

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A PROPHET “AS IN
DAYS OF YORE”

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From humble beginnings in a quiet grove in 1820, a marvelous flood of light burst into the world in a grand restoration of truth. According to the dictionary, the word *restore* means “to bring back into existence or use; re-establish” or “to bring back to an original condition.”¹ One of the greatest parts of the doctrinal restoration in this dispensation under Joseph Smith was the “bringing back” of an understanding of the role of a true prophet. In each dispensation on this earth, prophets have been called to do the Lord’s will and impart His word to His children (see Amos 3:7). After the Great Apostasy, the role and function of prophets had been lost to mankind. Part of the restoration under Joseph Smith was to restore how God communicates and works through His anointed servants, the prophets. Even as this dispensation began to unfold, the need for a prophet was sorely felt. Brigham Young lamented that, before he found the gospel, he “would be willing to crawl around the earth on [his] hands and knees, to see such a man as was Peter, Jeremiah, [or] Moses.”² As done anciently, the Lord would anoint a prophet like Moses to usher in this dispensation. The calling of Joseph Smith as a prophet was accompanied by the necessary signs and symbols to support, sustain, and define his role.

The Lord had foretold the restoration of prophets and declared

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in this dispensation, “I will raise up unto my people a man, who shall lead them like as Moses” and “My servant Joseph Smith, Jun., is the man” (D&C 103:16, 21; see also 28:2; Moses 1:41; 2 Nephi 3:7, 9). In January of 1836 in Kirtland, Joseph Smith received a blessing from his father, wherein Joseph stated that he “sealed upon me the blessings of Moses, to lead Israel in the latter days, even as Moses led him in days of old.”³ Joseph had been ordained as “President of the High Priesthood” at a conference in January of 1832.⁴ His role as prophet was further revealed in 1835, as “the duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses—Behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church” (D&C 107:91–92).

Those four specific functions of the President of the High Priesthood were reiterated in 1841, as the Lord stated He had given His “servant Joseph to be a presiding elder over all [the] church, to be a translator, a revelator, a seer, and prophet” (D&C 124:125). To restore the meaning of those four titles, the Lord prepared symbolic evidence to sustain Joseph Smith as the prophet of God.⁵ John Taylor compared the preservation of the symbols Moses had in the ark of the covenant⁶ with others likewise preserved on the American continent in the Book of Mormon: “As ancient Israel preserved in the Ark of the Covenant memorials of God’s power, goodness and mercy, manifested during the exodus from Egypt, in the two tablets of stone and the pot of manna; and of the recognition of the Aaronic Priesthood in Aaron’s rod that budded; and as the sword of Laban, the sacred plates already revealed, as well as numerous others yet to be made manifest, and a Urim and Thummim were preserved on this continent; so will there be an exhibition an evidence, a memorial . . . preserved and manifested in the dispensation that the Lord in His loving kindness has now inaugurated.”⁷ The Liahona was added to the sacred collection of the sword of Laban, the plates, and the Urim and Thummim to make up a group of symbols that would be an “exhibition of evidence” in the latter days of the Prophet’s role. As Moses led the children of Israel anciently with the ark and sacred objects, Joseph Smith would be the Moses of the last dispensation with the sacred symbols preserved for his role.

THE SACRED COLLECTION OF SYMBOLS

These sacred symbols were passed down among those who were in authority as the Lord's representatives in the Book of Mormon.⁸ From the history of the Church, we find that all four parts of the sacred collection of symbols were preserved, and their coming forth as part of the Restoration under Joseph Smith helps to testify of his role as the prophet to head up this last dispensation. Just prior to the publication in 1829 of the Book of Mormon, the Lord warned Joseph Smith, "Behold, if they will not believe my words, they would not believe you, my servant Joseph, if it were possible that you should show them all these things which I have committed unto you. . . . Behold, verily I say unto you, I have reserved those things which I have entrusted unto you, my servant Joseph, for a wise purpose in me, and it shall be made known unto future generations" (D&C 5:7, 9). Echoing the words of Alma and Mormon (see Alma 37:3; Words of Mormon 1:7), the Lord promised that three others would be called and ordained, "unto whom I will show these things," and their testimony would be added to Joseph's (D&C 5:11). Three months later those three witnesses—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris—were told in a revelation that they would "have a view of the plates, and also of the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, . . . and the miraculous directors" (D&C 17:1). They would be witnesses to the sacred symbols and were to "testify of them, by the power of God." The Lord continued, "And this you shall do that my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., may not be destroyed, that I may bring about my righteous purposes unto the children of men" (D&C 17:3–4).

In the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ and His gospel to the earth, the sacred collection of items appears as an additional witness to the calling of a prophet in the latter days. The three witnesses later testified that they saw all four of the items, even as the Lord had promised they would.⁹ It is thought that the sacred symbols Joseph possessed were eventually returned to the angel, but there were many of the early Saints for whom the power of the symbols in connection with Joseph remained. All four items came forth in this dispensation as testimonies to the office and calling of Joseph Smith as "a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet." The conferring of those four titles upon Joseph Smith in this dispensation corresponds

to the four sacred items the Lord preserved as a testament of the role of Joseph Smith, that he “may not be destroyed, that I may bring about my righteous purposes unto the children of men” (D&C 17:4).

JOSEPH AS SEER—THE URIM AND THUMMIM

Elder Orson F. Whitney explained that “a seer is one who sees. But it is not the ordinary sight that is meant. The seeric gift is a supernatural endowment. Joseph was ‘like unto Moses;’ and Moses, who saw God face to face, explains how he saw him in these words: ‘Now mine own eyes have beheld God; yet not my natural, but my spiritual eyes; for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him.’ [Moses 1:11.]”¹⁰ One with the seeric gift, to see or perceive the things of God, was considered to be “greater than a prophet” (Mosiah 8:15). Ammon further taught, “A seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them” (Mosiah 8:17). In the development of a seer, the Lord has bestowed blessings to help in the process. Elder Widtsoe remarked: “A seer is one who sees with spiritual eyes. He perceives the meaning of that which seems obscure to others; therefore he is an interpreter and clarifier of eternal truth. He foresees the future from the past and the present. This he does by the power of the Lord operating through him directly, or indirectly with the aid of divine instruments such as the Urim and Thummim.”¹¹

The Urim and Thummim¹² were also “called interpreters. . . . And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called a seer” (Mosiah 8:13). They were a gift given to many of the Lord’s servants, such as Abraham (see Abraham 3:1), Noah,¹³ Moses and Aaron (see Exodus 28:30),¹⁴ the brother of Jared (see Ether 2:23), and Mosiah (see Mosiah 8:13). Joseph Smith received the Urim and Thummim with the plates for the purpose of translation in 1827 (see Joseph Smith—History 1:59, 62; Ether 3:23, 24, 28).¹⁵ In addition to translation, the Urim and Thummim served as an instrument for Joseph to see with spiritual eyes and receive other revelations and inspiration. The early revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants Joseph received through

the Urim and Thummim.¹⁶ His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, wrote, "That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was indeed, nothing more nor less than the Urim and Thummim, and it was by this that the angel showed him many things which he saw in vision." She continued by saying, "He could ascertain, at any time, the approach of danger, either to himself or the Record, and on account of which he always kept the Urim and Thummim about his person."¹⁷ It was through the Urim and Thummim that Joseph received the command for him and Oliver Cowdery to be baptized, and by this same instrument Joseph was told to write to David Whitmer for assistance so he could complete the translation of the plates.¹⁸

As a seer, Joseph had the privilege of using the Urim and Thummim, but he did not always need it. As Joseph developed as the Lord's anointed servant, so did his ability to receive communication from the Lord. Joseph explained in 1831 to Orson Pratt while working on his inspired translation of the Bible that "the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim when he was inexperienced in the Spirit of inspiration. But now he had advanced so far that he understood the operations of that Spirit, and did not need the assistance of that instrument."¹⁹ Revelations after section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants were apparently received without them. President Joseph Fielding Smith held that the Urim and Thummim were returned with the plates to the angel and that the Prophet Joseph never used them after the organization of the Church. Any mention of the Urim and Thummim after that was most likely referring to a seer stone that Joseph was known to possess.²⁰ On December 27, 1841, Elder Wilford Woodruff and the rest of the Twelve met with the Prophet Joseph. On that date he recorded, "I had the privilege of seeing for the first time in my day the Urim and Thummim."²¹ Elder Brigham Young recorded on the same day that Joseph "explained to us the Urim and Thummim which he found with the plates" and "he showed us his seer stone."²² For the purposes of our examination, whether these statements about the Urim and Thummim refer to the original, a new set of interpreters, or a seer stone doesn't matter. The fact that the symbolism of the Urim and Thummim stayed connected with the Prophet Joseph Smith and his role as seer among the early Saints is what does.

Some of Joseph Smith's closest associates years later continued to view him as having the Urim and Thummim and the seeric gift. Edward Stevenson first met the Prophet in 1834, and his family loaned Joseph their copy of *Book of Martyrs* by John Fox. When Joseph returned it, he stated, "I have, by the aid of the Urim and Thummim, seen those martyrs."²³ In July of 1843, Joseph and Hyrum Smith were discussing the revelation on plural marriage. Hyrum "very urgently requested Joseph to write the revelation by means of the Urim and Thummim, but Joseph in reply, said he did not need to, for he knew the revelation perfectly from beginning to end."²⁴ After the death of the Prophet Joseph, Elder Heber C. Kimball testified that this divine instrument passed on to the next leader of the Church: "Has brother Brigham Young got the Urim and Thummim? Yes, he has . . . everything that is necessary for him to receive the will and mind of God to this people. Do I know it? Yes, I know all about it."²⁵ Joseph Smith was a seer as in ancient times, and the Urim and Thummim was a symbol that testified of the restoration of that role in this dispensation.

JOSEPH AS REVELATOR—THE LIAHONA

An understanding of revelation is one of the wonderful doctrines restored by the Prophet Joseph Smith. As Amos declared, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, until he revealeth the secret unto his servants the prophets" (Joseph Smith Translation, Amos 3:7; see also Daniel 2:28). Using an example of an ancient prophet, Joseph Smith was told, "This is the spirit of revelation; behold this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground" (D&C 8:3). Moses was a revelator for the children of Israel by receiving revelation to help them cross the Red Sea and escape the Egyptians. Elder John A. Widtsoe stated: "A revelator makes known, with the Lord's help, something before unknown. It may be new or forgotten truth, or a new or forgotten application of known truth to man's need."²⁶ While anyone may qualify to receive revelation of truth for oneself, only the President of the High Priesthood can receive it on behalf of all the people. Among the sacred symbols passed on to Joseph Smith, the Liahona testified of his role as revelator.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Lehi was given "a round

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ball of curious workmanship" that "pointed the way whither [he] should go into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:10). Not only would it point Lehi and his family to the most fertile parts of the wilderness, but it also worked "according to the faith and diligence and heed" that was given it (1 Nephi 16:16, 28). In addition, "there was also written upon [its spindles] a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time" (1 Nephi 16:29). From this sacred instrument they received direction and new revelation that would guide them in the wilderness. Alma tells us this ball or director was also called the Liahona, or compass, and it was a type or shadow of the words of Christ that will lead us to eternal bliss if we heed them (see Alma 37:38–45).

The function of the Liahona was an example of how the words of Christ are revealed. The Apostle John recorded that because of apostasy, the Church "fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God" (Revelation 12:6). It was revealed to Joseph Smith that Satan did "drive the church into the wilderness" (D&C 86:3), and the opening of this dispensation was "the beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of [the] church out of the wilderness" (D&C 5:14; see also 33:5; 109:73). To be led out, the Lord said, the Church needed to hear "the voice of one crying in the wilderness—in the wilderness, because you cannot see him—my voice, because my voice is spirit; my spirit is truth" (D&C 88:66). Joseph heard that voice in the wilderness when in the grove in 1820 the word of Christ was revealed to him (see Joseph Smith—History 1:14–20). Joseph Smith was the revelator of the Lord's word in this dispensation and was called as His servant. In that role as revelator Joseph was told, "This generation shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10; see also 21:5; 43:3). Like the Liahona, Joseph was to reveal the word of Christ to guide the church through the wilderness.

Those who knew Joseph saw him as the director and guide, the revelator of the will of God. Edward Partridge, the first bishop in this dispensation, understood that role when he said the Lord would "give unto his people a prophet, through whom they can have the word of the Lord from time to time, to lead them along from the wilderness in which they have been lost."²⁷

Brigham Young suggested, "A guide is what we want—a guide for

our actions on the earth. God has given us one—he revealed a guide through Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and others who have lived in modern times, and they have revealed the will of the Almighty unto the people.”²⁸

Joseph Murdock wrote in 1844, a few months before Joseph’s martyrdom, “He is a prophet of God and as much called to guide the people in this day as Moses was in his day.”²⁹ President George Q. Cannon testified that the Apostles have the keys “necessary to obtain revelation from God, and to lead and guide this people in the path that leads to the celestial glory; but there is only one man at a time who can hold the keys, who can dictate, who can guide, who can give revelation to the Church. The rest must acquiesce in his action, the rest must be governed by his counsels, the rest must receive his doctrines. It was so with Joseph.”³⁰

Not only did Joseph exemplify the role of Revelator, he restored our understanding of revelation. Even as the writing on the Liahona was “changed from time to time” according to their faith, Joseph taught that this was “the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed.”³¹ Joseph Smith showed that the heavens are indeed open, and the Liahona testified of his role as revelator to guide the Church out of the wilderness to the promised land.

JOSEPH AS TRANSLATOR—THE PLATES

The role of translator is very similar to that of seer, but the Lord lists the two roles separately in three different revelations (see D&C 21:1; 107:92; 124:125). Even though the title “translator” is not in use today, “should records appear needing translation, the President of the Church may at any time be called, through revelation, to the special labor of translation.”³² What exactly does it mean to “translate”? The most basic understanding is “to express in another language, systematically retaining the original sense.” But is it always to render something from one language to another? Not necessarily, as “translate” is further defined as “to put in simpler terms, explain” or “to convey from one form or style to another; convert.”³³ A translator’s responsibility, then, is to make something more understandable, whether through other words or different languages. The prophetic

office of translator is different in that it requires the gift of translation, which is one of the gifts of the Spirit (see Alma 9:21). Through the translation process, knowledge would be revealed and one would gain greater understanding.

As part of the sacred collection, the angel Moroni entrusted the plates to Joseph Smith, and the Lord said Joseph would "have power to translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God, the Book of Mormon" (D&C 1:29; see also 20:8). The plates were obviously the prominent part of the sacred collection and held specific significance. When Alma passed the records on to his son Helaman, he noted that "these things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls" (Alma 37:8). The record they kept, in addition to the plates of brass, "brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer" (Alma 37:9). The plates revealed knowledge, knowledge of the gospel and of God, and without that knowledge one could not know God.³⁴ The Lord stated in this dispensation, "For this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ" (D&C 3:19–20). The plates contained the knowledge of God and would give the reader greater understanding of the gospel.

Joseph was given the gift to translate (D&C 5:4) and revealed to Oliver Cowdery that through this gift one "may translate and receive knowledge from all these ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred." (D&C 8:11) After the translation of the Book of Mormon, we know that Joseph returned the plates to the custody of the angel Moroni.³⁵ However, the role of translator, the symbol of revealed knowledge and understanding from the Book of Mormon plates, continued in Joseph Smith. In addition to the Book of Mormon, Joseph received commandments to translate the Old and New Testaments (see D&C 35:20; 45:60–61; 90:13; 93:53) and other records. In his short time in mortality, Joseph Smith restored large volumes of knowledge by translation and revelation. Elder Jeffrey R.

Holland said, “More books or pages of scripture have come to us through Joseph Smith than from any other prophet—more even than from Moses, Luke, Paul, and Mormon combined!”³⁶ Just what the Prophet Joseph produced by way of translation filled most of his adult life.³⁷ The knowledge restored by Joseph Smith as translator has shed greater light on ancient prophets and their teachings.

Those who knew Joseph understood the supernal gifts that he had for divinely restoring knowledge. Brigham Young declared that “Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the last days, had a happy faculty of . . . throwing a flood of light into the gloom of ages, . . . connecting the heavenly and the earthly together—in one blending flood of heavenly intelligence.”³⁸ Benjamin F. Johnson records that “the Lord began through the Prophet Joseph to turn the Keys of Knowledge to flood the world with new Light and Life.”³⁹ As a translator, Joseph restored that lost knowledge. Other records have been promised by the Lord to come forth (see D&C 6:26),⁴⁰ and the office of translator will again be needed to bring back lost truth and knowledge. Elder Orson Pratt stated that we “will behold other books come forth and other records translated” by one “that God will raise up by which these ancient records will be brought to light.”⁴¹ Joseph Smith was the translator to open this dispensation, and he brought the first of those ancient records to light.

JOSEPH AS PROPHET—THE SWORD OF LABAN

The term *prophet* can be used in a variety of ways. In a generic sense, a prophet is one who has the spirit of prophecy, and “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Anyone who has that testimony “is a prophet within the sphere of responsibility and authority given him.”⁴² But in a specific sense, those with the calling or office of a prophet differ in their sphere of responsibility than those generally with that testimony. President Anthony W. Ivins taught: “A careful study of the etymology of the word and of the lives, works and character of the prophets of old makes clear the fact that a prophet was, and is, one called to act as God’s messenger. He is to teach men the character of God, and define and make known to the people, his will.”⁴³ President Harold B. Lee testified, “A prophet is one who speaks, who is inspired of God to speak in his name.”⁴⁴ As one with divine authority, he becomes a legal

administrator for God's kingdom on earth and, like Moses, he is "to preside over the whole church" (D&C 107:91). As a prophet would officially declare the word of God, he is also a teacher of it. Elder Widtsoe explains: "A prophet is a teacher. That is the essential meaning of the word. He teaches the body of truth, the gospel, revealed by the Lord to man; and under inspiration explains it to the understanding of the people. He is an expounder of truth. . . . He becomes a warrior for the consummation of the Lord's purposes with respect to the human family. The purpose of his life is to uphold the Lord's plan of salvation."⁴⁵ As a "warrior" for the Lord and defender of the faith, the role of the prophet is to be his spokesman invested with divine authority to teach the word of the Lord.

The word of the Lord is often symbolized in the scriptures as a double-edged sword,⁴⁶ and the Lord declared that his "sword is bathed in heaven" (D&C 1:13). For many, the sword is a symbol of divine authority and power,⁴⁷ and the sword of Laban held that prominence in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁸ The Saints early in this dispensation also understood that symbol,⁴⁹ and the sword of Laban was known to be associated with the Prophet Joseph Smith. In 1831 there were many spiritual phenomena and false visions in the Church that prompted the Lord to reveal section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants. John Whitmer recorded that "some would fancy to themselves that they had the sword of Laban, and would wield it as expert as a light dragoon."⁵⁰

The Saints looked upon Joseph Smith as a leader fighting for their cause with the sword symbolic of the authority of God. In the October 1838 journal of Albert P. Rockwood, which was sent in installments as letters, he wrote to his family about the Mormon militia at Far West and the Battle of Crooked River. He implored to his father, "Come to Zion and fight for the religion of Jesus[,] many a hoary head is engaged here, the Prophet goes out to the battle as in days of old. he has the sword that Nephi took from Laban. is not this marvellous? well when you come to Zion you will see <& learn> many marvellous things, which will strengthen your faith, and which is for the edification of all the saints."⁵¹

Even as some felt that Joseph possessed the sword of Laban, his strongest association with the sacred symbol comes from the famous "cave story" mentioned in a discourse by Brigham Young in 1877. In

the middle of his sermon about the treasures that the Lord has stored up in the earth, Brigham related a story from the life of Oliver Cowdery:

When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. . . . They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: "This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ." I tell you this as coming not only from Oliver Cowdery, but others who are familiar with it.⁵²

President Heber C. Kimball delivered an earlier discourse in 1856 that mentioned the same event, noting, "How does it compare with the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry?"⁵³ Here it is declared a vision, but the authenticity of it is strengthened by many other accounts mentioning it with some variations.⁵⁴ Whether it was a vision or a physical event, the meaning was real, and the principles in it just as relevant.

The symbolic meaning of the words written on the sword is what was associated with Joseph Smith. It is reminiscent of the words of the Lord to Ezekiel: "Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh from the south to the north: that all flesh may know that I the Lord have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath: it shall not return any more" (Ezekiel 21:4–5). In 1838 Albert P. Rockwood wrote, "The Prophet has unsheathed his sword and in the name of Jesus declares that it shall not be sheathed again until [*sic*] he can go unto any County or state in safety and in peace."⁵⁵ The Saints connected the wording on the sword of Laban with Joseph as

the prophet. Years later in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith repeated the same language on the sword that declared it will never be sheathed again.

Joseph was mayor and lieutenant general of the Nauvoo Legion and had the three roles of prophet, military leader, and civil administrator. On June 18, 1844, close to his death and with enemies on all sides, Joseph assembled the Nauvoo Legion. In full uniform, he gave his last public address to the troops, during which he drew his sword, presented it to heaven, and said: "I call God and angels to witness that I have unsheathed my sword with a firm and unalterable determination that this people shall have their legal rights."⁵⁶ Other witnesses recorded the event, saying that the Prophet stated: "The sword is unsheathed and shall never return to its sheath again until all those who reject the truth and fight against the kingdom of God are swept from the face of the earth."⁵⁷ The sword Joseph used at this time was not the sword of Laban, but language similar to what was on the sword of Laban in the cave was used in conjunction with his Nauvoo military blade. Like some of the other sacred items, it was the symbolism that was important, not whether it was still the original object or not. As Joseph stood before his troops as their military leader, the sword had the same symbolic meaning as the sword of Laban, and the people rallied around him as their authorized leader. The sword of Laban was a symbol of divine authority that testified of Joseph as a prophet who speaks the word of God.

CONCLUSION

Joseph Smith was called as a prophet of God, a prophet as "in days of yore."⁵⁸ To testify of the restored understanding of the role of a prophet, the Lord preserved a collection of sacred items "for future generations." As part of the doctrinal restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith, these symbols bore witness of his calling and restored to the world an understanding of how God works with his official representatives here on earth. As one like unto Moses, Joseph was to be called "a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet" (D&C 107:92), the meaning of which had been lost to the world. Each sacred object symbolized one of these aspects. The Urim and Thummim testified of Joseph's role as seer, that he would see with spiritual eyes and bring vision to his people. The Liahona bore witness of the revelator receiving the word of God to guide the Church

out of the wilderness. The plates showed forth the gift as translator that had been given to Joseph, to bring knowledge and understanding back to light. Finally, the sword of Laban was a symbol of divine authority and power that had been placed upon Joseph as the prophet to speak the word of God. In time still to come the role of translator will again be needed, but today we sustain the President of the High Priesthood as “prophet, seer, and revelator.” Through the Restoration, the Lord has brought “back to an original condition” His spokesmen and witnesses here upon the earth.

NOTES

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “restore.”
2. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854–86), 8:228.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 2:380.
4. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:267.
5. Symbols are a type of universal language, defined as “something that represents something else by association, resemblance or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “symbol”). Even when the objects are removed or lost, the power of the association remains as the symbolism becomes more important to the people than the object, and the symbolism can even be transferred to other objects (H. J. T. Johnson, “Regalia,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951], 10:632).
6. For Moses and the children of Israel, a collection of symbols went before them in the form of the ark of the covenant (see Numbers 10:33). Not only did the mercy seat on top of the ark represent the presence of the Lord (Exodus 25:22), but the items contained therein were symbols of the Lord’s providence, guidance, and authority. The Apostle Paul tells us that within the ark of the covenant “was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant” (Hebrews 9:4). All three of these items were preserved by direct command of the Lord, “to be kept for a token” and “to be kept for your generations” (Numbers 17:10; Exodus 16:32–34; 25:16; 40:20).
7. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 122–23.

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8. Great care was taken to pass these items down (see 2 Nephi 5:12–14; Mosiah 1:15–16; 28:20; Alma 37:3, 14; 50:38).
9. See, for example, Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 11, 15, 20, 86, 127, 192, 198, 213.
10. Orson F. Whitney, *Cowley & Whitney on Doctrine*, comp. Forace Green (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 233–34.
11. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 258.
12. "In other terms, communicating light perfectly, and intelligence perfectly, through a principle that God has ordained for that purpose" (John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:263).
13. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:50.
14. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:206.
15. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:537.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants sections 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 17.
17. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 110.
18. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 142, 147.
19. Orson Pratt, *Millennial Star*, August 11, 1874, 498–99; Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 89–90.
20. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 3:223–24.
21. Wilford Woodruff, *Waiting for World's End: The Diaries of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 50.
22. Brigham Young, *Millennial Star*, February 20, 1864, 118–19.
23. Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Edward Stevenson, 1893), 5–6.
24. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:xxxii.
25. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:111.
26. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 258.
27. Edward Partridge, in *Messenger and Advocate*, January 1835, 61.
28. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 15:192.
29. "Joseph Stacey Murdock to John Dougless, East Hamilton, N.Y., Jan. 24, 1844," in Mark L. McConkie, *Remembering Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 66.
30. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:234.
31. Smith, *Teachings*, 256.
32. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 256.
33. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "translate."

34. This was the case with the Mulekites, whose “language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah, could understand them” (Omni 1:17).
35. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:18–19.
36. Quoted in Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 18.
37. Chronologically, Joseph translated the following: the Book of Mormon between 1828 and 1829; the Parchment of John (D&C 7) April 1829; the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible between 1830 and 1833; the book of Abraham between 1835 and 1842; and the Papyrus Scroll of Joseph in Egypt in 1835 (see Robert J. Matthews, “Joseph Smith—Translator,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993], 77–79).
38. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:310.
39. Quoted in Dean R. Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1976), 52.
40. These records include the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 27:7, 22), those of the lost tribes of Israel (2 Nephi 29:13), an account of the mount of transfiguration (D&C 63:20–21), the record of John the Baptist (93:18), and the book of Enoch (D&C 107:57).
41. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:216.
42. Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 155.
43. Anthony W. Ivins, in Conference Report, October 1925, 20. A prophet was one who was an official representative of God, who would deliver the word of God as a messenger (see Malachi 1:13; 2 Chronicles 36:15–16). As the authorized messenger, a prophet was sent because he “hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word” (Jeremiah 23:18).
44. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places*, 153.
45. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 257.
46. Some of these references are Revelation 1:16; 19:15; 1 Nephi 21:2; D&C 6:2; 11:2; 12:2; 14:2; 33:1.
47. Brett L. Holbrook, “The Sword of Laban as a Symbol of Divine Authority and Kingship,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 41–48.
48. Originally taken by Nephi around 600 B.C. from Laban, who was slain by it, this sword of “exceedingly fine” (1 Nephi 4:9) workmanship was passed down among the sacred items in Nephite history. Once it was brought to the new world, Nephi “did take the

- sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords" (2 Nephi 5:14). Held by the Nephite kings as a symbol of authority, the people said Nephi "was a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defense" (Jacob 1:10). Nearly four hundred years later, against the Lamanites, King Benjamin "did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban" (Words of Mormon 1:13).
49. Joseph Smith on occasion saw the formation of stars in the night sky as a sword or a stream of light in the heavens in the form of a broadsword that was witnessed by others (John J. Stewart, *Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* [Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publishing, 1966], 154–155; *History of the Church*, 4:439; Joseph Grant Stevenson, ed., *Autobiography of Edward Stevenson, 1820–1897* [Provo, UT: Stevenson's Genealogical Center, 1986], 90).
 50. F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launis, eds., *An Early Latter-day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1980), 62.
 51. D. C. Jessee and D. J. Whitaker, "The Last Months of Mormonism in Missouri: The Albert P. Rockwood Journal," *BYU Studies* 28 (Winter 1988): 25.
 52. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38.
 53. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105. David Whitmer also spoke of "the caves [that] hold other records that will not come forth till all is peace" (Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 7, 22, 127).
 54. See Alexander Baugh, "The Visions of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 33–34, 52–53.
 55. Jessee and Whitaker, "The Albert P. Rockwood Journal," 25.
 56. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:497–99.
 57. George Morris, "Autobiography," L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 17. Others recorded it as follows: "I can see him now, as he stood with his sword drawn and lifted toward heaven, as he declared the things which should take place on the earth, that the sword should not be sheathed until the earth was cleansed from wickedness" (Wandle Mace, "Journal [1809–1890]," L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 134); "(Drawing his sword out of its scabbard and raised it above his head,) I will call upon the Gods to bear witness of this. I will draw my sword and it shall never be sheathed again until vengeance is taken upon all your enemies" (William Bryam Pace, "Diary," L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 6); "Then, Said He, I will die for you. Drew his sword and raised it up to heaven and said it should never be sheathed

again until Zion was redeemed" (Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2:524).

58. Joseph S. Murdock, "Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 21.