

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE IMPACT OF THE DOCTRINAL RESTORATION: HOW THE WORLD WAS DIFFERENT AFTER JOSEPH SMITH

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“Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (D&C 135:3). What a statement! Though stunning to some, and even shocking to others, it is no exaggeration. The Prophet Joseph Smith single-handedly changed the theological landscape of the world. It was he who, after a long period of apostasy, reintroduced the world to a true knowledge of God the Father. It was he who made known to the world the full and far-reaching saving potential of Christ’s atoning power. It was he who taught the doctrine and put back into operation the powers that enable all who so desire to reenter the Father’s presence.

## THE IMPACT OF JOSEPH’S PERSONAL TUTORS

Latter-day Saints are not the first group of people to comprehend the greatness of Joseph Smith. From the beginning of time, God and His many prophets have known of and declared the coming of Joseph Smith to inaugurate and establish this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. President Brigham Young’s well-known statement on this topic has become a classic but is well worth repeating because it is so mind-expanding! He said:

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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 Joseph, 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 has circulated from its fountain to the birth of that man. He was fore-ordained in eternity to preside over this last dispensation.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that Joseph Smith was personally tutored in mortality by God as well as the many prophets who foreknew of him and his mortal sojourn. Many of the ancient prophets and patriarchs, and all of the heads of gospel dispensations, appeared to Joseph and either instructed him one-on-one or laid their hands upon his head and bestowed keys, powers, and knowledge that they had gained from Deity themselves.

Who else among all the world's leaders has stood in the presence of God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, Adam, Noah, Raphael, Moses, Elias, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Moroni, and many, many more, and received the power to bring salvation to *all* of Heavenly Father's children? We can document at least fifty-nine nonmortal or divine beings who appeared to, or were seen by, Joseph Smith in vision, each one presenting to the Prophet a divine tutorial or personalized lesson of eternal consequence for all of God's children.<sup>2</sup>

President John Taylor, beloved friend and trusted associate of the Prophet Joseph Smith, summed up the matter regarding his friend in these words:

Joseph Smith in the first place was set apart by the Almighty according to the councils of the gods in the eternal worlds, to introduce the principles of life among the people, of which the Gospel is the grand power and influence, and through which salvation can extend to all peoples, all nations, all kindreds, all tongues and all worlds. It is the principle that brings life and immortality to light, and places us in communication with God. God selected him for that

purpose, and he fulfilled his mission and lived honorably and died honorably. I know of what I speak, for I was very well acquainted with him and was with him a great deal during his life, and was with him when he died. The principles which he had, placed him in communication with the Lord, and not only with the Lord, but with the ancient apostles and prophets; such men, for instance, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Jesus, and the Father, and the apostles that lived on this continent, as well as those who lived on the Asiatic continent. He seemed to be as familiar with these people as we are with one another. Why? Because he had to introduce a dispensation which was called the dispensation of the fulness of times, and it was known as such by the ancient servants of God.<sup>3</sup>

The Prophet's divine tutorials not only introduced the Restoration in stages but also affected the way we think about God's saving plan in general, and our own lives and relationship to Deity in particular. Both Joseph Smith's life and the doctrine he restored show us just how carefully and meticulously the Lord plans events. Joseph Smith did not end up where he was by accident, just as you and I have not ended up where we are by happenstance. As Paul taught, "[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Joseph Smith's experience also showed to the world the reality of heavenly beings and the closeness of an unseen realm of existence.

#### **THE IMPACT OF THE PRINCIPLE OF REVELATION**

Joseph Smith is one who seems to have lived every day of his life guided by the lodestar of revelation. This is impressive enough, but one of the reasons we have come to appreciate Joseph and his ministry so much is the assurance we have received from him that the same principle of revelation by which he lived his life and restored so much truth to the earth is available to each of us. As much as anything, the Prophet restored to the world a knowledge of, and an appreciation for, the doctrine of personal revelation—a kind of revelation that is not limited to the educated or the wealthy, not restricted to the powerful or the prelates, not intended only for those in some inner circle. But, rather, Joseph restored a knowledge of

revelation that is available to all who simply call upon God in their quest for truth and in the sincerity of their souls. Is this not the lesson of Joseph's application of James 1:5?

The Prophet Joseph Smith, and all prophets since his inaugural ministry, have constantly preached that revelation is an "equal-opportunity" doctrine. Said Joseph, "The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, "Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. . . . Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject."<sup>5</sup> Joseph consistently taught that "it is the privilege of the Children of God to come to God & get Revelation. . . . When *any* person receives a vision of heaven, he sees things that he never thought of before."<sup>6</sup> In regard to Church members, he indicated that it was the privilege of any officeholder in the Church to obtain revelations so far as it relates to his or her particular calling and duty in the Church.<sup>7</sup>

This is truly liberating doctrine. Both men and women are called into fellowship with God, to share equally in the glorious flood of light, knowledge, and power restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. As Joseph found out when translating the Book of Mormon, God "imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned" (Alma 32:23). Equal opportunities for all people to receive revelation and exaltation were inherent in the system Joseph restored.

### THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST VISION

Perhaps the most important revelation of this last and greatest dispensation was Joseph Smith's First Vision of the Father and the Son. President Ezra Taft Benson certainly thought so. He declared, "The appearance of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ to the boy prophet is the greatest event that has occurred in this world since the resurrection of the Master."<sup>8</sup> There are many lessons to learn from, as well as about, the First Vision.

Writing about the First Vision years after it had taken place, Joseph Smith himself said that he had thought how much he felt

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“like Paul [the Apostle], when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice” (Joseph Smith—History 1:24). In truth, the ministries of Paul and Joseph demonstrate significant parallels, and these parallels, beginning with a first vision for both, serve to help honest people see that the same reasons for accepting Paul as a bona fide servant of Jesus Christ should also lead them to accept and appreciate Joseph Smith as a genuine, duly authorized and commissioned servant of the same Lord that Paul followed.<sup>9</sup> When Paul came off the road to Damascus, where he was intending to persecute the Christians, at least seven things were confirmed:

- Jesus Christ is Lord.
- He is alive in heaven.
- He is a Being possessing great glory.
- Persecuting His followers is the equivalent of persecuting Him personally.
- Direct revelation is a continuing reality even after the Lord’s mortal ministry ended.
- Jesus Christ has the power to change men’s hearts.
- Jesus Christ continues to call men to be witnesses of Him after His death and Resurrection.

When Joseph Smith walked out of the Sacred Grove on that early spring morning in 1820, at least fourteen things were clarified or reestablished that had been lost or unknown during the previous seventeen hundred years:

- God the Father and Jesus Christ are alive and reside in heaven.
- Their relationship is a familial one—Father to Son.
- They are separate and distinct personages, not one spiritual essence.
- They possess a glory beyond description.
- They look, act, and speak like human beings.
- Humans are created in the image of the Father and the Son.
- The Father and the Son hear and answer prayers.
- The Father and the Son know individuals by name.
- There is an opponent to righteousness; he is real.
- That adversary to righteousness tries to thwart prayer.

- Revelation was a continuing reality seventeen hundred years after the so-called era of primitive Christianity.
- The Father testifies of His Son, and the Son of God deals directly with humankind.
- There had been an apostasy from Christ's Church.
- None of the churches on the earth in Joseph's day possessed the fulness of Christ's gospel.

The first visions of both Paul and Joseph Smith did have, and will continue to have, eternal consequences. Those visions inaugurated for both men a long period of direct revelation that continued until their martyrdoms. The instruction that accompanied both visions told their recipients to change their respective courses and wait for further instruction.<sup>10</sup> Out of these profound revelatory experiences came divine direction that blessed lives and changed the way countless humans looked at God's dealings with mortals. Both Paul and Joseph added to a corpus of prior revelations given by God to the human family in order to raise a new generation to a higher level. The essence of all these revelations was centered in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. The Apostle John declared that the *testimony of Jesus* was the spirit of prophecy (see Revelation 19:10). That is to say, the essence, or life-force, of prophecy is a knowledge of what Jesus has done and will yet do for the world. Thus, the essential job of every prophet is to testify personally of Jesus Christ. "And in the case of the great prophets Paul and Joseph Smith, they did so on the basis of their eyewitness contact with Christ."<sup>11</sup>

### PAUL AND JOSEPH SMITH

The Prophet made many references to Paul, both explicit and implicit, throughout his life.<sup>12</sup> He constantly invoked the example and language of Paul to illustrate the way the Restoration unfolded and to describe the continuous, unchanging nature of opposition to divine truth and the work of the Father and the Son. Thus, one of the undervalued, perhaps unappreciated, aspects of the Restoration is the increased understanding of previous dispensations it provides—especially of Paul's day, the doctrine the ancient Apostle taught, what he thought and felt, and the social and cultural context of the gospel restoration of the first century.

Significantly, Paul's time was much like Joseph's. We can learn

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much about each period by studying the other. Both Joseph Smith and Paul endured monumental challenges to their integrity and teachings as a result of their first visions. For example, in describing his own encounters with opposition and persecution over his First Vision, Joseph Smith quoted the experience of the ancient Apostle:

There were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew. . . . So it was with me. . . . And though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for saying so, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? (Joseph Smith—History 1:24–25)

Paul gave us some appreciation for how the message of his vision was received among his non-Christian contemporaries. “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). In other words, it was not easy to preach the message of Christ in an environment of Jewish superiority and Greek intellectualism. But, continued Paul, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. . . . God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:25, 27).

Echoing the words of Paul, Joseph Smith presented a revelation during a special conference of elders at Hiram, Ohio, in November 1831, in which the Lord told His servants not to mind the wisdom of the world nor pay attention to worldly estimations of weakness and foolishness. For “the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh . . . that the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world. . . . Behold, I am God and have spoken it;

these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:19, 23–24). One notes that the words of Joseph Smith and those of Paul are truly interchangeable.

Many so-called “hearers of the word” in the first century regarded the vision of Paul as foolishness. And many investigators in the dispensation of the fulness of times have regarded Joseph Smith’s First Vision as a “delusion.”<sup>13</sup> It has been observed that most of the objections raised against Joseph Smith’s First Vision also call into question Paul’s experience with equal force.<sup>14</sup> For example, one of the points of attack leveled against Joseph Smith’s First Vision is that the Prophet did not describe his experience until a dozen years after it happened, and then he issued multiple versions of it thereafter. However, critics should have realized this is perfectly consistent with the timing of Paul’s report of his first vision and his subsequent republicizing of it. The first known mention of Paul’s dramatic experience is found in 1 Corinthians 9:1, written about two dozen years after it happened: “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?”

In fact, arguments regarding the historical validity of an event that are based on the closeness of that event to the time it first appears in written form present a problem for the whole New Testament as well. According to tradition, the Gospel of John was composed between AD 90 and 100. And the earliest extant fragment of John’s Gospel is dated even later—to around AD 110–30 on paleographical grounds.<sup>15</sup> That means at least seventy years went by from the time the Savior’s mortal ministry took place until the time John wrote his Gospel account. Yet no committed Christian who believes the New Testament to be the word of God would dismiss the Gospel of John as untrustworthy.

Other attacks leveled against Paul in his day and Joseph Smith in his (and beyond) attempted to appeal to the principle of empirical evidence as well as the irrationality of believing that God is literally, physically, a resurrected Being. More to the point, in Joseph’s day, how could anyone seriously believe that such a God would appear to a teenage boy and call into question all other denominations? However, both Paul and Joseph Smith taught that the natural



man—the man or woman devoid of the Spirit of God—does not and cannot receive knowledge conveyed by the Spirit of God. Here are Paul’s words: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Compare that statement with one translated by Joseph Smith from the gold plates: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

No insignificant parallel here! Neither Joseph Smith nor Paul attempted to engage their critics in debate over the philosophical possibility of resurrection or visions involving divine beings. Rather, they both humbly offered the strongest evidence possible, evidence against which there is no philosophical or logical counter: they *saw* the resurrected Lord for themselves! Said Paul: “And last of all he was *seen* of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8; emphasis added). Said Joseph: “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we *saw* him” (D&C 76:22–23; emphasis added). Without the help of the doctrinal restoration in modern times, we would not be able to appreciate the significance of Paul’s position or teaching and, thus, the consistency in the gospel of Jesus Christ over time.

### THE IMPACT OF JOSEPH’S LEGACY OF SACRIFICE

From the moment of his First Vision onward, Joseph could never say his life was his own. The Sacred Grove inaugurated a lifetime of service to the Lord. Joseph Smith taught us by example as well as precept what it meant to live a consecrated life. (The word *consecrated* literally means “to make or declare sacred, to devote irrevocably to the worship of God.”<sup>16</sup>) This is another lasting legacy of the Restoration. The Prophet gave to the world a template of unyielding loyalty in the face of continual hardship and persecution. The world

is a different place because many individuals have hearkened to Joseph's words and modeled his behavior.

In describing his experiences, Joseph again harked back to Paul's words as found in Second Corinthians wherein the ancient Apostle spoke of his "journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by [his] own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:26–27). Joseph said of his own difficulties: "I, like Paul, have been in perils, and oftener than anyone in this generation. As Paul boasted, I have suffered more than Paul did. I should be like a fish out of water if I were out of persecution. . . . The Lord has constituted me so curiously that I glory in persecution."<sup>17</sup> Writing to the Church in Nauvoo during a challenging period of legal harassment that kept him out of that city, Joseph again made explicit reference to Paul's example and mentoring influence. His comment has become part of the Church's official canon of scripture, Doctrine and Covenants 127:2:

And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world for some good end, or bad, as you may choose to call it. Judge ye for yourselves. God knoweth all these things, whether it be good or bad. But nevertheless, deep water is what I am wont to swim in. It all has become a second nature to me; and I feel, like Paul, to glory in tribulation; for to this day has the God of my fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth; for behold, and lo, I shall triumph over all my enemies, for the Lord God hath spoken it.

President Brigham Young was a second witness to Joseph's unrelenting hardships. Of his friend and mentor, President Young said that Joseph was

poor, harassed, distressed, afflicted, and tormented with lawsuits, persecution upon persecution, and it cost thousands

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and hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep him alive, which a few had to sustain. . . .

Joseph, our Prophet, was hunted and driven, arrested and persecuted, and although no law was ever made in these United States that would bear against him, for he never broke a law, yet to my certain knowledge he was defendant in forty-six lawsuits, and every time Mr. Priest was at the head of and led the band or mob who hunted and persecuted him. And when Joseph and Hyrum were slain in Carthage jail, the mob, painted like Indians, was led by a preacher.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of their sufferings, both Paul and Joseph Smith possessed a contagious optimism born of faith and hope in Jesus Christ. All members of the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days are the beneficiaries and the inheritors of this optimistic mind-set. In addition to the trials and persecutions previously mentioned, Paul seems to have suffered throughout his life with an affliction that he called a thorn in the flesh. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2 Corinthians 12:7-8).

An important lesson from this comment is that all mortals, even the most dedicated, righteous servants of the Lord, will have afflictions to endure throughout mortality. But the Lord's power and grace are sufficient to make weak things strong. Thus, the Lord's response to Paul's petition regarding his thorn in the flesh and Paul's subsequent response to the Lord are comforting and fortifying: "And he [the Lord] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

It is important to emphasize that Joseph Smith came across this same concept, in almost the same language used by Paul, when he was translating Ether 12:27 of the Book of Mormon:

"And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them."

In addition to Paul and Joseph Smith, other of the Lord's prophets have recognized that weaknesses and problems are inherent in mortality. Most of these challenges come as a result of the Fall of Adam and therefore impose limitations on all of us. We cannot escape them. But we can overcome them through the grace, or enabling power, granted unto mortals through the Atonement. "It is not just in the next life that the 'weak things' are made strong through Christ. The Savior's grace is sufficient even in mortality to buoy up the spirit, to strengthen and spiritually enlarge one above natural abilities."<sup>19</sup> The prophet Ammon in the Book of Mormon described how much God can help us, saying, "Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things" (Alma 26:12).

Precisely because of the doctrinal restoration accomplished through Joseph Smith, we are able to recognize that even those who are not of our faith have been inspired to see that God gives to all men weakness that all may humbly learn to rely upon Him, *and* that once we have entered into a covenant partnership with Him, He has unlimited resources to make us into something we could not even fathom beforehand. C. S. Lewis observed:

When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are now corrected), he often feels that it would now be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along—illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation—he is disappointed. These things, he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him . . . into situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us. . . .

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He

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starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself. . . .

He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the most magnificent declarations uttered by the Prophet Joseph about the eternal triumphs we may expect through God’s power came in the midst of some of his most terrible trials. Said Joseph as he was incarcerated in Liberty Jail: “Do not think that our hearts faint, as though some strange thing had happened unto us, for we have seen and been assured of all these things beforehand, and have an assurance of a better hope than that of our persecutors. Therefore God hath made broad our shoulders for the burden. We glory in our tribulation, because we know that God is with us, that He is our friend, and that He will save our souls.”<sup>21</sup>

For me personally, the most profound of the Prophet’s inspiring exhortations are those Liberty Jail revelations we all know so well but sometimes forget or fail to comprehend. “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes” (D&C 121:7–8).

For his total service and sacrifice, the Prophet Joseph Smith was promised a crown of exaltation and given the pattern for the way in which God will deal with each of us. To Joseph the Lord declared: “I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily I seal upon you your exaltation, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father,

with Abraham your father. Behold, I have seen your sacrifices, and will forgive all your sins; I have seen your sacrifices in obedience to that which I have told you. Go, therefore, and I make a way for your escape, as I accepted the offering of Abraham of his son Isaac" (D&C 132:49–50).

Though Joseph Smith ultimately did escape the grasp of his enemies, it might not have been the way he originally thought it would—though he finally came to know that he would suffer a martyr's death (see D&C 135:4). John Taylor said Joseph was "like most of the Lord's anointed in ancient times, [who] . . . sealed his mission and his works with his own blood" (D&C 135:3). So it was with most of the ancient Apostles, including Peter and Paul. Our knowledge of Peter's and Paul's martyrdoms comes from sources outside the canon of scripture. The early church historian Eusebius (c. 260–339), whose *History of the Church* fills in many gaps in our knowledge about the early church, recorded: "So it came about that this man [Nero], the first to be heralded as a conspicuous fighter against God, was led on to murder the apostles. It is recorded that in his reign Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified."<sup>22</sup>

Eusebius's perspective on Peter and Paul was further informed by another of the early church's theologians, Origen (c. 185–254). Eusebius wrote: "Peter . . . came to Rome where he was crucified, head downwards at his own request. What need be said of Paul, who from Jerusalem as far as Illyricum preached in all its fulness the gospel of Christ, and later was martyred in Rome under Nero? This is exactly what Origen tells us in Volume III of his *Commentary on Genesis*."<sup>23</sup>

Our English word *martyr* is a loanword from Greek and originally meant "witness." Truly, Peter, Paul, and Joseph were such true and faithful witnesses that they gave their very lives for the cause of revealed truth. All three were killed for restoring to the world a correct understanding of the nature of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. All three died at the hands of unscrupulous men, who were lovers of self more than lovers of God. The rough treatment and eventual deaths of Peter, Paul, and Joseph can be laid squarely at the feet of political rulers—not a happy parallel, but an important one as we examine the history of the interaction between governments and God's people through the ages.

**THE PROFUNDITY OF JOSEPH SMITH'S INTIMATE  
ACQUAINTANCE WITH DEITY**

When all is said and done, no one was better acquainted with God than the Prophet Joseph Smith. He stood in the presence of the resurrected Lord a number of times. And though others, like Paul for example, speak of similar experiences (Paul records seeing the Lord on three other occasions after his Damascus experience), I believe there is a difference between Joseph Smith and others. The depth of Joseph's association with and understanding of Deity seems greater, so much so that Joseph's seeric powers come through with an intensity, constancy, majesty, and directness matched by few other personalities in all of scripture.

First, in canonized scripture Joseph speaks of seeing *both* the Father and the Son a number of times: during his First Vision in 1820, in a vision in 1832 that is so spectacular it is called "The Vision" (see D&C 76:20), and in an 1836 vision in the Kirtland Temple. Regarding the latter he said: "The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell. I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire; also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son" (D&C 137:1-3). While other prophets may have had such experiences, they do not mention them. Joseph Smith alone helps us to see that the nature and person of Jesus Christ can only be fully comprehended and appreciated by gaining a knowledge of God the Father as well. This is a truly remarkable and unique aspect of the Restoration of the latter days. What the doctrinal restoration does, purely and simply, is reintroduce the world to a knowledge of God the Father (much the same way the same kind of restoration did during the meridian dispensation) after a long period of apostasy.

In addition to his mention of Elohim in scriptural passages, Joseph Smith also discussed God the Father in many of his non-canonical sermons, writings, musings, and dialogues. This rich and deep contact with and understanding of the nature and person of Elohim is nowhere better demonstrated than in the Prophet's 1844 sermons, especially the King Follett discourse. In that magnificent sermon, delivered before some 20,000 Saints at the April conference

of the Church in Nauvoo, the Prophet asked and answered the question regarding what kind of being God is.

The necessity of possessing the right answer to the question about the nature of God is simple according to Joseph Smith:

If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. . . . The Scriptures inform us that “This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

If any man does not know God, and inquires what kind of a being he is,—if he will search diligently his own heart— if the declaration of Jesus and the apostles be true, he will realize that he has not eternal life; for there can be eternal life on no other principle.<sup>24</sup>

When one reads and ponders material like the King Follet discourse, one quickly realizes that there is not another person besides Joseph Smith to whom we may go to find such depth of insight about Deity. The reason Joseph spent so much time dwelling on this information about God was to bless the Saints. “I want you all to know him, and to be familiar with him,” Joseph said.<sup>25</sup>

What are some of the critical concepts Joseph Smith taught about God the Father that are not articulated elsewhere in such clarity?

- “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22).
- The Father is “the Eternal God of all other gods” (D&C 121:32).
- “In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.”<sup>26</sup>
- “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!”<sup>27</sup>
- “[God] was once a man like us. . . . God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself.”<sup>28</sup>
- “[We] have got to learn how to be Gods . . . and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before [us], namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until [we] attain to the resurrection of the dead,



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and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power."<sup>29</sup>

- "When we are ready to come to [God], he is ready to come to us."<sup>30</sup>

All of these insights about God the Father that came through the Prophet Joseph Smith present us with new information that is unique or uniquely stated in Christian theology. This is a profound and lasting consequence of the doctrinal restoration. The great Prophet of the Restoration knew God the Father in a special, intimate way. And yet there remained with Joseph a profound respect for Deity that eschewed any hint of inappropriate familiarity.

Another profound aspect of Joseph Smith's intimate association with Deity deserves to be noted. Often the canonized thoughts and words expressed by Joseph Smith were, in actuality, the thoughts and very words of the Lord Himself. Much of the doctrine and theology imparted to us by Joseph Smith is composed of nothing less than the direct, first-person declarations of Jesus Christ. Often Joseph was simply the amplifier through whom the Lord's own words passed to others.

Even a cursory examination of the Doctrine and Covenants shows how often Joseph Smith was simply relaying the actual declarations of the Lord in unmistakable language to various recipients:

- Four sections of the Doctrine and Covenants begin with the declaration "Behold, I am God."
- At least twenty-nine sections begin with the direct expression of the Lord "Behold [or Verily], I say unto you."
- At least thirty-seven sections of the Doctrine and Covenants begin with "Thus saith the Lord" or a slight variation of that formula.
- At least ten sections open with "Hearken and listen to the voice [words] of Jesus Christ" or some slight variation of that direct call to give undivided attention to the Lord Himself.

What the Apostle Paul said of his day and ministry may be said even more intensely and literally about Joseph Smith's day: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). We have the mind of Christ, and we have it through the Prophet Joseph Smith!

### THE IMPACT OF THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

From Joseph's interactions with God and angels there have come to us the keys to perform the ordinances of exaltation for both the living and the dead. This is one of the most important of the Restoration's many facets.

Keys are conduits of power and information. The revelations of the Restoration speak of keys in two major senses: one is the power and authority to *direct* the priesthood and the Church; the other is the means to reveal, to discover, to bring to light things unknown or hidden. In this second sense, for example, "Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were given the *keys* to translate and bring hidden scriptures to light" (see D&C 6:24–28).<sup>31</sup> For our discussion, we will define the keys of the kingdom of God in the first sense, as the right and power to direct and govern the Lord's affairs on this earth. Joseph Smith taught, "The fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the Church are vested in the keys of the kingdom."<sup>32</sup> These keys are part of the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood. As revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, this higher priesthood, which encompasses the Aaronic and Levitical Priesthood,<sup>33</sup> holds "the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church" and "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (D&C 107:18–19); it "holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church in all ages of the world" (D&C 107:8). Like God Himself, the Melchizedek Priesthood is eternal. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "The priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity."<sup>34</sup>

The Melchizedek Priesthood was instituted "prior to the foundation of this earth" said the Prophet Joseph, and "is the channel through which the Almighty commenced revealing His glory at the beginning of the creation of this earth, and through which He has continued to reveal Himself . . . and through which He will make known His purpose to the end of time."<sup>35</sup> This is critical doctrine, and without the revelations and work of Joseph Smith we would not know these things.

Consider what knowledge has come to us as a direct result of Joseph Smith's instruction. He revealed that before the time of the Old Testament patriarch Melchizedek, the higher priesthood was called "the Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God." But

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out of respect or reverence for the name of Deity, its name was changed to the Melchizedek Priesthood in honor of the great Patriarch (see D&C 107:2–4). Joseph taught that all the prophets in ancient times held the Melchizedek Priesthood.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, he said that the Melchizedek Priesthood is the power by which men and women become like our heavenly parents, heirs of our Heavenly Father's kingdom and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, possessing every power and every blessing the Father and the Son possess.<sup>37</sup> This is at the very core of God's work and glory (see Moses 1:39).

Joseph Smith revealed that the first person on this earth to possess the keys of the priesthood was Adam. In fact, our first father holds the keys of presidency over *all* dispensations and eras of the gospel. He is the presiding high priest, under Christ's direction, over all the earth. Noah stands next to Adam in priesthood authority,<sup>38</sup> and "after these two come all the heads of the different gospel dispensations, together with a host of other mighty prophets."<sup>39</sup> Not the least of these are Elijah, who held the keys of the sealing power in ancient Israel (see D&C 27:9; 110:13–16), and Nephi the son of Helaman, who held the keys of the sealing power among the Nephites (see Helaman 10:4–10).

The scriptures given through Joseph Smith speak of others who hold keys. Another Book of Mormon prophet, Moroni, holds "the keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim" (D&C 27:5). The prophet Moses holds the keys of the gathering of Israel and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north (see D&C 110:11). A prophet named Elias holds the keys of the Abrahamic covenant (see D&C 110:12).<sup>40</sup> An angel named Raphael holds the keys of his dispensation (see D&C 128:21). The chief Apostles, Peter, James, and John, held the keys of the kingdom of God on the earth in their day (see D&C 27:12–13; 128:20).

All of these specific keys we have mentioned constitute the keys of the kingdom of God. And all of these prophets who held keys, and many other "divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time," have returned in these latter days to the Prophet Joseph Smith and declared "their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood," according to D&C 128:21. Joseph Smith and his successors have

been, and now are, the possessors of all the keys and powers of the kingdom of God that are possible for mortal men to possess.

### KEYS AND SEALING POWER

Among the keys of authority and power bestowed upon the Prophet Joseph Smith, none are of greater or more far-reaching significance than those given by Elijah.<sup>41</sup> This ancient prophet held the keys of the kingdom in his day; he held the keys of presidency and the keys of the sealing power that constitute the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood. President Joseph Fielding Smith said that “it is that sealing power which gave [Elijah] the right and authority to officiate. And the Lord said unto him, ‘That which you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.’ That is how great his power was, and in that day Elijah stood up and officiated for the people in the sealing power.”<sup>42</sup>

So great and important are the keys of the sealing power that sometimes we equate the keys of the kingdom with the keys of the sealing power. The “sealing power puts the stamp of approval upon every ordinance that is done in this Church and more particularly those that are performed in the temples of the Lord.”<sup>43</sup> And as the revelation states, “All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are *not* made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed . . . whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power, . . . and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred . . . are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead” (D&C 132:7; emphasis added).

The sealing powers for the living and the dead constitute the fulness of the priesthood. We can receive a fulness of the priesthood only in the temples of the Lord. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared: “If a man get a fulness of the priesthood of God, he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord.”<sup>44</sup>

Further commenting on the Prophet’s words, President Joseph Fielding Smith stated: “Let me put this in a little different way. I do

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not care what office you hold in this Church—you may be an apostle, you may be a patriarch, a high priest, or anything else—you cannot receive the fulness of the priesthood unless you go into the temple of the Lord and receive these ordinances of which the Prophet speaks. No [one] can get the fulness of the priesthood outside of the temple of the Lord."<sup>45</sup> But the fulness of the priesthood is available to anyone who is worthy to enter the house of the Lord.

There is no exaltation in the kingdom of God without the fulness of priesthood, including the sealing keys. Thus, the fulness of the priesthood or the sealing power might also be termed the keys of exaltation. Again, President Smith said: "Only in the temple of the Lord can the fulness of the priesthood be received. Now that temples are on the earth, there is no other place where the endowment and the sealing powers for all eternity can be given. No man [or woman] can receive the keys of exaltation in any other place."<sup>46</sup>

In the temples of the Lord that now dot the earth, men and women can be sealed as husbands and wives for eternity. Children can be sealed to parents in family units forever. "What a glorious privilege it is to know that the family organization will remain intact."<sup>47</sup> Through the doctrinal restoration, we know that what is enacted on earth by the Lord's authorized stewards is bound in heaven. What value can be put on this knowledge? There is great comfort in knowing this. There is great security. There is great stability. There is a great anchor that comes to the soul in knowing this. Has any aspect of the Restoration had greater impact on the entire human family than the return of the keys of the priesthood—the sealing power of eternity?

My father died when I was young. I idolized him. Those were dark days. But tremendous peace, security, and motivation to carry on came from my knowledge that we had been to the temple and had been sealed as a family for eternity. I believe there would be significant value in having mothers and fathers spend some time with their children talking about the ordinances of eternity and the sealing power that binds families together forever. I believe our children would be more secure in their faith, better prepared to face life's challenges, and come to regard living prophets with a new love and appreciation if they could understand the incomparable sealing

power, found in the temples of the Lord because of the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

### CONCLUSION

There are invaluable, even incomparable, benefits that have issued forth from the restoration of all things through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Humankind has been impacted in profound ways. First, we see that God is consistent. He has had a plan for His children from before this world was created, and that plan has been administered through prophets who have held priesthood power and priesthood keys.

Second, we see that God has fulfilled and is fulfilling His prophecies and promises concerning the restoration of all things in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. We may have perfect confidence and trust in Him. He has the power to fulfill all His purposes, which are perfectly just and fair. God does *not* deal in accidents or coincidences.

Third, divine beings, Gods and angels, are real and they have ministered to men and women on earth since its creation. Divine tutorials are powerful tools of instruction.

Fourth, not only is revelation a principle of power with prophets but it is also available to every man, woman, and child who desires to have it. The heavens are not closed!

Fifth, the restoration of all things is founded on the First Vision, the most important event since the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sixth, the doctrinal restoration in this dispensation teaches us about all other dispensations: what they were like, how God dealt with His children in those dispensations, and what challenges previous prophets and apostles (Paul and others) had to contend with.

Seventh, our gratitude for the Prophet Joseph Smith will continue to increase as we expand our understanding of the doctrinal restoration—as we begin to comprehend the magnitude of his prophetic office and calling, and the depth of his association with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The doctrinal restoration reintroduced the world to a knowledge of God the Father.

Eighth, every aspect of the doctrinal restoration points to the fullness of the priesthood and the culminating power we call the keys of

the sealing power. This power is so great that it has an impact on both the living and the dead for eternity.

Ninth, our gratitude and respect for all of Joseph's successors will increase profoundly as we are able to understand the nature of the power and authority held by all the Presidents of the Church up to the current day.

Tenth, knowing that the keys and fulness of the priesthood are upon the earth and available to all who desire them gives us security and stability in a world that is horribly unstable. It gives us assurance of the continuation of the bonds of love and association with friends and family through the eternities.

All of this is made possible by the Father and the Son through the great Prophet of the Restoration. God be thanked for Joseph Smith and his successors.

#### NOTES

1. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 108.
2. See H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000, pp. 148–150. See also chapter 21 in this volume.
3. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 21:94.
4. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 4:425.
5. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 324.
6. Joseph Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 13–14; emphasis added.
7. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:477.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1971, 20.
9. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Parallel Prophets: Paul and Joseph Smith," in *BYU Fireside and Devotional Speeches, 1982–83* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 177.
10. See Anderson, "Parallel Prophets," 178.
11. Anderson, "Parallel Prophets," 178.
12. For Joseph Smith's explicit references to Paul in modern scripture see D&C 18:9; 74:1–6; 127:2; 128:13, 15–16; JS—H 1:24; and Article

of Faith 13. For many of Joseph Smith's references to Paul outside of scripture, see Smith, *Teachings*: as author of Epistle to Hebrews, 59–60; an example of industry and patience, 63; labored unceasingly in the gospel, 63; summary of life and labors of, 63–64; did not seek honors of this life, 64; to receive a crown of righteousness at Jesus's Second Coming, 64; had the Second Comforter, 151; received a visit from and was taught mysteries of godliness by Abel, 169–70; was acquainted with and instructed by Enoch, 170; description of, 180; a good orator, 180; caught up to third heavens, 247, 301, 304, 311, 323; knew things unlawful to utter, 247, 305, 323; had to be baptized for remission of sins, 265; was all things to all men to save some, 306; was persecuted, 32; quoted: on hasty ordinations, 42; on sacrifice offered by Abel, 59; on gospel taught to Abraham, 60; on necessity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, 62; on Second Coming of Jesus, 63–65, 286; on receiving crown of righteousness, 63–64; on apostasy in Church at Ephesus, 67; on love of husbands and wives, 88–89; on doctrine of election, 149, 189; on ministry of angels, 158; on dispensation of the fulness of times, 159, 168; on baptism of children of Israel, 159; on purposes and order of God, 158; on baptism for the dead, 179, 201, 222; on spiritual gifts, 202, 207, 243–45; on gift of prophecy, 209, 244–46; on order in the Church, 209; on offices in the Church, 244–45; on necessity of having Spirit of God, 247; on three degrees of glory, 311, 359, 374; on rebaptism, 263, 336; on wisdom of the world, 300; on being yoked to unbelievers, 306; on priesthood and ordinances, 308; on seeking after the dead, 356; on plurality of gods, 370–71; on earthly likeness to heavenly things, 373 (Robert J. Matthews's index of *Teachings*, 422).

13. So said Charles Francis Adams in 1844; quoted in Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith: The Man and the Seer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1.
14. See Anderson, "Parallel Prophets," 178.
15. See F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 17.
16. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "consecrate."
17. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:408.
18. Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 465–66.
19. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 4:301.
20. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 176.
21. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:227.
22. Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 62.



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23. Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 65.
24. Smith, *Teachings*, 343–44.
25. Smith, *Teachings*, 345.
26. Smith, *Teachings*, 349.
27. Smith, *Teachings*, 345.
28. Smith, *Teachings*, 346.
29. Smith, *Teachings*, 346–47.
30. Smith, *Teachings*, 350.
31. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 410; emphasis added.
32. Smith, *Teachings*, 21.
33. See Smith, *Teachings*, 166.
34. Smith, *Teachings*, 157.
35. Smith, *Teachings*, 166–67.
36. See Smith, *Teachings*, 181.
37. See Smith, *Teachings*, 308–9, 322.
38. See D&C 78:16; see also Smith, *Teachings*, 157.
39. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 412.
40. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 3:126–27.
41. See Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:126.
42. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:127.
43. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:129.
44. Smith, *Teachings*, 308.
45. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:131.
46. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:133.
47. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:129.