

President Ezra Taft Benson

I would like to discuss with you this morning the calling and mission of a modern prophet to our generation.

Angel appeared to Prophet Joseph Smith

It is generally understood that the faith of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rests on the claim that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, and also that he declared the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was the result of angelic visitations to him between the years 1823 and 1827.

Upon learning of this claim, some people contend that it seems preposterous that angels would visit the earth in this modern era.

The Bible contains testimony that God directed the affairs of His church on earth for over four thousand years by revelation and, when necessary, by heavenly ministrations.

In describing conditions of the last days incident to the second coming of Jesus Christ, John prophesied in the New Testament that before the Savior's return, the world would receive a warning that the hour of God's judgment was near. That warning would come by an angel from heaven declaring an "everlasting gospel." Hear his words:

"I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

"Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Rev. 14:6-7.)

If one accepts the testimony of John the Revelator, new revelation and a visitation by a heavenly messenger to earth should be expected.

Our solemn testimony is that this angelic messenger appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the early nineteenth century. This announcement that an angel from God appeared to a prophet in our times is entirely consistent with the prophecies of the New Testament and should therefore command the interest of every earnest seeker after truth.

Book of Mormon—additional witness of Christ

In light of the fact that Jesus said there would be both true and false prophets in the last days preceding His second coming, the central question is: "Did Joseph Smith speak for God? Was he a true prophet?"

My intent today is to offer some evidences in support of Joseph Smith's mission as a prophet to this generation.

The most singular evidence in support of Joseph Smith's claim to being a spokesman for Almighty God was the publication of a scriptural record, the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is a record of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent and records the visit and ministry of Jesus Christ to the people on this continent following His ascension at Jerusalem. The major purpose of the record is to convince a later generation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The Book of Mormon, therefore, constitutes an additional witness, along with the Bible, to the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Joseph Smith obtained this ancient record from a heavenly messenger, just as John prophesied. This angel appeared to him and revealed the location of ancient records which were inscribed on metallic plates and buried in a stone vault. In due time, the young prophet was given the plates and the means by which they were translated. The book was then published to the world as canonized scripture.

Also, in harmony with the testimony of John, the book contains "the everlasting gospel." It is now preached by our missionaries to the world.

We invite you to test the validity of our witness about the origin of the Book of Mormon. You can do this by reading it and asking our Heavenly Father if these things are true. I promise you, if you are sincere, you will receive a confirmation of the truthfulness by the Holy Ghost. Millions, with soberness and sincerity, testify they know it is from God.

Message from God

A revealing characteristic of a true prophet is that he declares a message from God. He makes no apology for the message, nor does he fear for any social repercussions which may lead to derision and persecution.

As a young man, Joseph Smith was a seeker after truth. Confusion among existing churches led him to inquire of God which of them was true. In answer to that prayer, he asserted that a pillar of brilliant light appeared. These are his words:

"When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (JS—H 1:17.)

Joseph asked the second personage, who was Jesus Christ, which one of the Christian sects was correct. He was told that he must not join any of them, that none were correct.

Some treated his testimony with great contempt and began to incite false stories and persecution against him. The young prophet, like the Apostle Paul of old, would not recant his testimony, but defended his claim in these words:

"I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I

could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation." (JS—H 1:25.)

A true prophet's words come to pass

The ultimate test of a true prophet is that when he speaks in the name of the Lord his words come to pass. That standard was explained by the Lord to Moses in these words:

"When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously." (Deut. 18:22.)

Many prophecies of Joseph Smith are recorded to which this test might be applied. May I illustrate with two examples.

In 1832, he prophesied that the southern states and northern states would shortly be divided in civil war, that this war would be the beginning of world wars which would eventually involve all nations and result in the death and misery of many souls. Specifically, he said that the great Civil War would begin with a rebellion in South Carolina. (See D&C 87.) This prophecy was published to the world in 1851.

As every schoolboy knows, the Civil War began with the secession of South Carolina from the Union, and other states followed. When Lincoln sent provisions to the Union forces at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, the Confederate forces opened fire on the fort. Since that fateful day in 1861, the world has seen as a result of warfare the death and misery of many souls.

The desire of the Prophet Joseph Smith was to save the Union from that bloody conflict. He recognized the iniquity of slavery and urged Congress to abolish it and to pay the slaveholders from the sale of public lands. The message went unheeded, and nearly one-half million souls died in the Civil War.

In another prophecy, one of the most remarkable pronounced on the head of one man, Joseph Smith said to a young judge named Stephen A. Douglas, in the presence of several others: "Judge, you will aspire to the presidency of the United States; and if ever you turn your hand against me or the Latter-day Saints, you will feel the weight of the hand of Almighty upon you; and you will live to see and know that I have testified the truth to you; for the conversation of this day will stick to you through life." (*History of the Church*, 5:394.)

Stephen A. Douglas did aspire to the presidency of the United States. He did have opportunity to defend the Church. But in a political speech in 1857, he viciously attacked the Church as "a loathsome, disgusting ulcer in the body politic" and recommended that Congress cut it out.

Some have asserted that no one had better prospects for the presidency than did Douglas, but when the results of the election were tallied, he received only twelve electoral votes. The election victory went to an obscure backwoodsman by the name of Abraham Lincoln.

A few months after the election, Mr. Douglas died a broken man in the prime of life.

"By their fruits"

Another test of a true prophet was established by the Savior Himself. True prophets should be distinguished from false prophets by the standard, "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 7:20.) Consider some of the "fruits" of Joseph Smith's teachings:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints takes care of its poor and needy by tithes and offerings from Church members. Latter-day Saints take seriously the Savior's statement that "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:40.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith said the Church was not fully organized until the women had their own organization. So he organized, in 1842, the women's Relief Society, which is today the largest women's organization in the world.

Utah was one of the first states to grant voting rights to women.

This is a missionary church, as you've heard this morning. Jesus said one of the signs of the times before His second coming was that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all the world as a witness unto all nations. (See Matt. 24:14.)

Missionary service is expected from all young men and many married couples. Training begins in the home and is augmented by additional training in Church responsibilities. Priesthood training for young men commences at age twelve and continues throughout life. Additionally, the Church sponsors missionary training centers, where missionaries receive instruction and training in preparation for the teaching of the gospel to nations in their own languages.

How effective is the training? It took 117 years for the Church to achieve one million members. The second million was achieved in 16 years; the third million in 9 years; the fourth million in 6 years; and the fifth million in just 3 years.

In less than two decades, three million people have come into the Church.

Today there are about thirty thousand missionaries laboring in seventy-one nations of the world. Most donate their time and service at their own or their family's expense.

Joseph Smith and his successors have stressed education for all Church members. That emphasis has produced some remarkable results. Dr. Clark Kerr, chairman of the Carnegie Council in Policy Studies in Higher Education, noted:

"Utah is the leadership state in education in the nation, and thus in the world. . . ."

"Utah stands first in the percentage of total population age 3 to 34 enrolled in school.

"Utah stands first in the percentage of the total population enrolled in school at every age level except ages 16-17. . . .

"Utah stands first in the average years of school completed for all of its citizens age 25 and older. . . .

"Utah, overall, has been . . . a model for educational development, a rich source for leadership." ("New Areas for Leadership," *1974 University of Utah Commencement Address*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1974, pp. 2-4.)

The Word of Wisdom

If any revelation given to Joseph Smith is susceptible to scientific investigation, it is the dietary health code known as the Word of Wisdom. In that revelation given in 1833, Church members were directed to abstain from coffee, tea, tobacco, and all alcoholic beverages.

Those who obey the commandment are promised "health in their navel and marrow to their bones." (D&C 89:18.)

A number of scientific studies have been made involving members of the LDS church. One study showed that Latter-day Saints in Utah have 65 percent fewer cases of lung cancer than the U.S. general population, and their rate of heart disease is 35 percent below the national average. (See *Church News*, 23 June 1979, pp. 5, 10.)

In another study in California, where Mormons are less than 2 percent of the population, Dr. James Enstrom, a radiation physicist at UCLA, who is not a member of the Church, found even more startling disclosures. Dr. Enstrom found that Mormons had a lung cancer rate 75 percent below the national average and an overall cancer rate 45 percent below the national average. As he concluded his study,

Dr. Enstrom said of the Mormons: "They must be doing *something* right." (Quoted by Bill Davidson, "What Can We Learn About Health from the Mormons?" *Family Circle*, Jan. 1976, p. 82.)

Joseph Smith received the Word of Wisdom in 1833. Today medical science has validated the soundness of that revelation.

Yes, "by their fruits ye shall know them"! (Matt. 7:20.) The fruits of Joseph Smith's teachings have withstood over 150 years of investigation, criticism, and persecution. The message, the Church, and the people stand as a vindication of the truth of his testimony and works.

Joseph Smith "sealed his mission and his works with his own blood"

Just as prophets of the past were without honor in their own countries and were persecuted and killed, Joseph Smith was maligned and martyred in his generation.

Was Joseph Smith sent from God? We answer an emphatic "yes"!

"He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord's anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood." (D&C 135:3.)

I testify to you that God has again spoken from the heavens; that the visitation of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ constitutes the greatest event in this world since the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world—not just a great moral teacher, as much of the Christian world is claiming, but the Savior of mankind, the very Son of God.

I bear testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the living God, one of the greatest prophets that has ever lived on the earth. He was the instrument in God's hand in ushering in the present gospel dispensation, the greatest of all, and the last of all in

preparation for the second coming of the Master.

I bear witness that we have standing at the head of the Church today a prophet of the living God, who holds all the authority necessary to carry forward our Father's program for the blessing of His children.

As God lives, I know these things are true and bear this witness to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Choir sang "An Angel from on High" without announcement.

President Romney

We appreciate the courtesies shown by the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations who have offered their facilities as a

public service to make the proceedings of this conference available to a large audience throughout many areas of the world.

We shall conclude this fourth session of the conference with the Tabernacle Choir singing "In My Father's House Are Many Mansions," after which the benediction will be pronounced by Elder Ted E. Brewerton, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

This conference will then be adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

The Choir sang "In My Father's House Are Many Mansions."

The benediction was offered by Elder Ted E. Brewerton.

SECOND DAY AFTERNOON MEETING

FIFTH SESSION

The fifth and final general session of the 151st Semiannual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, October 4, 1981.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir directed by Jerold Ottley with John Longhurst at the organ.

President Hinckley made the following remarks at the outset of the meeting:

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We extend a sincere welcome to

all assembled this afternoon in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah in the fifth and concluding session of the 151st Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We also welcome those seated in the Salt Palace where Elders Hartman Rector, Jr. and Jacob de Jager preside.

We send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, and cable.

The Tabernacle Choir with Jerold Ottley directing and John Longhurst at the organ will begin this service by