

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET OF THE LIVING GOD.

BY JAMES E. TALMAGE, PH.D., F.G.S., F.R.S. (EDIN.) PROFESSOR OF GEOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH.

In the record of the years long gone, on the pages of the years now passing, appear names and portraits beyond count, presenting all degrees of distinctness, of varied significance, and of graded importance. The pictured lineaments are often faint and undefined, the name almost illegible, the characters undecipherable; while other pages glow with the brilliancy of strong imprint, portrait and biography indelible and unfading. Of those who read and examine the record, few interpret the portrait or understand the inscribed words alike. To one the engraved features and the lettered name are inspiring and potent; in the soul of another they arouse anger and hatred. The names of the truly great are known and remembered for evil as well as for good, and the noblest of men are commonly the most maligned.

Some whom the world has called great for a season—for a season of centuries even—are finally forgotten, as the specific effects of their individual labors are obscured by later and, perchance, greater achievements. They are thought of occasionally, but their features are forgotten, and their names have lost their old-time echo of power and action.

Others there are whose individuality is intensified with the passage of the years, whose forms and features are projected ever more and more sharply on the background of time; whose names are the titles, each of a separate volume listed in the world's library;—men whose place in history is unique and sacred; whose life-

work perpetuates itself; whose honor is enhanced by the achievements of their successors, whose thrones can not be usurped, whose names shall never be erased from the tablets of fame, nor weakened in their potency to inspire and impel. Such characters seem to be more than men; they are recognized as representatives of a power greater than that of mortals; they come to be known as having taught and wrought with authority, each of them the bearer of a special message, each an ambassador with a mission specifically his own.

The names that live longest as titles of distinction are of men whose message to the world is in a manner new, whose mission is specific and distinctive, and whose commission bears the seal of authority.

The man of whom we speak, Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Gospel of Christ in the latter days; the man through whom was opened the latest dispensation in the work of the Lord,—a dispensation called new, though characterized by the restoration of the authority and powers of all preceding epochs,—this man is one whom men cannot forget or ignore, try as they may. His place in history is secure; his work is recognized as that of a mission delegated to him alone.

The message he bore, the labor he performed among his fellows, the claims he made as to authority and appointment, have naturally and properly been questioned, tested, and analyzed, with keenest care and most exacting detail, at the hand of both friends and enemies.

Few indeed are the historic instances in which so many questions of supreme importance to mankind have turned upon the personality and claims of an individual, as are associated with the life and labors of the man Joseph Smith.

While yet a lad he appeared on the stage of human activity and advancement, declaring, in gentle tone and simple words, that he had been personally visited and instructed by the Eternal Father, and by Jesus the Christ.

If the basis of this solemn declaration was delusion or illusion, if Joseph Smith intentionally or involuntarily thus proclaimed a falsehood, in short, if he was himself mistaken and was to others an impostor or a deceiver, then the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

day Saints is the embodiment of hypocrisy and deceit, false and corrupt in all its parts, and the incarnation of blackest blasphemy in the very name it bears.

On the other hand, if the testimony of the boy, if the life-work of the man, with its tragic close in the dread scenes of martyrdom, if these be genuine and true, then the perpetuity of the Church is assured, its bold claim as the repository of the Holy Priesthood is proved, its authority is vindicated, and its sanctity confirmed.

The question of the age is this: WAS JOSEPH SMITH A PROPHET OF THE LIVING GOD?

In the interests of clearness and precision, let us first assure ourselves as to the true meaning of the title, in short, let us first seek an answer to the question:

What is a Prophet? In common usage and present application of the term, a prophet is regarded as one who foretells or predicts events. True, prediction is one of the characteristics of prophecy, yet in no sense is it the only feature or even the principal function of the prophetic office. By derivation of the word itself, as also by its use and distinctive application in scripture, the term prophet denotes one who receives, interprets, and proclaims the revelations of God. His authoritative message may pertain to matters of past or present importance, not essentially to the future alone. Prior to the time of Samuel, one endowed with prophetic power was called a seer; thus runs the record: "for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." (I Sam. 9: 9). The specific office of the seer is included in that of the prophet, and the powers of both seer and prophet are united in the calling of the revelator.

The functions of the three may be and commonly are combined in the same person; and he, when authoritatively called and divinely invested, stands as an intermediary between Deity and mortals. As a seer, he is permitted to behold in fitting plainness the manifestations of the divine purposes and plans; as prophet, he is enlightened to comprehend in part the mind and will of his Lord; as revelator, he is empowered, and oftentimes commanded, to proclaim the same to the people. Unto him it is given to ascend the cloud-capped Sinai, while the multitude waits below; his privilege it is to enter the Holy of Holies; there to see and hear and learn as

his calling and appointment may require. From the enshrouded heights, sanctified by the Divine Presence, the prophet returns, bearing the new message—not always writ on tables hewn from the mountain rock, but imprinted and deeply graven on mind and heart,—the proclamation of counsel and command unto those who wait and listen for the word divine, as it is voiced by Heaven's ambassador.

Since the beginning of history, the prophet has been as truly a fulfiller of earlier prophecy, as a proclaimer of new. Adam, the patriarch of the race, first seer, prophet, and revelator to the human family, was the fore-ordained medium through whom the blessing of mortality was conferred on the spirit-children of God; and in the life-work so wrought, he became the fulfiller of prophecy uttered, and the executor of plans decreed, in the primeval councils of the Gods.

A prophet or revelator truly sent of God will bear power and authority to instruct and administer in the ordinances of the gospel of Christ. No envoy from the courts of Heaven, no ambassador from the throne of the Great King, will be sent out unprovided with the credentials by which his appointment is authenticated; nor will such a messenger present himself and assert his claims among men unequipped with the insignia of his office.

In the effective discharge of his duties, the true prophet will not only testify in words as to his authoritative appointment and ordination, but will manifest his actual possession of spiritual gifts and specific powers pertaining to the prophetic office, by duly exercising the same as conditions require.

Furthermore, a prophet of the Lord officiating in any one dispensation or period will be consistent in his official utterances and acts with the prophets of earlier days; even as his successors will be in harmony with him. Consistency and harmony as here referred to diminish in no sense the distinctive and individual character of the calling and appointment with which every succeeding prophet is charged and commissioned; indeed, unity of the divine purpose is even more forcibly declared through the differences that isolate each prophet from all others than would be possible in any mere repetition.

The true prophet is no imitator, blindly following step by step

the footprints of a predecessor; he is, perforce, path-finder and path-maker himself; for though he travels as others have done, as yet others shall do, toward destination fixed and known, his special duties often lead him over ground before untrodden. Originality, relative originality at least, is essentially associated with the prophetic calling. The Hebrew equivalents of our word prophet signified one from whom inspired utterances bubbled forth spontaneously, as water from a fountain; one who was a source of right counsel, a well-spring of truth. The prophet of God is without predecessor or successor in his own particular mission; yet his words and his works must be consistent with those of the prophets before him, and of assured agreement with the prophecies that shall appear as the scroll of futurity unrolls. Through ordination one may be installed in the place of a prophet who has departed this life; yet, in the labors and official administration of each, a marked individuality as to the work and its execution appears.

We affirm that by the foregoing, and by all other tests involving the characteristics essential to and distinctive of the exalted calling and office of the prophet, JOSEPH SMITH WAS A PROPHET OF THE LIVING GOD.

1. *The man and his mission were proclaimed in ancient times;* therefore, he stands forth as a fulfiller of prophecy, and by his works he confirms the claims of earlier prophets. As instances, the following are in point.

John, known as the Revelator of olden time, describes in part a vision in which he, as seer and prophet, was shown certain developments that would occur in the last dispensation—the dispensation of fulness, the modern present. These are the words of the record as rendered in our tongue: “And 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.” This prophetic utterance by the lone seer on Patmos found partial fulfilment in the early revelations made to the boy-prophet, Joseph Smith. He solemnly testifies that he was visited by an angel, whose person he plainly saw, whose voice he distinctly heard, and by whom he was instructed.

This celestial visitant gave his name—Moroni; his mission he declared to be that of a messenger sent of God; his station, while a

mortal being, had been that of a prophet among the people who centuries before had inhabited the western continent. Moroni instructed Joseph concerning the restoration of the gospel then pending; impressed the youth with the importance of the part assigned to him in the working out of the divine purpose; and prophesied that his name would come to be known as a symbol of good and of evil among all nations. The angel further declared that an ancient record, engraven on plates of gold, lay buried near by; that this record comprised a history of the ancient peoples from whom he had descended; described the personal ministrations of Jesus Christ among them; and embodied "the fulness of the everlasting gospel." This record it was Joseph's privilege and appointed duty to translate into modern speech, through the power of divine inspiration.

Let it be remembered that this angelic visitation was directly in harmony with the predictions of John the Revelator, whose place in the brotherhood of true prophets is not disputed by the Christian world; and whose prophetic calling is attested by the fulfilment noted in this instance. The gospel of Christ, the everlasting gospel, was to be brought to earth again by an angel, and its truths were to be made known among all nations and peoples.

Moroni quoted certain parts of ancient scripture, including the predictions of Malachi as to the fate of the wicked, and concerning the coming of Elijah the prophet, in the last dispensation, to inaugurate a special work pertaining to both the living and the dead; he cited the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the gathering of the dispersed tribes of Israel, and declared the fulfilment of these predictions to be near at hand.

Thus was the restoration of the gospel inaugurated—through the official ministration of an angel, as had been foretold. Other heavenly personages visited Joseph Smith, each coming as a special messenger with a particular message to deliver, and a specific duty to perform.

In the translation of the graven record described by Moroni, and in its publication to the world as the Book of Mormon, appears the literal fulfilment of other ancient prophecy through the work of the modern seer and revelator. Isaiah's fateful prediction over disobedient Israel ran in part as follows: "And thou shalt be

brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.”

From the ground came forth the Book of Mormon record;—it is the voice of the past speaking from the dust, a voice that tells of peoples brought low, some even to the state of actual extinction. This volume—the record or stick of Ephraim, is now published as openly as is the book or stick of Judah—the Holy Bible; and each is the other’s essential complement. Thus they are one, for neither alone is complete as even a pretended record of both Judah and Ephraim. (Read Ezekiel 37: 16-19.)

The Book of Mormon was given to the world through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, specially authorized and empowered for the work, a prophet fulfilling prophecy.

The prophecies of Malachi, reiterated and emphasized by Moroni when he first appeared to Joseph Smith, specifically predicted the return of Elijah, with power to inaugurate the vicarious service by the living in behalf of the dead. This found fulfilment on the third day of April, 1836, when Elijah visited in person Joseph Smith and his fellow-servant Oliver Cowdery, declaring that the time designated by Malachi had fully come. Then he conferred the power and authority for the work of salvation for the dead, that, as a link in a chain, binds earth to heaven. The labor thus begun in the present dispensation, precisely as foretold, through the ministration of the prophet, named centuries before the meridian of time, has been prosecuted with earnestness, with zeal, and with sacrifice, to which the majestic temples reared by modern Israel testify with an eloquence surpassed only by that in which is told the story of the sacred rites and saving ordinances administered within.

The few instances cited must suffice as illustrative of the many wherein this modern prophet, while following the path specifically prescribed for him, unconsciously effected the realization of predictions already hoary with age.

2. *Joseph Smith received the Holy Priesthood through ordination under the hands of those who held it aforesaid.* The fact that no one can impart to another what he does not himself possess requires no demonstration. In the bestowal of the Holy Priesthood,

in the conferring of authority to act in the name of the Lord, this truth finds literal application. In the testimony of his life, in his testament bearing the blood-red seal of martyrdom, Joseph Smith affirms without qualification that the several powers and functions pertaining to the priesthood were conferred upon him by those who held and used the keys of those separate callings in earlier periods. Thus, the angel Moroni, who delivered to Joseph Smith the record of old containing "the fulness of the everlasting gospel," and who in so doing fulfilled the prediction of John as described, was the very person who, while yet a mortal being, had completed and sealed that record, and then had buried it where it was found under his direction fourteen centuries later.

In May, 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained to the order of the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood; the officiating priest was John, surnamed the Baptist,—he whose voice was heard in the wilderness of Judea crying repentance and proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, he who baptized the Savior in Jordan, the priest after the order of Aaron to whose authority Jesus submitted. Who more fit than John to restore to earth the authority of the priestly office to which pertained the preaching of repentance and the power to administer in the essential ordinance of baptism?

The higher or Melchizedek order of priesthood was afterward conferred on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, each of whom was ordained to the holy apostleship, with authority to officiate in all the ordinances of the gospel. By whom could this higher authority be more properly restored to earth than by those who last officiated as presiding officers therein? And by these,—Peter, James, and John, who constituted the presidency of the apostles in the primitive church,—were Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery ordained apostles of the Lord Jesus.

In the same orderly manner, the special appointment pertaining to the gathering of Israel in the last days was conferred by Moses—the leader of unscattered Israel. Furthermore, as already cited, the commission and authority relating to the labor of the living for the salvation of the dead came through Elijah, who, not having passed the portals of death, yet quickened to a life continued, was particularly qualified to officiate in matters pertaining to both the living and the dead.

The last dispensation—that of the fulness of times,—was long ago foretold, as a period of restoration and restitution, a time of re-establishment, when all things before revealed shall be again made plain, and the sublime consummation of another part of the great plan of salvation be accomplished. Elias, the restorer, came to earth and transmitted to Joseph Smith the keys of authority in the work of restoration and re-establishment.

The claims made by and for the first prophet of this, the last dispensation—as to the source of his authority, the means and manner of his ordination—are consistent and logical.

In view of the great apostasy, following the Messianic dispensation and the apostolic period immediately succeeding, whereby the Church of Christ ceased to exist among men, and the Holy Priesthood was no longer represented by organized quorums of men duly ordained—the apostasy predicted by Christ and the apostles, and proved by rational interpretation of later history, it was impossible for any mortal to re-establish the Church without the restoration of the powers, gifts, and authority, of the priesthood.

This re-establishment, as foretold and as now realized, was no mere revival; no fanning a flame from a heap of smouldering cinders; no rejuvenation of a weak and decrepit church. It was to be and it proved to be the creation of a church new to modern times, though in reality older than time—the Church of Jesus Christ restored to earth. Men are the instruments, the agents, through and by whom the Omnipotent brings about the realization of purposes which may be but in small degree comprehended by human minds; indeed, the authorized and appointed agents may fail to fathom the divine thought to its depths; and may see but dimly the outlines of the great edifice they help to rear. Prophets have ever builded better than they knew.

3. *That Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God is conclusively proved by his life work and its results.*

A nomination or call to office, even when followed by valid election, does not assure active and efficient service. Actual qualification for any position of authority is manifested through effective administration under the authority vested in the official. That men through their organizations,—municipal, state, and

national, frequently nominate and elect from among themselves those who are unfit to exercise official powers, will not be seriously disputed. Authority may be delegated under the laws enacted by men; qualification cannot be so conferred. But when God calls and ordains a man to any office, qualification and power are given as required.

Joseph Smith was not a prophet by election nor an apostle by ordination alone; his works confirm and prove his actual possession of the authority he professed. In relation to the power of prediction as a feature of the prophet's calling, a test by which to distinguish the true prophet from the pretender was given of old, and is equally applicable today; it was this:—"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; thou shalt not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:22). The rule implies that the fulfilment of prediction is at least strong evidence that he who so prophesied was indeed a prophet.

A prophecy given to the world through Joseph Smith, though described as the words of the angel Moroni, referred to the Book of Mormon, which at that time was untranslated, and declared: "The knowledge that this record contains will go to every nation," etc. Already the book has been published in all the principal languages of earth, and the work is still progressing.

The persecutions of the Latter-day Saints, the mobbings and drivings that awaited them, their painful and perilous journey to the west, and their growth as a mighty people amongst the mountains, were all foretold by the prophet Joseph, many years before the exodus began. The literal fulfilment is a matter of current history, and a subject that claims the attention of philosopher, historian, and statesman alike.

In 1832, Joseph Smith gave to the Church this revelation:—"Verily thus saith the Lord, concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls. The days will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at that place; for, behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will

call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain," etc. (Doc. & Cov. section 87). This prediction was proclaimed by the elders of the Church more than a quarter of a century before the civil war broke out between the North and the South; and the revelation was published in *The Pearl of Great Price*, British edition of 1851, and was announced yet earlier, within the year named, in the *Millennial Star*, volume 49, page 396. The terrible events constituting a literal fulfilment of this dire prophecy, beginning twenty-eight years after its announcement, are known even by the school-boy conning his lesson in United States history.

These instances of prediction, made by this prophet of the latter-days, and verified by literal fulfilment, are cited as examples; others equally convincing are of record in the published works of the Church, and to these the investigator is referred.

Let it not be forgotten, however, that the gift and function of prophecy comprises more than the power of prediction. Joseph Smith's position as a prophet of God is proved by his spiritual enlightenment and surpassing wisdom in matters of present importance, and in his interpretation of events of history to him as to us ancient. The translation of the Book of Mormon, and of other ancient records, is proof of his divine endowment. In the exercise of other gifts and graces of the Spirit, in healing the sick, in his power to read the minds of men and lay bare the secrets of their hearts, in his inspired counsel, in his administrative ability as shown in the plan of Church organization, as a preacher of righteousness and a teacher of men, he was verily a prophet from whose lips issued truth and wisdom as living water from the perennial spring.

4. *The doctrines taught by Joseph Smith are true and scriptural.* The revelations proclaimed by him are in harmony with earlier scriptures, yet adapted to the new dispensation inaugurated through his agency. Hostile critics and avowed enemies of the Church have failed in their eager search for inconsistency or contradiction between modern revelation and ancient scripture. The doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the doctrines of the gospel; they change not, for their foundation is truth.

If a shadow of doubt yet lingers as to the divine authenticity

of Joseph Smith's calling and mission among men, let the results of his life's work dispel the shade. What sect or church, other than the Church of Jesus Christ, re-established and founded through the authorized administration of Joseph Smith, even professes that its organization and operation are after the manner of Christ's Church of former days? Where is another church to be found ready to solemnly proclaim and defend its title to bear the name of Jesus Christ, and to demonstrate its possession of the Holy Priesthood.

Proof of actual and unbroken succession in the apostolic office from the chosen twelve ordained by The Christ in person, has been attempted in vain. Moreover, the great falling away—already begun in apostolic days—the general apostasy with consequent loss of priesthood and authority, was clearly foretold, and is plainly admitted by unbiased theologians of modern times. The assumption that any man, or combination of men, or the human family in its entirety, can originate or create among themselves the authority of heaven—the right to administer in the sacred ordinances of the gospel of Christ, and the power to speak in the name of the Lord, is so illogical and absurd as to be its own refutation. If man cannot obtain this power of himself, he cannot delegate or transmit the same to his fellows by ordination or other ceremony. Where shall we search for a church other than that founded through the authority conferred on Joseph Smith, that asserts the weakest pretense of claim to the restored priesthood?

Had the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints originated in deceit, were its professed authority and power man-created and self-assumed, were its title but a name, and that name of man's choosing, were this Church but one among the many small sects and parties that have grown as a fungus in the night, only to wither and rot under the next day's sun; in short, if it be not what it claims to be, how are to be explained its steady growth, its orderly development, its stability and vitality, its marvelous recuperative capacity, its varied manifestations of vigor and life of which neither men nor demons can rob it. It boldly declares its own immortality, and affirms that human power shall never avail to destroy it. So declared the prophet at its inception; so each successor to the seat of prophet-presidency has reiterated;

so does its history warrant; so shall the years and centuries confirm.

There is but this answer to the greatest question of the age:
JOSEPH SMITH WAS TRULY THE PROPHET OF THE MOST HIGH GOD.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

A CENTURY SONG—DECEMBER 23, 1905.

One hundred years—how quickly gone!
 How full last century's lines were hung
 With signs of this Millennial dawn,
 Which ancient prophets saw and sung.
 Great books of truth, for ages sealed,
 The nineteenth century revealed;
 The birth, the life, and death it holds,
 Of him whose work that truth unfolds.

A humble youth, no thought had he,
 Of worldly fame, he only sought,
 To be from error's creeds kept free,
 And learn the truth, as Jesus taught.
 He asked in faith, with heart so pure,
 That he God's presence could endure—
 Father and Son—O vision fair!
 Came, answering his fervent prayer.

A century since that prophet's birth,
 And still the doubting nations scorn;
 Will they e'er sense salvation's worth,
 Or why the Son of God was born?
 Peace, peace, O Zion! sing thy songs;
 All glory to thy God belongs;
 Thy children testify with joy,
 Of Joseph Smith, the prophet boy.

L. L. GREENE RICHARDS.

Salt Lake City, Utah.