

D&C#03 "I Had Seen a Vision"

Outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. After the Apostasy, God Prepared The Way For The Restoration
- III. God Prepared Joseph Smith As The Prophet of The Restoration
- IV. First Vision Ushered In The Restoration
- V. Many Truths Revealed In The First Vision
- VI. Important Testimony Of The First Vision
- VII. Conclusions

I. Introduction

The purpose of this lesson is to increase our understanding of the events of the First Vision and Joseph Smith's experience in the grove. This event marks the beginning of the restoration of the Church. We begin our exploration by addressing why a "restoration" was necessary.

Gordon B. Hinckley states,

"If the First Vision was true, if it actually happened, then the Book of Mormon is true. Then we have the priesthood. Then we have the Church organization and all the other keys and blessings of authority which we say we have. If the First Vision did not occur, then we are involved in a great sham... [The First Vision is] the hinge pin on which this whole cause turns... It is just that simple." (*Teaching of Gordon B. Hinckley*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997, 227).

Before we can understand why a restoration or "a return to a former condition" was necessary, we need to understand what had been lost and why it needed to be restored. In the meridian of time, Jesus Christ established His Church upon the earth. He established His Church or organization where His disciples could go and be taught the true principles of his gospel.

Paul, writing to the members in Ephesus, spoke of the Church Christ had established and the importance of its' foundation.

Ephesians 2:19-21

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord:

The Church Jesus Christ established upon the earth was based upon a foundation of apostles and prophets. It was here the early saints or members would gather together to be instructed regarding the principles that would assist them in their eternal growth and spiritual development. Paul endeavored to instruct the converts in Ephesus further regarding the essential purposes of the Church.

Ephesians 4:11-14

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists [Patriarchs]; and some, pastors [Bishops] and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

In these verses, Paul addressed the purposes for which Christ had established His Church upon the earth. It was based upon a sure organization staffed by apostles and prophets to receive direction and revelation regarding the operation of His Church. It was established in order to help the saints or members to progress in improving their lives, to help strengthen them and to unite their efforts in caring for those amongst them. Here they would be taught the teachings of Jesus Christ as they continued to strive to become like Him. Another purpose for the establishment of the Church was to strengthen the members so they would

not be falsely influenced by those who would seek to deceive them.

As Paul neared the end of his life, he foresaw the seeds of apostasy that were already entering the Church would increase. There would be those who would seek to destroy the Church both from without and within the membership.

Acts 20:29-30

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things [false doctrine], to draw away disciples after them.

2 Thessalonians 2:2-3

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

Some members, at the time, thought that the Second Coming of Christ would be imminent. Paul instructed the Thessalonians that before Christ would return, there would be "a falling away" of the true Church upon the earth.

Some of Paul's concluding words to Timothy were to warn him of the conditions that were to come.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Peter also addressed the coming departure from the truth.

2 Peter 2:1-3

1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

As noted by Paul and Peter, the doctrines Christ taught would be substituted by the philosophies of man accompanied by the denial of the truths the apostles had taught. With the death of the apostles came the loss of the authority to act in God's name and with the passing of time, the loss of their authority had reached its apex.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler state,

"Though the gospel spread quickly throughout the Roman Empire after the resurrection of Christ, an insidious mutiny was fomenting among some. Embarrassed by the simple doctrine taught by the Apostles, they sought for something more acceptable in a sophisticated Greek world. This transformation of the faith was obviously complete by the writing of Nicene Creed in A.D. 325.

"Thus a midst of darkness filled the earth in what we have come to call a universal apostasy. It engulfed the priesthood, its keys, all the ordinances of salvation and the ordinances of blessing, and the offices of the priesthood and its officers. Plain and precious things were taken from holy writ, and other things were added in their place. The purity of every doctrine and principle of salvation was lost. In their stead came an oppressive tyranny over the hearts and minds of men. Where once there had been love unfeigned, now there was a blood-stained sword. Where there had been robes of righteousness, now there were silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and precious clothing. Worship was replaced by ritual; the

prayer of faith by gold and silver. So darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people (Isaiah 60:2)." (*Revelations of the Restoration*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2000, 13-14).

Doctrine and Covenants 1:15-16

**15 For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;
16 They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.**

The loss of the authority to act in God's name and to receive divine revelation to direct the Church with the death of the apostles, the Church of Jesus Christ was no longer upon the earth. No longer could the ordinances essential to salvation be administered. As a result of the apostasy, or loss of the Church of Jesus Christ upon the earth, God's revealed word was lost. The apostasy would continue for many centuries until God prepared the way for a restoration, or return of the Church of Jesus Christ, once more upon the earth. Just as the Church which Jesus Christ had organized, it would be built upon a foundation of Apostles and Prophets. God's voice would again be revealed and the authority for man to act in God's name would once more be upon the earth.

As a result of the apostasy, many churches arose. Each claimed to be the true Church of Jesus Christ upon the earth. There were many sincere individuals who sought for the truth. A young boy by the name of Joseph Smith was one of these individuals. He wrote of his experience regarding his own attempt to learn which church was true among the various churches in his area.

Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith-History 1:8-9, 21

8 ...In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so

unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. 9 ...The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodist, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.

21 Some few days after I had...[a] vision, I happened to be in the company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement; and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in those days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.

*What were some of the consequences of the Great Apostasy?

There was no priesthood authority on the earth.
There were no apostles or prophets on the earth.
Essential knowledge about the nature of God was lost.
The doctrines of the gospel were corrupted by man.
Sacred ordinances, such as baptism, were changed.
The original Church became divided into discordant groups.

II. After the Apostasy, God Prepared The Way For The Restoration

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"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*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition], 717.

* Before Joseph Smith was born, what events helped prepare the way for the restoration of the gospel?

These included:

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

James E. Talmage states,

"The fifteenth century witnessed the movement known as the Renaissance or Revival of Learning; it was 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*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1916, [Twenty-ninth edition, [1959], 749).

2. 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.

M. Russell Ballard states,

"[Martin Luther and other reformers] were inspired to create a religious climate in which God could restore lost truths and priesthood authority." ("Restored Truth," in *Ensign*, November 1994, 66).

3. The Americas were discovered. The United States was colonized by religious people and eventually became an independent nation (see B/M, 1 Nephi 13:12-19).
4. The Constitution of the United States was established, guaranteeing religious freedom in that nation.

Doctrine and Covenants 101:77-80

77 According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles;
78 That every man may act in doctrine and principles pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

79 Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

80 For this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood.

M. Russell Ballard continues,

"God inspired the earlier explorers and colonizers of American and the framers of the Constitution of the United States to develop a land and governing principles to which the gospel could be restored." ("Restored Truth," in *Ensign*, November 1994, 66).

III. God Prepared Joseph Smith As The Prophet of The Restoration

Having prepared the conditions in which the restoration may occur, God also prepared a man to be the prophet of the Restoration. The man was Joseph Smith, who was born on 23 December 1805, in Sharon, Vermont.

Joseph's family helped prepare him:

Gordon B. Hinckley states,

"[Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mark Smith] were a typical New England family of English and Scottish extraction who prized the independence their fathers on both lines had fought for in the American Revolution of 1776. And they were religious folk who read the Bible and had family prayer, although like many of their kind they belonged to no church." (*Truth Restored*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 1).

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

"[His paternal grandfather, Asael Smith, stated years before Joseph Smith 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" (*Essential in Church History*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1950, [Eighteenth Edition, 1963], 29).

Both of Joseph's parents had profound religious experiences. Joseph Sr. had several dreams that gave him

assurance that he would enjoy the blessings of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

The following vision was given to Joseph Smith, Sr. following the family's move in 1811, from Royalton, Vermont, to the town of Lebanon, New Hampshire. It was recorded by his wife, Lucy Mack Smith:

"I thought," said he, "I was traveling in an open, desolate field, which appeared to be very barren. As I was thus traveling, the thought suddenly came into my mind that I had better stop and reflect upon what I was doing, before I went any further. So I asked myself, 'What motive can I have traveling here, and what place can this be?' My guide, who was by my side, as before, said, 'This is the desolate world; but travel on.' The road was so broad and barren that I wondered why I should travel in it; for, said I to myself, 'Broad is the road, and wide is the gate that leads to death, and many there by that walk therein; but narrow is the way, and strait is the gate that leads to everlasting life, and few there be that go in thereat.' Traveling a short distance further, I came to a narrow path. This path I entered, and when I had traveled a little way in it, I beheld a beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west. Of this stream, I could see neither the source yet the mouth; but as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope, running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach, and beyond me was a low, but very pleasant valley, in which stood a tree such as I had never seen before. It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as white as snow, or if possible whiter. I gazed upon the same with considerable interest, and as I was doing so, the burs or shells commenced opening and shedding their particles, or the fruit which they contained, which was of dazzling whiteness. I drew near and began to eat of it, and I found it delicious beyond description. As I was eating, I said in my heart, 'I cannot eat this alone. I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me.' Accordingly, I went and brought my family, which consisted of a wife and seven children, and we all commenced eating and praising God for this blessing. We were exceedingly happy, insomuch that our joy could not easily be expressed. While thus engaged, I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley which we

were in, and it appeared to reach to the very heavens. It was full of doors and windows, and they were all filled with people, who were very finely dressed. When these people observed us in the low valley, under the tree, they pointed a finger of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt. But their contumely we utterly disregarded. I presently turned to my guide and inquired of him the meaning of the fruit that was so delicious. He told me it was the pure love of God, shed abroad in the heart of all those who love him, and keep his commandments. He then commanded me to go and bring the rest of the children. I told him that we were all there. 'No,' he replied, 'look yonder, you have two more, and you must bring them also.' Upon raising my eyes, I saw two small children, standing some distance off. I immediately went to them, and brought them to the tree; upon which they commenced eating with the rest and we all rejoiced together. The more we ate, the more we seemed to desire, until we even got down upon our knees and scooped it up, eating it by double handfuls. After feasting in this manner a short time, I asked my guide what was the meaning of the spacious building which I saw. He replied, 'It was Babylon, it is Babylon, and it must fall. The people in the doors and windows are the inhabitants thereof, who scorn and despise the Saints of God because of their humility.' I soon awoke, clapping my hands together for joy." (Lucy Mack Smith. *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother Lucy Mack Smith*. Edited by Preston Nibley. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958, 48-50).

This vision received by Joseph Smith, Sr. is similar to the vision the Prophet Lehi experienced as recorded in 1 Nephi 8 in the Book of Mormon. It is noteworthy to remember that the Book of Mormon was not published until 1830; Joseph Smith, Sr. had his experience in 1811. While there are several similarities with Lehi's vision and Father Smith's, the main focus for Father Smith was upon the delicious fruit he finds. It would appear that one of the purposes of Father Smith's vision was to prepare him for the coming restoration of the gospel upon the earth.

Previously, Lucy, the wife of Father Smith, as a young mother had been critically ill. She then "made a solemn covenant with God that if He would let [her] live [she] would endeavor to serve Him accordingly to the best of [her] abilities. Shortly after this [she] heard a voice say to [her] "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be

opened unto you. Let your heart be comforted; ye believe in God, believe also in me." (*History of Joseph Smith by His Mother Lucy Mack Smith*. Edited by Preston Nibley. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958, 34).

Both Father Smith and his wife were acquainted with the manifestations of the Spirit in their humble, but faithful lives.

The Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher's manual states,

"Joseph Sr. and Lucy search[ed] 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.

*Why was Joseph Smith's family heritage important in helping prepare him for his mission as the prophet of the Restoration?

Adversity helped prepare him:

Our Heritage states,

"Joseph Jr., was seven years old when he survived a typhoid epidemic that caused more than 3,000 deaths in the New England area. As he was recovering, a severe infection developed in the marrow of the bone in his left leg, and the almost unbearable pain lasted for more than three weeks.

"A local surgeon decided the leg would have to be amputated. [At the insistence of his mother], another doctor, ...Nathan Smith, a physician from nearby Dartmouth College said he would try to save the leg using a relatively new and extremely painful procedure to remove part of the bone. [Joseph refused both brandy and cords to bind him, but asked that his father hold him in his arms during the operation. [While extremely painful and bloody], the Doctor...was able to save Joseph's leg. Joseph suffered for long time before his leg healed and he could walk without pain... [The Smith family then] moved to Norwich, Vermont, where [after suffering] three successive years of

crop failure,...they moved to Palmyra, New York." (*Our Heritage*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996, 1-2).

*What can we learn about the character of young Joseph Smith from this experience?

*In what ways could the trials and afflictions of Joseph's youth 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?

The religious atmosphere in western New York helped prepare him:

The Smith family determined to move to Palmyra, New York, when they learned of undeveloped land available at a reduced rate that offered better farming conditions.

Gordon B. Hinckley states,

"[As a result of many [individuals] not claiming membership in any church], this condition among the people of the frontier areas of America became a matter of serious concern to religious leaders, and a crusade was begun to convert the unconverted... In 1820 it [had] reached western New York. The ministers of the various denominations united in their efforts, and many conversions were made among the scattered settlers.

"Under the impetus of this revival, four of the Smith family--the mother and three children--joined the Presbyterian Church. Joseph Jr., then fourteen years of age, also felt a strong desire to affiliate himself with a church. But he wanted to be right in so important a step,...The more he listened to [their] conflicting arguments, the more confused he became. He reasoned that all of them could not be right, and the question as to which was recognized by God as His church greatly troubled him." (*Truth Restored*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 1-2).

*Why was Joseph Smith confused about which church he should join? (see PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:5-10.)

*How was Joseph's situation like that of people today who are searching to know the truth?

Joseph Smith states,

PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:11-13

11 While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

12 Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.

13 At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to "ask of God," concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.

*How did scripture study help Joseph resolve his confusion?

*What can we learn from Joseph's example?

Joseph not only read the scriptures but also searched and pondered them and applied them in his life.

*How have the scriptures helped you in times of need or confusion?

Bruce R. McConkie, referring to James 1:5, states,

"Thus, this single verse of scripture has had a great 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.

"And it might well be added that every investigator of revealed truth stand, at some time in the course of his search, in the place where Joseph Smith stood. He must turn to the Almighty and gain wisdom from God by revelation if he is to gain a place on that strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life." (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 3. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973, [9th Printing, 1976], 246-247).

IV. First Vision Ushered in The Restoration

Joseph Smith determined that he would turn to God in order to gain an answer to the question which, despite his youthful age, had given him great concern. He would ask God.

Joseph states,

PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:14

14 So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

*How was Joseph's prayer on this morning different from other prayers he had offered?

*Why is private vocal prayer often helpful when we are offering up the desires of our hearts to God?

Joseph continued,

PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:15-16

15 After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me,

and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

16 But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction--not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being--just at this moment of great alarm,...

I believe that Joseph's experience as noted in these two verses is one of the most important parts of his narrative. Had this part been omitted, we would have been left to wonder where was Satan at this most important moment of his existence? If he could contrive of some way to get Joseph to leave the grove and thereby delay his effort to offer a vocal prayer, maybe he could even forestall Joseph's intrusion and the weakening of his power on the earth. If Joseph succeeded, Satan's power upon the earth would then be greatly diminished. The light of truth always drives away the darkness.

Joseph states,

PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:16-17

16 ...just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

There are ten known accounts of the First Vision that were written or published during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. (see Matthew B. Christensen. *The First Vision: A Harmonization of 10 Accounts From The Sacred Grove*. Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort Inc., 2014.)

One account, recorded by Orson Pratt in 1840, states,

"[H]e [Joseph] at length, saw a very bright and glorious light in the heavens above; which, at first, seemed to be a considerable distance. He continued praying, while the light appeared to be gradually descending towards him; and as it drew nearer, it increased in brightness and magnitude, so that, by the time that it reached the tops of the trees, the whole wilderness, for some distance around was illuminated in a most glorious and brilliant manner. He expected to have seen the leaves and boughs of the trees consumed, as soon as the light came in contact with them; but perceiving that it did not produce that effect, he was encouraged with the hope of being able to endure its presence. It continued descending slowly, until it rested upon the earth, and he was enveloped in the midst of it...he was enwrapped in a heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in their features or likeness." ("Orson Pratt's Account of the First Vision," in Milton V. Backman, Jr. *Joseph Smith's First Vision*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971, [Second Edition, 1980], 172).

Joseph Smith continued,

PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:17

17 It [pillar of light] no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. 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!

One can only imagine what joy and gratitude must have filled the heart of Joseph as God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ appeared to him, calling him by name, in that sacred grove.

The words of the hymn, *Joseph Smith's First Prayer state*,

"Joseph, this is my Beloved; Hear him!' Oh, how sweet the word! Joseph's humble prayer was answered. And he listened to the Lord. Oh, what rapture filled his bosom, For he saw the living God; Oh, what rapture filled his bosom, For he saw the living God." (George Manwaring. *Joseph Smith's*

First Prayer, #26. Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985).

Joseph continued,

PGP, Joseph Smith-History 1:18-20

18 My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects were right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)--and which I should join.

19 I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."

20 He again forbade me to join with any of them; and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home..

Joseph had gone to the grove to offer in sacred prayer his petition that he might know which of all the churches to join. He was told to join none of them.

V. Many Truths Revealed In The First Vision

Gordon B. Hinckley states,

"Joseph went in as a boy. I have wondered at times why the Lord would have him go in as a fourteen-year-old boy...He went in--the Lord permitted it, responded to his inquiry--because he came in perfect trust. There was no doubt in his mind...he needed wisdom, and he asked for it with full confidence that something would happen as a result of his prayer.

"...Joseph Smith learned in those few minutes, however long or brief, more about the nature of God than all the learned divines of all time had ever learned. What a remarkable thing it was." (**First Vision**. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997, 227).

*What are some of the truths we can learn from the First Vision?

The Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual state,

- "a. God the Father and Jesus Christ live.
- "b. The Father and the Son are real, separate beings with glorified bodies of flesh and bones.
- "c. We are created in the image of God.
- "d. Satan and his power are real, but God's power is infinitely greater.
- "e. God hears and answers prayers and cares for us.
- "f. None of the churches on earth had the fullness of Christ's gospel.
- "g. Revelation has not ceased." (*The Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 14).

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

"We have a wonderful illustration of how revelation comes through Christ presented to us in the Vision given to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Father and Son appeared unto him, but it was not the Father who answered his question! The Father introduced Joseph to his Son, and it was the Son who answered the important question and gave the instruction.

"[H]is [Joseph Smith account]...was in perfect harmony with divine truth...with the divine law that Christ is the Mediator between God and man." (*Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954, [24th Printing, 1980], 28).

VI. Important Testimony Of The First Vision

David O. McKay states,

"The appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith is the foundation of this Church. Therein lies the secret of its strength and vitality. This is true, and I bear witness to it. That one revelation 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*. Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1953, [Thirteenth Printing, 1966], 85).

Ezra Taft Benson, then a member of the Twelve Apostles states regarding the importance of the First Vision,

"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." ("Life Eternal," in *Ensign*, June 1971, 34).

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

*How has a testimony of the First Vision blessed your life?

The most important of all the testimonies of the First Vision is the one that you have. It is surely one of your greatest treasures. After you had learned of the testimony given by Joseph Smith, you also wanted to know if it was true. In humility you got on your knees, and you too asked God if it was true. Through a witness of the Spirit, you received your answer. It is true. You now know it for yourself.

VII. Conclusions

We began by asking why a restoration was necessary? We learned that before a restoration could occur, something had to be lost. The Church Jesus Christ had established upon the earth during His earthly ministry had, with the death of the apostles and the loss of God's authority to act in His name was lost. We also learned that churches based upon the tenants of the philosophies of man had

replaced the previously revealed truths of God. This resulted in an apostasy which lasted many centuries.

Over time, God began to prepare the way for a restoration of His truth, once again upon the earth. This included: the Renaissance, the work of the reformers, the discovery of America, including the establishment of the Constitution that guaranteed religious freedom.

God also prepared Joseph Smith as His prophet of the restoration. He was blessed with parents who were sensitive to the manifestations of the spirit and taught him the importance of reading the Bible. It will be his reading of the Bible that prompted Joseph Smith to ask the Lord in prayer for divine direction. During the time of his leg surgery, Joseph turned to his father to hold him so that he could endure the pain. As he faced this adversity in his life, he turned to his father for strength and comfort, just as he will also turn to his Father in Heaven for guidance and direction throughout his life.

Joseph lived in an area where, at the time, there was a great focus upon religious truth. Each of the various churches were seeking for converts, which prompted Joseph to want to know which Church was true.

How special it is to read Joseph's own words regarding the visitation of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to him. One can almost feel the spirit of darkness that was then replaced by the spirit of light and joy that came to Joseph on this special occasion. He learned that humble prayers will be answered and truths given.

I close this lesson with my witness that I do know of the truth of Joseph's First Vision. I know that he did truly see God the Father and the Son, as they appeared to him on that Spring day, in 1820.

We began with Gordon B. Hinckley's statement regarding the importance of the First Vision. We conclude with his testimony of its truthfulness.

Gordon B. Hinckley states,

"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*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984, 10).

Our next lesson [D&C #04] will address the coming forth of the Book of Mormon including its translation, the witnesses, and the blessing it can be in both our lives and the lives of others.