

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE VISION OF THE REDEMPTION OF THE DEAD (D&C 138)

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In an address to Church educators in 1977, President Boyd K. Packer stressed that we live in a day of great events relating to the scriptures. He reminded us that it has only been a short time since two revelations were added to the standard works, both of which have salvation for the dead as a central theme. President Packer continued: "I was surprised, and I think all of the Brethren were surprised, at how casually that announcement of two additions to the standard works was received by the Church. But we will live to sense the significance of it; we will tell our grandchildren and our great grandchildren, and we will record in our diaries, that we were on the earth and remember when that took place."¹ The two revelations to which President Packer made reference are sections 137 and 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This article will discuss the historical setting and doctrinal significance of section 138, President Joseph F. Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead.

During the last six months of his life, President Joseph F. Smith suffered from the effects of advancing years (he was in his eightieth year) and spent much of his time in his own room in the Beehive House. However, President Smith did manage to garner enough strength to attend the 89th Semi-Annual General Conference of the Church (October 1918). At the opening session of the General

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Conference (Friday, October 4), he arose to welcome and address the Saints, and with a voice filled with emotion² he spoke the following:

“As most of you, I suppose, are aware, I have undergone a siege of very serious illness for the last five months. It would be impossible for me, on this occasion, to occupy sufficient time to express the desires of my heart and my feelings, as I would desire to express them to you. . . .

“I will not, I dare not, attempt to enter upon many things that are resting upon my mind this morning, and I shall postpone until some future time, the Lord being willing, my attempt to tell you some of the things that are in my mind, and that dwell in my heart. *I have not lived alone these last five months. I have dwelt in the spirit of prayer, of supplication, of faith and of determination; and I have had my communication with the Spirit of the Lord continuously.*”³

According to the President’s son, Joseph Fielding Smith, the prophet was here expressing (albeit in broadest terms) the fact that during the past half-year he had been the recipient of numerous manifestations, some of which he had shared with his son both before and after the conference. One of these manifestations, the vision of the redemption of the dead, had been received just the day before, on October 3, and was recorded immediately following the close of the conference.⁴

PREPARATION FOR THE VISION

The state of the world in early 1918 was cause for serious reflection upon such matters as the purpose of life and death. World War I, the “war to end all wars,” cast its ominous shadow upon the globe, and Latter-day Saints were not immune from its broadening effects. By early January 1919, approximately fifteen thousand members of the Church were involved in the military services.⁵ Revolutions in Russia and Finland further intensified the anxieties and confirmed the fears that truly war had begun to be poured out upon all nations (see D&C 87:2). By October an influenza epidemic began to spread throughout the land, leaving death and sorrow in its wake.

A few reminders about the status of the Church during the closing years of President Smith’s administration may also help to place things into perspective. At the close of 1916, there were 819 wards, 73 stakes, and 21 missions with just over 1,300 full-time missionaries.

The new Church office building on 47 East South Temple was nearing completion, and the first temples outside the continental United States were under construction in Canada and Hawaii.⁶

Nowhere do we see the critical preparation and readiness for the vision more than in the life and ministry of Smith. The son of Hyrum the Patriarch and nephew of Joseph the Seer, Joseph F. possessed the blood of the prophets. He was foreordained to serve the Lord in the leading councils of the Church, and he spent the last fifty years of his life realizing that election, actively involved as a legal administrator in the kingdom. Young Joseph F. was called while in his teens to serve as a missionary to Hawaii. At twenty-seven he was called to the apostleship by Brigham Young, and he served as a counselor in the First Presidency to Presidents Young, Taylor, Woodruff, and Snow before assuming the office of President of the Church in 1901. Intimate associations and personal searchings over several decades distilled and solidified principles and doctrines in the mind of Joseph F. Smith. By the time of his death, he had spoken and written upon a myriad of subjects and came to represent a leader grounded in the theology of the Restoration. One of the greatest compliments paid to President Smith was a simple statement by a successor, Harold B. Lee. Brother Lee, himself no novice in gospel understanding, said: "When I want to seek for a more clear definition of doctrinal subjects, I have usually turned to the writings and sermons of President Joseph F. Smith."⁷

Joseph F.'s attention was drawn to the world beyond mortality by his frequent confrontation with death. His parents, Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith, both died while he was a young man. Among the great trials of his life, none was more devastating than the passing of many of his children into death. President Smith was possessed of an almost infinite capacity to love, and the sudden departure of dear ones brought extreme anguish and sorrow. Joseph Fielding has written, "When death invaded his home, as frequently it did, and his little ones were taken from him, he grieved with a broken heart and mourned, not as those mourn who live without hope, but for the loss of his 'precious jewels' dearer to him than life itself."⁸

On January 20, 1918, Hyrum Mack Smith, oldest son of Joseph F. and then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was taken to the hospital for a serious illness, where the physicians diagnosed a

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ruptured appendix. Despite constant medical attention and repeated prayers, Hyrum—then only forty-five years of age and at the time with a pregnant wife—died on the night of January 23. This was a particularly traumatic affliction for the President. Hyrum had been called as an Apostle at the same conference wherein his father had been sustained as the Church's sixth President (October 1901). Hyrum was a man of depth and wisdom beyond his years, and his powerful sermons evidenced his unusual insight into gospel principles. Heber J. Grant explained at the funeral services: "In all my travels, week after week, no man of our quorum has ever fed me the bread of life, touched my heart, and caused me to rejoice more in the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . than did our dearly beloved brother whose remains lie before us today. His death comes as a great shock to each and every member of the Council to which he belonged."⁹ In speaking of Hyrum's sermons and spirituality, his father remarked: "His mind was quick and bright and correct. His judgment was not excelled, and he saw and comprehended things in their true light and meaning. When he spoke, men listened and felt the weight of his thoughts and words." Finally, President Smith observed: "He has thrilled my soul by his power of speech, as no other man ever did. Perhaps this was because he was my son, and he was filled with the fire of the Holy Ghost."¹⁰ Already in a weakened physical condition due to age, the prophet's sudden sense of loss caused him "one of the most severe blows that he was ever called upon to endure." He cried out in anguish: "My soul is rent asunder. My heart is broken, and flutters for life! O my sweet son, my joy, my hope! . . . And now what can I do! O what can I do! My soul is rent, my heart is broken! O God, help me!"¹¹ In regard to the passing of Hyrum, it is worth attending to the remarks of Elder James E. Talmage at the funeral service:

"He has gone. Elders are needed on the other side, and apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ are wanted there. . . . I read of the Lord Jesus Christ going, as soon as his spirit left his pierced and tortured body on the cross, to minister unto the spirits on the other side. . . . I *cannot think of Hyrum M. Smith as being otherwise employed*. I cannot conceive of him as being idle. I cannot think of him having no regard for those among whom he is called to associate.

"And where is he now? . . . He has gone to join the apostles who

departed before him, to share with them in the work of declaring the glad message of redemption and salvation unto those who for lack of opportunity, or through neglect, failed to avail themselves of those wondrous and transcendent blessings upon the earth."¹²

AN EVENTFUL THIRTY MONTHS

Even though President Smith indicated in October 1918 that the preceding months had been a season of special enrichment, in fact it may be shown that the last thirty months of his life (specifically, from April 1916 to October 1918) represent a brief era of unusual spiritual enlightenment, in which the prophet delivered to the Church some of the most important and inspiring insights of this dispensation.

At the April 1916 general conference, President Smith delivered a remarkable address, the thrust of which established a theme for the next thirty months of his life and laid the foundation for his final doctrinal contribution—the vision of the redemption of the dead. In his opening sermon, entitled “In the Presence of the Divine,” Joseph F. spoke of the nearness of the world of spirits and of the interest and concern for us and our labors exercised by those who have passed beyond the veil. He stressed that those who labored so diligently in their *mortal* estate to establish the cause of Zion would not be denied the privilege of “looking down upon the results of their own labors” from their *postmortal* estate. In fact, the president insisted, “they are as deeply interested in our welfare today, if not with greater capacity, with far more interest, behind the veil, than they were in the flesh.” Perhaps the keynote statement in this sermon was the following: “*Sometimes the Lord expands our vision from this point of view and this side of the veil, so that we feel and seem to realize that we can look beyond the thin veil which separates us from that other sphere.*”¹³ This remark, both penetrating and prophetic, set the stage for the next two and one-half years.

In June of 1916 the First Presidency and the Twelve released a doctrinal exposition in pamphlet form entitled *The Father and the Son*. This document was delivered to alleviate doctrinal misunderstandings concerning the nature of the Godhead, specifically the role and scriptural designation of Jesus Christ as “Father.”¹⁴

One of the most significant fruits of this segment of time was a

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talk delivered by President Smith at a temple fast meeting in February 1918 entitled "The Status of Children in the Resurrection." In this address we gain an insight into the power and prophetic stature of one schooled and prepared in doctrine; in addition, we are allowed a brief glimpse into the heart of a noble father who, having lost little ones to death and having mourned their absence, rejoices in the sure knowledge that (1) mortal children are immortal beings, spirits who continue to live and progress beyond the veil, and (2) as taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, children will come forth from the grave as children and will be nurtured and reared to physical maturity by worthy parents. "O how I have been blessed with these children," exulted President Smith, "and how happy I shall be to meet them on the other side!"¹⁵

Further evidence that the veil had become thin for Joseph F. Smith is found in his recording (on April 7, 1918) of a dream or vision he had actually received many years earlier while on his first mission. The dream had served initially to strengthen the faith and build the confidence of a lonely and weary fifteen-year-old on the slopes of Haleakala on the isle of Maui; it had, through the years that followed, served to chart a course for Joseph F. and give to him the assurance that his labors were acceptable to the Lord, and that he also had the approbation of his predecessors in the presidency of the Church. In the dream young Joseph encountered his uncle, the Prophet, and was fortified in his desire to remain free from the taints of the world. In addition, he learned at an early age that the separation between mortality and immortality is subtle and that the Lord frequently permits an intermingling of the inhabitants of the two spheres. "That vision, that manifestation and witness that I enjoyed at that time," Joseph F. explained, "has made me what I am, if I am anything that is good, or clean, or upright before the Lord if there is anything good in me. That has helped me out in every trial and through every difficulty." Finally, "I know that that was a reality, to show me my duty, to teach me something, and to impress upon me something that I cannot forget."¹⁶

THE VISION: RECEPTION AND ANNOUNCEMENT

In 1862 President Brigham Young explained that despite the passing of years and the decay of the mortal body, one who opens him-

self to the realm of divine experience—though loosening his grip upon the here and now—may begin to tighten his grasp upon the things of eternity. “If we live our holy religion,” stated President Young, “and let the Spirit reign,” the mind of man “will not become dull and stupid, but as the body approaches dissolution *the spirit takes a firmer hold on the enduring substance behind the veil*, drawing from the depths of that eternal Fountain of Light sparkling gems of intelligence which surround the frail and sinking tabernacle with a halo of immortal wisdom.”¹⁷ This poignant principle was beautifully demonstrated in the life of President Joseph F. Smith. Here was a man who met death and sorrow and persecution head on, and thus through participating in the fellowship of Christ’s suffering was made acquainted with the things of God. As a modern Apostle has explained: “In the agonies of life, we seem to listen better to the faint, godly whisperings of the Divine Shepherd.”¹⁸ Of President Smith it was said by Charles W. Nibley, Presiding Bishop of the Church: “He lived in close communion with the Spirit of the Lord, and his life was so exemplary and chaste that the Lord could easily manifest himself to his servant.” Bishop Nibley concluded that “the heart of President Smith was attuned to the celestial melodies—he could hear and did hear.”¹⁹

On Thursday, October 3, 1918, President Smith, largely confined to his room because of illness, sat meditating over matters of substance. No doubt because of the world situation, his own suffering, and the loss of loved ones, it has been suggested that “he had long pondered the problems connected with making family ties complete in the patriarchal lineages.”²⁰ On this day, the prophet specifically began to read and ponder upon the universal nature of the Atonement and the Apostle Peter’s allusions to Christ’s postmortal ministry. The stage was set: preparation of a lifetime and preparation of the moment were recompensed with a heavenly endowment—the vision of the redemption of the dead. In the words of the President: “As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great” (D&C 138:11).

The vision was dictated to Joseph Fielding and recorded immediately after the close of the general conference.²¹ It is interesting that

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Joseph Fielding delivered a discourse, "Salvation for the Living and the Dead," at the genealogical conference on the afternoon of Monday, October 7. In this sermon there is no mention of his father's visionary experience of only four days before, nor are any of the doctrinal particulars from the vision voiced in the talk. It would appear that Joseph Fielding knew well the principle of allowing the prophet the opportunity to deal properly with a matter of new revelation before the contents are put forward to the Church as a whole. In the Saturday afternoon (October 5) session of conference, President Joseph F. Smith had said simply, "When the Lord reveals something to me, I will consider the matter with my brethren, and when it becomes proper, I will let it be known to the people, and not otherwise."²²

President Smith saw fit to "consider the matter" of the vision in the Thursday Council Meeting of October 31. Because of his weakened condition, the President was not in attendance, but asked his son, Joseph Fielding, to present the vision to the combined gathering of the counselors in the First Presidency, the Twelve Apostles, and the Patriarch to the Church. Note the following journal entry from Anthon H. Lund, first counselor to President Smith: "In our Council Joseph F. Smith Jr. read a revelation which his father had had in which he saw the spirits in Paradise and he also saw that Jesus organized a number of brethren to go and preach to the spirits in prison, but did not go himself. It was an interesting document and the apostles accepted it as true and from God."²³ Elder James Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve recorded the following in his personal journal regarding this occasion: "Attended meeting of the First Presidency and the Twelve. Today President Smith who is still confined to his home by illness, sent to the Brethren the account of a vision through which, as he states, were revealed to him important facts relating to the work of the disembodied Savior in the realm of departed spirits, and of the missionary work in progress on the other side of the veil. By united action the Council of the Twelve, with the Counselors in the First Presidency, and the Presiding Patriarch accepted and endorsed the revelation as the Word of the Lord. President Smith's signed statement will be published in the next issue (December) of the Improvement Era, which is the organ of the Priesthood quorums of the church."²⁴

The text of the vision first appeared in the November 30 edition of the *Deseret News*, eleven days after the passing of President Smith on November 19. It was printed in the December *Improvement Era*, and in January 1919 editions of the *Relief Society Magazine*, the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, the *Young Women's Journal*, and the *Millennial Star*.

President Smith's physical condition worsened during the first weeks of November 1918. On Sunday, November 17, he was taken with an attack of pleurisy, which finally developed into pleuropneumonia. Tuesday morning, November 19, 1918, his work in mortality was completed. It was fitting that at the April 1919 general conference Elder Talmage should deliver the following touching and appropriate tribute to the president. Elder Talmage asked, "Well, where is he now?" and then answered, "*He was permitted shortly before his passing to have a glimpse into the hereafter, and to learn where he would soon be at work. He was a preacher of righteousness on earth, he is a preacher of righteousness today. He was a missionary from his boyhood up, and he is a missionary today amongst those who have not yet heard the gospel, though they have passed from mortality into the spirit world. I cannot conceive of him as otherwise than busily engaged in the work of the Master.*"²⁵

DOCTRINAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VISION

The vision of the redemption of the dead is central to the theology of the Latter-day Saints because it confirms and expands upon earlier prophetic insights concerning work for the dead; it also introduces doctrinal truths not had in the Church before October 1918.

While pondering upon the infinite Atonement of Christ and particularly upon Peter's testimony of the same in the third and fourth chapters of his first epistle, President Joseph F. Smith was enlightened by the Spirit and power of God. He saw within the veil and viewed the proceedings within the world of spirits (see D&C 138:1–11). He first saw "an innumerable company of the spirits of the just" (verse 12), that is to say, the righteous dead from the days of Adam to the meridian of time. They were anxiously awaiting the advent of the Christ into their dimension of life and were exuberant in their joy over an imminent resurrection (see verses 12–17). Having consummated the atoning sacrifice on Golgotha, the Lord of the living and

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the dead passed in the twinkling of an eye into the world of the departed. The dead, having “looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage” (verse 50; see also D&C 45:17), are in a sense in prison. Yes, even the righteous seek “deliverance” (verses 15, 18); the Master came to declare “liberty to the captives who had been faithful” (verse 18). As Peter had said, Christ went beyond the veil to preach “unto the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19). Joseph Smith had taught that “Hades, Sheol, paradise, spirits in prison, are all one; *it is a world of spirits.*”²⁶ And as Elder Bruce R. McConkie has explained, in the vision “it is clearly set forth that the whole spirit world, and not only that portion designated as hell, is considered to be a spirit prison.”²⁷

To the congregation of the righteous the Lord appeared, and “their countenances shone, and the radiance from the presence of the Lord rested upon them” (verse 24). President Smith observed the Lord teaching “the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance” (verse 19). In addition, Christ extended to the righteous spirits “power to come forth, after his resurrection from the dead, to enter into his Father’s kingdom, there to be crowned with immortality and eternal life” (verse 51).

It is while pondering the question of how the Savior could have taught the gospel to so many in the spirit world in so short a time (approximately thirty-eight to forty hours) that President Smith received what may well be the most significant doctrinal insight of the entire vision. The president understood “that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and disobedient”—those in hell or outer darkness—but rather “organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority,” that such representatives might carry the message of the gospel “unto whom he [the Lord] could not go personally, because of their rebellion and transgression” (verses 29–30, 37; see also verses 20–22, 25–29). Christ’s mission to the world of spirits was thus seen to be largely organizational, as well as instructional. The chosen messengers declared “the acceptable day of the Lord” (verse 31). They carried the gospel message to those who had no opportunity in mortality to accept or reject the truth, and also to those who rejected the message on earth. These (who are visited by the messengers) are taught the first principles and ordi-

nances of the gospel (including vicarious ordinances), in order that the inhabitants of the spirit world might be judged and rewarded by the same divine standards as those who inhabit the world of mortals (see verses 31–34).

In this vision the Lord saw fit to add “line upon line, precept upon precept” to the understanding of the Latter-day Saints relative to the work of redemption beyond the grave. The insight that Christ did not personally visit the disobedient is a doctrinal matter introduced to the Church for the first time in October 1918 and does much to broaden our scope and answer questions with regard to the work within that sphere. In the words of Elder Orson F. Whitney in the February 20, 1919, issue of the *Millennial Star*: “The new light here thrown upon the subject proceeds from the declaration that when the Savior visited the inhabitants of the Spirit World, it was by proxy and not in person so far as the wicked were concerned. He ministered to the righteous directly, and to the unrighteous indirectly, sending to them His servants bearing the authority of the Priesthood and duly commissioned to speak and act in His name and stead. President Smith’s pronouncement is a modification of the view commonly taken, that the Savior’s personal ministry was to both classes of spirits.”²⁸ President Smith’s pronouncement as a “modification of the view commonly taken” is evident if we simply note that in a major doctrinal standard, *Jesus the Christ* (which had been published three years earlier, in 1915), Elder Talmage had taken a traditional approach to the subject.²⁹ The revolutionary but inspiring nature of this particular contribution is also manifest in the fact that President Smith himself had taught on previous occasions of Christ’s postmortal ministry to the wicked and unbelieving.³⁰ In this sense the doctrine was truly a “revelation” to the Prophet, as well as to the people.

By the power of the Holy Ghost, President Smith perceived the identity of many of the noble and great from the beginning of time, including Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaiah, the Nephite prophets before Christ, and many more. In addition, the president recognized Mother Eve and many of her faithful daughters (see verses 38–49). Joseph F. had taught several years earlier that women minister to women in the spirit world, even as they do in holy places on earth.³¹

Suddenly the vision seems to shift in time—from a first-century AD gathering to a gathering of workers in the spirit world during the

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final gospel dispensation. A change in time frame is common in visions, as can be seen from the experiences of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 13–14), John the Apostle (see Revelation 11–12), and Joseph Smith (see D&C 76). President Smith sees in the spirit world his predecessors in the presidency of the restored Church and other noble leaders who played such a critical role “in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work” (verse 53).

It may be that the vision shifts again in time, allowing President Smith a glimpse into the premortal world. He observes that the great leaders of the latter-day Church were “among the noble and great ones who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of god,” and becomes aware of their premortal lessons, preparation, and foreordination (verse 55).

President Joseph F. Smith’s vision confirms another doctrine that had been taught by Joseph Smith—that the faithful in this life continue to teach and labor in the world of spirits in behalf of those who did not know God. As recorded in George Laub’s journal under the date of May 12, 1844, the Prophet Joseph proclaimed: “Now all those die in the faith goe [*sic*] to the prison of Spirits to preach to the ded [*sic*] in body, but they are alive in the Spirit & those Spirits preach to the Spirits that they may live according to god in the Spirit and men do minister for them in the flesh.”³² Joseph F. had himself taught this doctrine on a number of occasions;³³ here he becomes an eyewitness of the same.

President Smith then reconfirms the law concerning the dead and the preaching of the gospel. Gaining salvation is by individual decision, and God will force exaltation upon no man. Those spirits that repent and accept the gospel and the vicarious ordinances “shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation” (verse 59).³⁴

Having laid before us his remarkable vision, “a complete and comprehensive confirmation of the established doctrine of the church where salvation for the dead is concerned,”³⁵ President Smith climaxes his doctrinal contribution with a testimony: “Thus was the vision of the redemption of the dead revealed to me, and I bear record, and I know that this record is true, through the blessing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, even so. Amen” (verse 60).

FROM SCRIPTURE TO CANON

In 1919 the writings and sermons of President Joseph F. Smith were compiled and published under the title *Gospel Doctrine*, a work intended originally as a course of study for Melchizedek Priesthood quorums. The vision of the redemption of the dead was contained in chapter 24 of that volume, the chapter entitled "Eternal Life and Salvation." The vision was therefore readily available to those Saints who made the book *Gospel Doctrine* a part of their Church library or who turned to the book in their doctrinal studies. Reference was made to the vision after 1919, and excerpts were occasionally quoted by Church leaders in articles or conference addresses.³⁶

In the Saturday afternoon session of conference on April 3, 1976, President N. Eldon Tanner made the following announcement:

"President Kimball has asked me to read a very important resolution for your sustaining vote.

"At a meeting of the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve held in the Salt Lake Temple on March 25, 1976, approval was given to add to the Pearl of Great Price the two following revelations:

"First, a vision of the celestial kingdom given to Joseph Smith the Prophet in the Kirtland Temple, on January 21, 1836, which deals with the salvation of those who die without a knowledge of the Gospel; second, a vision given to President Joseph F. Smith in Salt Lake City, Utah, on October 3, 1918, showing the visit of the Lord Jesus Christ in the spirit world, and setting forth the doctrine of the redemption of the dead.

"It is proposed that we sustain and approve this action and adopt these revelations as part of the standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"All those in favor manifest it. Those opposed, if any, by the same sign.

"Thank you. President Kimball, the voting seems to be unanimous in the affirmative."³⁷

The vision of the redemption of the dead thus became a part of the standard works, specifically an addition to the Pearl of Great Price.³⁸ The First Presidency and the Twelve had discussed including the revelations in the standard works on a number of occasions prior to March 1976. Elder McConkie, a member of the Twelve, divided the

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two visions into verses, as we now have them. In a letter to me regarding the canonization of President Joseph F. Smith's vision, Elder McConkie explained: "President Kimball and all the Brethren thought it should be formally and officially recognized as scripture so that it would be quoted, used, and relied upon more than the case would have been if it had simply been published as heretofore in various books. By putting it in the Standard Works formally, it gets cross referenced and is used to better advantage by the saints."³⁹ To take the lead in accomplishing what Elder McConkie has suggested above, President Kimball did a most unusual but impressive thing not long after the vision was added to the collection of holy writ. In a meeting with the General Authorities and regional representatives, he read the entire text of the vision of the redemption of the dead as a part of his own address.⁴⁰

In June 1979 by administrative decision and "as a very direct outgrowth of the [new] scripture project,"⁴¹ the two revelations approved in April 1976 were shifted to the Doctrine and Covenants, becoming sections 137 and 138, respectively.⁴²

There can be no question but that the vision of the redemption of the dead was scripture before April 3, 1976; it was certainly spoken by the power of the Holy Ghost, and it represented the will, mind, word, and voice of the Lord (see D&C 68:4). The First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve, and Patriarch in 1918 recognized and acknowledged it as "true and from God." Once it had been voted upon and accepted by the membership of the Church, however, it shifted in significance from *scripture* to *canonized scripture*. Prior to April 3, 1976, it represented a theological document of inestimable worth to the Saints, one that deserved the study of those interested in spiritual things; on that date it was circumscribed into the standard works, and thus its message—principles and doctrines—became binding⁴³ upon the Latter-day Saints, the same as the revelations of Moses or Jesus or Alma or Joseph Smith. The vision of the redemption of the dead became a part of the canon, the rule of faith and doctrine and practice, the written measure by which we discern truth from error. And at a time and in a day when the First Presidency has specifically defined the threefold mission of the Church (proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead),⁴⁴ it seems fitting that we focus greater attention upon a significant reve-

lation that provides a spiritual justification for the Church's continued thrust in genealogical research and temple work. President Joseph F. Smith's vision has expanded our vision "from this point of view and this side of the veil," so that now, better than ever before, "we can look beyond the thin veil which separates us from that other sphere."⁴⁵

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, "Teach the Scriptures," address delivered to CES personnel, October 14, 1977, Salt Lake City, in *Charge to Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 21.
2. In reporting the address, the *Improvement Era* recorded: "He was visibly [sic] affected when he arose to make his opening speech which was listened to with profound silence." See "Editor's Table" in *Improvement Era*, November 1918, 80.
3. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1918, 2; emphasis added.
4. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 466.
5. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 516–17.
6. See Conference Report, April 1917, 8–9.
7. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1972, 18.
8. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 455.
9. "In Memoriam," *Improvement Era*, March 1918, 380.
10. Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 474.
11. Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 474.
12. "In Memoriam," *Improvement Era*, March 1918, 384; emphasis added.
13. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1916, 1–8; emphasis added.
14. See "The Father and Son," *Improvement Era*, March 1916, 934–72; James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:23–34.
15. Joseph F. Smith, "A Dream that Was a Reality," *Improvement Era*, May 1918, 567–74; Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:90–98.
16. Joseph F. Smith, "Status of Children in the Resurrection," *Improvement Era*, November 1919, 16–17; Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:99–101; Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 445–47.

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17. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Latter-day Saint Book Depot, 1862), K:288.
18. James E. Faust, in Conference Report, April 1979, 77.
19. Charles W. Nibley, "Reminiscences of President Joseph F. Smith," in *Improvement Era*, January 1919, 198.
20. Family Life, "An Eternal Unit—Joseph F. Smith," *Relief Society Magazine*, January 1941, 57.
21. Joseph Fielding Smith, in his father's biography, stated that Joseph F. saw to it that the vision was "written *immediately following the close of that conference*" (*Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 466.) Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, in their biography of Joseph Fielding, wrote: "This vision [Joseph F.] received on October 3, 1918, the day before General Conference convened. *Two weeks later* Joseph Fielding wrote the vision as his father dictated it to him" (*The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972], 201; emphasis added).
22. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1918, 57.
23. Anthon H. Lund Journal, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; under date of October 31, 1918.
24. James E. Talmage Journal, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; under date of October 31, 1918.
25. James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, June 1919, 60; emphasis added.
26. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, comp. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:425; emphasis added.
27. Bruce R. McConkie, "A New Commandment: Save Thyself and Thy Kindred," *Ensign*, August 1976, 11.
28. Orson F. Whitney, *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, February 20, 1919, 116.
29. See James E. Talmage, "The Living and the Dead," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1918, 126. The article contains the following statement: "While in the bodiless state our Lord ministered among the departed, both in Paradise and in the prison realm where dwelt in a state of durance the spirits of the disobedient." See also James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 672.
30. Joseph F. Smith quotes first from Peter's epistle and then remarks: "This may seem strange to some, that Jesus should go to preach the Gospel unto the wicked, rebellious antedeluvians, . . . nevertheless it is true." In the same sermon, he said: "Thus we see those wicked, unrepentant antedeluvians who even had the privilege of hearing

the Gospel in the flesh, as preached by Noah, . . . were actually visited in the 'prison house' by the Savior himself, and heard the Gospel from his own mouth after he was 'put to death in the flesh' (*Journal of Discourses*, 18:92; October 6, 1875). See also Joseph F. Smith, "Redemption Beyond the Grave," *Improvement Era*, December 1901, 145–47.

31. See Joseph F. Smith, *Young Women's Journal*, 1911, 128–32; *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 461.
32. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comp., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 370. From the Samuel W. Richards Record: "The sectarians have no charity for me but I have for them. *I intend to send men to prison to preach to them*" (Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 371; emphasis added).
33. See, for example, Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 134–35, 460–61.
34. Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Christ, in the meridian of time, bridged the gulf between paradise and hell or outer darkness (see Luke 16:26). "From that time forth this gulf is bridged so that the captives, after they have paid the full penalty of their misdeeds, satisfied justice, and have accepted the gospel of Christ, having the ordinances attended to in their behalf by their living relatives or friends, receive the passport that entitles them to cross the gulf" (*Doctrines of Salvation* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 2:158).
35. McConkie, "A New Commandment," 11.
36. See, for example, Joseph L. Wirthlin, April 1945 conference; Marion G. Romney, April 1964 conference; Spencer W. Kimball, September 1966 conference; Boyd K. Packer, October 1975 conference; see also *Instructor*, March 1961, November 1963.
37. N. Eldon Tanner, in Conference Report, April 1976, 29.
38. The complete statement of President Boyd K. Packer at the beginning of this paper is as follows: "We live in a day of great events relating to the scriptures. It has been only a short time, something more than a year, since two revelations were added to the scriptures, to the standard works, both of these to the Pearl of Great Price. Some have asked, 'Why did they go in the Pearl of Great Price? Why not the Doctrine and Covenants?' They could have gone either place; they were put in the Pearl of Great Price." (from a tape recording of an address to CES personnel, October 14, 1977).
39. Bruce R. McConkie, letter to Robert L. Millet, October 5, 1983.
40. See Spencer W. Kimball, address in Regional Representatives Seminar, September 30, 1977.
41. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1982, 75–76. In a letter to the author of this paper, Elder McConkie stated: "As to

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whether it [the vision of the redemption of the dead] should be in the Pearl of Great Price or the Doctrine and Covenants, that is simply an administrative decision. A number of our revelations have been published in both places over the years. It seems to me that it is properly placed in the Doctrine and Covenants" (McConkie, Millet, October 5, 1983).

42. See *Church News*, June 2, 1979, 3.
43. Note a statement to this effect by President George Q. Cannon at the time of the canonization of the Pearl of Great Price (Conference Report; October 1880; see also McConkie, "A New Commandment," 7).
44. See Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1918, 3.
45. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1916, 1–8.