

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“PRAISE TO THE MAN”: A REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL JOSEPH SMITH MEMORIAL SERMONS

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One of the most significant ongoing tributes to the Prophet Joseph Smith is the annual Joseph Smith Memorial Firesides (also referred to as Memorial Sermons and Lectures) held in Logan, Utah. These firesides, sponsored by the Logan Institute of Religion, began in 1944 and have been held each year since, as close as possible to December 23, Joseph Smith’s birthday. Speakers during the past six decades have included all the presidents of the Church (David O. McKay through Gordon B. Hinckley, prior to their calls as president), counselors in the First Presidency, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, other General Authorities, Church leaders, and scholars.¹ Their insights into the life, character, and doctrinal contributions of the Prophet Joseph, along with their testimonies of his divine calling, are invaluable resources in the reservoir of witnesses to the monumental contributions of the Prophet of the Restoration.

“Thumbnail History of the Logan Institute, 1928–1957” describes the inception of the Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons as follows: “One of the objectives of the LDS Educational System is to develop a testimony of the Divinity of the work of Joseph Smith. In harmony with this objective, the institute began the traditional Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons under the direction of Director Daryl Chase in 1944. Each year the institute invites an outstanding scholar and churchman to deliver a sermon dealing with some phase of the life

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and work of the Prophet Joseph Smith.”² Brother Chase’s intense interest in this topic was obvious, since in the same year, 1944, he published a small volume titled *Joseph the Prophet, As He Lives in the Hearts of His People*. This book was the product of his graduate work and years of studying the life of Joseph Smith. Some thoughts he expressed in the foreword cast light on his motivation for initiating the Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture Series. In it he expressed his opinion that “the definitive biography of the Prophet has not yet appeared.” Nonetheless, he believed “that some day the great book on the life of Joseph Smith” would appear and that its author would have to be a first-rate scholar.³

This series began in the heat of World War II, when many students experienced a trial of their faith. These lectures were a wonderful source of inspiration, testimony, and direction in a chaotic world. The students and faculty of the Logan institute described the desired outcome of the series as follows: “It is hoped that these Memorial Sermons will help to keep the Prophet and his teachings in a vital and meaningful place before each succeeding generation.”⁴

When the first sermon in the series was delivered by then Acting Patriarch of the Church, Joseph F. Smith,⁵ on February 6, 1944, the Logan institute consisted of the director, two instructors,⁶ and fewer than eight hundred institute students.⁷ The early sermons were intended to be not only inspirational but also of a scholarly nature, reporting new research and blazing new territory. In recent years, most of the sermons have focused on personal testimony of Joseph’s character and works. By the 2004 memorial fireside (also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Logan institute), the institute faculty included thirty-four instructors and 7,500 students.

The array of distinguished speakers who have been invited to speak at the Memorial Firesides has included fifty-three brethren and three sisters: Barbara B. Smith, Elaine Cannon, and Janette Hales (Beckham). These three sisters were serving as general auxiliary presidents at the time of their presentations. The speakers have included two Brigham Young University presidents (Howard McDonald and Jeffrey R. Holland), eminent scholars (Sidney B. Sperry, Lowell L. Bennion, G. Homer Durham, T. Edgar Lyon, Daniel H. Ludlow, Richard L. Bushman, Truman G. Madsen, Robert K. Thomas, and Robert J. Matthews), and General Authorities (mostly from the

Twelve and First Presidency). Three of these speakers, Elders L. Tom Perry, Robert J. Matthews, and Truman G. Madsen, have presented twice at the memorial firesides, and Elder Henry B. Eyring has spoken three times.

In 1953 William E. Berrett observed: "It is an appropriate thing to remember the birthday of the Prophet Joseph. . . . This is the birthday of our greatest countryman. Joseph Smith is the only American whose birthday is heralded around the world. . . . People of every land and of every race are coming to honor the birthday of the Prophet Joseph Smith."⁸ In this spirit, this article brings together insights shared by these presenters on the life and mission of Joseph Smith the Prophet. The wide variety of topics addressed by these speakers is fascinating, instructive, and awe-inspiring. Obviously, a comprehensive summary would be impractical. Therefore, the major topics discussed here are the testimony of Joseph's divine calling and mission, the doctrinal restoration through Joseph Smith, and Joseph's lasting legacy.

TESTIMONY OF JOSEPH'S DIVINE CALLING AND MISSION

The essential and most consistent theme of all the presentations was the powerful witness that testifies of Joseph Smith's divine calling, the centerpiece of the Restoration. Elder Russell M. Nelson identified the appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820 as the "center from which the very pulse of life for this Church has emanated." It "is at the very heart of our religion. . . . The prophetic mission of Joseph Smith and the doctrines he taught . . . [are] central to this work. God knows it. We know it. Satan knows it."⁹

Elder Richard G. Scott amplified the centrality of Joseph Smith's role by sharing the familiar story of President McKay's father, who, while serving a mission in the 1880s, had become downcast and gloomy. In despair he "retire[d] to a cave near the ocean . . . and pour[ed] out his soul to God and asked why he was oppressed. . . . He entered that place and said, 'Oh, Father, what can I do to have this feeling removed?' He heard a voice . . . say, 'Testify that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God.' . . . Always, we need to be valiant in the testimony of Joseph Smith."¹⁰

The pivotal role that the testimony of Joseph Smith plays in

missionary work and the conversion process was characterized by a survey conducted in the Canadian Mission under the direction of the mission president, Thomas S. Monson. Elder Monson reported that converts were asked: "Of all the things which came together to bring you into membership in the Church, what aided you most? Almost invariably the response to that question would be this: That which aided me most in my conversion was the humble, simple testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith."¹¹ Speaking of his own conversion, Elder Gary J. Coleman recalled, "Coming to know the Prophet Joseph Smith was the key to my conversion, along with reading the Book of Mormon."¹²

Discussing 2 Nephi 3 and elaborating on the similarities between the lives of Joseph of Egypt and Joseph Smith, his latter-day descendant, Elder Sterling W. Sill, concluded:

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sent before the face of the Egyptian famine to preserve life. Joseph Smith was to go before the face of the spiritual famine. . . . Joseph, the son of Jacob, opened the Egyptian graineries that people might not perish in the famine for bread. . . . God touched the life of Joseph Smith and through him opened the graineries of spiritual truth to abate the famine of hearing the word of the Lord mentioned by Amos. . . . But the spiritual graineries are now open. All things that were lost have now been restored. . . . The greatest information of our lives might well be the personal testimony of Joseph Smith.¹³

The divine and heavenly preparation the boy Joseph received was what made him into a prophet, according to President Harold B. Lee. He stated: "We come to the sure conclusion that a prophet does not become a spiritual leader by studying books about religion, nor does he become one by attending a theological seminary. . . . One becomes a prophet or a religious leader by actual spiritual contacts. The true spiritual expert thus gets his diploma direct from God."¹⁴ Howard W. Hunter further explained in his sermon: "History does not indicate that prophets have been chosen for their great learning, for their acquisition of worldly culture, or for their social position. They have been called from the more humble stations of life, they were chosen before they were born."¹⁵

In this light Elder Coleman cited John Taylor's observation that

"[Joseph] was ignorant of letters as the world has it, but the most profoundly learned and intelligent man that I ever met in my life."¹⁶

"The Lord had shepherded the unveiling of this work," stated Elder David B. Haight.¹⁷ Elder Russell M. Nelson pointed out that Joseph was known to the ancient prophets, and they appeared to and tutored him.¹⁸ He was not a self-made man; rather, God prepared, molded, fashioned, and endowed him.

After rehearsing the key elements of what constitutes a prophetic calling, Elder Hugh B. Brown testified, "I have the sacred honor to be a witness for Him, and now with the solemnity of an oath, standing before you as in a witness box, I declare that our Heavenly Father . . . commissioned the Prophet Joseph Smith to establish His Church and through him the priesthood was restored by which men today are authorized to speak and act in the name of God, as did the prophets of old."¹⁹ Elder Boyd K. Packer reasoned that by all standards Joseph qualifies for and is "worthy of the designation of prophet, seer, and revelator."²⁰

Many of the Joseph Smith memorial speakers emphasized the need for all those present to obtain this personal witness of Joseph Smith. Elder James E. Faust put into perspective the vital role of a personal testimony, pointing out that "the beginning point of the restoration is the story of Joseph Smith. . . . Joseph Smith lies at the heart of it all. . . . Every person who claims membership in the Church must have his own personal witness concerning the truthfulness of the story of Joseph Smith. . . . That which makes [the Church] live is the individual testimony of the members of the Church."²¹ Regarding personal testimony, Patriarch Joseph F. Smith observed that some people do not yet believe Joseph was a prophet, to whom he said, "That is not a disgrace. Honest doubt was never shameful." It was this questioning state of mind that led Joseph to the grove. "Honest doubt is a salutary thing. Dynamic doubt is a good thing."²² He then concluded, "I promise you young people that if you will make the Gospel of Christ the cornerstone of your education, and live according to the principles of the Gospel. . . . You will be given a greater insight and a wider wisdom. . . . You will know that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Lord, and no amount of sophistry, no amount of worldly learning, can move your faith."²³

An eloquent summary to the testimonies of all the memorial

speakers came in the words of President David O. McKay, who asked, "Whence hath this man wisdom?" Then he answered as follows: "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah! Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer. . . . As absolute as the certainty that you have in your hearts that tonight will be followed by dawn tomorrow morning, so is my assurance that Jesus Christ is the Savior of mankind, the Light that will dispel the darkness of the world through the Gospel restored by direct revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith."²⁴

THE DOCTRINAL RESTORATION THROUGH JOSEPH SMITH

The most significant contribution of the Prophet Joseph Smith was the vast reservoir of revealed truth that flowed almost continually from heaven through him. Of all the topics discussed by the Joseph Smith memorial speakers, this theme, the doctrinal restoration, was by far the most prevalent. The nature and reality of the Godhead, additional scripture, the restoration of lost truths, and doctrines related to the plan of salvation were among the topics most frequently addressed. Elder Joe J. Christensen depicted the Prophet Joseph's revelatory capacity in the words of Truman G. Madsen, who wrote:

[Joseph Smith's] Biblical teachings, letters and counsels are so extensive as to transcend the grasp of any one historian. . . . He spoke profoundly of eternal law, of the . . . cosmos, of the relationship of matter and spirit, of space and time, of the nature of freedom, of causation and process, of the meaning and unity of truth, of the foundations of ethics, and of history, education and languages. . . . He testified firsthand of the revealed personalities of God and Jesus Christ, the origins of man. . . . He manifested such grasp of the meaning of life as to exceed, even, the aspirations of men of faith in every age. . . . That it could have come from, or even through, a mind as taxed by a thousand other matters as was Joseph Smith's, staggers the imagination.²⁵

The First Vision and the Godhead. The event of Joseph's life most frequently referred to by memorial sermon speakers was the First Vision. As a result of that consummate event, Joseph, and the world, would never be the same. Elders John A. Widtsoe and Spencer W.

Kimball dedicated the bulk of their remarks to the significance of the First Vision. Of this experience Elder Kimball testified: "This young boy was entrusted with the greatest block of knowledge known to men." No one "in the world had absolute knowledge of God. . . . But, here was a boy who knew . . . God lives. . . . He is a person with flesh and bones and personality. . . . The Father and the Son were two distinct beings. . . . The gospel was not on the earth. . . . The true church was absent from the earth. . . . He must join none of the many religious sects. . . . Joseph knew from firsthand experience the attributes of the Father and the Son and the program that was to be restored through him."²⁶

"The First Vision," Elder Widtsoe stated, "was not only the Prophet's first great religious experience and, therefore, of great consequence, but it seems to me to be an epitome of the approach to all truth, whatever it may be."²⁷ Two great lessons may be gleaned from this theophany: "First, divinity is personal. . . . We in this day can hardly understand the greatness of that message, for in that day men were taught that God could not or would not speak anymore. . . . The second lesson . . . was a simple lesson: order must prevail among us. . . . The law of order rules the universe."²⁸

"At no time has God made himself common by appearing to people in general," stated Elder Mark E. Petersen, "but always in the past He has restored the true knowledge of himself by appearing to divinely chosen instruments on the earth. . . . Their testimonies then would become a basis for a proper and intelligent worship of the Deity and through that worship, with proper obedience, mankind could be saved. This is why . . . Joseph Smith was permitted to see the Father and the Son."²⁹

The primary role of the First Vision in the Restoration leads us to what Sidney B. Sperry called "the first and in many respects, the most important contribution of Joseph Smith in this realm . . . his concept of God,"³⁰ or the nature of God. In light of this theme, Elder Jay E. Jensen titled his sermon "'Joseph Smith—The First and the Last Lesson.' . . . Based on a statement by President Joseph F. Smith, 'The knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, . . . is the first and the last lesson.' . . . The foundation of the restored gospel is the correct knowledge of God."³¹ Elder Petersen stated that "no one can be saved

in ignorance of a true knowledge of God." We become like him by learning of his attributes and applying them to our lives.³²

Additional scripture. Discussing the doctrinal restoration, Elder Joe J. Christensen said that one can hardly overlook Joseph's "literary labors. . . . He produced more scripture, that is, the revealed word of God, than any other man of whom we have record. Indeed, his total scriptural productions would almost equal those of all others put together."³³ Standing first and foremost was the foundation work of translating and publishing the Book of Mormon. Many of the memorial fireside speakers addressed the keystone role of the Book of Mormon. William E. Berrett referred to the Book of Mormon as a living book: "We see not only the organization of the Church but we see some books, living books. I could count on the fingers of my two hands every book published in America a hundred years ago that is still being printed. Most books are dead in a half dozen years. And when a book survives a century we come to call it a living book." The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price are, therefore, living books, having passed the test of time.³⁴

"The Book of Mormon," Robert K. Thomas concluded, "claims to be essentially Hebraic history. . . . The Hebraic theory of history is devastatingly simple and exclusive: History is God's dealings with his chosen people—no more, no less."³⁵ The Book of Mormon stands as "Another Witness of Jesus Christ," and that witness "is the heart of the Book of Mormon," concluded Truman Madsen. "It is . . . the most revealing, relieving, releasing portrait of Jesus Christ in the world today. To say that it is crucially different from other prevailing portraits is an understatement. . . . This is a segment of the life of Christ, otherwise unknown, given with clarity. Here he is a resurrected, a composite self. . . . He is in all the highest senses of flesh and spirit a personality. He can be seen, felt, embraced . . . loved. He is the revelation of the Father not because 'two natures' are combined, but because He is now exactly like the Father in nature."³⁶

Another major body of scripture, often overlooked, that played a pivotal role in the Restoration was Joseph's translation of the Bible. Both times Robert J. Matthews spoke, he addressed the Joseph Smith Translation. Of it he said, "The Joseph Smith Translation, or JST, is not just a better Bible; it was the channel or the means of doctrinal

restoration in the infancy of this Church. Or in other words, several of the major doctrines and practices of the Church today were first revealed by means of the Bible translation by the Prophet Joseph Smith.³⁷ “If we select the great doctrinal revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants, we can immediately see that it was during the time of the Bible translation that such sections as D&C 29, 42, 45, 76, 77, 84, 86, 88, 93, 107, 132, and 133 were received.”³⁸ Among the doctrines clarified by the Genesis account in the JST were “the spiritual and temporal creations, agency, the rebellion of Lucifer, the fall of Adam and the introduction of the gospel to Adam and his posterity.”³⁹ The Lectures on Faith and even the temple ceremony were greatly influenced by what Joseph received while translating the Bible.⁴⁰ “There are at least 3,400 verses that contain alterations by him.”⁴¹ “The translation was not just a process of pouring information from one vessel to another, nor was it a matter of inserting doctrine already understood. The manuscripts suggest that the Prophet received inspiration line upon line, here a little and there a little. It was a learning experience for him.”⁴²

The house of Israel and Zion. Many other familiar doctrines became new at the hands of Joseph Smith. The revelations, teachings, and prophecies regarding Judah and the house of Israel led Daniel H. Ludlow to postulate: “I am convinced in my heart Joseph Smith knew more about Israel than any other person of his century.”⁴³ Joseph taught that “there are three aspects of the gathering of Israel, just as there were three aspects of the scattering: The lost tribes, the dispersed of Israel, and Judah. Some peoples of the world understand one of these aspects, but I honestly do not know anyone except the Latter-day Saints who understand all three of those aspects.”⁴⁴

Another doctrine unique to our theology is that of building up the latter-day Zion. Speaking to this theme, Elder Alvin R. Dyer said, “It is the responsibility, the obligation, of every servant of God in this dispensation, according to the revelations, to bear record unto the children of men that the foundation of Zion has been laid, that the celestial principles upon which it will be redeemed have been revealed.”⁴⁵ Elder Dyer quoted Joseph on the destiny of Zion: “You know there has been a great discussion in relation to Zion—where it is, and where the gathering of this dispensation is, and which I am

now going to tell you. The prophets have spoken and written about it; but I will make a proclamation that will cover a broader ground. The whole of America is Zion itself, from north to south."⁴⁶

The plan of salvation. Many of the doctrines revealed through Joseph Smith deal with the plan of salvation. These revelations stand supreme in teaching mortals the eternal truths of their origin, mortality, and destiny. It is not surprising that the plan would be addressed by many of the memorial speakers. Stressing the importance of man's knowing the plan, Elder L. Tom Perry stated: "The Plan of Salvation provides direction and purpose to the eternal scheme of things and is available to everyone in every condition. Unless people understand and act upon the principles found in the Plan of Salvation, the fullness of happiness will slip from their grasp."⁴⁷ In 1966 President N. Eldon Tanner said we learn from Joseph's teachings "about man's relationship to God, our pre-existence, the council in heaven. . . . Here also we learn about the resurrection. . . . We are taught also how we can do work for our dead, thereby making available the blessings of the Gospel to millions of our ancestors who died without a knowledge of it. Then we have the principle of Celestial Marriage and eternal progression."⁴⁸ "To me," concluded Brother Tanner, "this is the greatest story in all the world."⁴⁹

Of the plan of salvation, President Jeffrey R. Holland said, "You go back I suppose from the very beginning and think of all of the things we know about the premortal existence, the council in heaven, the conflict, the role of Satan, the role of Christ, our role, whatever our testimony was even then clear back with Christ. If you took away what the Prophet Joseph has contributed to that we wouldn't know a lot."⁵⁰ No other Christian religion teaches anything about premortal existence or the general plan of salvation. "If you just begin there," continued Brother Holland, "[you can] make that leap forward to all this business about three degrees of glory and rather detailed doctrine about sons of perdition and all that it takes to get there, the fall and the atonement, . . . relationship of faith to works, . . . the nature of man, . . . baptisms for the dead, . . . the attributes of God. The list is as long as your arm."⁵¹ "All of the significance of all these temples moving throughout the world, well, that alone . . . is a legacy from Joseph Smith."⁵²

Elder Dallin H. Oaks addressed another aspect of the plan of salvation, the eternal nature of man in regard to his agency. He concluded: "What the Prophet Joseph Smith taught about the nature of man and his relationship to God and the role of free agency contrasted sharply with the accepted Christian doctrine of his day. These are among the most distinguishing doctrines of the restoration. . . . Our understanding of the principles of free agency is traceable almost entirely to revelations received and taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith."⁵³

"Joseph Smith made clear the part played by this earth life in the eternal scheme of things," stated Sidney Sperry. "We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body."⁵⁴ The great and anticipated climax of the plan is to return to God and become one with Him. Dr. Henry Eyring, an eminent scientist, said: "One other idea that was revolutionary and is still revolutionary is to take away the idea of the limitation that one supposes exists for man. . . . He replaced it with the idea . . . that there is no limit to how high man might go, man the son of God, might go, if he lived the gospel . . . that through the eternities he could go beyond any limit. That great idea is something that can't help catching hold of our imaginations."⁵⁵

These doctrines are but a sampling of those discussed by the Joseph Smith memorial speakers. President Henry D. Moyle expressed it well when he related, "President McKay frequently has impressed upon my mind the fact that if the Prophet Joseph had given us nothing but the 89th Section and the 121st Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, he would have given us enough to justify our recognizing him fully as a Prophet of God with a mission to perform here upon the earth."⁵⁶ Joseph Smith revolutionized the doctrinal world of his day and changed the world for the centuries to come.

JOSEPH'S LASTING LEGACY

As significant as the life, teachings, and works of Joseph Smith were to his day, the greatest measure of importance lies in their endurance. "Our concern with history, Joseph Smith's or any other," asserted G. Homer Durham, "is not merely for what happened in the

past, but in what history suggests by way of principle for the present and the future."⁵⁷ Does the message and the work outlast the man, not only outlast but grow and increase with time? This last section will consider the spiritual heritage left by Joseph Smith and what impact and lasting difference his life, mission, and doctrines have made in our twenty-first-century world.

Regarding the test of time, Elder Bruce D. Porter quoted Joseph's own projection: "I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world."⁵⁸ Of this prophetic vision, Elder M. Russell Ballard quoted Joseph's prophecy that "this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world," and observed, "You will detect in this statement by Joseph Smith no element of cautious forecasting. He certainly did not predict future growth based on past trends. He gave a bold statement, a prophecy—given by the Spirit of the Lord to a prophet of the Lord."⁵⁹

Many of the speakers of the memorial firesides sought to acquaint their audiences with the Prophet Joseph, sharing anecdotal insights from his life and citing personal appraisals by friends and prominent figures of his day. President Howard McDonald cited an 1843 *New York Times* article that stated, "This Joe Smith must be set down as an extraordinary character, a prophet hero. . . . He is one of the great men of his age, and in future history will rank with those who, in one way or another, have stamped their impress strongly upon society."⁶⁰ Leaders of his day esteemed Joseph Smith to be one of the greatest Americans of the nineteenth century who left his mark on future generations.⁶¹

Such admiration of the Prophet has often been misconstrued. Elder Neal A. Maxwell clarified: "We do not, as some occasionally charge, worship Joseph Smith, nor place him on a par with Jesus. But we do venerate him, remembering, hopefully, that the highest and best form of veneration is emulation."⁶² Modestly, Joseph "made no attempt to hide his errors or the Lord's rebuke,"⁶³ Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin reminded his listeners. Elder Russell M. Nelson quoted Joseph's personal assessment of himself: "I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."⁶⁴

"Time judges all men," observed William E. Berrett, "most of us rather severely. Few of us are remembered long after the grave is closed except by our most intimate friends and family. . . . It is

interesting to note that at the end of a century there are more devoted followers of [Joseph Smith], more who are paying obedience to those things he taught."⁶⁵ In the same light, Elder Ezra Taft Benson commented: "I have thumbed through more than a score of volumes on the Prophet in my own library and recalled there are, it is reported, more than 1,600 separate volumes and more than 20,000 books and pamphlets which refer to the prophet in the library of the Church."⁶⁶

It is not in the least surprising that the most frequently quoted statement and scripture by all of the memorial speakers in esteeming the Prophet Joseph was John Taylor's tribute found in the 135th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. "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). Dr. Eyring said, "I do believe and I don't see how others can help but believe that there is no greater man in the last two centuries and no other person who has more effectively caught hold of people's minds and led them than has Joseph Smith, with the exception of the Savior Himself who lived about 2,000 years ago."⁶⁷

Elder Widtsoe identified the qualities that contributed to Joseph's greatness, "the cornerstones of his character": "First, he had an unchanging faith and trust in God. Second, he loved the truth. Third, he was humble, and fourth, he loved his fellow men."⁶⁸ "The Prophet Joseph Smith was creative," asserted Lowell L. Bennion, "Everything he touched became a new thing. In him was something of the curiosity of a child, the imagination of an artist, the practical zeal of a reformer, the idealism of a Utopian and the fire of a Prophet. His theology is dynamic. He used religion to remake life."⁶⁹ Brother Bennion then concluded, "Joseph Smith stood upon a wall with a plumb line in his hand, and every important institution of life which was not in line with the fundamental principles and purposes of religion and human welfare must needs be made straight."⁷⁰

Wesley P. Lloyd assured that each of us "will recognize with gratitude the mission of the Prophet and his part in affecting where and how we live; his part in the determination of our present associates, his part in the actual makeup of our families."⁷¹ As to the makeup of families, Elder Hartman Rector Jr., a convert to the Church, quipped: "My wife and I had two children at the time the elders knocked on

the door, and we were expecting our third, and that was all that we were going to have. That was one for me, one for my wife, and one unplanned; then we found out why we are here. Now we have seven, and expecting another. Joseph Smith is responsible for five of my children."⁷²

On a tender note, Elder Richard G. Scott related how the restored truths of the eternal plan of salvation affected how he and his wife dealt with the passing of their two infant children. He related his assurance that "we knew that Joseph Smith had promised that any child born before the age of accountability inherited the Celestial Kingdom. Difficult as it was to lose Richard and Andrea, we knew that we would live with them again." Elder Scott then posed a probing question: "What does Joseph Smith mean to you? What will he mean to you as your life unfolds? Will the truths he gave his life to sustain guide your life? Will you share them with others on both sides of the veil?"⁷³

Elder Benson noted, "The greatest activity in this world or in the world to come is directly related to the work and mission of Joseph Smith."⁷⁴ The effects of the ministry of Joseph Smith do not merely linger on; rather, they grow in crescendo. Joseph's works and teachings affect virtually all aspects of our lives. The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, priesthood, love, eternal marriage and family, knowledge of truth, agency, and even the Constitution and politics⁷⁵ were but a few of the doctrinal legacies discussed in these sermons. Even "the JST has affected every member of the Church, including those who have not even heard about the JST," concluded Robert Matthews. How? Doctrines concerning the age of baptism, the three degrees of glory, Zion, celestial marriage, and priesthood quorums all came as a result of Joseph's work on the Bible.⁷⁶

Barbara B. Smith, as president of the Relief Society, spoke about Joseph Smith's contribution to all women. She stated, "I think it is significant that all of the saving ordinances of the gospel are for women as well as men. From the beginning the freedom of truth, as revealed by the Prophet Joseph, has been available to all women."⁷⁷ Sister Smith then identified what she felt was one of the most enduring blessings bestowed upon the women of the Church, the organization and commission of the Relief Society. Joseph charged them to render service, to teach one another, to strengthen the community,

and to unite the sisters around the world.⁷⁸ This inspired organization continues to grow in strength and number as a result of Joseph's turning the key in their behalf.

Focusing on the personal nature of restored truths, Elder Eyring observed, "Yes, his work will touch the lives of all who have lived on the earth. That is a contribution of breadth. But how has it touched your life? That is another way to think about it: as a contribution of depth. And for you, that will matter more."⁷⁹ Elder Eyring emphasized how to receive and respond to revelation, using Joseph Smith as our model: "More than for any other prophet, we have a clear and lengthy record from Joseph Smith of how we can communicate with God. . . . Your problem and mine is not to get God to speak to us. . . . Our problem is to hear. The Prophet Joseph is our master example in that art."⁸⁰

Elder Christensen concluded his sermon with this admonition and promise: "Now what does this mean for all of us here this evening? . . . We should study more about the prophet. . . . Of greater importance, we should strive to incorporate into our lives the principles that he taught. . . . If [anyone] will receive and apply the teachings of Joseph Smith he will be made happy. Doubt and uncertainty will leave him. Glorious purpose will come into life. Family ties will be sweeter. Friendships will be dearer. Service will be nobler, and the peace of Christ will be his portion."⁸¹

A fitting concluding testimony to all Joseph has done for us was given in 1980 by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, who testified: "I stand before you as one who has both heard and spoken testimony of him across [the world]. . . . We are inclined to exclaim, What hath God wrought through the instrumentality of His servant Joseph! As we assess the present we find strength. The Church flourishes in a world of secularism. It is a refuge of spirituality. . . . Never has it taken a step backward."⁸²

President Hinckley concluded: "'When a man gives his life for the cause he has advocated, he meets the highest test of his honesty and sincerity that his own or any future generation can in fairness ask. When he dies for the testimony he has borne, all malicious tongues should ever after be silent, and all voices hushed in reverence before a sacrifice so complete.' . . . He was the servant of God,

this Joseph raised up to become the mighty prophet of this dispensation, the restorer of the ancient truth."⁸³

The annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons are truly a treasure trove, filled with nuggets of testimony, insight, wisdom, and inspiration. Reading them is an enriching experience in deepening one's love and appreciation for and testimony of this noble prophet of God. They constitute one of the most enduring tributes to the legacy of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his divinely directed mission. These sermons confirm what Leo Tolstoy observed, that Joseph was the one great American, "the only man who has brought forth any new ideas that could in the long range of time change the history of men."⁸⁴ This being the case, appropriately we sing, "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah! . . . Praise to his memory. . . . Honored and blest be his ever great name!" For the time is not far distant when "millions shall know Brother Joseph again."⁸⁵

APPENDIX

JOSEPH SMITH MEMORIAL FIRESIDES, 1944–2005

	Date	Speaker	Title of Presentation
1	6 February 1944	Patriarch Joseph F. Smith	Joseph Smith— a Prophet
2	10 December 1944	BYU President David O. McKay	The Prophet Joseph Smith— on Doctrine and Organization
3	9 December 1945	President Howard S. McDonald	The Prophet Joseph Smith
4	8 December 1946	Elder John A. Widtsoe	Joseph Smith—Significance of the First Vision
5	17 December 1947	Sidney B. Sperry	An Evaluation of Joseph Smith and His Work
6	5 December 1948	Lowell L. Bennion	Joseph Smith—His Creative Role in Religion
7	4 December 1949	President J. Reuben Clark Jr.	The Prophet Joseph Smith— Equally Burdened with Moses
8	3 December 1950	G. Homer Durham	Joseph Smith and the Political World

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| 9 | 2 December 1951 | President Joseph Fielding Smith | Joseph Smith—Prophet of the Restoration |
| 10 | 7 December 1952 | President Stephen L. Richards | Joseph Smith—Prophet, Martyr |
| 11 | 6 December 1953 | William E. Berrett | Joseph Smith and the Verdict of Time |
| 12 | 5 December 1954 | T. Edgar Lyon | The Wentworth Letter & Religious America in 1842 |
| 13 | 4 December 1955 | Elder Harold B. Lee | Joseph Smith, His Mission Divine |
| 14 | 2 December 1956 | Elder Wesley P. Lloyd | A New Dimension in Religious Thought and Action |
| 15 | 15 December 1957 | Henry Eyring | Religion in a Changing World |
| 16 | 7 December 1958 | Elder Hugh B. Brown | Joseph Smith Among the Prophets |
| 17 | 6 December 1959 | Boyd K. Packer | Joseph, Prophet Teacher |
| 18 | 15 December 1960 | Elder Howard W. Hunter | Joseph Smith—The Seer |
| 19 | 5 December 1961 | Elder Sterling W. Sill | The Leadership of Joseph Smith |
| 20 | 6 December 1962 | President Henry D. Moyle | The Prophet Joseph's Work |
| 21 | 11 December 1963 | Elder Thomas S. Monson | The Prophet Joseph Smith—Teacher by Example |
| 22 | 6 December 1964 | Robert K. Thomas | Joseph Smith Memorial Sermon (Untitled) |
| 23 | 5 December 1965 | Truman G. Madsen | Joseph Smith and the Source of Love |
| 24 | 4 December 1966 | President N. Eldon Tanner | Joseph Smith the Prophet |
| 25 | 3 December 1967 | Elder Ezra Taft Benson | Joseph Smith—Man of Destiny |
| 26 | 8 December 1968 | President Alvin R. Dyer | The Foundation in the Center Place of Zion |

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| 27 | 14 December 1969 | Elder Mark E. Petersen | The Prophet and the True Knowledge of God |
| 28 | 13 December 1970 | President Spencer W. Kimball | The Prophet Joseph Smith and the First Vision |
| 29 | 12 December 1971 | Bishop Victor L. Brown | The Prophet Joseph Smith—A Beacon in Our Lives |
| 30 | 10 December 1972 | Elder Hartman Rector Jr. | The Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 31 | 9 December 1973 | Robert J. Matthews | A Walk through the Bible with the Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 32 | 19 January 1975 | Elder Neal A. Maxwell | The Prophet Joseph Smith: Spiritual Statesman |
| 33 | 18 January 1976 | Richard L. Bushman | The Teachings of Joseph Smith |
| 34 | 16 January 1977 | Daniel H. Ludlow | Joseph Smith's Contribution to Understanding of Israel |
| 35 | 15 January 1978 | President Marion G. Romney | Joseph Smith the Seer, and Truth |
| 36 | 28 January 1979 | Barbara B. Smith | Joseph Smith—A Life of Love |
| 37 | 3 February 1980 | Elder Gordon B. Hinckley | Joseph Smith from the Perspective of 150 Years |
| 38 | 25 January 1981 | Elder James E. Faust | Joseph Smith, the Beloved Leader |
| 39 | January 1982 | Truman G. Madsen | (No transcript available) |
| 40 | 30 January 1983 | Elder David B. Haight | Joseph Smith, the Stalwart |
| 41 | January 1984 | Elaine Cannon | (No transcript available) |
| 42 | 3 February 1985 | Elder Russell M. Nelson | At the Heart of the Church |
| 43 | 25 January 1986 | President Jeffrey R. Holland | Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture (Untitled) |
| 44 | 25 January 1987 | Robert J. Matthews | The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church |

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| 45 | 17 January 1988 | Elder Dallin H. Oaks | Free Agency and Freedom |
| 46 | 29 January 1989 | Elder M. Russell Ballard | The Prophet Joseph Smith and Later Prophets |
| 47 | 21 January 1990 | Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin | The Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 48 | 13 January 1991 | Elder Richard G. Scott | The Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 49 | 19 January 1992 | Elder Henry B. Eyring | For the Salvation of Men in This World |
| 50 | 17 January 1993 | Janette C. Hales | The Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 51 | 16 January 1994 | Elder L. Tom Perry | A Visit with the Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 52 | 22 January 1995 | Elder Joe J. Christensen | In Memory of the Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 53 | 21 January 1996 | Elder Henry B. Eyring | (No transcript available) |
| 54 | 26 January 1997 | Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone | The Unspeakable Gift of the Prophet Joseph Smith |
| 55 | 8 February 1998 | Elder Jay E. Jensen | The Prophet Joseph Smith—The First and the Last Lesson |
| 56 | 31 January 1999 | Elder Gary J. Coleman | Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture (Untitled) |
| 57 | 27 February 2000 | Elder Bruce D. Porter | Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture (Untitled) |
| 58 | 25 February 2001 | Elder D. Todd Christofferson | Joseph Smith—The Revelator of Jesus Christ |
| 59 | 10 February 2002 | Elder Henry B. Eyring | He Could Not Do Otherwise |
| 60 | February 2003 | Elder Cree-L Kofford | (No transcript available) |
| 61 | 25 January 2004 | Elder L. Tom Perry | (No transcript available) |
| 62 | 3 February 2005 | F. Melvin Hammond | The Prophet Joseph Smith |

NOTES

1. A complete *list* of speakers is found in the appendix (above).
2. Thumbnail History of the Logan Institute, 1928–1957, unpublished manuscript, Special Collections Library of the Logan Institute of Religion.
3. Daryl Chase, *Joseph the Prophet, As He Lives in the Hearts of His People* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1944), 7–8.
4. The Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons, Vol. 1 (Sermons 1–10), Logan, UT, 1966.
5. Oldest son of Hyrum Mack Smith, son of President Joseph F. Smith—President of the Church, 1901–1918.
6. Director Daryl Chase later became president of Utah State University. The two instructors were Milton R. Hunter, who was called to the First Council of the Seventy a year later, and Wilford W. Richards, who succeeded Chase as Logan Institute director.
7. No number was available for this year. The Logan institute enrollment for 1945–46 was 846.
8. William E. Berrett, “Joseph Smith and the Verdict of Time,” transcript, Logan institute, 1953, 1.
9. Russell M. Nelson, “At the Heart of the Church,” transcript, Logan institute, 1985, 1.
10. Richard G. Scott, “The Prophet Joseph Smith,” transcript, Logan institute, 1991, 3–4.
11. Thomas S. Monson, “The Prophet Joseph Smith—Teacher by Example,” transcript, Logan institute, 1963, 1.
12. Gary J. Coleman, transcript, Logan institute, 1999, 12.
13. Sterling W. Sill, “The Leadership of Joseph Smith,” transcript, Logan institute, 1961, 8–9.
14. Harold B. Lee, “Joseph Smith, His Mission Divine,” transcript, Logan institute, 1955, 5.
15. Howard W. Hunter, “Joseph Smith—The Seer,” transcript, Logan institute, 1960, 3.
16. Coleman, transcript, 5–6; quoting *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 21:163.
17. David B. Haight, “Joseph Smith, the Stalwart,” transcript, Logan institute, 1983, 3.
18. Nelson, “At the Heart of the Church,” 4.
19. Hugh B. Brown, “Joseph Smith Among the Prophets,” transcript, Logan institute, 1958, 10.
20. Boyd K. Packer, “Joseph, Prophet Teacher,” transcript, Logan institute, 1959, 1.

21. James E. Faust, "Joseph Smith, the Beloved Leader," transcript, Logan institute, 1981, 1-2.
22. Joseph F. Smith, "Joseph Smith—A Prophet," transcript, Logan institute, 1944, 2.
23. Smith, "Joseph Smith—A Prophet," 6.
24. David O. McKay, "The Prophet Joseph Smith on Doctrine and Organization," transcript, Logan institute, 1944, 7-8.
25. Joe J. Christensen, "In Memory of the Prophet Joseph Smith," transcript, Logan institute, 1995, 4. quoting "Joseph Smith Among the Prophets" (The New England Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963), 5-6.
26. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and the First Vision," transcript, Logan institute, 1970, 7.
27. John A. Widtsoe, "Joseph Smith—Significance of the First Vision," transcript, Logan institute, 1946, 1.
28. Widtsoe, "Joseph Smith—Significance of the First Vision," 3-4.
29. Mark E. Petersen, "The Prophet and the True Knowledge of God," transcript, Logan institute, 1969, 6-7.
30. Sidney B. Sperry, "An Evaluation of Joseph Smith and His Work," transcript, Logan institute, 1947, 2.
31. Jay E. Jensen, "The Prophet Joseph Smith—The First and the Last Lesson," transcript, Logan institute, 1998, 1.
32. Petersen, "The Prophet and the True Knowledge of God," 1-3.
33. Christensen, "In Memory of the Prophet Joseph Smith," 3.
34. Berrett, "Joseph Smith and the Verdict of Time," 4.
35. Robert K. Thomas, transcript, Logan institute, 1964, 4-6.
36. Truman G. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Source of Love," transcript, Logan institute, 1965, 2-3.
37. Robert J. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church," transcript, Logan institute, 1987, 1.
38. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church," 6.
39. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church," 4.
40. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church," 5.
41. Robert J. Matthews, "A Walk through the Bible with the Prophet Joseph Smith," transcript, Logan institute, 1973, 14.
42. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church," 2.

43. Daniel H. Ludlow, "Joseph Smith's Contribution to an Understanding of Israel," transcript, Logan institute, 1977, 2.
44. Ludlow, "Joseph Smith's Contribution to an Understanding of Israel," 10.
45. Alvin R. Dyer, "The Foundation in the Center Place of Zion," transcript, Logan institute, 1968, 8.
46. Dyer, "The Foundation in the Center Place of Zion," 5–6; quoting *History of the Church*, VI, 318–19.
47. L. Tom Perry, "A Visit with the Prophet Joseph Smith," transcript, Logan institute, 1994, 5.
48. N. Eldon Tanner, "Joseph Smith the Prophet," transcript, Logan institute, 1966, 8.
49. Tanner, "Joseph Smith the Prophet," 10.
50. Jeffrey R. Holland, transcript, Logan institute, 1986, 18.
51. Holland, transcript, Logan institute, 1986, 19–22.
52. Holland, transcript, Logan institute, 1986, 21.
53. Dallin H. Oaks, "Free Agency and Freedom," transcript, Logan institute, 1988, 2.
54. Sperry, "An Evaluation of Joseph Smith and His Work," 7–8.
55. Henry B. Eyring, "Religion in a Changing World," transcript, Logan institute, 1957, 3.
56. Henry D. Moyle, "The Prophet Joseph's Work," transcript, Logan institute, 1962, 1.
57. G. Homer Durham, "Joseph Smith and the Political World," transcript, Logan institute, 1950, 3.
58. Bruce D. Porter, transcript, Logan institute, 2000, 7.
59. M. Russell Ballard, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and Later Prophets," transcript, Logan institute, 1989, 2.
60. Howard S. McDonald, "The Prophet Joseph Smith," transcript, Logan institute, 1945, 2.
61. McDonald, "The Prophet Joseph Smith," 2.
62. Neal A. Maxwell, "The Prophet Joseph Smith: Spiritual Statesman," transcript, Logan institute, 1975, 12.
63. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "The Prophet Joseph Smith," transcript, Logan institute, 1990, 17.
64. Nelson, "At the Heart of the Church," 6; quoting Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 368.
65. Berrett, "Joseph Smith and the Verdict of Time," 1.
66. Ezra Taft Benson, "Joseph Smith—Man of Destiny," transcript, Logan institute, 1967, 1.

67. Eyring, "Religion in a Changing World," 2.
68. Widtsoe, "The Prophet Joseph Smith," 14.
69. Lowell L. Bennion, "Joseph Smith—His Creative Role in Religion," transcript, Logan institute, 1948, 2.
70. Bennion, "An Evaluation of Joseph Smith and His Work," 7.
71. Lloyd, "Joseph Smith—His Creative Role In Religion," 7.
72. Hartman Rector Jr., "The Prophet Joseph Smith," transcript, Logan institute, 1972, 3.
73. Scott, "The Prophet Joseph Smith," 18.
74. Benson, "Joseph Smith—Man of Destiny," 3.
75. Maxwell, "The Prophet Joseph Smith: Spiritual Statesman," 1.
76. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation—A Blessing to the Church," 7–8.
77. Barbara B. Smith, "Joseph Smith—A Life of Love," transcript, Logan institute, 1979, 8.
78. Smith, "Joseph Smith—A Life of Love," 9–11.
79. Henry B. Eyring, "For the Salvation of Men in This World," transcript, Logan institute, 1992, 1.
80. Eyring, "For the Salvation of Men," 2.
81. Christensen, "In Memory of the Prophet Joseph Smith," 10.
82. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Joseph Smith from the Perspective of 150 Years," transcript, Logan institute, 1980, 10.
83. Hinckley, 12; quoting Ezra Dalby, Dec. 12, 1926.
84. Berrett, "Joseph Smith and the Verdict of Time," 5.
85. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), no. 27.