

DOCTRINE & COVENANTS & CHURCH HISTORY GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

* GREEN MOUNTAIN 1ST WARD * LAKEWOOD, COLORADO * 01/18/09 * PAGE 1 *

Lesson 3: “I Had Seen a Vision”, Joseph Smith—History 1:1–26, Our Heritage, pages 1–4

Introduction



This lesson discusses how the Lord prepared the right time and the right place for the restoration of His gospel after the many centuries of the Apostasy. In addition, God chose and prepared the right man—Joseph Smith—to be the prophet through whom the gospel would be restored.

After the Apostasy, God prepared the way for the Restoration

After Jesus Christ was crucified, His Apostles presided over the Church. But soon persecution, divisions, and apostasy increased. Within a few decades, there was a falling away from the Church, as the Apostles had prophesied (Acts 20:28–30; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; 2 Timothy 4:3–4). This falling away is known as the Great Apostasy.

Consequences of the Great Apostasy included (**D&C 1:15–16; Joseph Smith—History 1:8–9, 19, 21; Mormon 1:13–14**):

- No priesthood authority remained on the earth
- No apostles and no prophets on the earth
- Knowledge of the true nature of God was lost
- The doctrines of the gospel were corrupted
- Sacred ordinances such as baptism were altered
- The original Church divided into competing, discordant, and apostate groups

The darkness of the Apostasy lasted many centuries. However, God had foreseen this and planned for the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve taught that preparation for restoring the gospel began centuries before the First Vision:

“Beginning in the 14th century, the Lord began to prepare those social, educational, religious, economic, and governmental conditions under which he could more easily restore the gospel for the last time” (Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed. [1966], 717).

Several events helped prepare the way for the restoration of the gospel before Joseph Smith was born:

- a) The Renaissance was a rebirth of learning, particularly in literature, art, and science. Inventions such as the printing press emerged.

Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve said the Renaissance was not a chance occurrence but rather *“a development predetermined in the Mind of God to illumine the benighted minds of men in preparation for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which was appointed to be accomplished some centuries later”* (Jesus the Christ, 3rd ed. [1916], 749).

Lesson Highlights

- After the Apostasy, God prepared the way for the Restoration.
- God prepared Joseph Smith to be the prophet of the Restoration.
- The First Vision ushered in the restoration of the gospel.
- Many truths were revealed in the First Vision.

A study of this lesson will strengthen our testimonies of the First Vision and of Joseph Smith’s calling as the prophet through whom God restored the fulness of the gospel to the earth.



b) Reformers such as John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and John Calvin began to challenge the practices and teachings of existing churches, recognizing that the churches had strayed from the teachings of Christ.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve said that Martin Luther and other reformers *"were inspired to create a religious climate in which God could restore lost truths and priesthood authority"* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 85; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 66).

c) The Americas were discovered. The United States was colonized by religious people and eventually became an independent nation (1 Nephi 13:12–19).

d) The Constitution of the United States was established, guaranteeing religious freedom in that nation (D&C 101:77–80).

Elder Ballard said, *"God inspired the earlier explorers and colonizers of America and the framers of the Constitution of the United States to develop a land and governing principles to which the gospel could be restored"* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 85; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 66).

God prepared Joseph Smith to be the prophet of the Restoration.

In addition to providing the right conditions for the restoration of the gospel, God provided a man to be the prophet of the Restoration. This man was Joseph Smith, who was born on 23 December 1805 in Sharon, Vermont.



Joseph's family helped prepare him

Joseph Smith's family heritage was important in helping prepare him for his mission as the prophet of the Restoration. Brother Joseph came from a rich spiritual heritage. His parents and grandparents were religious, patriotic, educationally minded, and of strong moral convictions. His paternal grandfather, Asael Smith, stated years before Joseph was born, *"It has been borne in upon my soul that one of my descendants will promulgate a work to revolutionize the world of religious faith"* (in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 27th ed. [1974], 25).

Joseph Smith's parents, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, greatly influenced his life. Both were deeply devoted to God. They were also devoted parents, teaching their children the principles of faith and righteousness.

Both of Joseph's parents had profound religious experiences. Joseph Sr. had several dreams that gave him assurances that he would enjoy the blessings

of the true gospel of Jesus Christ (see Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley [1958], 47–50, 64–66).

Once while Lucy was critically ill as a young mother, she made a covenant with God that she would serve Him completely if He would let her live to care for her family. Soon afterward she heard a voice comfort her, and she made a remarkable recovery. (See *History of Joseph Smith*, 33–35.)

Joseph Sr. and Lucy searched actively for religious truth. Both of them felt that none of the existing churches was consistent with the Church that Jesus Christ had established. For this reason, Joseph Sr. did not join any church. Lucy felt it was her duty to be baptized, so she joined the Presbyterian Church. When the gospel was restored, they both recognized the truth and embraced it.

Adversity helped prepare him

Our Heritage, pages 1–2. While Joseph Smith was growing up, he and his family faced many challenges. When he was seven years old, he became gravely ill with an infection in his leg. We learn much about the character of young Joseph from this experience.

Consider in what ways the trials and afflictions of Joseph's youth could have helped prepare him to become the prophet of the Restoration. How have trials and afflictions helped prepare you for the responsibilities you have been given?

JS-H 1:11

"I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse"

"This single verse of scripture has had a greater impact and a more far reaching effect upon mankind than any other single sentence ever recorded by any prophet in any age. It might well be said that the crowning act of the ministry of James was not his martyrdom for the testimony of Jesus, but his recitation, as guided by the Holy Ghost, of these simple words which led to the opening of the heavens in modern times."

(Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:246–47.)



The religious atmosphere in western New York helped prepare him

When Joseph was about 10 years old, three years of crop failures in Vermont left the Smith family in serious financial difficulty. After much deliberation, the family moved to the area of Palmyra, New York, where there was a prospect of better farming conditions. At the time, there was great religious excitement and confusion in western New York, with many churches contending for converts.

Joseph Smith—History 1:5–10. Joseph was confused about which church he should join. Ponder how Joseph's situation was like that of people today who are searching to know the truth.

The First Vision ushered in the restoration of the gospel.

On a spring morning in 1820, Joseph Smith went to the woods near his home to pray for guidance.

Joseph Smith—History 1:14. Joseph's prayer on this morning was different from other prayers he had offered. Ponder how private vocal prayer is often helpful when we are offering up the desires of our hearts to God.

Joseph Smith—History 1:15. Relates what happened as Joseph Smith began to pray.

Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17. Joseph was delivered from a powerful darkness.

What can we learn from this experience about overcoming the influence of Satan?

Many truths were revealed in the First Vision.

The visit of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith is rich in doctrinal significance.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, *"I submit that in the few minutes that Joseph Smith was with the Father and the Son, he learned more of the nature of God the Eternal Father and the risen Lord than all the learned minds in all their discussions through all centuries of time"* (Church News, 24 Oct. 1998, 6).

From the First Vision, we learn:

- God the Father and Jesus Christ live.
- The Father and the Son are real, separate beings with glorified bodies of flesh and bones.
- We are created in the image of God
- Satan and his power are real, but God's power is infinitely greater.
- God hears and answers prayers. He cares for us.

Joseph Smith—History 1:11–12.

Scripture study helped Joseph resolve his confusion.

Through his example we learn that Joseph not only read the scriptures but also searched and pondered them and applied them in his life.

Consider how the scriptures helped you in times of need or confusion.

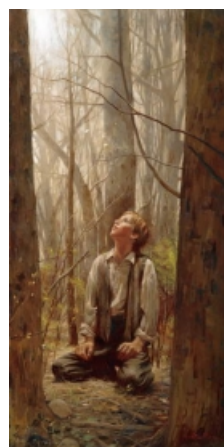


Why is it important to keep praying in times of darkness or trial?

Ponder when prayer has helped you during such difficulties.

Joseph Smith—History 1:18–19.

Joseph Smith was told that he should not join any of the churches by a Personage who addressed him and said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.



The First Vision
Walter Rane

- No church on earth had the fullness of Christ's gospel.
- Revelation has not ceased.

President David O. McKay testified that the First Vision *"answers all the [questions] regarding God and his divine personality. ... His relation to his children is clear. His interest in humanity through authority delegated to man is apparent. The future of the work is assured. These and other glorious truths are clarified by that glorious first vision"* (Gospel Ideals [1954], 85).

While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve, **Elder Ezra Taft Benson** said, *"The appearance of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ to the boy prophet is the greatest event that has occurred in this world since the resurrection of the Master"* (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 20; or Ensign, June 1971, 34).

Why is it important for each of us to have a testimony of the First Vision?

President Gordon B. Hinckley:

"A most remarkable manifestation occurred on a spring morning in the year 1820 when the Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph Smith. ... A testimony of [that vision] has touched the hearts of millions in many lands. I add my own witness, given me by the Spirit, that the Prophet's description of that marvelous event is true, that God the Eternal Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ spoke with him on that occasion in a conversation as real and personal and intimate as are our conversations today" (Be Thou an Example [1981], 10).

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- What are your feelings regarding the First Vision?
- How has a testimony of the First Vision blessed your life?

