet and his fellow prisoners in, the walls were not thick enough to keep revelation out!

During his stay in Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph Smith received some of the most sublime revelations ever received by any prophet in any dispensation, known now as sections 121 and 122 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Therein are divine tutorials by which the Lord schooled his latter-day prophet—probably the most tender tutorials in all of holy writ now available.

A Special Relationship

Joseph Smith was probably first made intellectually aware of the special relationship he had with ancient Joseph, whom we commonly refer to as Joseph in Egypt, when the Prophet Joseph translated the third chapter of 2 Nephi. It was not until Liberty Jail, however, that the record indicates any public affirmation of this unusual relationship. In one of his last letters from Liberty Jail, Joseph wrote, "I feel like Joseph in Egypt" (*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. Dean C. Jessee [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984], p. 409). It was not an idle comparison, for it reflected an important verse in the third chapter of 2 Nephi. Ancient Joseph spoke of the latter-day seer, saying, "And he shall be like unto me" (2 Nephi 3:15).

When Joseph Smith, Jr., was given a blessing by Father Smith in December 1834, an extensive portion of that blessing informed modern Joseph of his special relationship to ancient Joseph (see Joseph Smith, Sr., blessing, 9 Dec. 1834, Church Historical Department, 1:3–4).

The comparisons between the two Josephs, of course, reflect varying degrees of exactitude, but they are, nevertheless, quite striking. Some similarities are situational, others are dispositional. Some are strategic, such as ancient Joseph's making stored grain available in time of famine (see Genesis 41:56), while modern Joseph opened the granary of the gospel after years of famine.

First, both Josephs had inauspicious beginnings. Initially, they were unlikely candidates to have had the impact they did on Egyptian history and American history, respectively.

Both had visions at a young and tender age (see Genesis 37:2–5 and JS—H 1). The visions brought to both men hate from their fellowmen (see Genesis 37:5–8 and JS—H 1:21–26). Both knew sibling jealousy. Modern Joseph had to contend with a mercurial brother, William, whom Joseph forgave many times (see HC 2:353–54).

Both Josephs were generous to those who betrayed them. Ancient Joseph was generous to his once-betraying brothers whom he later saved from starvation (see Genesis 45:1–15). Both prophesied remarkably of the future of their nations and the challenges their governments would face (see Genesis 41:29–31 and D&C 87).

They both knew what it was to be falsely accused, and they both were jailed.

Both, in their extremities, helped others who shared their imprisonment, but who later forgot their benefactors. In the case of ancient Joseph, it was the chief butler (see Genesis 40:20–23). Joseph Smith worried over an ill cell mate, Sidney Rigdon, who was freed in January 1839. The Prophet rejoiced. Three months later, the Prophet inquired “after Elder Rigdon if he has not forgotten us” (*Writings*, p. 399).

Both Josephs were torn from their families, although ancient Joseph suffered through this for a much, much longer time.

Very significantly, both were “like unto” each other in being amazingly resilient in the midst of adversity. This, in each man, is a truly striking quality.

Both were understandably anxious about their loved ones and friends. Ancient Joseph, when his true identity became known, inquired tenderly of his brothers, “Doth my father yet live?” (Genesis 45:3). From Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph Smith, with comparative awareness, wrote, “Doth my friends yet live if they live do they remember me?” (*Writings*, p. 409).

Indeed, these two uncommon men had much in common, being truly “like unto” each other!

In the Prison Temple

The “prison temple” involved a time of obscurity, adversity, irony, and testimony. W. W. Phelps had briefly faltered, being part of the betrayals that had placed Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail. Joseph was, at the time, indignant over Brother Phelps' failures. Yet later on, Joseph was generous. The next year, 1840, when W. W. Phelps pled for readmission into the Church, Joseph Smith, who pledged from jail to act later “in the spirit of generosity,” wrote a powerful and redemptive letter, the closing lines of which were, “Come on, dear brother, since the war is past, For friends at first, are friends again at last” (HC 4:164; see also pp. 162–63).

No wonder a grateful Brother Phelps, soon after Joseph's June 1844 martyrdom, wrote the text “Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 27).

The ironies in Liberty Jail are many. Though deprived of his constitutional rights, Joseph Smith therein praised the glorious U.S. Constitution. Then, after the misery of Missouri, Joseph declared with inspired anticipation:

I am willing to be sacrificed. . . maintaining the laws & Constitution of the United States if need be for the general good of mankind. [Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), p. 320]

While being grossly abused by some biased political, judicial, and military leaders who wrongly used their powers Joseph received a glorious revelation. A sizable portion of that revelation, D&C 121, contrastingly sets forth the style and substance the Lord wants from his leaders that diverges so sharply from the ways of the world (see D&C 121:34–46).

Though Joseph was jailed nearly five months, more than four of these in Liberty Jail, he was told by the tutoring Lord that these things shall be “but for a small moment” (D&C 122:4; see also D&C 121:7). Though Joseph was suffering, the Lord reminded him that he was not suffering as much as Job had (see D&C 121:7–11). Only the Lord can compare crosses, and on that particular occasion he did (D&C 122:8).

The conditions in Liberty Jail were grim. The food was scanty and often consisted of leftovers from the jailer’s table brought to them in a basket where chickens slept at night and which was often not cleaned. When the prisoners were permitted to cook, they had to endure smoke. It was also a particularly cold winter. The constant darkness bothered the prisoners’ eyes. Joseph wrote about how his hand actually trembled as he penned his next-to-last letter to Emma (see *Writings*, p. 409).

In the midst of this stark obscurity and incessant difficulty, and with twelve thousand of Joseph’s followers driven from the state of Missouri, the enemies of the Church probably felt that they had destroyed Joseph’s work. Yet in the midst of all this deprivation, affliction, and obscurity, Joseph received the Lord’s

stunning assurance that “the ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name” (D&C 122:1).

How inspired and audacious a prophecy for any religious leader, let alone one on the obscure nineteenth-century American frontier. Meanwhile, Joseph’s contemporary frontier and religious leaders have since become mere footnotes to history. But not Joseph!

Joseph, earlier in his imprisonment, had special assurances of which he later wrote,

Death stared me in the face, and . . . my destruction was determined upon, as far as man was concerned; yet, from my first entrance into the camp, . . . that still small voice, which has so often whispered consolation to my soul, in the depth of sorrow and distress, bade me be of good cheer, and promised deliverance, which gave me great comfort.
[*Writings* (November 1839), p. 443]

However, Joseph was not unmindful or unaware of how grim things looked. With unusual empathy he observed from his prison temple: “Those who have persecuted us and smitten us and borne false witness against us . . . do seem to have a great triumph over us for the present”; then, “[But] Zion shall yet live though she seemeth to be dead” (*Writings*, pp. 375, 382).

It was from Liberty Jail that Joseph, more than once, testified that through God “we received the Book of Mormon” (*Writings*, p. 399), “that the Book of Mormon is true,” and “that the ministering angels sent forth from God are true” (*Writings*, p. 407).

It was soon after his release from Liberty Jail that the Prophet Joseph Smith spoke about how the Book of Mormon was “the keystone of our religion” (HC 4:461).

After the Liberty Jail experience, the Prophet gave fervent public testimony about the Book of Mormon to a congregation of about three thousand in Philadelphia. When Sidney Rigdon, in his remarks on that same occasion, seemed to neglect the Book of Mormon in

favor of citing the Bible, Joseph took the pulpit and declared, “If nobody else had the courage to testify of so glorious a message from Heaven, and of the finding of so glorious a record, he felt to do it” (*Words*, p. 45). The atmosphere, according to one present, was electric.

This is not to say that Joseph had not earlier been clear and declarative regarding the Book of Mormon. For instance, in an 1834 sermon, Joseph observed, “Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion?” (*Teachings*, p. 71).

Sharing the jail with Joseph was his brother Hyrum, ever faithful at Joseph’s side. We have yet to pay Hyrum his due. Alas, we have little from his pen, but his actions spoke for him. However, on 16 March 1839, he wrote from Liberty Jail to a Sister Grinnal who was nursing Hyrum’s wife, Mary Fielding, to his daughter, Lovina, and to a girl, Clarrinda. To Clarrinda he wrote:

Let mother give you one of the Books of Mormon & write your name in it. I want you to seek every opportunity to read it through. Remember me both night and morning in your prayers.

To Lovina he wrote:

You may have my small Book of Mormon. You must try to read it through. Pray for your father that the Lord may help him to come home. [Letter used with permission of Elder Eldred G. Smith, in whose possession it is.]

In the extremity of jail, Hyrum, so much at the center of things, joined Joseph in stressing the Book of Mormon.

Significantly, Joseph was released from the bondage of Liberty Jail 6 April 1839, and a few days later was allowed to escape from his captors. As you know, April 6 is the date of Jesus’ birth. It is also the date of birth of his latter-day church (D&C 20:1). Additionally, the time of

Joseph’s release from the bondage of jail is often part of the season of Passover when our Jewish friends celebrate ancient Israel’s deliverance and subsequent release from bondage in Egypt.

By the way, after Jesus’ ascension when Herod “stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church,” he killed James, the brother of John, with a sword. When Herod saw the people’s approval, he had Peter imprisoned, thinking to bring him to the people after Easter. But Peter was helped by the Lord to escape from prison during this same spring season (see Acts 12:1–5). Easter time is filled with rich remembrances.

The day the Prophet Joseph ended his bondage in Liberty Jail, 6 April 1839, involved yet another significant event. Heber C. Kimball recorded in his journal that on that day

the following words came to my mind, and the Spirit said unto me, “write,” which I did by taking a piece of paper and writing on my knee as follows: . . . “Verily I say unto my servant Heber, thou art my son, in whom I am well pleased for thou art careful to hearken to my words, and not transgress my law, nor rebel against my servant Joseph Smith, for thou has a respect to the words of mine anointed, even from the least to the greatest of them; therefore thy name is written in heaven, no more to be blotted out for ever, because of these things.” [Words, p. 18]

Note how much importance the Lord attached to our being loyal to his servants! It is no different now.

With regard to the ministry of Joseph Smith, there are significant expressions of divine determination. In each of these examples, the Lord issued his declarations using the word “shall.” The books of scripture that were to come through the “choice seer” “shall grow together” (2 Nephi 3:11–12; emphasis added). The books of scripture that came through Joseph Smith are joined with the Holy Bible,

especially now with the new recent publication of the four standard works.

Another promise was given in the same chapter: those who would try to destroy the work of the latter-day seer “shall be confounded” (2 Nephi 3:14; emphasis added). This promise continues to be kept.

Joseph also received another *shall* promise, which likewise has never been revoked: “Thy people *shall* never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors” (D&C 122:3; emphasis added). This continues to be true today.

Furthermore, the central tutorial theme in Liberty Jail was also a promise: “All these things *shall* give thee experience, and *shall* be for thy good” (D&C 122:7; emphasis added). Joseph Smith, Jr., was that “choice seer!” All the “shall” promises about him shall be fulfilled, as the “ends of the earth shall inquire after [his] name” (D&C 122:1).

A Choice Seer

Brigham Young, who was not easily impressed by anyone, observed that before he met Joseph Smith, he was searching for just such a seer:

The secret feeling of my heart was that I would be willing to crawl around the earth on my hands and knees, to see such a man as was Peter, Jeremiah, Moses, or any man that could tell me anything about God and heaven. . . .

. . . When I saw Joseph Smith, he took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth, brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God; and that is the beauty of his mission. [JD 8:228, 5:332]

On another occasion, Brigham said, “I feel like shouting hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith” (JD 3:51). Significantly, Brigham’s last mortal words were, “Joseph! Joseph! Joseph!” (Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985], p. 399).

We have obligations to the Lord’s prophets, past and present, which include being fair, posthumously or presently, concerning their words. The “choice seer,” Joseph, reminded the Church in an epistle (December 1838) from jail that, “our light speeches from time to time. . . have nothing to do with the fixed principle of our hearts” (*Writings*, p. 376). Should we not distinguish between the utterances of the moment and considered opinions? Do not all of us wish for that same understanding on the part of our friends, hoping they, “with the breath of kindness,” will “blow the chaff away”?

We are wise to follow, therefore, the example of Lorenzo Snow rather than that of Thomas B. Marsh. Marsh let himself become so preoccupied with the imperfections in the Prophet Joseph Smith that he found himself disaffected and out of the Church for a season. Lorenzo Snow said he had observed some imperfections in the Prophet Joseph Smith, but his reaction was that it was marvelous to see how the Lord could still use Joseph. Seeing this, Lorenzo Snow—later President Snow—concluded that there might even be some hope for him!

One of the great messages that flows from the Lord’s use of Joseph Smith as a “choice seer” in the latter days is that there is indeed hope for each of us! The Lord can call us in our weaknesses and yet magnify us for his purposes.

In the 1834 blessing, Father Smith promised Joseph, “Thou shalt fill up the measure of thy days” (Joseph Smith, Sr., blessing, pp. 3–4). The Lord likewise reassured the Prophet in Liberty Jail, “Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less” (D&C 122:9). It proved to be so. However, the Prophet was conscious of the pressures of time upon him. President Brigham Young, who visited Joseph in the prison temple, noted that Joseph told him, more than once, that he, Joseph, would not live to see his fortieth year (*Wilford*

Woodruff's Journal, July 28, 1844 [Salt Lake City: Kraut's Pioneer Press, 1982]).

In the 1834 blessing, Joseph was promised that during his ministry, “Thy heart shall be enlarged” (Joseph Smith, Sr., blessing, pp. 3–4). An enlarged Joseph wrote from Liberty Jail,

It seems to me my heart will always be more tender after this than ever it was before. . . for my part I think I never could have felt as I now do if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered. [Writings, pp. 386, 387]

In the 1834 blessing, the Prophet Joseph was promised, “Thou shalt like to do the work the Lord thy God shall command thee” (Joseph Smith, Sr., blessing, pp. 3–4). How often that intrinsic satisfaction sustained the Seer, when extrinsic conditions were so unsatisfactory!

On 4 April 1839, Joseph wrote his last letter to Emma from Liberty Jail “just as the sun [was] going down” while peeking through the “grates of this lonesome prison. . . with emotions known only to God” (Writings, p. 425). Such was Joseph’s view of a temporal sunset that evening. But what a view of eternity he had and gave to us!

Joseph, as B. H. Roberts wrote, lived “in crescendo!” Looking back upon his busy, task-filled years, the Prophet said near the end, “No man knows my history. I cannot tell it: I shall never undertake it. I don’t blame anyone for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I would not have believed it myself” (HC 6:317). Thus, even in his adversity, Joseph had unusual empathy for those who lacked his special perspective.

This empathy extended beyond Joseph’s own time and circumstances. He actually saw his prison sufferings as helping and expanding him “to understand the minds of the Ancients” (Writings, p. 387). A linkage was felt with their “afflictions,” so that, said Joseph, “in the day of judgment . . . we may hold an even weight in the balances with them” (Writings, p. 395).

How else could Joseph take his rightful place, “crowned in the midst of the prophets of old” (Hymns; 1985, no. 27)?

I gladly and gratefully testify that Joseph was and is a “choice seer,” a prophet of God!

The Lord and His Servants

Now may I close my message by bringing to the fore again, Jesus of Nazareth, who as the resurrected Lord and Savior called Joseph Smith. Let us focus on a particular part of the Atonement that makes the celebration of Easter possible.

A short while before Gethsemane and Calvary, Jesus prayed, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.” Then, as if in soliloquy, he said, “But for this cause came I unto this hour” (John 12:27). The awful weight of the Atonement had begun to descend upon him. We next find him in Gethsemane.

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.

And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy. [Mark 14:32–33]

The Greek for “very heavy” is “depressed, dejected, in anguish.” Just as the Psalmist had foreseen, the Savior was “full of heaviness” (Psalms 69:20). The heavy weight of the sins of all mankind were falling upon him.

He had been intellectually and otherwise prepared from ages past for this task. He is the creator of this and other worlds. He knew the plan of salvation. He knew this is what it would come to. But when it happened, it was so much worse than even he had imagined!

Now, brothers and sisters, this was not theater; it was the real thing. “And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him” (Mark 14:35). Only in the

Gospel of Mark do we get this next special pleading, “And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me” (Mark 14:36). When Jesus used the word “Abba,” it was a most personal and intimate familiar reference—the cry of a child in deepest distress for his father to help him in the midst of this agony.

Did Jesus hope there might be, as with Abraham, a ram in the thicket? We do not know, but the agony and the extremity were great. The sins and the grossness of all mankind were falling upon someone who was perfectly sinless, perfectly sensitive. This pleading to the Father included the doctrine he had taught in his ministry as Jehovah to Abraham and Sarah. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). He had taught it in his mortal messiahship: “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). Hence, this resounding plea. And then came that marvelous spiritual submissiveness: “Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36).

Luke wrote that at a particular point, an angel appeared to strengthen him. I do not know who that angel was, but what a great privilege to be at the side of the Son of God as he worked out the Atonement for the whole human family!

Jesus bled at every pore, and the bleeding started in Gethsemane. He was stretched to the limits. Later, when Jesus was on the cross, the Father, for reasons that are not completely apparent, withdrew his immediate presence from his son. The full weight fell upon him one last time, and there came the great soul cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

Through that marvelous Prophet Joseph, in the book of Alma, we learned that Jesus not

only suffered for our sins, but, in order to perfect his capacity of mercy and empathy, he also bore our sicknesses and infirmities that he might know “according to the flesh” (see Alma 7:11–12) what we pass through and thus become the perfect shepherd, which he is.

This is Jesus’ Church, and Joseph was his prophet, and all the prophecies pertaining to his second coming will be fulfilled just as surely as all pertaining to his birth and early ministry were fulfilled.

He is our Lord, he is our God, and the day will come, brothers and sisters, when the veil will be stripped away, and you and I will see the incredible, spiritual intimacy that prevails between the Lord and his servants. Moses in the Sinai before the Exodus was on an exceedingly high mountain with Jesus—Jehovah. Not many centuries later, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses was again with his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Someday we will see the interlacings of the lives of the Lord, his prophets, and our own. It is all part of Father in Heaven’s glorious and wondrous plan of salvation—about which we know so much that matters through that remarkable Prophet Joseph Smith.

Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah! Praise to Jehovah for loving us and leading us and atoning for us. Praise to God the Father. Whenever we learn finally to love him, we must remember that he loved us first. Out of his love he has given to us this remarkable plan of salvation.

May God send us on our way with hearts brimming with joy for what we know. May we search the scriptures, follow their commandments, and rejoice in them. This is my prayer for myself and for you on this Easter evening, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.