

The Restoration in the Lord's Plan

Richard O. Cowan

The latter-day restoration of the gospel was not something new. Its significance can be understood best by seeing it against the backdrop of earlier developments. Furthermore, the world had to be prepared for this great event. Its ultimate glorious destiny is yet to be fully achieved.

PATTERNS IN HISTORY

The world's history can be seen in terms of a series of spiritual cycles. Adam, the first man, was taught the gospel (see Moses 6:51–52) and received God's authority to represent Him on earth. This power was known as "the Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God" (D&C 107:3).

With the passage of time, many among Adam's posterity began to depart from the righteous paths he had taught. Motivated by Satan, these problems included wars, murders, and lust for power (see Moses 6:15). Such a falling away

became known as "apostasy." This term is derived from the Greek prefix *apo-*, meaning "away," plus *stasis*, a "stance." The term *apostasia* was actually used in secular Greek histories to refer to a rebellion against legally constituted authority. Hence this term suggests a rejection of God's authority and a deliberate abandonment of former beliefs or behaviors rather than merely an accidental drifting away.

Not wanting to leave His children on earth in spiritual darkness, God sent another prophet, Enoch, to restore them to a knowledge of and commitment to the truth. Enoch had great success—at least among some of the people (see Moses 7:16–19).

When Enoch and his city were taken into heaven, conditions of apostasy once again became rampant. The prophet Noah was sent to warn the people that the world would be destroyed by a flood if they did not repent. The act of sending God's word anew to the earth is

known as a “dispensation” of the gospel. Unfortunately, even though Noah preached over 120 years, only he and his immediate family were spared in the ark (see Moses 8:17; Genesis 7:7).

In coming years, Noah’s descendants once again lost their way spiritually. By the time of Abraham, idolatry was widespread (see Abraham 1:5–7). Knowing that he must have authority to minister in the name of God, Abraham sought out Melchizedek, the leader of a righteous people. Abraham paid his tithes to Melchizedek and from him received the holy priesthood (see Genesis 14:20; D&C 84:14). At this time, the name of the priesthood was changed to the Melchizedek Priesthood to avoid cheapening the title of Deity by too-frequent repetition (see D&C 107:4).

Following yet another period of apostasy, which included the Israelites’ captivity in Egypt, the Lord raised up another prophet to lead them to both temporal and spiritual liberation. An important development in priesthood history occurred after Moses led his people through the Red Sea. Jethro became concerned that his son-in-law, Moses, was overloaded by the myriad responsibilities he attempted to carry alone (see Exodus 18:13–23). The Lord subsequently appointed Aaron and his descendants to officiate in a lesser priesthood, which was responsible for “the preparatory gospel” of “repentance and of baptism” (D&C 84:26–27). Aaron’s appointment marked the division of the priesthood into two orders: the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood was responsible for more spiritual matters, while the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood assumed the responsibility for temporal affairs (see D&C 107:6–15, 68).

In the days of Jesus Christ, both orders were restored (see Hebrews 7:11). Philip, for example, may have had only the lesser priesthood, because he had the authority to baptize, but the Apostles had to come from Jerusalem to lay on hands to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Acts 8:13–15). Because of the Savior’s pivotal

place in history and the practice of counting years from the time of His birth, we know the era in which He ministered as the dispensation of the meridian of time.

PROPHECIES OF THE GLORIOUS LATTER-DAY RESTORATION

Following the times of Christ and His Apostles, there came one of the worst departures from the light of the gospel. Known as the Dark Ages or the Great Apostasy, it smothered the earth for many centuries. From even before the days of the Savior, however, holy prophets looked forward to glorious latter-day events that would dispel the gloom of ignorance.

As he was interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Daniel spoke of the time when God would “set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed,” but rather, like the stone which the king had seen in his dream, would roll forth to fill “the whole earth” (see Daniel 2:26–45, especially verses 35 and 44).

As Malachi concluded what would become the last book of the Old Testament, he looked forward to the latter days, when God would send prophets with divine authority to the earth. Moroni cited Malachi’s prophecy as follows: “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (D&C 2:1–3; see also Malachi 4:5–6).

Not long after the Savior’s Ascension into heaven, the Apostle Peter referred to the Second Coming of Christ as following “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (see Acts 3:20–21). In like spirit, Paul declared that “in the dispensation of the fulness of times” God would “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). Hence

this would be not just a restitution but a culmination of all previous dispensations.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE RESTORATION

The prophesied latter-day restoration of the gospel and Church of Jesus Christ could not occur until political, social, and religious conditions were just right. Other essays in this volume describe key elements of this preparation. Elder Mark E. Petersen portrayed the process as a “world movement requiring centuries of time. . . . Even the renaissance of medieval Europe was a part of this mighty drama, for an awakening of mankind was stimulated in the Dark Ages.”¹ This Renaissance of learning in general led to the reformation of religion in particular: “The heralds of a distant dawn came forth,” declared Elder Bruce R. McConkie. “There was a Calvin, a Zwingli, a Luther, a Wesley. . . . There were men of insight and courage who were sickened by the sins and evils of the night. These great souls hacked and sawed at the chains with which the masses were bound. They sought to do good and to help their fellowmen—all according to the best light and knowledge they had.”² President Thomas S. Monson echoed these sentiments: “[The great reformers’] deeds were heroic, their contributions many, their sacrifices great—but they did not restore the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Still, he insisted, they put the Bible “within the grasp of the people.”³

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi, who lived six hundred years before the time of Christ, foresaw other events that were essential in preparing the way for the restoration: “And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters” to the “promised land.” Columbus fulfilled this prophecy.⁴ Nephi then saw that the Spirit “wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.”

Eventually, they successfully fought against the “mother Gentiles” and “were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:12, 13, 17, 19).

Concerning these events, President Joseph F. Smith declared that “it was part of the design of the Almighty when He influenced our fathers to leave the old world and come to this continent; He had a hand in the establishment of this government; He inspired the framers of the Constitution and the fathers of this nation to contend for their liberties.”⁵ Specifically, the Lord declared that he had “established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom [He] raised up unto this very purpose” (D&C 101:80). The Prophet Joseph Smith described this inspired Constitution as a “glorious standard” and “heavenly banner.”⁶ Indeed, the Constitution is at the head of the government that, as Joseph F. Smith insisted, has afforded “the widest liberty and the greatest freedom to man that has ever been known to exist among men.”⁷

In addition to the development of political and religious freedom, Nephi alluded to another key element in preparation for the latter-day Restoration. He foresaw that there would be “many plain and precious things taken away” from the scriptures that “proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew.” He also saw how God planned to restore that which had been lost: “I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed, and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:24, 28, 35). Thus, the record we know as the Book of Mormon was to play a key part in restoring sacred truths which had been lost from the Bible.

Latter-day revelation affirms that the Book of Mormon, the record preserved by Nephi’s seed, contains “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus

Christ. . . . Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old" (D&C 20:9, 11). The book's title page declares that it was prepared for the "convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations." This volume contains some of the most beautiful and powerful expositions and testimonies of Christ's gospel. Perhaps this is why the book has been given the subtitle *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. Appropriately, it has been described as "the keystone of our religion" with the affirmation that "a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."⁸

THE GLORIOUS RESTORATION BEGINS

The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi referred to a prophecy given centuries before by Joseph, who was sold into Egypt. Joseph foresaw that in the latter days "a seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer. . . . And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father" (2 Nephi 3:6, 15). Joseph Smith Jr., who fulfilled this prophecy, was born in Sharon, Vermont, on December 23, 1805. He spent the first decade of his life in New England as his family sought to eke out a living from the stony soil of that area.

Because the Book of Mormon was to have a key place in the process of Restoration, the Smith family would need to be led to western New York, where that record had been "hid up" (1 Nephi 13:35) by the hands of the prophet Moroni around AD 421. In April 1815, Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies exploded, throwing twenty-five cubic miles of volcanic ash and debris into the atmosphere. This unprecedented eruption affected climates around the world for over a year, as clouds of ash in the upper atmosphere obscured the sun. In New England there were three killing frosts between June 6 and August 30, 1816, the "year without a summer."⁹ As

crops failed, thousands of people—including the Smiths—looked for a place they might go for a new beginning. Joseph Smith Sr. found land in Palmyra, New York, where he moved his family later that year.

Once Joseph Smith was in the right location, the long-awaited Restoration could begin. It did not happen all at once but was unfolded "line upon line, precept upon precept" (2 Nephi 28:30; see also Isaiah 28:10).

Developments in the region provided the setting for the Restoration to unfold. Religious fervor of the "second great awakening" was particularly strong in western New York, which came to be known as the Burned-over District.¹⁰ Confused over the conflicting claims of rival churches, fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith sought help from the Bible. In the Epistle of James he read: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). "Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine," Joseph later acknowledged. "I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did" (Joseph Smith—History 1:11–12).

Seeking seclusion in a grove of trees near his home, Joseph knelt in prayer. On this wondrous day in the early spring of 1820, he experienced a remarkable vision that provided significant insights. Joseph learned that Satan's influence was real but that God's power was greater. He learned that God lives and does answer prayers. The personal appearance of the Father and the Son confirmed that they are two distinct persons. He later emphasized that their "brightness and glory defy all description," being "above the brightness of the sun." When he asked which church was right, he was instructed to "join none of them" (Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17, 19). He was assured that "the fulness of the Gospel should at some future time be made known unto me."¹¹

This unprecedented theophany changed young Joseph's life forever. Although members of his own family believed his account of the vision, Joseph was dismayed when ministers and the majority of his neighbors did not. Three years passed with no further formal spiritual experiences. Joseph could not help but wonder what had happened, and he was concerned whether he had offended God (see Joseph Smith—History 1:29).

On Sunday evening, September 21, 1823, after the others in the family's small log home were asleep, Joseph pleaded in prayer for assurance and forgiveness. He noticed a light coming into his room, and soon a heavenly messenger appeared whose "whole person was glorious beyond description." He wore a loose robe of "whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen." He identified himself as Moroni, the same person who "hid up" the records centuries earlier, and told Joseph of the book "written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent," and informed him that the ancient records were buried in a hill just three miles from his home (see Joseph Smith—History 1:31–42). Four years of preparation, including annual visits from Moroni, were required before Joseph Smith was permitted to actually obtain the plates and begin the work of translation. By this time, Joseph was in his early twenties and had married.

Translation and publication of the Book of Mormon was an important means of restoring gospel truths. Revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith became another important channel. These divine communications shed light on such central matters as priesthood organization and ordinances (D&C 20; 84; 107), the purposes and fruits of observing the Sabbath (D&C 59), life after death with differing degrees of glory (D&C 76), achieving a fulness of glory through diligence and obedience to God's commandments (D&C 93), and the eternal nature of the family and the glorious rewards of those who are exalted (D&C 132).

Many of these latter-day revelations were compiled in a volume of scripture known as the Doctrine and Covenants. Because the purpose of these revelations was to restore knowledge lost during centuries of apostasy, they typically included a more complete exposition of doctrinal points than can be found in other volumes of scripture. Appropriately, therefore, Church President Ezra Taft Benson described the Doctrine and Covenants as "the capstone" of our religion.¹²

A third means by which gospel truths were made known was through Joseph Smith's "new translation" of the Bible. The Lord directed Sidney Rigdon to write for Joseph, and He promised that "the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect" (D&C 35:20). With Sidney helping as scribe, the Prophet, by inspiration, corrected errors, clarified meanings, and restored material lost from the Bible. In addition to restoring an understanding of gospel principles, work on the Joseph Smith Translation provided the setting for revelations (now in the Doctrine and Covenants) that shed further light on key points of doctrine. The book of Abraham also provided additional insights into reasons for the earth's creation, promises made to Abraham and his seed, and the relationship between this life and that which went before and that which will follow hereafter.

RESTORATION OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION UNFOLDED

At the same time the Saints' understanding of gospel truths was being expanded, steps were already under way to restore priesthood power and Church organization. Joseph Smith taught what this restoration would need to include: "All the ordinances and duties that ever have been required by the Priesthood under the directions and commandments of the Almighty in any of the dispensations, shall all be had in the last dispensation, therefore all things had under the authority of the Priesthood at any former period, shall be had again, bringing to pass the restoration

spoken of by the mouth of all the Holy Prophets.”¹³

While living near the small village of Harmony, Pennsylvania, Joseph began translating the Book of Mormon by God’s power. As he pursued this task with the help of Oliver Cowdery, a young schoolteacher who was acting as scribe, a question arose respecting the matter of baptism. On May 15, 1829, Joseph and Oliver prayed for understanding. A heavenly messenger appeared, identified himself as John the Baptist, placed his hands upon their heads, and declared, “Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.” The heavenly visitor then directed Joseph and Oliver to baptize one another in the nearby Susquehanna River (see Joseph Smith—History 1:68–71; see also D&C 13).

Soon afterward, Peter, James, and John, the chief New Testament Apostles, appeared and restored the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood. The Savior subsequently declared that the three Apostles had conferred “the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (D&C 27:12–13; see also D&C 128:20). It was evident that the earthly leaders of the latter-day Restoration were to become personally acquainted with key figures of past dispensations.

In March 1830 the Book of Mormon was published. A growing number of followers were expressing an interest in establishing a formal organization. Once again Joseph sought divine guidance and was directed to proceed. Consequently, on Tuesday, April 6, 1830, the date designated by revelation (see D&C 20:1), a group of eager believers crowded into the small log home of Peter Whitmer near Fayette, New York. After opening the meeting with prayer, the group for-

mally organized Christ’s church on earth. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery then ordained each other to the office of elder. After the gathering partook of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, Joseph and Oliver then confirmed those present as members of the Church, bestowing the Holy Ghost. Joseph recorded, “The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree—some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord, and rejoiced exceedingly.”¹⁴ Others were then ordained to various offices in the priesthood. The revelation which had directed the organization of the Church specified duties for deacons, teachers, priests, and elders (see D&C 20:38–59).

Although the Church was officially organized and priesthood officers were ordained on this occasion, the process of restoration certainly was not yet completed.

The restored Church’s organization grew as needs arose and as the number of members permitted. During the early weeks of 1831, Saints from New York and Pennsylvania began gathering in northeastern Ohio around the town of Kirtland. There, the Lord had promised to reveal His law (see D&C 41:3), including the principle of consecration. Anticipating this, He called Edward Partridge to be the Church’s first bishop, to play a key role in temporal affairs (see D&C 41:9; 42:30–42).

The first high priests were ordained at a conference in June of that same year (see D&C 52 head note). A revelation given in March 1833 called two others to join Joseph Smith in presiding over the Church (see D&C 90:6–7; see also D&C 81:1). Consequently, ten days later Joseph Smith set apart Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams to be his counselors in what would become known as the First Presidency.¹⁵ This group of three reflected the grand presidency in heaven as well as the pattern of leadership set by the three New Testament Apostles Peter, James, and John.

The office of patriarch was restored on December 13, 1833. Appropriately, Joseph Smith Sr.,

the patriarch in the Prophet's own family, was the first appointed to this new priesthood calling.

In February 1835 the Quorums of the Twelve and the Seventy were organized. The great revelation on priesthood given the following month (D&C 107) explained that members of these Quorums were to be "special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world" and to act as an administrative body in "building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same in all nations" (D&C 107:23–34).

A significant event took place on Easter Sunday, April 3, 1836. Jesus Christ, as a radiantly glorious resurrected being, personally accepted the Church's first temple, which had been dedicated one week earlier at Kirtland, Ohio. Elijah also appeared, as prophesied by Malachi, and restored priesthood keys by which ordinances may be performed on earth and bound in heaven, and by which the hearts of the children and fathers are turned to one another (see D&C 110:13–14; see also Malachi 4:5–6 and Matthew 16:19). On this same occasion Moses also bestowed "the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north."¹⁶ Elias then "committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed" (D&C 110:11–12).

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, "It is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time," together with things that had not been previously revealed (D&C 128:18). To this end the foregoing messengers, plus many others, have appeared, representing all the dispensations of the past (see D&C 128:19–21). Thus, "all things" have been brought together in the "dispensation

of the fulness of times" as prophesied anciently (Ephesians 1:10).

During these same years, the Lord unfolded an understanding about the establishing of Zion and building the city of the New Jerusalem. While he was translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith learned that the New Jerusalem would be established in America (see Ether 13:6). In December 1830, he learned about Enoch's city of Zion, which would be the pattern for the latter-day society bearing that same name (see Moses 7:18–19). During the summer of the following year, he and several other elders were directed to go to Missouri, where the Lord revealed that this area had been appointed for the "gathering of the saints" and would be "the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion" (D&C 57:2–3). Thus, this location became a focal point for the latter-day gathering.

The Church's first stake was established at Kirtland in February 1834 with the organization of the first high council (see D&C 102). The title "stake" is taken from Isaiah's analogy of a tent (see Isaiah 54:2), suggesting that this grouping of congregations should be a source of strength to the whole Church. While the center place of Zion would be in Missouri, the stakes were considered outposts. Hence the complete name of each congregation includes the phrase "Stake of Zion." Local congregations were first headed by bishops and called "wards" when the Saints settled in Nauvoo beginning in 1839.

Other auxiliary organizations, created in later decades, provided help in a variety of ways. The Relief Society (1842) cared for the needy and later offered broadening instruction to the women of the Church. Sunday Schools (organized Churchwide in 1868) offered gospel classes graded by age. Young Women's and Young Men's "Mutual Improvement Associations" (1869 and 1875, respectively) sponsored cultural, social, and recreational activities for the youth. The Primary Association (1878) offered instruction and activities for children.¹⁷

Even though the 1835 revelation specified that there should be three presiding quorums at the head of the Church, this structure was not completed for nearly a century and a half. As the Church grew over the years, administrative demands on its leaders increased. Not until 1976, however, was there a need for a fully organized Quorum of Seventy at the General Authority level. Additional administrative Quorums of Seventy followed. Even these steps may not mean that the process of restoration has been completed.

The impact of the Restoration has gone far beyond the reestablishment of God's church on earth. Speaking of the latter days, the Old Testament prophet Joel declared that the Lord would "pour out [His] spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). The fruits of this inspiration can be seen in the marvelous inventions that have come since the time of the Restoration. When the Restoration began, people were traveling by essentially the same means as were common in the days of Christ. Reflecting on the developments of his time, President Brigham Young testified: "The construction of the electric telegraph and the method of using it, enabling the people to send messages from one end of the earth to the other, is just as much a revelation from God as any ever given. The same is true with regard to making machinery, whether it be a steamboat, a carding machine, . . . threshing machine, or anything else, it makes no difference . . . and the Lord has revealed them to His children."¹⁸

Not only did these and many other inventions accompany the restoration of the gospel, but Latter-day Saints believe that many of them were results of divine inspiration intended specifically to further the Lord's work on earth. "I believe," declared President Spencer W. Kimball, "that the telephone and the telegraph and other such conveniences were permitted by the Lord to be developed for the express purpose

[of] building the kingdom."¹⁹ The development of travel by jet enabled the Church to organize stakes in far distant places for the first time during the later 1950s. Radio, television, and satellite transmission have allowed the Church to communicate its message more completely to the world. Computer technology has greatly facilitated and accelerated genealogical research. But surely, the crown jewel of the Restoration has been the organization of the divine kingdom foreseen by the prophet Daniel over 2,500 years ago.

MISSION OF THE RESTORED CHURCH

During His earthly ministry in the meridian of times, the Master established a Church (see Matthew 16:18; 18:17). The Apostle Paul explained that an organized church with designated Priesthood officers was necessary "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–12). A reconstitution of "the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church" has been a vital aspect of the Restoration (Articles of Faith 1:6).

President Harold B. Lee asked, why is an organized church necessary? Answering his own question, he affirmed that "we organize to do the Lord's work better and easier by sharing the work load, by delegating responsibility."²⁰ What is the Lord's work? "To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Because exaltation can be attained only through the Atonement, a basic mission of the Church is to bring people to the Savior. As he concluded his record anciently, Moroni invited his latter-day readers to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him" (Moroni 10:32).

In 1823, when Moroni first told Joseph Smith about the ancient history recorded on golden plates, he provided an additional perspective on the Church's mission. He declared "that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the Gospel in all its fullness to be preached in power, unto all nations

that a people might be prepared for the Millennial reign."²¹ Those who will be ready to meet Christ will be called Zion. The Lord stressed that before this goal is met, His "army" must be very great and sanctified (see D&C 105:31). Hence members of the Church must be numerous enough and sufficiently worthy; they need both the requisite quantity and quality. The organized Church exists to help us meet these goals.

The Church's mission has a unique application to three distinct groups of people: proclaiming the gospel through missionary work to the living who are not yet members of the Church, perfecting those who are already members, and extending gospel blessings to those who died without the opportunity to receive them.

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

Just before the Savior ascended into heaven at the conclusion of His earthly ministry, He charged His disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Or, as recorded elsewhere: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This charge was renewed in the present dispensation: "Go ye into all the world, and preach my gospel unto every creature who has not received it" (D&C 112:28).

Over the years the Church has taken steps to strengthen missionaries' ability to share the gospel. In 1925 the "Missionary Home and Preparatory Training School" in Salt Lake City began offering a weeklong orientation. By the 1970s this had been expanded to include foreign language instruction. In 1978 the first Missionary Training Center opened in Provo, Utah; eventually more than a dozen MTCs would be located around the world. In the 1950s the Church began providing sets of proselyting lessons or discussions to guide missionaries in their teaching.²²

These efforts have contributed to remarkable Church growth. As converts around the

world came into the Church, prophecies of the gathering of Israel and ancient covenants were in the course of fulfillment. This is one of the great works of this dispensation. During the nineteenth century, most of these converts literally moved first to New York, then to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Finally they came to the valleys of the mountains of western America as they "gathered to Zion" in fulfillment of ancient prophecies (see Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2). In the 1890s, Church leaders increasingly counseled the Saints to stay where they were and build up the Church in their own lands. An 1833 revelation anticipated this shift in emphasis; at first the Saints were to gather in one place, but later there would be "other places," to be known as "stakes" (see D&C 101:20-22).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Saints numbered just over a quarter of a million, almost all located in the relatively isolated mountain valleys of western America. By 1947 Church membership passed the one million mark, including growing congregations in urban centers in the Midwest and along the east and west coasts of the United States.

The second half of the twentieth century brought an unprecedented period of international growth. The Church increasingly used the media and other methods to augment the work being done by missionaries. In 1997 membership passed ten million, with over 30 percent of the members living in Latin America. The Latter-day Saints constituted one of the six largest faith groups within the United States.²³

The Old Testament prophet Daniel had foreseen this growth. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Church membership stood at about eleven million, representing only two-tenths of one percent of the world's population. For every Latter-day Saint, there were approximately five hundred other people. Thus, despite the Church's extensive growth, there is still a long way to go before it even comes close to filling the earth.

Still, the Church's growth required that it overcome several significant challenges. The number of General Authorities was expanded to administer the growing number of missions and stakes worldwide. An average of more than one new chapel per day was constructed, and schedules were devised to more efficiently use existing facilities. The scriptures and other materials were translated into a growing number of languages, and handbooks and lesson manuals were streamlined to lessen this load. Training was provided for leaders in the exploding number of local congregations. While the gospel message was being related to an ever more diverse group of cultures, steps were taken to preserve its doctrinal purity. Satellites provided a means of communicating effectively with groups of Saints scattered around the world. On January 11, 2003, for example, the General Authorities were able to reach 95 percent of local Church leaders around the world in a priesthood training session carried by satellite.²⁴

PERFECTING THE SAINTS

New Testament writers referred to Church members as "saints." For example, the Apostle Paul addressed letters "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all "Achaia" (2 Corinthians 1:1) and "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi" (Philippians 1:1). When Paul explained why the Lord had organized His Church, the first reason he listed was "for the perfecting of the saints" (Ephesians 4:12). This is still a major function of the Church today.

The restored Church has implemented a wide variety of programs to help its members become more perfect. In the days of Joseph Smith, priesthood quorums were organized. Their leaders were to "sit in council with [their members], and to teach them according to the covenants" (D&C 107:89). The quorums also functioned as service organizations that provided fellowship to their members. Several auxiliary organizations

also had their beginnings during the nineteenth century with the object of teaching gospel principles and helping the Saints apply those principles in their lives. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, these organizations sponsored an array of publications. In addition to issuing handbooks and lesson manuals, each of the auxiliaries published its own magazine: the *Improvement Era* by the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association; the *Young Women's Journal*; the *Children's Friend* by the Primary; the *Juvenile Instructor* by the Sunday School; and the *Relief Society Magazine*.²⁵ In 1971 these were consolidated into three magazines published by the Church to support all programs: the *Ensign* for adults, the *New Era* for youth, and the *Friend* for children. The purpose of all these publications has been to help members learn and live the gospel more perfectly.

Church meetings have a similar purpose. The Lord declared: "I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given" (D&C 43:8). To this end, ward priesthood meetings were inaugurated in 1909. Before that time, quorums typically met only monthly, each setting its own schedule.

Weekly classes for adults were also conducted by the Relief Society beginning in 1902 and by the Sunday School four years later. Originally the Gospel Doctrine class in Sunday School studied writings of various popular Latter-day Saint authors. In 1972 these classes were changed to the study of the scriptures themselves. At first, the Relief Society presented classes in theology, literature, social relations, and cultural refinement. Beginning in 1998, however, the women in Relief Society and men in the Melchizedek Priesthood studied the same set of lessons featuring the teachings of latter-day prophets. This facilitated husbands and wives discussing the subjects of these lessons with each other and their children.²⁶

The Church has also developed an extensive educational system. Brigham Young University became the largest private university in the nation. In addition, beginning in 1912, seminaries provided weekday classes in religious education to supplement the secular instruction students received in public high schools. Institutes of religion, a similar program for the higher education level, were established beginning in 1926 at the University of Idaho. Surveys have demonstrated that students participating in these programs have had higher rates of missionary service and temple marriage.²⁷

The Church has focused on strengthening families in other ways. In 1915 the First Presidency urged parents to conduct regular "Home Evenings," declaring that "if the Saints obey this counsel, we promise that great blessings will result. Love at home and obedience to parents will increase. Faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power to combat the evil influence and temptations which beset them."²⁸ In 1965 a manual provided help to parents, and six years later Monday evenings were cleared from all other Church activities in favor of family home evenings.²⁹

The Church has also addressed the Saints' temporal needs. Building on earlier concepts of consecration and loving one's neighbor, the widely acclaimed welfare plan was implemented during the Depression of the 1930s. Not only did it help distressed Saints to meet their temporal needs, but it helped all Saints live gospel principles more fully. Monthly visits by priesthood "home teachers" and by Relief Society "visiting teachers" also provided channels of communication and help.³⁰

One of the Church's most significant efforts to perfect the Saints is providing copies of God's word in the standard works. The Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Bible appeared in 1979. It provided a six-hundred-page "Topical Guide," a "Bible Dictionary," helpful summaries at the beginning of each chapter, and thousands of use-

ful explanatory footnotes and cross-references, including references to the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible. Two years later, new editions of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price were added. The improved features of these volumes were designed to help Church members study the scriptures more effectively.³¹ "With the passing of years," asserted Elder Boyd K. Packer, "these scriptures will produce successive generations of faithful Christians who know the Lord Jesus Christ and are disposed to obey His will. . . . They will develop a gospel scholarship beyond that which their forebears could achieve."³²

REDEEMING THE DEAD

Since New Testament times, the Lord's people have been given the opportunity and responsibility to extend gospel blessings to their deceased loved ones. During the brief interval between His death and Resurrection, the Savior "went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19; see also 3:18–20, 4:6). A latter-day revelation explained what He was able to accomplish in so little time. President Joseph F. Smith "perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them; but behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead" (D&C 138:29–30). Following His Resurrection, the Lord introduced the practice of vicarious ordinances in behalf of the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:29). In this dispensation, the Master explained that this selfless service should take place in sacred temples dedicated for that purpose (see D&C 124:30).

Service in temples also blesses the living. Ancient peoples thought of temples as places of contact between heaven and earth or of revelation

between God and man. The Lord promised to meet His people in the Old Testament tabernacle (see Exodus 25:8, 22), and has renewed this promise in our own day (see D&C 97:15–16). Hence the atmosphere in temples is spiritually strengthening. President Packer explained: “In the temple we can receive spiritual perspective. There, during the time of the temple service, we are ‘out of the world.’ A large part of the value of these occasions is the fact that we are doing something for someone that they cannot do for themselves. As we perform the endowment for someone who is dead, somehow we feel a little less hesitant to pray fervently to the Lord to assist us. . . . There is something cleansing and clarifying about the spiritual atmosphere of the temple.”³³

The Church built its first temple at Kirtland, Ohio. Just one week after its dedication in 1836, the Savior appeared and accepted the temple, and the ancient prophets Moses, Elias, and Elijah restored their priesthood keys (see D&C 110). The second temple was dedicated at Nauvoo ten years later. Here, sacred “ordinances” or ceremonies were instituted and the concept of performing these in behalf of the dead was first taught. Unfortunately, both temples were left behind when the pioneers were forced to make their epic trek across the Great Plains to the Rocky Mountains. Four temples subsequently built in Utah were the only ones in service when the twentieth century began. Temples in Alberta, Hawaii, Arizona, and Idaho doubled the total by the midpoint of the century. The third quarter of the twentieth century brought the largest temple so far (in Los Angeles) and the first overseas temples (in Switzerland, New Zealand, and England). By 1975 the total number of temples once again had doubled, to sixteen. During the century’s last quarter, temple construction exploded worldwide; the total passed one hundred during the year 2000. This meant that temple blessings were far more accessible to Latter-day Saints wherever they lived.³⁴

As the number of temples was multiplying, rapid advances in technology made the task of identifying ancestors for whom temple ordinances were to be performed much easier. Records from around the world were microfilmed, and volunteers scoured them for genealogical information which was then computerized. Databases were created with several hundred million names; the Church made this information available on inexpensive CDs or free of charge via the Internet.³⁵

These advances, together with more accessible temples, enabled the Saints to enter these sacred structures in unprecedented numbers. Not only were more ordinances being performed for the dead, but the Saints themselves were being further perfected as they enjoyed the blessings of the house of the Lord.

DESTINY OF THE RESTORED CHURCH

As President Gordon B. Hinckley reflected on the marvelous accomplishments of the glorious Restoration, he summarized:

This is the focal point of all that has gone before. This is the season of restitution. These are the days of restoration. This is the time when men from over the earth come to the mountain of the Lord’s house to seek and learn of His ways and to walk in His paths. This is the summation of all of the centuries of time since the birth of Christ to this present and wonderful day. . . . The centuries have passed. The latter-day work of the Almighty, that of which the ancients spoke, that of which the prophets and apostles prophesied, is come. It is here. . . . There has been a great flowering of science. There has been a veritable explosion of learning. This is the greatest of all ages of human endeavor and human accomplishment. And more importantly, it is the season when God has spoken, when His Beloved Son has appeared, when the divine priesthood has been restored, when we hold in our hand

another testament of the Son of God. What a glorious and wonderful day this is.

. . . We stand on the summit of the ages, awed by a great and solemn sense of history. This is the last and final dispensation toward which all in the past has pointed.³⁶

The ultimate destiny of the restored Church was foreseen in Daniel's declaration that the Church would roll forth and fill the earth (see Daniel 2:35). This in turn will lead to establishing the New Jerusalem, or the glorious city of Zion (see Moses 7:62). Before this great goal can be achieved, however, difficult challenges will need to be overcome. The organized Church will play a key role in this process. "We are in a program of defense," President Harold B. Lee insisted, adding that the Church, with its various organizations and programs, has been established "for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it should be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth" (D&C 115:6). Therefore, President Lee exhorted, we must "move forward, that we consolidate to make more efficient, and more effective the work of the priesthood, the auxiliaries, and the other units in order that we may conserve our time, our energy, and our efforts toward the prime purpose for which the Church itself has been organized."³⁷ In like spirit, President Hugh B. Brown testified: "It seems to me that of all the signs of the times (and they are ominous and on every side) this is one of the most significant, . . . that the Church of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, is massing its forces, getting ready for that which is to follow. . . . Do you want to be among those on the side of Christ and his apostles?"³⁸

Unlike former dispensations, this last one would not be followed by another apostasy. Elder L. Tom Perry declared that through Joseph Smith, "the Lord was preparing for the establishment of the gospel again on the earth for the last time, and starting preparation for the return of his Son. This time the Restoration was to be per-

manent."³⁹ President Spencer W. Kimball similarly affirmed "that even though individuals may fall the Church and the gospel are here to stay, and all the powers of the earth and hell cannot effect total apostasy again."⁴⁰

What, then, is the ultimate destiny of the kingdom of God restored in these latter days? On the occasion of the Church's sesquicentennial in 1980, Elder Bruce R. McConkie likened the Church's progress to climbing a mountain. "From where we stand, on the peak of 150 years of progress, the view is glorious indeed. . . . But our joy and rejoicing is not in what lies below, not in our past—great and glorious as that is—but in our present and in our future. . . . From the top of the peak . . . we can look forward, crest upon crest, to the Zion of God which one day will be ours if we walk in the course charted by those who have gone before. We cannot see the whole course; many things are hidden from our view. Mountain trails wind through valleys and over crests, around ledges, and through forests. We do not know the length of the journey nor the perils that await us."⁴¹ Four years later, Elder McConkie employed a different analogy to depict the forward motion of the restored Church: "The Church is like a great caravan—organized, prepared, following an appointed course. . . . What does it matter if a few barking dogs snap at the heels of the weary travelers? Or that predators claim those few who fall by the way? The caravan moves on. . . . Ahead is the celestial city, the eternal Zion of our God, where all who maintain their position in the caravan shall find food and drink and rest. Thank God that the caravan moves on!"⁴² As Joseph Smith, the great Prophet of the Restoration reflected on its significance, he testified: "The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept

every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”⁴³

THE GLORIOUS SECOND COMING, MILLENNIUM, AND BEYOND

Moroni’s 1823 instructions to Joseph Smith emphasized that a major purpose of the Restoration was to prepare a people who would be ready to meet the Savior. Because the Lord’s “army” would need to be “very great” and “sanctified” (D&C 105:31), the progress of the Church and its members takes on added urgency. Certainly, the Lord’s people have become much more numerous. This moves the Church closer to fulfilling the quantitative requirement for building Zion. But is it sufficiently “sanctified”? Does it meet the qualitative requirement as well? At the dawning of the twenty-first century, President Hinckley declared, “We have become as a great army. We are now a people of consequence.”⁴⁴ He also affirmed that the Church “is stronger than it has ever been. It is not only larger in numbers, but I believe there is greater faithfulness among the Saints generally.”⁴⁵ Thus even though the Saints may not be fully ready for Christ’s advent, they are certainly moving in the right direction.

Several events need to take place before the Savior comes. These include the gospel being preached to all nations (see Matthew 24:14) and major geographical changes (see D&C 133:22–24, 29–31). The ten tribes will also return (see D&C 133:26–28). The return of these lost tribes will complete the gathering of Israel as authorized by the keys restored by Moses (see D&C 110:11).

The Second Coming of Christ will actually involve at least three distinctive appearances. Elder Charles W. Penrose explained that the first of these will be to the “Saints of God” gathered at the temple in the city of Zion, or New Jerusalem, in the Western Hemisphere (see also 3 Nephi 21:24–25). They will “behold his face, hear his voice, and gaze upon his glory. From his own lips

they will receive further instructions for the development and beautifying of Zion and for the extension and sure stability of his kingdom.”⁴⁶ Prior to this glorious occasion, the Lord will have met secretly with faithful leaders at Adam-ondi-Ahman (see Daniel 7:13–14; D&C 116). Second, He will appear to the beleaguered defenders of Jerusalem and deliver them from the forces that besiege the city (see D&C 45:48–52; Zechariah 14:2–5). This is when He will set His foot on the Mount of Olives and it will split in twain (see D&C 45:48).

Finally, he will appear to the whole world on what has been called “the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” The wicked will be burned as “stubble” (Malachi 4:1–5), but the righteous will survive to join the Lord in His millennial reign: “The tongue of man falters, and the pen drops from the hand of the writer,” continued Elder Penrose. “He comes! The earth shakes, and the tall mountains tremble; the mighty deep rolls back to the north as in fear, and the rent skies glow like molten brass. He comes! The dead Saints burst forth from their tombs, and ‘those who are alive and remain’ are ‘caught up’ with them to meet him. The ungodly rush to hide themselves from his presence, and call upon the quivering rocks to cover them. He comes! with all the hosts of the righteous glorified.”⁴⁷

The scriptures teach that the earth’s “temporal existence” following the Fall of Adam covers seven thousand years (see D&C 77:6–7). The last thousand of these years, inaugurated with the Lord’s glorious advent (see D&C 77:12), are called the Millennium, and have been likened to the earth’s Sabbath. The earth will be “renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Articles of Faith 1:10), such as it was before the Fall. This will be a time when “every corruptible thing” will be “consumed.” Furthermore, “in that day the enmity of man, and the enmity of beasts, yea, the enmity of all flesh, shall cease from before my face. And in that day whatsoever any man shall

ask, it shall be given unto him" and the Lord "shall reveal all things" (D&C 101:24–34).

A major purpose of the Millennium will be to complete the Lord's work of salvation on earth among the billions of people of previous generations who did not have the gospel during their lifetime. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith taught, "The great work of the millennium shall be performed in the temples which shall cover all parts of the land and into which the children shall go to complete the work for their fathers, which they could not do when in this mortal life for themselves." He noted that "during this time of peace, when the righteous shall come forth from their graves, they shall mingle with mortal men on the earth and instruct them. The veil which separates the living from the dead will be withdrawn and mortal men and the ancient saints shall converse together. Moreover, in perfect harmony shall they labor for the salvation and exaltation of the worthy who have died without the privileges of the gospel."⁴⁸ President Brigham Young explained that "to accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple but thousands of them, and thousand and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal."⁴⁹

When the work of the Millennium is completed, there will be a final judgment in which all will be assigned to one of the four final kingdoms. Even the earth will pass through a judgment process. Because it will have abided and not transgressed "the law of a celestial kingdom," it will be sanctified and prepared for that glory (D&C 88:25). The Prophet Joseph Smith foresaw the earth's conditions in its celestialized state: "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. I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold" (D&C 137:1–4). Those who are judged worthy to inherit that kingdom will not only be with God but, as His children, will have the potential to become as He is. Thus the ultimate purpose of the glorious Restoration, the marvelous work and a wonder heralded by Isaiah, was and is to provide the means by which men and women can achieve their divine destiny.

NOTES

1. Mark E. Petersen, *The Great Prologue* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 1.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, April 1978, 17.
3. Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, April 1975, 21.
4. See the chapter by Arnold K. Garr in the present volume.
5. Joseph F. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 22:44–45.
6. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 147.
7. Joseph F. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 22:44–45.
8. 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, 1957), 4:461.
9. See Robert Evans, "Blast from the Past," *Smithsonian*, July 2002, 52–57.
10. Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950).
11. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:536.
12. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1987, 105.
13. "History of Joseph Smith," *Deseret News Weekly*, October 5, 1854, 107; quoted in *Teachings of*

Latter-day Prophets (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986), 2:556.

14. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:78; see also 1:75–79.

15. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:334.

16. See chapter by Victor Ludlow in the present volume.

17. For more information on these organizations, see Richard O. Cowan, *The Latter-day Saint Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 46–51.

18. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:305.

19. Spencer W. Kimball, regional representatives seminar, April 3, 1975, 19.

20. Harold B. Lee, *Church News*, August 26, 1961.

21. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:537.

22. See Cowan, *Every Man Shall Hear the Gospel in His Own Tongue: A History of the Missionary Training Center and Its Predecessors* (Provo, UT: Missionary Training Center, 1984), 5–8; see also Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 187.

23. For a more complete discussion, see Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, chapter 13.

24. See *Church News*, January 18, 2003, 3–5.

25. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 57–59.

26. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 50, 286.

27. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 80–85, 167–71.

28. First Presidency Letter, April 27, 1915, in *Messages of the First Presidency*, comp. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1975), 4:339.

29. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 199–201.

30. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 92–100.

31. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 234–35.

32. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1982, 75.

33. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 180–81.

34. See Richard O. Cowan, *Temples to Dot the Earth* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort Inc., 1997).

35. See Cowan, *Latter-day Saint Century*, 299–303.

36. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 1999, 94–95.

37. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1961, 81.

38. Hugh B. Brown, in Conference Report, October 1967, 115–16.

39. L. Tom Perry, “He Hath Given a Law unto All Things,” in *Speeches of the Year, 1977* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 185.

40. Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” in *Speeches of the Year, 1977* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 141.

41. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, April 1980, 97–98.

42. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, October 1984, 105.

43. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:540.

44. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 2001, 4.

45. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, April 2001, 3.

46. Charles W. Penrose, *Millennial Star*, 21:582–83.

47. Charles W. Penrose, *Millennial Star*, 21:583.

48. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:251–52.

49. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:372.