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Forerunners and Foundation Stones of the Restoration

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In 1819 the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote, in a flash of prophetic insight and historical analysis, that “the great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the *companions* and *forerunners* of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightening, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now *restoring*, or is about to be *restored*.”^[1] Gordon K. Thomas, Brigham Young University English professor emeritus, has stated that “Shelley scholars have never known quite what to make of all this.”^[2] They are not aware of any historical events in the weeks or months following Shelley’s declaration that fulfill his prophecy of “unimagined change” or “restoring.”^[3] Latter-day Saints know through the help of inspired interpreters, however, that Shelley’s prescient rumblings presaged the monumental religious revolution of 1820 and that he was one of several other scholars, sages, and savants who anticipated and helped prepare the world for the restoration of all things that began with Joseph Smith’s First Vision.

These other “forerunners,” to use Shelley’s own language, included such luminaries as John Wycliffe, Johannes Gutenberg, Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale, George Fox, Roger Williams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, William Wordsworth, and many more. Among the women forerunners were Joan of Arc, Mary Washington, Charlotte Corday, Elizabeth Gurney, Anne Hutchinson, Hannah Moore, Abigail Adams, and others. These individuals, their good works and words, and the events they set in motion constitute what Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve called a “significant *prelude* to the great events in which the Prophet Joseph Smith was the primary figure.”^[4] In other words, the planning for the restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth after an extended absence began long before Joseph walked into the Sacred Grove in 1820, even centuries before the earth-shaking revelations of the 1820s, ‘30s, and ‘40s brought the piercing light of revealed truth back to this earth. Beginning in the Middle Ages, the Lord “began to prepare those social, educational, religious, economic, and governmental conditions under which he could more easily restore the gospel for the last time among men.”^[5] Almost imperceptibly at times, God moved upon the minds of men and women, who in turn moved the world toward the Restoration.

The Certainty of a Period of Preparation

Latter-day prophets and apostles have repeatedly affirmed that preparations for the latter-day restoration of God’s ancient gospel took place in stages, throughout the long and varied periods of world history. Elder Petersen wrote, “The restoration of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in these latter days, together with the advance preparation of conditions which made it possible, was indeed a divine drama which had many stages and many scenes, some of which were world shaking.”^[6]

The Restoration was not a surprise, nor was it a contingency plan of the Lords. Before the foundations of this world, our Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son, Jehovah, knew of the Great Apostasy that would begin in the first century of the Christian era. More importantly, thousands of years before the Restoration occurred they foreordained the events and individuals that would be associated with the restoration of all things. President Brigham Young taught:

“We are a people whose rise and progress from the beginning, has been the work of God our Heavenly Father. . . . It was decreed in the counsels of eternity, long before the foundations of the earth were laid, that he, Joseph Smith, should be the man, in the last dispensation of this world, to bring forth the word of God to the people, and receive the fulness of the keys and power of the Priesthood of the Son of God. The Lord had his eyes upon him, and upon his father,

and upon his father's father, and upon their progenitors clear back to Abraham, and from Abraham to the flood, from the flood to Enoch, and from Enoch to Adam. He has watched that family and that blood as it circulated from its fountain to the birth of that man. He was fore-ordained in eternity to preside over this last dispensation.”^[7]

The Lord began to teach His ancient covenant people about the future events of the latter-day Restoration even from the earliest dispensations of earth's temporal history. In the book of Moses, we read of Enoch's visions and conversations with God. The seer witnessed the future mortal ministry of Jesus Christ, His Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Then Enoch asked about the Second Coming:

“And Enoch beheld the Son of Man ascend up unto the Father; and he called unto the Lord, saying: Wilt thou not come again upon the earth? Forasmuch as thou art God, and I know thee, and thou hast sworn unto me, and commanded me that I should ask in the name of thine Only Begotten; thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own grace; wherefore, I ask thee if thou wilt not come again on the earth.

“And the Lord said unto Enoch: As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfil the oath which I have made unto you concerning the children of Noah;

“And the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve;

“And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem” (Moses 7:58–62).

Thousands of years before the actual events took place, Enoch was taught that in the last days righteousness would come down out of heaven and truth would be sent forth out of the earth prior to the Second Coming. President Ezra Taft Benson declared, “We have seen the marvelous fulfillment of that prophecy in our generation. The Book of Mormon has come forth out of the earth, filled with truth. . . . God has also sent down righteousness from heaven. The Father Himself appeared with His Son to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The angel Moroni, John the Baptist, Peter, James, and numerous other angels were directed by heaven to restore the necessary powers to the kingdom.”^[8]

The point to be emphasized here is that the key events of the Restoration were revealed by the Lord to His prophets many thousands of years before they happened. But it is also true that the preparatory events leading up to the Restoration were revealed long before they occurred. The prophet Nephi described some of the significant preparatory events he saw for himself, which had also been seen by his father, Lehi (1 Nephi 10:17 and 11:3). These events include the voyage of Christopher Columbus across the Atlantic Ocean (1 Nephi 13:10); the travails and travels of the Puritans and Pilgrims (1 Nephi 13:13); the colonization of America (1 Nephi 13:15–16); the American Revolutionary War involving Great Britain (1 Nephi 13:17); God's direct intervention in the affairs of the fledgling country of America (1 Nephi 13:18–19); the country's prosperity (1 Nephi 13:20); and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 13:35–40).

A careful study of Nephi's vision increases our own panoramic understanding of how the Lord orchestrated events in preparation for the Restoration of His gospel on the American continent. But we note with particular interest Nephi's comment, at the end of his sweeping vision, regarding others who saw the things he saw:

“But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God [John] that he should write them.

“And *also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things*, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 14:25–26; emphasis added).

Other prophets besides Nephi and Lehi saw all the preparatory events leading up to the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been told about some of these seers in scripture. For example, we know of Adam, who prophesied all things that would befall his posterity to the latest generation (D&C 107:56); the brother of Jared, who was shown all the inhabitants of the earth and all things pertaining to them (Ether 3:25–26); and Moses, who beheld every particle of the earth and every soul on the earth (Moses 1:27–29). Preparations for the latter-day Restoration were not planned nor carried out in a dark closet. Many were privileged to see the foreordained preparations as well as the foreordained forerunners. According to President Benson, “all of the great events that have transpired [in

America], including the coming of Columbus and of the Pilgrim fathers, were foreseen by ancient prophets.”^[9]

President Joseph Fielding Smith, tenth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, interpreted part of the prophecy of the Old Testament seer Joel as a clear and sure prediction of events preparatory to the Restoration of the gospel as well as events that would accompany the rolling forth of the kingdom after the initial phases of its restoration. Joel declared the word of the Lord, saying: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28–29). Of Joel’s words, President Smith said:

“When Joel by inspiration stated that the Lord would pour out his spirit upon all flesh, he did not mean that this Spirit which should be poured in such abundance, was to be the Holy Ghost. That the Holy Ghost would be received by some is evident, but it was to be the Light of Christ that was to be so universally received. The many remarkable events, discoveries, and inventions of the later centuries, particularly since the restoration of the gospel, that have been poured out prove this thesis to be true. The time of preparation for the restoration of the gospel commenced several hundred years ago, when there was no one on the earth to perform legal baptisms or bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. The inspiration given to the so-called reformers, the invention of printing and the making of books that could be placed in the hands of the multitude, the discovery of the western hemisphere and a thousand other things were the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. These wonders have been coming rapidly since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and particularly since the organization of the Church. In bringing to pass these great discoveries, the Lord has used men who apparently and boastingly have no faith in him, yet because of their talents he has seen fit to use them.”^[10]

There is no doubt that the Lord’s Spirit moved upon men and women from many backgrounds and countries. Forerunners of the Restoration included explorers, statesmen, poets, churchmen, and theologians. Sometimes their faith in God was strong, sometimes weak. But God used their talents for His purposes. In a remarkable general conference address in April 1972, Elder Ezra Taft Benson testified unequivocally: “God, the Father of us all, uses the men of the earth, especially good men, to accomplish His purposes. It has been true in the past, it is true today, it will be true in the future. . . . God is using [and has used] more than one people for the accomplishment of His great and marvelous work.”^[11]

Restoration Parallels

The restoration of the fulness of the gospel in the nineteenth century is not the first time the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth after a long period of apostasy and spiritual decay. God’s dealings with the human family display patterns and parallels. The meridian dispensation, the time of Jesus’ mortal ministry, witnessed a great restoration of priesthood power, eternal principles, and sacred ordinances under the direction of the Savior Himself. In Joseph Smith’s inspired revision of John’s Gospel, Jesus Christ is designated as the Elias of restoration in the meridian dispensation:

“And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him; Who art thou?

“And he confessed, and denied not that he was Elias; but confessed, saying; I am not the Christ.

“And they asked him, saying; How then art thou Elias? And he said, I am not *that Elias who was to restore all things*. And they asked him, saying, Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

“Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

“He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as saith the prophet Esaias.

“And they who were sent were of the Pharisees.

“And they asked him, and said unto him; Why baptizest thou then, *if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias who was to restore all things, neither that prophet?*

“John answered them, saying; I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

“He it is of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (Joseph Smith Translation, John 1:20–28; emphasis added).

These verses tell us that some of the Jewish leaders at the beginning of the Savior’s mortal ministry were expecting a Messiah who would also function as the Elias of restoration and “restore all things” in their day (Joseph

Smith Translation, John 1:22). They were expecting a restoration in their day, and God had planned and prepared for one. This profound insight helps us to comprehend that the latter-day restoration is truly in the likeness of a former-day restoration of all things during the meridian of time. Just as Jesus was the Elias of restoration in His day, so Joseph Smith was an Elias of restoration in his day. To repeat, we see patterns in God’s dealings with the human family.

From the time of Adam to the days of the Abrahamic patriarchs, righteous men and women enjoyed the fulness of the gospel, including the Melchizedek Priesthood and temple ordinances. During the Egyptian captivity of Israel, there was a loss of sacred truths and spiritual power among the people generally. Moses took steps to restore that which had been lost or become dormant by trying to prepare Israel to be ushered into the literal, physical presence of the Lord (Exodus 19:10–11; D&C 84:23) and make them “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). But Israel rejected this opportunity and brought upon themselves and their posterity a long period of spiritual decay. From the time of Moses’ last visits to Mount Sinai to the time of John the Baptist’s mortal ministry, most of the house of Israel lived without the fulness of the gospel (though many prophets had it). The Lord revealed the plight of Israel’s existence:

“And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

“Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

“And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;

“For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

“Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

“But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

“Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;

“And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel;

“Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John, whom God raised up, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb” (D&C 84:19–27).

With the coming of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, the Melchizedek Priesthood, the ordinances of the temple, the higher covenants associated with the fulness of the gospel, and a personal knowledge of God the Father were restored and reinstated among the membership of the new covenant community. The Apostles took the message of the restoration of their day to the world (Acts 1:8). They set the Church in order and administered the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood until apostasy once again set in and the world had to wait for another restoration—the restoration of the latter days.

For our purposes it is important to note that the restoration of the meridian dispensation did not happen without significant preparations, just as the restoration of the latter days did not occur without significant preparation. One modern Church leader has said, “The [meridian] Apostles were not thrown into a world that was completely unprepared for their message. The Lord had made some very substantial preparations that permitted His Apostles to succeed in His commission to them.”^[12] In fact, three foundational preparations were in place so that the restoration of the gospel in the meridian dispensation could proceed:

1. A widely accepted translation of the Bible, in the dominant language and tied to the dominant culture of the period.
2. A stable political system to provide a base of operations from which the Restoration could go forward.
3. A culture and language which fostered the establishment of the gospel, including a spirit of restoration which anticipated a new dispensation.

These same three foundational preparations were also put in place for the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

In the meridian dispensation, the Bible that served as the basis for the restoration of the first century was the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew. It had been in place for more than two hundred years, was common to all, and was tied to the pervasive Greek culture of the period. In the nineteenth century, the Bible undergirding the Restoration was the King James Version—the latest iteration of English Bibles, made from the available Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments. It had been in place for two hundred

years.

In the meridian dispensation, the political system that allowed for the gospel to be established in a stable environment (for its day) was the Roman Empire. It was largely the creation of one man, Octavian, called Caesar Augustus (31 B.C.–A.D. 14), who established it on the foundations of the Roman Republic. It was so well founded and provided such a period of peace and prosperity that it survived its founder for several hundred years (even with subsequent incompetent and wicked emperors at its helm) and left a legacy known as the Pax Romana (Roman Peace).

In preparation for the latter-day Restoration, the United States of America had been recently established. The system of government prepared by the Lord was grounded in the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights, and the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence.

In the meridian dispensation, the language and culture of the Mediterranean world that allowed for the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to take root and flourish for a season was Greek. In the nineteenth century, the English language and culture provided the seedbed for the flowering of the restored gospel. Both eras witnessed an expectation of restoration.

The Bible and the Latter-Day Restoration

A key element in laying the foundation for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the latter days was the bringing forth of the English Bible, especially the King James Version. Religious reformers of the Renaissance and Reformation periods played a vital role, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie testified: “The spirit of inspiration rested upon Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and others, causing them to rebel against the religious evils of the day and seek to make *the Bible* and other truth available to all who would receive such.”^[13] The Restoration owes much to the Protestant reformers. In addition to changing the theological landscape of Christendom, the reformers were instrumental in paving the way for the King James Bible and drawing attention to its doctrines and teachings—which were critical to the establishment of the Restoration. The English Bible was “in a sense . . . a Protestant book,”^[14] and many of the reformers sacrificed much for it as well as the greater cause they believed in: giving the true word of God to the world. One modern prophet has described the reformers, in the main, as “honest men with yearning hearts, [who] at the peril of their very lives, attempted to establish points of reference, that they might find the true way. . . . The reformers were pioneers, blazing wilderness trails in a desperate search for those lost points of reference which, they felt, when found would lead mankind back to the truth Jesus taught. . . . Significant was the declaration of [William] Tyndale to his critics: T will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou doest.”^[15]

William Tyndale (1490–1536) is a superb example of one of the pivotal forerunners to the Restoration. He deserves much attention and credit for the quality of prose and clarity of expression found in early English Bibles. Tyndale’s work is really the cornerstone of the King James Version. Scholars at Brigham Young University have compared the King James Version with Tyndale’s English Bible and found that “nearly 84 per cent of the New Testament and close to 76 per cent of the portions of the Old Testament that Tyndale translated have been transmitted to the KJV [King James Version] just as he left them.”^[16] Tyndale was an intellectual and spiritual giant, “one of history’s great heroes,”^[17] who suffered martyrdom to put a readable Bible in the hands of lay people. Truly he exemplifies what is best about the Reformation’s leaders and translators.

Thus, it is appropriate to laud the efforts of these early modern reformers and scholars in moving European Christianity toward the creation and use of a widely acceptable and reliable edition of the biblical text, culminating in the King James Version. However, it is also clear to me that almost from the onset of apostasy in the meridian dispensation, the Lord began laying the foundation for the Bible that would serve as the anchor for the Restoration. As early as the late fourth century, we see the Lord’s Spirit working upon a man who has become known as one of history’s most famous Bible translators—Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, better known as St. Jerome.

Jerome was born in northeast Italy in A.D. 345. By age twenty-nine he had become a disciplined scholar and Christian, living a life of contemplation and self-denial. But in a now well-known dream, a heavenly voice accused him of worshiping secular scholarship more than Jesus. “You are a follower of Cicero, not of Christ,” he was told.^[18] From that point on, he devoted his life to learning the original languages of the biblical texts. In 382 he became secretary to Pope Damasus and formulated a plan to produce a new, more trustworthy version of the Bible. This Bible would correct the problems existing in the Old Latin manuscripts of the biblical text that were in circulation. Whatever one thinks about Jerome—he was not without his faults—I believe Jerome’s motives were honorable and that the Lord used his

abilities to accomplish important purposes. I believe the spirit of restoration brooded over Jerome as a precursor to the development of the King James Version of 1611.

In a letter to Pope Damasus in 383, Jerome described the problem with the existing Latin manuscripts of just the New Testament. In language reminiscent of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jerome said: “For if we are to pin our faith to the Latin texts, it is for our opponents to tell us *which*; for there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies. If, on the other hand, we are to glean the truth from a comparison of many, why not go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators, and the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and further all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake?”^[19]

Compare this statement with one by the Prophet Joseph Smith: “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”^[20] With the publication of Jerome’s Vulgate, the Lord gave to the people of medieval Christendom that which they were ready to possess and which best served His purposes at the time. As Alma said, “The Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8).

The Vulgate was an early step in the preparation of a Bible ultimately suitable for the restoration of Christ’s gospel on the English-speaking continent of America and for later missionary efforts in Great Britain from whence came much strength to the Latter-day Saint Church. The Vulgate was the direct precursor to the Wycliffe Bible, the first Bible translated completely into English from the Latin version. Wycliffe’s Bible played a role in both the Reformation and the efforts to arrive at the King James Version.

John Wycliffe (1328–84) did not actually translate the Bible named after him; he inspired a group of his followers to render it into English.^[21] Born in Yorkshire, England, and known to history as the “morning star of the reformation,” Wycliffe was the harbinger of change, promoting doctrinal and practical reform of the Roman Catholic Church. The centerpiece of his theology was the Bible. Wycliffe lived at a time of great upheaval in the church. In particular, the Papal Schism of 1378 (when rival popes competed for the Holy See) caused him and others to see the church hierarchy as corrupt and far removed from the pattern established by the ancient Apostles. Wycliffe used the Bible as the yardstick by which to measure the morals and actions of church leadership and believed it should be the center of Christian thought and practice. Scriptural infallibility replaced papal infallibility. “To Wycliffe, Scripture was ‘a divine exemplar conceived in the mind of God before creation, and before the material Scriptures were written down.’”^[22]

Wycliffe’s thinking influenced other reformers, including Jan Huss (1359–1415), and through Huss, the Moravians and Martin Luther (1483–1546). All of these reformers worked to release the people and their theology from the stranglehold of the Roman Church—a necessary step in preparing for the Restoration.

Founding of America

A second key event in preparing the world for the latter-day restoration of Christ’s gospel was the founding of America. The Lord was intimately involved in its establishment. President Joseph F. Smith testified, “This great American nation the Almighty raised up by the power of his omnipotent hand, that it might be possible in the latter days for the kingdom of God to be established in the earth. If the Lord had not prepared the way by laying the foundations of this glorious nation, it would have been impossible (under the stringent laws and bigotry of the monarchical governments of the world) to have laid the foundations for the coming of his great kingdom. *The Lord has done this.*”^[23]

America was discovered, colonized, and established by individuals and groups prepared, raised up, and inspired by God. Christopher Columbus is an example of one who believed and stated frankly that the Holy Ghost inspired him and that God gave him the faith and courage to undertake his great journey.^[24] Scholars of the life of the great explorer recognize his profound belief in personal revelation and God’s involvement in directing the affairs and future of humankind.

From the modern introduction to Columbus’s own *Libro de las profecias* (*Book of the Prophecies*) we read: “Christopher Columbus was a careful student of the Bible. He studied it systematically together with the opinions of learned scholars and commentators who were held in the highest regard in his day. The focus of the Discoverer’s interest was the prophesied latter-day enlargement of the Christian Church which would take place through

the discovery and evangelization of all the world's nations and tribes, with the consequent renewal and enrichment of Christendom. Although aided by the commentators, he interpreted the Holy Scriptures himself with confidence, claiming that he had the direct illumination of the Holy Spirit in his study of the sacred text. Columbus said and wrote that the divine guidance he received through the Bible not only generated the vision for all of his voyages to the New World but also supplied his motivating drive and sustained him through his trials and dangers. He professed to believe implicitly in his own special vocation as the 'Christ-bearer,' a missionary discoverer, divinely called and equipped for the task of announcing a new era of foreordained expansion and renewal for all Christendom. The *Libro de las profecias*, compiled by Christopher Columbus to substantiate each of these claims in minute detail, is surely the world's most unique notebook of an individual's personal Bible studies."^[25]

Columbus, the Puritans, and later colonizers who came to the land of America were all brought here by the hand of the Lord. In fact, Father Lehi prophesied that "there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring" (2 Nephi 1:6–7).

Many are the statements, both contemporary and historical, which attest to a belief in the inspiration and intervention of Deity on the side of the colonists and their struggle to establish independence in this land. George Washington, the very leader of the American cause, was himself such a believer. In his farewell orders to the colonial army in 1783, he said:

"A contemplation of the complete attainment, at a period earlier than could be expected, of the objects for which we contended against so formidable a power, cannot but inspire us with astonishment and gratitude. The disadvantageous circumstances on our part under which the war was undertaken can never be forgotten. The singular interpositions of Providence in our feeble condition were such as could scarcely escape the attention of the most unobserving: while the unparalleled perseverance of the armies of the United States through almost every possible suffering and discouragement for the space of eight years was little short of a standing miracle."^[26]

There can be no doubt that the creation of the United States Constitution was a giant step toward furthering the plan of salvation on this earth and setting the stage for the Restoration. The Lord Himself said that He caused the Constitution to be established to allow all men and women to act according to the eternal principle of moral agency: "And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood" (D&C 101:80).

It is significant that the Lord says that this land—the land prepared to host the Restoration—was redeemed by the shedding of blood. This redemption parallels and imitates the redemption of all of God's children through the shedding of the blood of Christ. When we examine the history of the Restoration, we realize that the restored gospel itself was redeemed, or purchased, by the shedding of the blood of Joseph Smith and his associates. What this means for me is that *my life* was redeemed and purchased by the blood of Christ; *my country*, my land of promise, was redeemed and purchased by the blood of patriots; *my religion* was redeemed and purchased by the blood of prophets. All of this was done for you and me. All of this was prepared for you and me. Preparation and redemption have come at a dear price.

Culture and Environment

A third key element in laying the foundation necessary for the Restoration to succeed was a powerful and pervasive language and culture, which included a spirit of restoration and anticipation of a new dispensation. English was the culture and language of the British Empire, which circled the world in the nineteenth century. English culture and language functioned in much the same way as Hellenism (Greek culture and language) functioned in the first century to provide the intellectual and cultural infrastructure that allowed the gospel to spread and that formed the context of and linkage to the accepted Bible of the period (the Septuagint in the case of Hellenism, and the King James Version in the case of English culture).

Regarding the Restoration of the latter days, English was the language and culture of the nation that produced the freedom necessary to allow the gospel to be reestablished in the latter days and to flourish. English was the language and culture of the nation the Lord chose as His base of operations in the nineteenth century to take the gospel to the rest of the world—the world, not coincidentally, of the English-speaking British Empire and the King James Bible. (I once heard President Benson use the very words "Lord's base of operations" to describe the magnitude of the accomplishment of the Founding Fathers.^[27])

The Constitution of the United States was adopted in 1789, but some states refused to ratify it without assurance and description of personal freedoms and guarantees (speech, religion, assembly, and so forth), which had not been

delineated in the Constitution. James Madison led in the adoption of the ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights. By December 1791 enough states had ratified the Bill of Rights for it to become effective. It was no accident that these rights were concretely articulated in America. Many of the concepts written in the Bill of Rights came from various ideas in the Bible (by then found in the hands of a wider readership than during the Middle Ages, when it was controlled by the Roman Church), in the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, and in the philosophies of such Englishmen as John Locke, John Milton, and John Stuart Mill. Significantly, these ideas were distilled by the Founding Fathers—early American leaders and thinkers such as James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine.

Anticipation Of The Restoration

All of these men and ideas were significant forerunners of the Restoration. President Wilford Woodruff testified that “those men who laid the foundation of this American government and signed the Declaration of Independence were the best spirits the God of Heaven could find on the face of the earth. They were choice spirits, . . . and all the men that labored for the purpose were inspired of the Lord.”^[28] Remarkably, as part of the preparation for the Restoration, and in addition to their work in founding the American republic, many of these same inspired men were moved upon by the Lord to voice a feeling of anticipation about a great restoration of original Christianity, or a revolution in religion. Two examples from among the men mentioned above will suffice: Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.

In a letter to Jared Sparks dated November 4, 1820, just months after Joseph Smith’s First Vision, Jefferson wrote: “I hold the precepts of Jesus, as delivered by himself, to be the most pure, benevolent, and sublime which have ever been preached to man. I adhere to the principles of the first age; and consider all subsequent innovations as corruptions of this religion, having no foundation in what came from him. . . . If the freedom of religion, guaranteed to us by law *in theory*, can ever rise *in practice* under the overbearing inquisition of public opinion, truth will prevail over fanaticism, and the genuine doctrines of Jesus, so long perverted by his pseudo-priests, will again be restored to their original purity. This reformation will advance with the other improvements of the human mind, but too late for me to witness it.”^[29]

In a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse dated June 26, 1822, Jefferson castigated the intrusion of Greek philosophy on primitive Christianity. And in a follow-up letter of July 22, 1822, he mused, “Happy in the prospect of a *restoration of primitive Christianity*, I must leave to younger athletes to encounter and lop off the false branches which have been engrafted into it by the mythologists of the middle and modern ages.”^[30] Jefferson believed unequivocally in a restoration of primitive Christianity, even if he did not completely understand the nature of that restoration.

In 1794 Thomas Paine completed a book in Paris entitled *The Age of Reason*. He addressed it to “my fellow-citizens of the United States of America.” In the following excerpt, he postulates a revolution in religion to accompany the recently completed revolution in American government: “Soon after I had published the pamphlet ‘Common Sense,’ in America, I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion. The adulterous connection of church and state, wherever it has taken place, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, had so effectually prohibited by pains and penalties every discussion upon established creeds, and upon first principles of religion, that until the system of government should be changed, those subjects could not be brought fairly and openly before the world; but that whenever this should be done, a revolution in the system of religion would follow.”^[31]

A great many other individuals from various fields of endeavor also anticipated the Restoration through their inspired ideas, though they were less explicit in stating their beliefs that a restoration was about to occur. Religious reformer Roger Williams, founder of both the Baptist Society of America and the colony of Rhode Island, is reported to have said at one point, “There is no regularly constituted church on earth, nor any person qualified to administer any church ordinances; nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the Great Head of the Church for whose coming I am seeking.”^[32] The English poet laureate William Wordsworth (1770–1850) has been called a poet who speaks “with a voice of divine authority” and “an inspired forerunner of the Gospel” largely because of his *Ode on Intimations of*

Immortality.^[33] Therein he waxes eloquent on the doctrine of preexistence, which was “an obscure idea for centuries between the time of the fall of the early church and the restoration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is the only Christian religion that still holds that belief as fundamental doctrine today.”^[34] Others of Wordsworth’s writings are cited for their inspired concepts, including his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, which

presents the idea that mankind can “move toward” godliness. ^[35]

Conclusion

Many more individuals, and the events in which they played a part, could be presented as examples of forerunners and foundation stones of the Restoration. They constitute the grand prelude that so many modern prophets have spoken about. A good place to start looking for the names of those who helped prepare conditions for the Restoration, or who believed in its eventuality, is the list of those for whom President Wilford Woodruff was baptized in the St. George Temple on August 21, 1877. In his journal for that date, he writes that he was baptized on behalf of one hundred notable individuals, that some of his associates served as proxies for still others, and that many of these people he served appeared to him in vision and requested the ordinances of the house of the Lord. The names listed included Columbus, Americus Vespucci, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson (in fact, all the signers of the Declaration of Independence except two), John Wesley, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, and Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. ^[36]

President Woodruff also noted that “Sister Lucy Bigelow Young went forth into the font and was Baptized for Martha Washington and her family and seventy (70) of the Eminent women of the world.” ^[37] These women also played a role in laying the foundation for the Restoration and the preaching of the gospel. This list includes Mary Ball Washington (1708–89), mother of George Washington; Charlotte Corday (1768–93), French patriot; Elizabeth Gurney of England (1780–1845), religious social reformer; Sarah Van Brugh Livingstone (1757–1802), wife of John Jay; Marie Antoinette of France (1755–93); Empress Maria Theresa of Austria (1717–80), mother of Marie Antoinette; Hannah Moore of England (1745–1833), religious author; Dorothy “Dolley” Madison (1772–1849), wife of President James Madison; and Abigail Smith Adams (1744–1818), wife of President John Adams. ^[38]

These names also serve to emphasize the amazing nature and power of the restored gospel (reaching beyond the grave), as well as how the Lord prepared the earth for it and who He used and inspired to bring it about. In the end, the convergence of ideas, institutions, and individuals that helped to bring about the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is mind boggling. Only God could have orchestrated it, using so many individuals over such a span of time. The latter-day Restoration of all things is too deep and complex and its preparations too vast and detailed, and yet so perfectly fitted together, for it to be attributed to anything but the plan of an infinite, all-knowing God. He prepared all things from the beginning to occur at the right time and the right place in world history in order to lay the foundation for the Restoration under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who is rightly called the capstone of all preparations.

The concept of a great prelude to the Restoration, of forerunners and foundation stones, of people and events preparing the earth for the restoration of all things, is a true principle. It is exciting to study this prelude. It is even better to demonstrate our appreciation for it by living the principles and keeping the covenants the Lord restored in this last dispensation.

[1] Percy Bysshe Shelley, as cited in Gordon K. Thomas, “‘Companions and Forerunners’: English Romantics and the Restoration,” in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas J. Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 151; emphasis added.

[2] Thomas, “‘Companions and Forerunners,’” 151.

[3] See Thomas, “‘Companions and Forerunners,’” 151.

[4] Mark E. Petersen, *The Great Prologue* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 1; emphasis added.

[5] Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 717.

[6] Petersen, *Great Prologue*, 2.

[7] Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 108.

[8] Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 26.

[9]

Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 575.

- [10] Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 2:155.
- [11] Ezra Taft Benson, “Civic Standards for the Faithful Saints,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 59.
- [12] Dennis B. Neuenschwander, “The Voice of the Lord Is unto All Men” [Christmas Message to Quorum of the Seventy], December 18, 2003.
- [13] McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 717; emphasis added.
- [14] Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 16.
- [15] Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, April 1997, 73–74.
- [16] John Nielsen and Royal Skousen, “How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale’s?” *Reformation 3* (1998): 73.
- [17] Nielsen and Skousen, “How Much of the King James Bible,” 74.
- [18] As cited in “The One Hundred Most Important Events in Church History: Jerome Completes the Vulgate,” *Christian History* 9, no. 4 (1990): 14.
- [19] James Stevenson, ed., *Creeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church A.D. 337–461* (London: SPCK, 1989), 183; emphasis in original.
- [20] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 327.
- [21] See W. R. Cooper, ed., *The Wycliffe New Testament* (London: The British Library, 2002), v.
- [22] Cooper, *Wycliffe New Testament*, v.
- [23] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 409; emphasis in original.
- [24] See Petersen, *Great Prologue*, 26, 29.
- [25] Christopher Columbus, *Libro de las profecias*, trans. Delno C. West and August Kling (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 3.
- [26] George Washington, as cited in Petersen, *Great Prologue*, 55–56.
- [27] See Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 571.
- [28] Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 89
- [29] Thomas Jefferson, as cited in Norman Cousins, ed., “*In God We Trust*”—*The Religious Beliefs and Ideas of the American Founding Fathers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 156.
- [30] Jefferson, as cited in Cousins, “*In God We Trust*,” 162; emphasis added.
- [31] Thomas Paine, as cited in Cousins, “*In God We Trust*,” 396.
- [32] Roger Williams, as cited in *The Great Prologue: A Prophetic History and Destiny of America* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 4.
- [33] Thomas, “Companions and Forerunners,” 153.
- [34] Gary Ellsworth, “‘Trailing Clouds of Glory’: Poets and Philosophers Examine the Preexistence,” *Ensign*, October 1974, 49.
- [35] See Thomas, “Companions and Forerunners,” 153.
- [36]

See Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: 1985), 7:367–69.

[37] Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 369; original spelling retained.

[38] Vicki Jo Anderson, *The Other Eminent Men of Wilford Woodruff* (Cottonwood, Ariz.: Zichron Historical Research Institute, 1994) 411–18.