

ambassador. He's out in the world preaching the gospel." Then when they leave your home, the memory of these things will linger with them when all else is forgotten.

God help us to remember that this is a missionary year; and in honoring those that went before, we shall courageously and with faith-destroying fear give to these visitors the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ by our humble living. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELDER JOSEPH F. MERRILL

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

Brethren and sisters, listeners here and elsewhere:

JOSEPH SMITH'S FIRST VISION

Mormonism, as the world generally calls the religious faith taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is noted for many characteristic teachings, one of which is that Joseph Smith was divinely called, beginning with a most wonderful and glorious vision. Relative to this matter a basic and fundamental question that every member of the Church may rightfully ask, as well as every honest investigator, is "Did Joseph Smith really see God?"

As I view it, this is perhaps the most natural and logical question that can be asked concerning the origin of Mormonism. It is one that might well challenge the attention of every person who believes in God and in life beyond the grave, whether he is a Mormon or non-Mormon.

All informed Latter-day Saints know the story of the first vision as related by Joseph Smith. He was a member of a sincerely religious family but belonged to no church. Though he was only fourteen years old at the time, this fact of non-church membership worried him. As a means of helping him to solve his problem, he read the Bible with deep interest, for he wanted to know which of the contending churches was the right one to join. He therefore resolved to heed the injunction of James (James 1:5, 6) and so went into the woods and prayed that God would give him wisdom that he might know what to do. In answer to the boy's simple prayer, he related that he was enveloped in a pillar of brilliant light which descended from above. Looking up he beheld two personages standing above him whose brightness and glory defied all description. One of them, calling him by name and pointing to the other said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" and then Joseph heard the voice of Jesus Christ, the Son, and received instructions from him.

Thus, according to his story, Joseph Smith, the fourteen-year-old lad, saw the Father and the Son and heard their voices. So far as the records indicate, this was the most glorious vision ever given to mortal man. Never before had both Father and Son appeared simulta-

neously to any mortal man. I have called your attention to Joseph's story because of its extreme importance to our faith—to Mormonism, which we testify is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. So I ask again, did Joseph Smith really and in fact see God? I believe all of us can profit by asking ourselves this question, occasionally at least. The correct answer can be stimulating and satisfying to us.

THE VISION GAVE EVIDENCE OF A PERSONAL GOD

The implications of the affirmative answer are tremendously significant. Through misunderstanding and wrong interpretations the world had lost the correct conception of the image and personality of God. To restore the truth, a new revelation was imperative. Though from the beginning to its end, the Bible, as we understand it, teaches that God is a personal being in whose image we are made, and that the Father and the Son are two separate and distinct personalities, alike in image and attributes, yet the modern world, through ignorance and lack of understanding, denies these fundamental truths. And so important are these truths to a satisfying faith that, I think, they are absolutely basic. Without any concrete conception of the image of God, how can one develop the necessary faith of the kind that the Apostle James asserts is needed to get an answer to prayer. Yes, God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, are personal beings in whose image man himself is made, so declared Joseph Smith. Hence in this sense we do believe in an anthropomorphic God and take great satisfaction in this belief.

TRUTHFULNESS OF JOSEPH SMITH'S CLAIMS

In addition to seeing the Father and the Son, Joseph also claimed he was visited, in his eighteenth year, by the Angel Moroni who among other things told him that his ". . . name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people." (Joseph Smith 2:33.) This was a very daring and reckless statement for Joseph to make, unless in very truth it was spoken to him by a divine messenger; for Joseph was then only seventeen years of age, a very poor and unschooled lad, living in a frontier village. Humanly speaking, there were no discernible prospects that he would ever be known beyond the limits of his own backwoods area.

Now, what evidence can we present of the truthfulness of Joseph Smith's claims, one might ask. Such a question is both natural and reasonable. My time in this meeting will permit of indicating only a few of the highlights relative to the man, his teachings, and his works. In his great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the principle that a tree is judged by its fruits. Can there be a more fair, just, and satisfactory basis of judgment than this? All followers of the Prophet will ask for no other.

JOSEPH SMITH'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Then as to the man: He was born of worthy parents who lived in humble circumstances in one of the rural areas of Vermont. When Joseph was ten years old, the family moved to the frontiers of western New York where it continued by dint of frugality and hard work to earn a very modest livelihood. Joseph grew to manhood denied most of the opportunities for even a common school education, his school training therefore being very limited. Judged by modern standards, he was practically uneducated and untrained for leadership in any sphere of intellectual endeavor. Thus handicapped in the eyes of the world, is it any wonder that he was rejected by people generally and his stories regarded as the product of a wild and foolish imagination?

But notwithstanding all the severely handicapping conditions from an economic and educational point of view, what did Joseph Smith become? Let me make a few quotes. First from John Henry Evans' book entitled, *Joseph Smith, An American Prophet*, we read:

Here is a man who was born in the stark hills of Vermont; who was reared in the backwoods of New York; who never looked inside a college or high school; who lived in six States, no one of which would own him during his lifetime; who spent months in the vile prisons of the period; who, even when he had his freedom, was hounded like a fugitive; who was covered once with a coat of tar and feathers, and left for dead; who, with his following, was driven by irate neighbors from New York to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, and from Missouri to Illinois; and who, at the unripe age of thirty-eight, was shot to death by a mob with painted faces.

Yet this man became mayor of the biggest town in Illinois and the state's most prominent citizen, the commander of the largest body of trained soldiers in the nation outside of the Federal army, the founder of cities and of a university, and aspired to become President of the United States.

He wrote a book [the Book of Mormon] which has baffled the literary critics for a hundred years and which is today more widely read than any other volume save the Bible. On the threshold of an organizing age he established the most nearly perfect social mechanism in the modern world, and developed a religious philosophy that challenges anything of the kind in history, for completeness and cohesion. And he set up the machinery for an economic system that would take the brood of fears out of the heart of man—the fear of want through sickness, old age, unemployment, and poverty.

In thirty nations are men and women who look upon him as a greater leader than Moses and a greater prophet than Isaiah; his disciples now number close to a million; and already two granite shafts pierce the sky, one over the place where he was born, and the other over the place where he received the inspiration for his Book.

JOSIAH QUINCY'S OPINION

Further, you may be interested to hear what a nationally-known writer and publicist and once mayor of Boston, Josiah Quincy, wrote about Joseph Smith. In May 1844, Mr. Quincy and his cultured

friend, Charles Francis Adams, son and grandson, respectively, of two United States Presidents, happened to make a two-day visit to Nauvoo. Being well-known, prominent men they were entertained at the Mansion House, Joseph Smith's residence. An account of this visit is given by Mr. Quincy, in the last chapter of his book entitled *Figures of the Past*, published in 1880. I quote the following from this twenty-four page chapter:

It is by no means improbable that some future textbook for the use of generations yet unborn, will contain a question something like this: What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen? And it is by no means impossible that the answer to that interrogatory may be thus written: Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet. And the reply, absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious commonplace to their descendants. History deals in surprises and paradoxes quite as startling as this. The man who established a religion in this age of free debate, who was and is today accepted by hundreds of thousands as a direct emissary from the Most High,—such a rare human being is not to be disposed of by pelting his memory with unsavory epithets. Fanatic, imposter, charlatan, he may have been; but these hard names furnish no solution to the problem he presents to us. Fanatics and impostors are living and dying every day, and their memory is buried with them; but the wonderful influence which this founder of a religion exerted and still exerts throws him into relief before us, not as a rogue to be criminated, but as a phenomenon to be explained. The most vital questions Americans are asking each other today have to do with this man and what he has left us. . . . Joseph Smith claiming to be an inspired teacher, faced adversity such as few men have been called to meet, enjoyed a brief season of prosperity such as few men have ever attained, and finally, forty-three days after I saw him, went cheerfully to a martyr's death.

Born in the lowest ranks of poverty, without book-learning, and with the homeliest of all human names, he had made himself at the age of thirty-nine a power upon earth. Of the multitudinous family of Smith . . . none had won human hearts and shaped human lives as this Joseph. His influence, whether for good or evil, is potent today, and the end is not yet. . . .

Mr. Quincy concludes his chapter with these words:

I have endeavored to give the details of my visit to the Mormon prophet with absolute accuracy. If the reader does not know just what to make of Joseph Smith, I cannot help him out of the difficulty. I myself stand helpless before the puzzle.

QUOTATION FROM NEW YORK TIMES

Now I recite one more quotation from an unfriendly writer in the *New York Times* of September 4, 1843:

This Joe Smith must be set down as an extraordinary character, a prophet-hero, as Carlyle might call him. He is one of the great men of this age, and in future history will rank with those who, in one way or another, have stamped their impress strongly on society.

It is no small thing, in the blaze of the nineteenth century, to give to men a new revelation, found a new religion, establish new forms of worship, to build a city with new laws, institutions, and orders of archi-

ture, to establish ecclesiastical, civil and military jurisdiction, found colleges, send out missionaries, and make proselytes on two hemispheres. Yet all this has been done by Joe Smith, and that against every sort of opposition, ridicule, and persecution.

In the short space of fifteen years, Joseph Smith, unschooled in the learning and the methods of the world, did all these important things. How was it possible? Does not the only rational explanation lie in the claim that he was God-taught and that the statement is literally true which asserts,

. . . I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things of the earth. (D. & C. 124:1.)?

Yes, Joseph Smith was able to confound the wise, to astonish the learned, and to outmarvel the great.

TRUTHS TAUGHT BY JOSEPH SMITH

I have briefly indicated who Joseph Smith was and some of the things he accomplished. Now another important question is what characteristic things did he teach—things not taught by other churches. A number of these are mentioned in the thirteen widely used Articles of Faith of the Church, and written by the Prophet himself. Many of his teachings are not accepted by the world, but time will permit me to speak of only a few of them. I have already indicated one such teaching—a very important and basic one—the personality and image of God the Father and of Jesus Christ his Son who redeemed mankind from the bondage of death, brought about by the fall of Adam. He also taught that we are spirit children of the Father and had an individual, conscious existence with him and Jesus Christ, our elder spirit brother, before we were born in mortality. Unquestionably, God created us in the flesh, and biologists teach that the human family came from the same parents. It follows that the universal brotherhood of man, both in the spirit and in the flesh, is a divine truth.

Another closely related teaching to the fatherhood of God is the personality and actuality of Satan, the devil. He is a real person with a spirit body in the image of man. He is here on earth, accompanied by a multitude of other spirit persons who cooperate with him in his evil work. This fact should be kept in mind by all who sincerely desire to live righteously and resist temptations to do wrong. All such temptations stem right back to the devil and his host of evil spirits, spirit brothers of ours who because of rebellion were cast out of heaven. They are permitted by the Father to be here as a means of testing us to find if in the exercise of our free agency we can prove ourselves worthy to return to his presence.

And this suggests a word relative to free agency—the freedom the Father has given to every child born in mortality to do as he pleases so long as he does not infringe upon or deny this freedom

to others. Multitudes of people in the world today deny the existence of a loving and merciful Heavenly Father because he permits war with its associated terrors and horrors. Such persons do not understand the divine doctrine of free agency, else they would never hold the Lord responsible for the wickedness, crimes, and horrors in which his children engage. The Lord is merciful, loving, and good to all his children who will refrain from doing evil and follow the way of life he has given them. He said to Moses:

... this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39.)

And the Lord will not fail in his purpose with those of his children who will render obedience to, and cooperate with, him.

This leads to a word relative to the beautiful doctrine of salvation for the dead, taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith. This doctrine, as I understand it, absolutely reveals the Father as a God of love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, and all other attributes we ascribe to a perfect Father. He has given his children their free agency. He has prepared for them a plan of eternal progression. Not one of them will be annihilated—all will have eternal life, be they saints or sinners. Every one coming into mortality will in this life or in the life beyond the grave have the opportunity of hearing and accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who comply with all the conditions, which they will have the privilege of doing, will eventually be saved in the Father's kingdom.

Brethren and sisters, how beautiful is the way of the Lord! How great his mercy and forgiveness! How all-embracing his love!

But it is very largely to the teachings and labors of the Prophet Joseph Smith that the modern world is indebted for a correct interpretation of the plan of life, salvation, and exaltation that the Lord has provided for his children to follow if they would care to return to his presence.

I close with the thought that Joseph Smith, his claims, his teachings, and his achievements are so very remarkable in character that they challenge every normal human being able to do so, to make an honest and thorough investigation of them. A refusal to do this is likely to bring sometime, somewhere, painful regrets and handicaps as a consequence. Certainly every member of the Church, in justice to himself, should rouse up to the performance of this important duty. May every one of us worthily seek the help of the Lord in responding to the calls of duty I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President George Albert Smith:

After the singing and prayer, this Conference will stand adjourned until 2 o'clock this afternoon.

The proceedings of that session will be broadcast over KSL, Salt Lake City, KSUB at Cedar City, and KDYY at Pocatello.