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JOSEPH SMITH'S VIEW OF HIS OWN CALLING

by

Tucker John Boyle

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religious Education

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Tucker John Boyle in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

JOSEPH SMITH'S VIEW OF HIS OWN CALLING

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Department of Religious Education

Master of Arts

The Prophet Joseph Smith stood in a unique position as the leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He held positions of translator, prophet, seer and revelator. He was taught the responsibilities of his calling as he translated ancient scripture – the Book of Mormon and the Bible. He was further instructed concerning his calling as he received revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. This study examines scriptural passages that surely influenced the Prophet's understanding of his own calling. It then illustrates Joseph Smith's view of his calling as evidenced by statements in his writings and discourses. It examines what he understood to be his duties in his position as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and head of the dispensation of the fullness of times.

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Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to the Prophet Joseph Smith for shouldering the weight of his immense calling despite all opposition.

Methodology

The methods of research for this thesis varied from chapter to chapter. The first chapter is an examination of references to the Prophet Joseph Smith's calling in ancient scripture. It was the result of a search of the Book of Mormon and the Bible to find passages which referred to the Prophet Joseph Smith and which may have provided him insight into his calling.

Chapters two and three examine the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. It is the result of a careful search of the Doctrine and Covenants, looking specifically for passages which described Joseph Smith's calling. I also studied the history behind several of the revelations as found in the *History of the Church* and commentaries on the Doctrine and Covenants in order to discover events from which the Prophet learned about his calling.

Chapters four and five constitute an effort to discover what Joseph Smith understood about his calling according to his own statements. Chapter four is a study of Joseph Smith's writings. It is the result of an examination of over 600 pages of the Prophet's writings. The writings are found in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, which was compiled by Dean C. Jessee, and *History of the Church*. These include letters written or dictated by Joseph Smith, as well as the Prophet's journals and personal histories. I studied these writings looking for statements that revealed Joseph Smith's feelings, thoughts or beliefs concerning the responsibilities and duties of his calling.

Chapter five is a study of Joseph Smith's calling according to statements he made in his discourses. It is the result of an examination of Joseph Smith's discourses as found in journals of those present. I searched *Words of Joseph Smith* by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, which contains journal accounts of 177 different discourses of Joseph Smith from 36 individuals.

Though *History of the Church* was cited in chapter five, I compared the quotes to the

journal accounts in *Words of Joseph Smith* to certify their accuracy. I felt the need to verify quotations found in *History of the Church* because although it was compiled with great care, it often does not cite sources, so the reader cannot be completely sure whether or not it is citing an actual statement from the Prophet.¹ At times, the historians who compiled it tried to “fill in the blanks” that existed in journal accounts. A classic example, given by Dean C. Jessee,² comes from this oft-quoted passage:

I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty, who will give me dominion over all and every one of them, when their refuge of lies shall fail, and their hiding place shall be destroyed, while these smooth-polished stones with which I come in contact become marred.³

The original journal quote from which this larger quote is apparently taken says simply “rough stone rolling down hill.”⁴ The historians evidently took some liberty to expand on the limited

1 “Joseph Smith’s personality is obscured in writings attributed to him [due to the] editorial practice, common even in our own time, of inserting eyewitness writings that have been changed from indirect to direct discourse.” For example, Heber C. Kimball reported on one occasion that as the Prophet spoke visitors “melted into compassion.” However, in the *History of the Church* this is changed to first person so it appears that the Prophet wrote it: “When I had closed a lengthy speech, the spirit of which melted them into compassion . . .” Dean C. Jessee points out that in this first person voice, “there emerges a sense of pride, an almost egotistic image, that may not accurately represent Joseph Smith at all.” (“Introduction,” in Joseph Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. Dean C. Jessee, comp., ed., [2002], 4.)

2 Dean C. Jessee, “Introduction,” in Smith, *Personal Writings*, 4-5.

3 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 7 vols., [1978], 5:401.

4 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 21 May 1843,” Joseph Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, Andrew F. Ehat

written records they possessed.⁵ For this reason, I did not use the expanded quotation in this study, though it was pertinent to my subject.

This is a rare case, and I do not mean to suggest that *History of the Church* should not be trusted, as most of the Prophet's discourses match the reports found in the journals of those present.⁶ Those who worked on the project took great pains to create an accurate record. George A. Smith, one of the historians involved in producing the *History of the Church* explained his efforts to stay true to the Prophet's words: "The greatest care [was] taken to convey the ideas in the Prophet's style as near as possible; and in no case [was] the sentiment . . . varied that I know of; as I heard most of his discourses myself, was on the most intimate terms with him, have retained a most vivid recollection of his teachings, and was well acquainted with his principles and motives."⁷ The *History of the Church* is invaluable in portraying the early events in the Restoration of the Gospel, and those that worked on it deserve our utmost gratitude for preserving priceless historical items. However, in an effort to ensure that all quotations I used in the study of Joseph Smith's discourses were accurate and were not additions from later recollections, I used only quotes that were verified by contemporary journal accounts found in *Words of Joseph Smith*. In my study of Joseph Smith's statements concerning his calling in his discourses, I found only minor discrepancies as I compared the *History of the Church* to the journal accounts.

and Lyndon B. Cook, comp. and ed. [1996], 205. Computer Edition as found in *LDS Collector's Library Software* [2005].

5 In 1854, George A. Smith began work on the *History of the Church* starting from April 1, 1840 and concluding at the Prophet's death on June 27, 1844. Thus any additions to the history, which were not included in journals, were made at least ten years after the fact. The *History of the Church* up to Joseph Smith's death was completed in August of 1856, twelve years after his martyrdom (see Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies*, Summer 1971, 470-472).

6 Dean C. Jessee, "Introduction," Joseph Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. Dean C. Jessee, comp., ed., [2002], 4.

7 Letter from George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856. As cited in Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, xvi.

In the study of the Prophet's writings I quoted only sources that he either wrote or dictated. In the study of his discourses I used only records that were produced at the time of his discourses, excluding later recollections of those present. This was an effort to ensure accuracy in the quotations.

My effort to ensure accuracy in the quotations limits the scope of this study. It does not include the opinions of Joseph Smith's contemporaries about his calling. Nor does it include a study of private utterances the Prophet made concerning his calling. There is opportunity for further study and insight in these areas.

As I quoted journals and other sources in this paper, I made spelling, punctuation and capitalization corrections in order to improve the readability of the quotes, while being careful not to alter their meaning. Throughout this study I sought to preserve and accurately portray Joseph Smith's own expressions concerning his divine calling.

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Joseph Smith's Calling According to Ancient Scripture

Ancient scripture—the Bible and the Book of Mormon—was a significant source for the Prophet Joseph Smith to learn about his calling as a latter-day prophet. As a lifetime student of the scriptures, Joseph Smith quoted them often in his discourses.¹ Shortly before his martyrdom he declared simply, “I know the scriptures, I understand them.”² There are many scriptural passages that have been interpreted to refer to the Prophet himself, and when understood, provide insight into his calling. This chapter will examine those scriptural passages that may have contributed to Joseph Smith learning his role as a latter-day prophet.

Joseph Smith stands in a unique position in relation to the Latter-day Saint scriptures. He was involved in translating or producing every LDS standard work. He began with the Book of Mormon. He also worked on a re-translation, or revision of the much of Bible.³ He received revelation included in 134 of the 138 sections in current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph Smith is also responsible for the writings in the Pearl of Great Price. He received the revelation that now comprises the Book of Moses while he was revising Genesis, and he translated the Book of Abraham from ancient papyri. He received inspiration to make significant changes in what is now Joseph Smith-Matthew. He also recorded his own history which is contained in the Pearl of Great Price (Joseph Smith-History). He wrote the Articles of Faith,

1 In a study of Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, (compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith), Richard C. Galbraith discovered more than eleven thousand references, both direct and contextual to scriptural passages in Joseph Smith's discourses and quotations (see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, scriptural annotations by Richard C. Galbraith, [1993], ix.).

2 “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, Aug. 15, 1844, 616.

3 The Latter-day Saints use the King James Version of the Bible, but many changes found in Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible, known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) are included in the footnotes and appendix of the LDS edition of the Bible. Joseph Smith did not translate the Apocrypha which is sometimes included in the books of the Bible (see Doctrine and Covenants 91). Kent Jackson described the extent of Joseph Smith's changes: “During the course of this work, changes were made in about thirteen hundred Old Testament verses and in about twenty-one hundred verses in the New Testament. Many of the changes are simple rewordings of the existing King James Translation text. But other changes involve the addition of new material-in some cases substantial amounts-or even the deletion of existing words.” (Kent P. Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, [1996], 196-7.)

which constitute the last part of the Pearl of Great Price.⁴ Joseph Smith's contributions to the LDS canon of scripture are profound.

While he was translating the Book of Mormon and revising the Bible, he undoubtedly learned about elements of his own calling. Typically, conclusions of what a person understands can only be drawn by evaluating what he or she says, or writes. However, it is reasonable to claim that Joseph Smith had some degree of understanding of the scriptures he translated, as we learn from the experience of Oliver Cowdery.

When Oliver Cowdery desired to translate, the Lord explained to him how an understanding of the passages would come to him: “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart” (D&C 8:2). The Lord describes a process that requires the translator to receive the message into his mind and heart. This is more than merely rendering a word or phrase into another language. The Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery to “study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me” (D&C 9:8-9). This process demanded intense concentration on the part of the translator which is much more than simply reading written words and rendering a translation of them into a foreign language.

Oliver no doubt expected the translation process would be considerably easier than he found it to be. The Lord explained that it required more than passive involvement: “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought

4 Joseph Smith included what are now known as the Articles of Faith as part of a letter to Mr. John Wentworth, editor of the Chicago Democrat (see Smith, *History of the Church*, 7 vols., [1978], 4:535-6).

save it was to ask me” (D&C 9:7). The process of translation was a process of receiving revelation. In fact, the word “translation,” as it is used today, is probably inadequate. The translator did not have to have knowledge of languages, he had to come to an understanding of the concepts he was translating through revelation.

As Joseph Smith worked on translating and revising scripture, he gained an understanding of the text and context with which he was working. Surely Joseph Smith understood the scriptures he was translating, especially those being translated or received for the first time. Such would be the case with the Book of Mormon and the passages he added or clarified from the Bible. He would have to come to an understanding of their meaning in order to articulate their message correctly. Thus, as Joseph Smith translated passages about himself in ancient scripture, he most certainly came to understand his own calling.

References to Joseph Smith's Calling in the Book of Mormon

The translation of the Book of Mormon was an early opportunity for the Lord to school his young prophet.⁵ There are many passages in the Book of Mormon which refer specifically to him and his responsibilities in the latter-days. As Joseph Smith translated these passages, he no doubt learned what the Lord expected and required of him as the head of the final dispensation.⁶

The first chapter in the Book of Mormon that directly addresses Joseph Smith’s calling is 2 Nephi 3. It contains a number of prophecies of the biblical Joseph of Egypt that refer to Joseph Smith. This implies that the calling of Joseph Smith was significant enough for God to reveal it to Joseph of Egypt thousands of years before the Prophet was born. Joseph Smith is introduced as a seer: “For [Joseph of Egypt] truly testified, saying: A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins” (2 Ne. 3:6). In the available prophecies of

⁵ Joseph Smith finished the translation of the Book of Mormon in June of 1829.

⁶ For more on dispensations, see Bible Dictionary, “Dispensations,” 657 (in LDS edition of the Bible). See also chapter two of this work.

Joseph of Egypt, Joseph Smith is always referred to as a seer.⁷

A definition of the word seer is given in the Book of Mormon by Ammon the Zarahemlite. He declared that when a man is commanded to look into the interpreters (Urim and Thummim), “the same is called seer” (Mosiah 8:13). Ammon also added that a seer is not just a translator of ancient texts, but “a seer is a revelator and a prophet also” (Mosiah 8:16). Joseph Smith was not only called a seer, but a choice seer. Joseph of Egypt prophesied of a great work that Joseph Smith would do: “that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together” (2 Ne. 3:12). According to Joseph of Egypt, one of the responsibilities Joseph Smith would have was to translate a book that would become one with the Bible, a book that would bring about the following results:

1. The confounding of false doctrines
2. Laying down of contentions
3. Establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins
4. Bringing the fruit of the loins of Joseph to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days
5. Bringing the fruit of the loins of Joseph to the knowledge of the Lord’s covenants.

(v.12)

This verse declares that through his translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith would rectify many effects of the confusion and apostasy that would take place after the first coming of the Savior. President Ezra Taft Benson, then the President of the Quorum of the Twelve

7 This includes not only the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt quoted in the Book of Mormon, but also those found in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50. The use of the term “seer” instead of “prophet” is consistent with 1 Samuel 9:9 which explains, “Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.”

Apostles, explained the role of the Book of Mormon: “The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace.”⁸ Joseph Smith’s work on the translation of the Book of Mormon was destined to unify the followers of Christ, establish peace, and restore knowledge to the seed of the ancient Joseph. As he translated this passage, Joseph Smith was instructed about the significant role the Book of Mormon would play in the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Joseph of Egypt declared of Joseph Smith: “Out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day when my work shall commence among all my people” (2 Ne. 3:13). This passage clarifies that though Joseph Smith was to be a choice seer, he would come out of a background that the world would consider weakness. He described his own lack of education as a youth: “As it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the family; therefore, we were deprived of the benefit of an education. Suffice it to say I was merely instructed in reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic which constituted my whole literary acquirements.”⁹ Though he had no scholarly training, the Prophet Joseph would move from a background of illiteracy to one made strong as he was taught of the Lord and the numerous angels that instructed him in his duties.

Furthermore, the Lord declares the context in which the Prophet Joseph would be made strong: “I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work” (2 Ne. 3:8). The Lord also declared that He would “give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save

8 Ezra Taft Benson, “A New Witness for Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 6.

9 Joseph Smith, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, [1989], 5.

the work which I shall command him” (2 Ne. 3:8).¹⁰ Joseph Smith's calling was to focus completely on the Lord's work. This guideline for the Prophet was reiterated in a latter day revelation, “For thou shalt devote all thy service in Zion; and in this thou shalt have strength” (D&C 24:7). As the Prophet Joseph Smith performed the Lord's work he had the promise that “those that seek to destroy him shall be confounded” (2 Ne. 3:14).

Joseph of Egypt described another aspect of Joseph Smith's calling by comparing him to Moses: “He shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel” (2 Ne. 3:9). Moses' calling was to be both a physical and a spiritual deliverer for the house of Israel. He is still praised and revered today by the Jews for delivering Israel (temporally) from the bondage of the Egyptians, as well as seeking to deliver Israel from spiritual bondage by teaching them the Lord's revealed word. In this last dispensation, Joseph Smith was also called to be a physical and spiritual deliverer. He began a physical gathering of Israel,¹¹ and led thousands of saints to Ohio, Missouri, and finally Illinois. And, as Moses, Joseph Smith sought to gather the Lord's people spiritually by teaching them the message of the Restoration.¹² Interestingly, Joseph Smith declared that Moses himself visited him and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple and “committed unto us the keys of the *gathering of Israel* from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north” (D&C 110:11, emphasis added).

Joseph of Egypt also prophesied that Joseph Smith “shall be like unto me; for the thing

10 Joseph Smith's Translation of Genesis 50 slightly alters this statement. It says, “He shall do whatsoever work I shall command him” (JST Gen. 50:28). This is apparently a prophecy of Joseph Smith's remarkable obedience to the Lord.

11 Israel in this context may be described as “the true believers in Christ, regardless of their lineage or geographical location” (Bible Dictionary, “Israel,” 708). Thus the gathering of Israel refers to the gathering of the faithful in the last days.

12 The message of the Restoration is that God called a modern day prophet in Joseph Smith and restored to him the authority to perform saving ordinances and revealed to him the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as He did to ancient prophets. See “Restitution; Restoration,” Bible Dictionary, 761.

which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation” (2 Ne. 3:15). The ancient Joseph also brought temporal and spiritual salvation to his people by saving them from the great famine and teaching them righteousness. Similarly, Joseph Smith was called to save the world from the spiritual famine caused by apostasy as described by the Lord in the Old Testament: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). The two references to Moses and Joseph of Egypt in 2 Nephi 3 were significant to the calling of Joseph Smith because he was compared with ancient prophets and his duties were comparable to theirs. His responsibility was to gather the righteous together, and bring them to salvation.

The last great prophecy in 2 Nephi 3 that appears to refer to Joseph Smith states, “there shall rise up one mighty among [the seed of Joseph], who shall do much good, both in word and in deed, being an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel” (2 Ne. 3:24). The items in this verse certainly match what Joseph Smith accomplished. With power from on high, he worked mighty wonders, participated in healings, translated ancient documents, and received revelations to build up the Kingdom of God on the earth.¹³ All of these works were done as a part of the latter-day restoration of the House of Israel.

No doubt Joseph Smith recognized that Joseph of Egypt was speaking of him when he prophesied of the latter-day seer, “His name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father” (2 Ne. 3:15). It would be difficult for Joseph Smith to misunderstand that he was the great latter-day seer of the ancient Joseph’s prophecies. Surely the Prophet was instructed concerning the significance of his divine calling as he translated this prophetic chapter

13 For examples of Joseph Smith performing healings see Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:18 (note 4).

of the Book of Mormon.

Another scriptural passage in 2 Nephi 27 gives insight into why Joseph Smith was called as the Lord's prophet. This chapter, which has similarities to Isaiah 29, details the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and declares of the gold plates, "The learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them, and I am able to do mine own work" (v.20). The Lord then commands Joseph Smith, "thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee" (v.20). The Lord states plainly here that Joseph Smith, though not a learned man, was useful to His work. The Prophet Joseph's limited education provides evidence that the book came from God, since he could not have possibly written or translated the Book of Mormon from an ancient language. In an interview with Emma Smith, Joseph Smith's wife, she expressed her own amazement at her husband's ability to translate the Book of Mormon: "Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translation of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder,' as much so as to anyone else."¹⁴ Joseph Smith's lack of education was also a benefit because he was able to be educated by the Lord instead of educated by the world. His mind did not have to be "reprogrammed," due to wrong ideas that had been instilled in him. Because of his lack of education, and his young age, Joseph Smith was a "clean slate." He was ready to receive divine education from heavenly messengers and revelations.

No doubt another reason Joseph Smith was called to translate the Book of Mormon was due to his pure motives. The Lord declared that the learned would want to translate the Book of Mormon, "because of the glory of the world and to get gain . . . and not for the glory of God" (2

¹⁴ Joseph Smith III interview with Emma Smith as quoted in Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies*, Winter 1990, 51.

Ne. 27:16). Thus, the Prophet Joseph's lack of education and pure motives allowed God to use him for this latter-day work.

The Lord limited the scope of what Joseph Smith could translate, "Touch not the things which are sealed, for I will bring them forth in mine own due time" (2 Ne. 27:21).¹⁵ The translation of the sealed portion was reserved for a day when the Gentiles were clean before the Lord (see Ether 4:6). Joseph Smith was given the gift to translate those things which the Lord had designated should be given at the present time. This was a pattern for his future; the Lord would give him power, as long as it was used in accordance with His will.

Additional light is shed on the Prophet's calling in 3 Nephi 21 in a discourse by the Savior about the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in last days. "For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them; and there shall be among them those who will not believe it, although a man shall declare it unto them. But behold, the life of my servant shall be in my hand; therefore they shall not hurt him, although he shall be marred because of them. Yet I will heal him, for I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil" (3 Ne. 21:9-10). These verses state that Joseph Smith's calling included the responsibility to move forward the "great and marvelous work," as ancient prophets did, regardless of how well-received it was. However, the Prophet was also given a comforting promise that his life would be in the Lord's hand despite opposition. Since his first vision in 1820, Joseph Smith had experienced great antagonism. This passage foreshadowed that he would yet be "marred." The Prophet could expect persecution to oppose the power he had received.

Another passage in 3 Nephi 21 highlights an important aspect of Joseph Smith's calling. "It shall come to pass that whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which

¹⁵ Moroni reiterates this command to not translate the sealed portion in Ether 5:1.

the Father shall cause *him* to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto *him* power that *he* shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cast off from among my people who are of the covenant” (3 Ne. 21:11, emphasis added). This verse indicates that a vital part of Joseph Smith’s calling was to bring forth the Lord’s words “unto the Gentiles.” In the Book of Mormon, the term “Gentiles” generally refers to non-Jews, or those who did not descend from the Jewish people.¹⁶ During Joseph Smith’s ministry, his calling was to bless the Gentiles. He was to bring the Gospel forth to them first, and they would in turn carry it to the Jews. This is the reverse order of how the Gospel was spread in New Testament times when it proceeded from the Jews to the Gentiles, primarily through the Apostle Paul. Thus, Joseph Smith’s calling was to be instrumental in fulfilling the scripture, “And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (1 Nephi 13:42).¹⁷ Joseph Smith’s calling included the responsibility to take the gospel to the latter-day Gentiles with the promise that those who would not believe the words he would bring forth would be “cast off” (3 Ne. 21:11). One LDS scholar, Victor Ludlow, explained that being cast off meant they would “be separated from God’s covenant people.”¹⁸ Part of Joseph Smith’s calling was to be an instrument in separating the righteous from the wicked in the last days.

There is another important prophecy about Joseph Smith’s calling in 3 Nephi. Christ quotes Malachi saying, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before

16 Monte S. Nyman, “Gentiles,” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, Dennis L. Largey, ed., [2003], 286. The term “Gentiles” also refers to latter-day Christians (see D&C 109:60).

17 See also Matt. 19:30; Mark 10:31.

18 Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, [1982], 439.

me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple” (3 Ne. 24:1).¹⁹ The first messenger referred to in this scripture seems to be Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith's calling was to prepare the way before the Lord. John the Baptist had a similar calling during the time of Christ. Matthew, speaking of John the Baptist, declared, “this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Matthew 3:3). Joseph Smith was to prepare the way before Christ's second coming, as John the Baptist prepared the way before His first coming. Joseph Smith was a preparer because he restored the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the authority to administer saving ordinances. These are preparatory for entrance into God’s presence.²⁰

The scripture that “the Lord . . . shall suddenly come to his temple” was fulfilled when the Savior appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple in 1836.²¹ Elijah also appeared on that occasion in fulfillment of the scripture that states, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (3 Nephi 25:5 and Malachi 4:5).

Malachi is one of the three Old Testament prophets that are directly quoted in the Book of Mormon.²² All three prophesied of Joseph Smith. Isaiah's prophecies are quoted in 2 Nephi 27. Malachi's prophecies are quoted in 3 Nephi 24 and 25, and Joseph of Egypt is quoted in 2 Nephi 3. After translating the prophecies of these ancient prophets it would be difficult for Joseph Smith to fail to understand the significance of his calling.

The last few passages which referred to Joseph Smith and his calling were written by

19 This passage is also found in Old Testament, in Malachi 3:1. See the next section, “Joseph Smith's Calling According to the Bible.”

20 Jesus taught, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

21 See Doctrine and Covenants 110.

22 Passages from Micah are by the Savior quoted in the Book of Mormon, but Micah’s name is never mentioned. See David R. Seely, “Micah,” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, Dennis L. Largey, ed., [2003], 540-1.

Moroni, the last prophet in the Book of Mormon. About 1400 years after writing in the Book of Mormon, Moroni appeared as an angel to Joseph Smith and instructed the Prophet concerning the whereabouts of the gold plates that would become the Book of Mormon. Moroni taught the Prophet concerning his calling, and appeared numerous times to instruct him concerning his responsibilities.²³ Before his death (approximately A.D. 422), Moroni had written to the future translator instructions concerning the record he was about to seal up unto the Lord. An instructive passage declares, “For none can have power to bring [the Book of Mormon] to light save it be given him of God; for God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory” (Mormon 8:15). Joseph Smith's calling required an eye single to the glory of God, or he would not be given the power necessary to bring forth the sacred text. Moroni further clarified that the Book of Mormon would not come by the ability of Joseph Smith, but “it shall be done by the power of God” (Mormon 8:16). The Prophet would have to be in tune with God in order to properly perform his calling.

In Ether chapter 5, Moroni turns from writing to a general audience to writing to the latter-day translator. Moroni gave him some specific instructions: “Behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work; And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true” (Ether 5:2-3). Joseph Smith was called to translate the plates himself, but the plates were to be shown to at least three others.²⁴ This passage likely provided some relief to the

23 “Joseph received about 22 recorded angelic visits directly pertaining to [finding and translating to Book of Mormon]. Most of these were appearances of Moroni, though the Prophet indicated other angels also came to him before he obtained the plates in 1827” (Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Moroni, visits of, to Joseph Smith,” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, Dennis L. Largey, ed., [2003], 563).

24 “The three men chosen as witnesses of the Book of Mormon were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. Their written ‘Testimony of Three Witnesses’ has been included in all of the almost 100 million copies of the Book of Mormon the Church has published since 1830.” (Dallin H. Oaks, “The Witness: Martin Harris,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 35). The testimony of eight other witnesses that saw the plates is also included in the introductory pages of the Book of Mormon.

Prophet to know he would not be the sole eyewitness to the gold plates. Others would share the burden of testifying of them. After the three witnesses saw the plates, Joseph Smith exclaimed to his parents: “Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am: the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, who has testified to them and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said, for now they know for themselves, that I do not go about to deceive the people, and I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear, and it rejoices my soul, that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.”²⁵ Joseph Smith’s burden of being the only eyewitness was relieved. He rejoiced that the Lord called others to support him in his calling.

The Book of Mormon contains several passages about Joseph Smith's calling. As he translated the Book of Mormon he came across enlightening passages about his calling, and the role he was to play in the Lord's work in the latter days. By the time he finished the translation, the Prophet knew that much was expected of him. He had learned that he was to be a seer and a prophet comparable to Joseph of Egypt and Moses. His calling included the responsibility to gather Israel and to prepare the way before the Lord. He also was also taught that even though he was unlearned, the Lord planned to use him to accomplish a great and marvelous work. As the Prophet translated the Book of Mormon, he received a greater understanding of his responsibilities as the Lord’s prophet who would bring about the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Joseph Smith's Calling According to the Bible

After completing the translation of the Book of Mormon in 1829, the Lord commanded Joseph Smith to work on a translation of the Bible. The Prophet declared that the translation (or

25 Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, [1979], 152.

revision) of the Bible was a “branch of my calling.”²⁶ This effort was not a translation from one language to another, but it was a “translation” in the sense that it was an effort to clarify or restore text.²⁷ The majority of the work on the Bible translation was done between June 1830 and July 1833. But the Prophet continued to modify the manuscript until his death in 1844.²⁸

It is clear that the process of revising the Bible was a learning experience for Joseph Smith. Several sections of the Doctrine and Covenants “reflect the work of the Prophet Joseph Smith in making an inspired translation of the Bible, during which many of the great doctrinal sections were received (see, for example, Sections 37, 45, 73, 76, 77, 86, 91, and 132)” (Doctrine and Covenants, Explanatory Introduction). The Prophet studied the entire Bible as he revised it, and therein he learned much about his calling. The Bible contains several passages that refer to Joseph Smith, and the Joseph Smith Translation adds a few more.²⁹ The Prophet’s revision of Genesis 50 was particularly significant as it includes the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt concerning Joseph Smith from 2 Nephi 3.³⁰ In the Topical Guide of the LDS edition of the scriptures, it lists three passages from the Old Testament that refer to Joseph Smith: Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 29:12, and Malachi 3:1-4.

The first passage in Isaiah that seems to refer to the Prophet is in Isaiah 11:1, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” The rod in this verse has been attributed to Joseph Smith among some Latter-day Saints.³¹ This is largely

26 *History of the Church*, 1:238.

27 Robert J. Matthews, “The Prophet Translates the Bible by the Spirit of Revelation,” *The Prophet Joseph – Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black, eds. [1988], 177.

28 Bible Dictionary, “Joseph Smith Translation,” 717.

29 The Joseph Smith Translation (JST) is the name that is now commonly used to refer to the Prophet’s inspired revision of the Bible. See Bible Dictionary, “Joseph Smith Translation,” 717. For additional passages referring to Joseph Smith see JST Genesis 50.

30 See JST Genesis 50:26-30, 32-33.

31 For examples of LDS authors that equate the rod with Joseph Smith see the following: (1) Sidney B. Sperry, *Voice of Israel's Prophets*, [1952], 35. (2) Keith A. Meservy, “God is With Us (Isaiah 1-17),” *Studies in Scripture - 1 Kings to Malachi*, vol. 4, Kent P. Jackson, ed. [1993], 102. (3) Monte S. Nyman, “The Second

due to a passage in the Doctrine and Covenants that declares that the rod is “a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power” (D&C 113:4). This description seems to match the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Prophet reported that the angel Moroni had quoted this chapter of Isaiah to him during his first visits in 1823, “saying that it was about to be fulfilled” (Joseph Smith History 1:40). The passage in Isaiah 11 describes Joseph Smith's calling as the Lord's servant, and promises an endowment of power.

In the same chapter as cited above, Isaiah declares, “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10). The root of Jesse in this verse has also been attributed to Joseph Smith.³² It is possible that this passage refers to Joseph Smith because he had the responsibility to bring the Gentiles to the Lord, as stated in 3 Nephi 21:11. In discussing these verses from Isaiah 11 it is important to notice that the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have not declared that these verses are speaking of Joseph Smith. These verses have not been quoted in General Conferences of the Church.³³ Thus, determining the correlation between Isaiah's prophecy and Joseph Smith has been left to individual interpretation

The leaders of the Church have not been so silent concerning a prophecy found in Isaiah 29. It has been quoted several times in General Conference, and declared to be a prophecy of

Gathering of the Literal Seed,” *Doctrines for Exaltation – The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants*, Susan Easton Black, et al. [1989], 188. (4) Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration* [2000], 911.

32 See Kent P. Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, [1996], 106. See also Monte S. Nyman, *Great are the Words of Isaiah*, [1980], 73-4.

33 A search of the 2005 LDS Collectors Library Database, which contains conference reports from April 1880 to April 2005, yielded no matches to verses one or ten in Isaiah 11. In a search on <http://scriptures.byu.edu> (on January 30, 2007), a site that lists all the scriptures cited in General Conference since 1942, there is no record of Isaiah 11:1 nor Isaiah 11:10 having been cited. This is interesting because the verses surrounding these two scriptures have been cited often. Isaiah 11:9 has been cited ten different times, and verse 11 has also been cited ten times (though verses nine and eleven were never cited in the same discourse). In General Conference, which is a primary place where church doctrine is declared, Church leaders have not made it a point to declare that Isaiah chapter 11 is referring to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith.³⁴ “And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned” (Isaiah 29:11-12). This passage is expanded upon in 2 Nephi 27 in the Book of Mormon as mentioned in the previous section of this chapter. Joseph Smith himself reported on the fulfillment of this prophecy in his 1832 History:

Martin Harris who became convinced of the vision and gave me fifty Dollars to bare my expenses and because of his faith and this righteous deed the Lord appeared unto him in a vision and shewed unto him His marvelous work which He was about to do and he immediately came to Susquehanna and said the Lord had shown him that he must go to New York City with some of the characters. So we proceeded to copy some of them and he took his journey to the eastern cities and to the learned saying, “Read this, I pray thee.” And the learned said, “I cannot,” but if he would bring the plates they would read it. But the Lord had forbid it and he returned to me and gave them to me to translate and I said, “I cannot for I am not learned.” But the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book. Therefore, I commenced translating the characters and thus the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled which is written in the 29 chapter concerning the book.³⁵

Joseph Smith saw himself fulfilling scripture. He did not, however, emphasize himself in the prophecy, he simply stated that the prophecy was fulfilled “concerning the book.” This is typical in Joseph Smith's writings and teachings. He rarely emphasized his own role, though it was vital.

34 See Bruce R. McConkie, “The Morning Breaks; the Shadows Flee,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 12. See also LeGrand Richards, “Value of the Holy Scriptures,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 82. See also S. Dilworth Young, Conference Report, April 1965, 51-2.

35 Joseph Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. Dean C. Jessee, comp., ed. [2002], 13-14.

Joseph Smith was concerned about spreading the gospel, not elevating himself.

Christ quoted from the verses that follow Isaiah's prophecy when He first appeared to Joseph Smith. "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" (Joseph Smith History 1:19).³⁶ The Lord was concerned that the hearts of people were too far from him. This is one of conditions that Joseph Smith was called to rectify. Isaiah's prophecy then states, "behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (Isaiah 29:14). Thus, the text implies, an unlearned man will be called by the Lord to aid in making the wisdom of the wise men perish. This was to be a marvelous work and a wonder because it was done through the Lord's power, not man's. Joseph Smith's works were to be a manifestation of the power of God.

Joseph Smith said that Moroni "first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi" (Joseph Smith History 1:36) during his multiple visits in 1823. The Prophet did not specify which verses were quoted, but it is interesting that one of the passages that is often associated with Joseph Smith is found in the third chapter of Malachi. It is the same passage as 3 Nephi 24:1, which was quoted earlier, in which the Lord declares, "I will send my messenger . . . and the Lord . . . shall come suddenly to his temple" (Malachi 3:1). Some may conclude that the person that is referred to as "my messenger" is John the Baptist. However, Elder LeGrand Richards, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, declared, "Now I don't think that was referring to his first coming. He didn't come swiftly to his temple, and all men were able to abide the day of his first coming; and he didn't come cleansing and purifying as refiner's fire and fullers' soap . . . Then I say to you, and to all the world, where is

³⁶ Compare to Isaiah 29:13.

that messenger that the Lord, speaking through Malachi, said he would send to prepare the way for his coming (and I refer to his second coming)? To us Latter-day Saints, we know that messenger was none other than the Prophet Joseph Smith.”³⁷ This Bible passage indicates what the Book of Mormon had also declared. Joseph Smith’s mission was to prepare the way for Christ to come.

Joseph Smith made a connection between Malachi's prophecies and his experience in the Kirtland Temple. He reported that Elijah appeared to him and Oliver Cowdery, and said that “the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come--to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse” (D&C 110:14-15).³⁸ The Prophet declared that Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would turn the hearts of the children and fathers to one another had been fulfilled. However, in typical fashion, Joseph Smith did not emphasize his own role as the Lord's messenger.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of these years of translation in the formative years of Joseph Smith's understanding of his calling. Doubtless he saw himself in Old Testament prophecies, as well as those of Book of Mormon prophets. He discovered that ancient prophets knew of his calling, and thus he knew that his mission was a significant part of the Lord's latter-day work. During the time he was translating the Book of Mormon, the Church had not yet been organized, and therefore he was acting only as a translator. But the passages he translated indicated that his calling would expand greatly. He was to be a great prophet like Joseph of Egypt and Moses. He had the responsibility to gather Israel and do a great and marvelous work.

37 Legrand Richards, “Prophecy,” *Ensign*, May 1974, 115. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, later a President of the Church, also taught that Malachi was referring to Joseph Smith. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Bruce R. McConkie, ed. 3 vols. [1956], 3:10-12.

38 Compare to Malachi 4:5-6.

During his revision of the Bible, the Prophet studied the biblical passages which referred to his calling and was further instructed concerning his role in the latter-day work. Joseph Smith started as a translator of ancient scripture, but during that translation, he was taught that the Lord had much greater things for him to do.

Joseph Smith's Calling in the Doctrine and Covenants – 1823-1830

Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants provide insight into Joseph Smith's calling. In that record Joseph Smith is both censured for shortcomings and commended for his faithfulness. As the Prophet received and dictated revelation, he learned something about his place in the unfolding drama of this final dispensation.

The first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, “the preface” (D&C 1:6), provides insights into the calling and ministry of Joseph Smith. The revelations are generally recorded with the Lord speaking in first person. This is similar to many of the ancient prophets who made declarations such as the following:

The word of the Lord came unto me saying . . . (Jeremiah 2:1)

Moreover, the Lord said unto me . . . (Isaiah 8:1)

Thus saith the Lord God . . . (Ezekiel 36:2)

Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you . . . (Amos 3:1)

Hear ye now what the Lord saith . . . (Micah 6:1)

Yea, for thus saith the Lord . . . (2 Ne. 7:1).³⁹

Verses of Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants begin in a similar way: “Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together. For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men” (D&C 1:1-2). It is apparent that Joseph Smith did not view himself as the source of the revelations. He saw himself as a messenger relaying the Lord's word to His children.

In this same revelation, given in November, 1831, the Lord outlined some of the primary

³⁹ Lowell L. Bennion, *The Religion of the Latter-day Saints*, [1940], 236.

reasons for Joseph Smith's calling as the Lord's mouthpiece:

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him [Joseph Smith] from heaven, and gave him commandments; And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets-- The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh-- But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; That faith also might increase in the earth; That mine everlasting covenants might be established; That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers. (D&C 1:17-23)

This passage outlines several aspects of Joseph Smith's calling. First, coming from a background of poverty and little education, he was to “proclaim these things unto the world,” which in part fulfilled prophecies that the “weak things of the world” would break down the mighty and strong ones” (D&C 1:19). This passage also alludes to the fact that part of Joseph's calling was to restore Priesthood authority wherein “every man might speak in the name of the Lord” (vs. 20). It also indicates that Joseph Smith's calling included the responsibilities to restore doctrine and teachings that would thereby increase faith on the part of mankind and establish the Lord's everlasting covenant and the fullness of the gospel to the earth.

The Lord indirectly outlined another portion of the Prophet's calling in this first section. He declared that the commandments found in the Doctrine and Covenants serve the following

functions:

1. That they (his servants) “might come to an understanding” (v. 24)
2. “Inasmuch as they erred it might be made known” (v. 25)
3. “Inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed” (v.26)
4. “Inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent” (v. 27)
5. “Inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong” (v.28)
6. “and be blessed from on high” (v. 28)
7. “and receive knowledge from time to time” (v. 28)

These are important elements of the revelation. Since these sections were received by Joseph Smith, it was apparent that his calling was to be the Lord's mouthpiece to (1) bring understanding of doctrine and priesthood to the earth, (2) correct false doctrine, (3) instruct the Latter-day Saints, (4) chasten those in need of chastisement, (5) strengthen those who were weak in the faith, (6) bless those in need of divine help, and (7) give knowledge of the Lord's plan of salvation. Joseph Smith must have come to know that his calling as a prophet encompassed all of these responsibilities. The Lord also mentions Joseph Smith's calling as a translator in this first section, and indicates that the Prophet received power to translate sacred ancient texts “through the mercy of God, by the power of God” (D&C 1:29). The Lord declared that the church that Joseph Smith established was “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30). This places the Prophet Joseph in a unique position as the man called to head the only true church of God on the earth.

In this same section, the Lord also emphasized the importance of Joseph Smith's declarations saying, “whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). Thus the Prophet's words were to be regarded as originating with the Lord. This

statement is important in outlining dimensions of his calling. His words were to carry the same authority as scripture, or other words spoken by the Lord at any time in the past.

Section 2 of the Doctrine and Covenants indicates another aspect of Joseph Smith's calling as a prophet. This section is "an extract from the words of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith" in September 1823.⁴⁰ This revelation came almost five years before later sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, and gives information about Joseph Smith's role in this last dispensation. Moroni declared, "I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (D&C 2:1). Moroni seems to be quoting from Malachi 4:5, with some important changes. Malachi stated, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5), while Moroni said, "Behold, I will *reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of* Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (D&C 2:1, italics indicate changes or additions to Malachi 4:5). A subtle, but extremely important nuance seems to be that the general "you" in Malachi's verse becomes a specific, singular "you," referring to Joseph Smith who is fulfilling this ancient quotation. Joseph Smith was to be the vehicle in fulfilling this prophecy when he was visited by Elijah in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836 (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:13-16). One facet of Joseph Smith's calling was to receive priesthood and priesthood keys which had been lost from the earth for centuries.⁴¹

Section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants is the first revelation given through Joseph Smith. This section was given in 1828, a year which Richard Bushman calls "the year when he found his prophetic voice."⁴² Section three was given as a result of the Prophet Joseph's carelessness with 116 translated Book of Mormon pages. He had prayed to the Lord, pleading for

40 Doctrine and Covenants 2 (Section Heading).

41 See Doctrine and Covenants 110, and the commentary in chapter 3 concerning that section.

42 Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith – Rough Stone Rolling*, [2005], 69.

permission to give the manuscript to Martin Harris to show to members of his family. The Lord's initial answer was no, but Joseph Smith insisted because he feared that Martin would be upset if he could not take them. He was finally granted permission to give the pages to Martin, under the condition that Martin follow specific rules. Martin took the pages, but he broke the rules and the pages were stolen.

In section 3, the Prophet found that his success as the Lord's prophet would be predicated on humility and obedience: "For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many might works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him" (D&C 3:4). Bushman explained, "When Joseph figures into the revelations, he stands among the listeners, receiving instructions. When reprimands are handed out, he is likely to receive one."⁴³ Joseph Smith's experience with the loss of the 116 pages illustrated that his calling did not place him above rebuke.⁴⁴

His calling required him to live in strict obedience to the Lord's counsel: "Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; Except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift" (D&C 3:9-11). The gift of translation that accompanied the Prophet's calling was contingent on his righteousness. The Lord made it clear in this revelation that the Prophet's calling demanded that he obey the Lord's counsel above all else and that he was not above chastisement. "And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments

⁴³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 129.

⁴⁴ Other examples of rebukes are found in Doctrine and Covenants 3:6-7, 9-11 (as quoted in previous paragraph), 10:2, 24:2 and 93:47.

and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God” (D&C 3:6-7). Joseph Smith's calling was to follow God's will above that of family, friends and associates. This lesson would prove to be an aspect of his calling that would, at times, alienate him from those he loved.

Section 5 also contains a rebuke for Joseph Smith from the Lord. This section, received eight months after Section 3, declares, “Now I command you, my servant Joseph, to repent and walk more uprightly before me, and to yield to the persuasions of men no more” (D&C 5:21). The Prophet's calling required him to overcome the fear of men and their unrighteous persuasions and seek God's will instead.

Section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants is important because it is the first revelation recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants that Joseph Smith received in behalf of another individual (his father). Past prophets generally focused on prophesying to society in general, though they also received revelations for individuals.⁴⁵ Joseph Smith was no different. He received many revelations directed towards society, but he also received revelation for specific individuals. The Doctrine and Covenants is filled with revelations given to different individuals. In fact, there are 136 individuals mentioned by name in the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁴⁶

The Revelations indicate that Joseph Smith was to communicate the Lord's will to individuals both inside and outside of the Church. For example, the Prophet received a revelation for Joseph Knight Sr. before the latter joined the Church. The command was “to unite with the true church” (D&C 23:7). On another occasion, Joseph Smith received a revelation for James

45 There are several examples of prophets receiving revelation for other individuals in the Bible. For instance, Nathan received revelation for David (see 2 Samuel 12). Elisha received revelation of what Naaman should do to clear up his leprosy (see 2 Kings 5). Christ received revelation about a woman's family situation in John 4. Prophetic calls in the Bible were not just to administer to large congregations, but also to individuals.

46 Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants*, [1997], introduction.

Covill that declared he should “arise and be baptized” (D&C 39:10). There are other accounts outside of the Doctrine and Covenants in which Joseph Smith received revelation for those who were not members of the Church.⁴⁷

Section 5 was given to Martin Harris, making it the first recorded revelation received for someone outside of Joseph Smith's family. Following this section, the Doctrine and Covenants contains many revelations intended for specific inquirers. But the Prophet did not limit himself to receiving revelations for individuals. In addition, the Prophet received revelations for small groups, large groups, the Church, and the world in general.⁴⁸ Section 5 of the Doctrine and Covenants contains a key declaration: “This generation shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10). This statement distinguishes Joseph Smith as not only *a* mouthpiece for the Lord, but *the* mouthpiece to all men everywhere.

Joseph Smith was told in Section 5 that the gift to translate was “the first gift that I bestowed upon you; and I have commanded that you should pretend to no other gift until my purpose is fulfilled in this; for I will grant unto you no other gift until it is finished” (D&C 5:4). Translation was his first gift and his first priority in March of 1829. Ronald K. Esplin explained, “This was not simply a matter of timing and priority but also of process: translating prepared Joseph Smith for further responsibility. Here he gained experience, learned principles and doctrine vital to his mission, received authority, and in general readied himself for what was to come. He also learned what God expected of him: that by virtue of restored priesthood authority,

47 One of the most famous examples is that of a prophecy given by Joseph Smith to Stephen A. Douglas, “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.

48 For example, D&C 88:117-141 was given for the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio. Section 89 is specified as being directed to “the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and the church, and also the saints in Zion” (D&C 89:1). Doctrine and Covenants 42 is addressed to the “elders of my church” (D&C 42:1). Section 45 is given to the “people of my church” (D&C 45:1) in general. Doctrine and Covenants 1:2 indicates that revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants are intended for all men.

he and his fellow laborer Oliver Cowdery were to baptize and then to organize those baptized into a church infused with the authority they had received.”⁴⁹ Joseph Smith was also told in Section 5 that “hereafter you shall be ordained and go forth and deliver my words unto the children of men” (D&C 5:6). This referred to the Prophet's coming ordination to the priesthood and his calling to preach the gospel. From his initial calling as a translator of ancient records, Joseph Smith's responsibilities were expanding.

Even the instructions from the Lord to Oliver Cowdery in the Doctrine and Covenants provide additional light on the calling of Joseph Smith. “Oliver Cowdery began his labors as scribe in the translation of the Book of Mormon, April 7, 1829” (D&C 6, section heading). As the Lord gave revelations to Oliver Cowdery through Joseph Smith, He further instructed the Prophet on the duties of his own calling. Oliver was instructed to “admonish [Joseph Smith] in his faults” (D&C 6:19). This is an important verse for both Oliver and Joseph Smith. It indicates that it was important for the Prophet to accept correction from one who held a lesser position than himself. He was not just to accept rebukes from the Lord (as in sections 3 and 5), but in some cases correction from other men.

Section 7 of the Doctrine and Covenants reveals another aspect of Joseph Smith's expanding calling. The *History of the Church* records that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had a difference of opinion about whether or not John the Apostle had died or continued to live. They resolved to settle the matter by inquiring of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim. Joseph Smith then received a revelation that was “translated from parchment, written and hid up by [John].”⁵⁰ Joseph Smith was not limited to translating texts that were physically present. Lyndon W. Cook explained, “The parchment would not have been in the Prophet's [immediate]

49 Ronald K. Esplin, “Joseph Smith's Mission and Timetable,” *The Prophet Joseph – Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black, eds. [1988], 284-5.

50 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:35-6.

possession, rather, it would have been seen and translated by means of the Urim and Thummim.”⁵¹ Joseph Smith learned he could, as a seer, receive revelation beyond the scope of those in his immediate area. He could peer into the past and see ancient things. He was more than just a translator, and he could do more than receive revelation about the present. The limits of Joseph Smith's abilities were expanding.

Doctrine and Covenants 13 is a pivotal revelation in the life of Joseph Smith. It came while under the hands of John the Baptist on the banks of the Susquehanna River, near Harmony, Pennsylvania. John “explained that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John, the ancient apostles, who held the key of the higher priesthood, which was called the Priesthood of Melchizedek. The promise was given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery that in due time the Priesthood of Melchizedek would be conferred upon them” (D&C 13, section heading). His calling included more than translation and revelation, it included authority to administer ordinances of salvation.

When John the Baptist ordained Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, he laid his hands on their heads to ordain them (Joseph Smith – History 1:68). Later, Peter, James and John laid their hands on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to ordain them to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The laying on of hands was a biblical practice. In the Old Testament it was done by priests as they laid hands on animals offered as a sacrifice (see Leviticus 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). It was also performed by Old Testament prophets such as Israel (Jacob) (see Genesis 48:14, 17) and Moses (see Numbers 27:23). In the New Testament, Christ said that those that believed would “lay their hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18). The restoration of the laying on of hands was a manifestation that Joseph Smith was restoring the ancient order of things.

When John the Baptist ordained Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, he called them

51 Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, [1985], 15.

“fellow servants” (D&C 13:1), placing them on a level with himself. This is an important statement as it declares that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were participating in the same work that John the Baptist did anciently. After their ordination, they were doing the same work, with the same authority as John the Baptist. This was a defining moment in the development of Joseph Smith's calling. Later, when the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery received the Melchizedek Priesthood, they received the same authority held by ancient prophets and apostles.

The first revelation mentioning the establishment of a church was received in March 1829. The Lord spoke of the “beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of my church out of the wilderness” (D&C 5:14). From this point on, Joseph Smith knew that there was to be a church. Bushman said, “The translation project was transmuting into a gospel program of conversion. Joseph was becoming a minister as well as a seer and translator.”⁵² The organization of the Church would further expand Joseph Smith’s responsibilities.

In the process of preparing for the organization of the Church, the Prophet received several revelations that helped define his calling and some of his responsibilities in the future Church. In Doctrine and Covenants 20, the first section regarding Church organization and government, the Lord declared that Joseph Smith was “called of God and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of the Church” (D&C 20:2).

The title of apostle carried important implications about Joseph Smith's duties. This Biblical title referred to an exclusive group of special witnesses of the Lord and his work. Included were Peter, James, and John (who ordained Joseph Smith⁵³) as well as the rest of the twelve whom Jesus chose. Paul, James, and Barnabas were also referred to as later apostles.⁵⁴

52 Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 77.

53 See Doctrine and Covenants 128:20.

54 See Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1; 9:1, and Galatians 1:1 for examples of Paul calling himself an apostle (which also means “one sent forth”). James is called an apostle by Paul in Galatians 1:19. And Barnabas and Paul are

When Joseph Smith was named as an apostle, the Lord placed him on the level of a select group of men.

Joseph Smith's role in the newly created Church of Christ was made clear in the revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 21. The first verse declares, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church” (D&C 21:1). This is the first reference where Joseph Smith is called a prophet. Up to this point, his major responsibility was as a translator, which is reiterated in this verse. His duties as a translator were not at an end. But in addition to those duties, Joseph Smith now held the callings and titles of prophet, seer, and apostle. The Prophet's responsibilities were increasing.

The organization of the Church required that a leader be placed at the head. The Lord indicated that the leader was indisputably to be Joseph Smith: “Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receives them. . . For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth” (D&C 21:4-5). The Lord then outlined the blessings that would come to those that accepted Joseph Smith as a prophet and heeded his counsel. “For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory” (D&C 21:6). This verse puts the words of Joseph Smith on a level with words uttered by former prophets. The phrase “the gates of hell shall not prevail against you” reflects the promise given to Peter from Christ: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Thus, the blessings of following Joseph Smith were equal to those promised to the faithful followers of the Lord's mouthpiece, Peter, in ancient days. Not only was Joseph

called apostles in Acts 14:14 (see Bible Dictionary, “Apostle,” 612).

Smith's calling as a prophet similar to those of ancient prophets, but his followers were comparable to those who followed prophets anciently. Joseph Smith was as important to people in his day as Peter was in his.

Joseph Smith was also called a seer in the opening verse of Doctrine and Covenants 21. The Book of Mormon explains that "seer" is a title for one who possesses the Urim and Thummim. "Whosoever has [the Urim and Thummim] is called seer, after the manner of old times" (Mosiah 28:16). The Book of Mormon further explains that "a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known" (Mosiah 8:17). When the Lord called him a seer, He was declaring that as a seer, Joseph Smith could reveal the past, present, future, secret things, hidden things, and ultimately all things. "A seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have" (Mosiah 8:16). By giving him this title, the Lord was declaring that the Prophet could and would reveal more than simply that found in the Book of Mormon.

Up to this point in the revelations (section 21), Oliver Cowdery had received the same priesthood authority as Joseph Smith. Both men were present when John the Baptist appeared and both were ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood on that occasion. Both were also present when Peter, James, and John appeared and ordained them to the Melchizedek Priesthood. In those ordinations they were equal. Despite both having the same priesthood authority, the Lord declared to Oliver Cowdery the following: "You are an elder under his hand, he being the first unto you" (D&C 21:11). The Lord established that Joseph Smith was "the first." The Lord here

differentiates between authority and position. Though Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had the same priesthood authority, they did not hold the same position. Joseph Smith held the highest position in the Church. This set a precedent that no Melchizedek Priesthood holder could claim that he had as much right to lead the Church as the Prophet simply because he held the same priesthood as the Prophet.

There is added insight into the Prophet's calling in section 22 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord states in this section that when someone receives the gospel and enters into the Church, they are receiving “a new and everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning” (D&C 22:1). If it is the same covenant that has been administered through the Lord's servants from the beginning, Joseph Smith is serving in the same calling as the Lord's servants were anciently. The Lord specified to mankind that “it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old” (D&C 22:3). The Church that Joseph Smith had organized was under the direction of the Lord just as had been ancient church. And the Lord labeled ordinances performed by any other religious organization as “dead works.” The Lord was declaring that only ordinances done in His Church, by His authority, were valid. Joseph Smith was in an important position as the leader of the only Church possessing authority to administer saving ordinances.

Doctrine and Covenants 24 offers greater insight into the calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In this section the Lord offers gentle rebukes as well as encouragement to the Prophet. Though Joseph Smith's responsibilities had increased from translator to prophet, seer, apostle, and first elder of the Church, these added responsibilities did not make him excusable in his transgressions. His greater positions afforded him no pardon for sins. He was required to live by the same principles that he taught. The Lord warned the Prophet, “Thou art not excusable in thy

transgressions” (D&C 24:2).

The Lord explained that He would bless those who honored Joseph Smith. “Go speedily unto the church which is in Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester, and they shall support thee; and I will bless them both spiritually and temporally; But if they receive thee not, I will send upon them a cursing instead of a blessing” (D&C 24:3-4). The Lord reiterates this principle saying, “And it shall be given thee in the very moment what thou shalt speak and write, and they shall hear it, or I will send unto them a cursing instead of a blessing” (D&C 24:6). These passages establish that the Lord would hold people accountable for how they responded to Joseph Smith's words. The Prophet's calling was not to be taken lightly by others. They would be blessed or cursed according to how they received him. Furthermore, he had the authority to pronounce a curse upon those who fought against the work of God. “And in whatsoever place ye shall enter, and they receive you not in my name, ye shall leave a cursing instead of a blessing, by casting off the dust of your feet against them as a testimony, cleansing them by the wayside . . . And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall lay their hands upon you by violence, ye shall command to be smitten in my name; and behold I will smite them according to your words, in mine own due time” (D&C 24:15, 16). Joseph Smith's calling included the power to both bless and curse, depending on how he was received.

The Lord placed limits on the Prophet's calling in this same section. “For thou shalt devote all thy service in Zion; and in this thou shalt have strength. . . And in temporal labors thou shalt not have strength, for this is not thy calling. Attend to thy calling and thou shalt have wherewith to magnify thine office” (D&C 24:7, 9). The Prophet was taught that his calling demanded complete devotion to spiritual things. It did not give him any special temporal

privileges.⁵⁵

In the same section the Prophet is also promised “thou shalt have wherewith to . . . expound all scriptures” (D&C 24:9). The word “all” is important. The Prophet's calling gave him the right to comment on all scripture, past and present. There were no scriptures which were previously given that could not be interpreted and expounded by the Prophet. As is shown by the Prophet's revising the Bible, he understood his divine commission to make clarifications, and corrections where past mistakes had crept in or where improper translations had given a false interpretation.

By all appearances, Joseph Smith would have seemed to have had complete power over all that occurred in the Church. With all the authority that the Lord had given him, it may have appeared that the members of the Church had no right to give input about what happened within the Church. However, soon after the organization of the Church, the Lord revealed that “all things shall be done by common consent in the church” (D&C 26:2). Though the members of the Church were expected to follow Joseph Smith's counsel, they were also afforded a manner by which they could express their approval or disapproval of actions taken. Joseph Smith's calling was to preside, but also seek the confirmation of the members of the church through a vote of common consent.⁵⁶

Section 27 of the Doctrine and Covenants is significant in describing the calling of Joseph Smith. Here the Lord gives him a prophecy about a future meeting that will take place. In this revelation, the Lord predicted, “I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth”

55 Joseph Smith struggled with temporal and business pursuits during his life. One example is the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society. For more on this failure see Milton V. Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, [1983], 315-321.

56 At one point when the Church was in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith did not want Sidney Rigdon as a counselor in the First Presidency. However, the Church voted for Sidney to remain in his position, and Joseph succumbed. See *History of the Church* 6:47-49.

(D&C 27:5). Then the Lord named who else will be present at the event. The list included the following: Moroni (a prominent Book of Mormon prophet), Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph (of Egypt), Adam, Peter, James, and John. It is significant that the Lord places Joseph Smith's name among this elite group of His ancient servants. It would be difficult for Joseph Smith to misunderstand the significance of his calling after being mentioned in such a group.

One way to discern the Prophet's perception of his calling is by examining how he reacted when his calling or authority was challenged. As an example, in the summer of 1830 Oliver Cowdery found what he thought to be an error in one of the revelations that Joseph Smith received. Bushman explained, “through the summer Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmer family began to conceive of themselves as independent authorities with the right to correct Joseph and receive revelation.”⁵⁷ Oliver wrote to inform the Prophet about what he discovered. The phrase in question is now found in Doctrine and Covenants 20:37: “And truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto a remission of their sins.” Oliver wrote to Joseph Smith: “I command you in the name of God to erase those words, that no priestcraft be amongst us!”⁵⁸ The Prophet's response indicates his perception of the authority of revelations: “I immediately wrote to him in reply, in which I asked him by what authority he took upon him to command me to alter or erase, to add to or diminish from, a revelation or commandment from Almighty God.” Joseph Smith saw the revelations as unchangeable, and above the reasoning of man. He felt that the revelations came from God, not from himself. It seems clear he saw himself as simply the conveyor or receiver of the revelations. Joseph Smith also recognized that Oliver's authority did not enable him to change the revelations. This illustrates the point that the Prophet

57 Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, [1984], 166.

58 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:105. Oliver was likely concerned that people would seek to prove their righteousness to others “by their works,” and thus they would be practicing priestcraft.

had come to understand that the revelations he received were above the criticism of men. No man possessed the authority to change the revelations.

In Section 28, the Lord corrected Oliver Cowdery for rebuking Joseph Smith, and demanding that he change the revelation. The Lord declared, “Thou shalt not command him who is at thy head, and at the head of the church; for I have given him the keys of the mysteries, and the revelations which are sealed, until I shall appoint unto them another in his stead” (D&C 28:7). This statement is important in defining Oliver Cowdery's position in relation to Joseph Smith. The Prophet was “at the head” of Oliver Cowdery, and since Oliver was the second elder, that also meant that Joseph Smith was “at the head” of the whole church.

Another early challenge to Joseph Smith's calling as the Lord's mouthpiece came from a young man named Hiram Page. Hiram claimed to have received revelations about Zion through a certain stone he possessed.⁵⁹ The Lord had earlier proclaimed that “this generation shall have my word through [Joseph Smith]” (D&C 5:10). But from the experience with Hiram Page, it is apparent that this principle was not yet thoroughly understood by some members of the Church. Some seemed to have thought that Joseph Smith could receive revelation for the Church, but that he was not the *only* source of revelation for the Church. Concerning the prophecies of Hiram Page, Joseph Smith reported, “many, especially the Whitmer family and Oliver Cowdery, were believing much in the things set forth.”⁶⁰ Thus the Prophet sought a revelation from the Lord on the matter.

The resulting revelation further clarifies the declaration in Section 5 that Joseph Smith was not only *a* mouthpiece of the Lord, but he was *the* mouthpiece of the Lord for the Church. “Behold, verily, verily, I say unto thee, *no one* shall be appointed to receive commandments and

⁵⁹ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

revelations in this Church *excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun.*, for he receiveth them even as Moses” (D&C 28:2, italics added). Here the Lord compares Joseph Smith to a revered ancient prophet, Moses. Oliver Cowdery is further taught his role in relation to Joseph Smith, “thou shalt be obedient unto the things which I shall give unto him, even as Aaron, to declare faithfully the commandments and the revelations, with power and authority unto the church” (D&C 28:1,3). Oliver Cowdery was given authority to teach the church the revelations and commandments which were given through Joseph Smith. However, he did not have authority to receive and record revelations from the Lord for the Church. “And if thou art led at any time by the Comforter to speak or teach, or at all times by the way of commandment unto the church, thou mayest do it. But thou shalt not write by way of commandment, but by wisdom” (D&C 28:4-5). Joseph Smith was learning that he alone possessed the right to receive and record revelations on behalf of the Church.

This revelation declared that Joseph Smith's words were to take precedence over the words of any other church member, including Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery. Joseph Smith was “at the head,” and no member had the authority to command the head. This was a defining moment of Joseph Smith's calling. Regarding the reaction of the Church to the revelation, Joseph Smith reported, “Brother Page, as well as the whole Church, renounced the said stone, and all things connected therewith, much to our mutual satisfaction and happiness.”⁶¹ Joseph Smith learned more about his calling through experiences such as this, and Church members learned with him.

The Prophet's calling was further illuminated with the conversion of Sidney Rigdon. Sidney Rigdon was hailed as “an eloquent orator, chaste in his language, and conclusive in his

61 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:115.

reasoning.”⁶² Soon after his conversion, Sidney was called to assist in the work of the Bible translation. It seems he was a much more gifted orator than the Prophet.⁶³ This created an interesting dynamic because Sidney Rigdon almost seemed to be more qualified to lead the Church than Joseph Smith. However, in Doctrine and Covenants 35, the Lord declared to Sidney Rigdon why Joseph Smith was called to lead the Church. “I call upon the weak things of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thrash the nations by the power of my Spirit. . . . have sent forth the fulness of my gospel by the hand of my servant Joseph; and in weakness have I blessed him” (D&C 35:13, 17). Joseph Smith learned he was called to some degree on account of his weakness, so that the Lord could show forth His power through him. This made the Prophet more qualified than even the eloquent Sidney Rigdon for the position of prophet and leader of the Church.

The revelation in Doctrine and Covenants 37 further augmented the Prophet's divine duties. The Lord commanded that the church “assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C 37:3). This is the first commandment that the people of the Church gather together to a particular place. From this point, Joseph Smith became involved in the temporal affairs of members of the Church. He helped organize settlements where the Saints could live. He even received revelation designating specific places of residence for various families.⁶⁴ The Prophet undoubtedly understood his calling extended beyond the spiritual welfare of the Church; he was also involved in temporal affairs, as manifest in the gathering of the saints. He was not to be overly concerned with his own temporal welfare, as explained in section 24. He was to concern himself with the

62 “The Mormon Prophets,” *Millennial Star*, May 1842. Quoting an excerpt from the *New York Herald*, Feb. 19 1842.

63 McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 729.

64 See the following examples of revelations concerning where people should live: Doctrine and Covenants 58:24 (Edward Partridge); 90:21 (Sidney Rigdon); 104:20 (Sidney Rigdon), 28 (Oliver Cowdery), 39 (Newel K. Whitney); 124:105 (Sidney Rigdon).

temporal welfare of the Church.

These revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants were a great tool for the Lord to teach Joseph Smith the nature of his expanding calling. Through them he learned that he was to be far more than just a translator of ancient texts. He was also an apostle, a prophet and a seer. As part of his calling, he had the sole responsibility to receive revelation for the whole Church, and even the whole world. He learned he was to focus on the spiritual welfare of the Church, not on his own temporal labors. The Prophet had the responsibility to help the Saints gather to Kirtland, Ohio. He also learned that he was called to his high position despite his weakness so the Lord could show forth His power through him. These revelations were invaluable teaching Joseph Smith his ever-increasing responsibilities as the head of the last dispensation and prophet and leader of the kingdom of God on the earth.

Joseph Smith's Calling in the Doctrine and Covenants – 1831-1844

As the Church moved to Ohio, revelations came to the Prophet with greater frequency. During the period of 1823-1830, he received 36 revelations that are included in the Doctrine and Covenants. In the year of 1831 alone, the Prophet received 37 revelations with many of them directed toward his calling as the Church president and prophet.

In Kirtland there arose again a need to clarify the position of Joseph Smith and the order of revelation in the Church. A woman named Hubble claimed to be receiving revelations from the Lord. John Whitmer recorded the situation: “About these days there was a woman by the name of Hubble who professed to be a prophetess of the Lord and professed to have many revelations, and knew the Book of Mormon was true, and that she should become a teacher in the Church of Christ. She appeared very sanctimonious and deceived some who were not able to detect her in her hypocrisy: others however had the spirit of discernment, and her follies and abominations were made manifest.”⁶⁵

The situation was similar to the Hiram Page incident when he claimed to be receiving revelations. Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord and received this instruction: “And this ye shall know assuredly—that there is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abide in me” (D&C 43: 3). The only way the Lord would give revelations to someone else on behalf of the Church, was if Joseph Smith ceased to “abide in” the Lord. However, the Lord added a safeguard against others trying to replace Joseph Smith. “I say unto you that none else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him; for if it be taken from him he shall not have power except to appoint another in his stead” (D&C 43:5). Joseph Smith was given power to designate a successor if he were to fall. Finally, the Lord used

65 John Whitmer, “Book of John Whitmer,” Typescript, 4. As found in *LDS Collectors Library* [2005].

definitive language in the revelation - perhaps to eliminate any future confusion: “And this shall be a law unto you, that ye receive not the teachings of any that shall come before you as revelations or commandments; and this I give unto you that you may not be deceived, that you may know that they are not of me” (D&C 43:6). Joseph Smith was to be the only mouthpiece of the Lord for the Church, and if the Lord needed to remove Joseph Smith, He would designate a successor through the Prophet.

The development of the doctrine of spiritual gifts was significant in further defining Joseph Smith's calling. Doctrine and Covenants 46 describes many spiritual gifts that “are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do” (D&C 46:9). The spiritual gifts mentioned include the gift of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, prophecy, the working of miracles, and many others.⁶⁶ After listing these spiritual gifts the Lord declares, “unto some it may be given to have all those gifts, that there may be a head, in order that every member may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:29). The person appointed as the head could receive all the gifts. In a later revelation, the Lord referred to this blessing stating that the President of the Church's calling was “to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church” (D&C 107:92). As the head of the church, Joseph Smith had the right to hold all the spiritual gifts.⁶⁷

The location of Zion revealed

Not long after the saints began to gather in Ohio, the Lord revealed yet another place of gathering. In July 1831, Joseph Smith and others traveled to Jackson County Missouri. Here the Prophet received the revelation found in Doctrine and Covenants 57. In it the Lord declared “this

⁶⁶ See Doctrine and Covenants 46:13-28. See also Moroni 10:9-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-11.

⁶⁷ One commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants explains, “The president of the Church not only presides over all of its members but also over all of the gifts given them of God to aid in the building of his earthly kingdom” (McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 369).

is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion” (D&C 57:2). More specifically, the Lord designated Independence, Missouri as “the center place” (D&C 57:3). This indicated that Independence, Missouri was to be the center place for the New Jerusalem which was to be built up in the days surrounding the Second Coming.⁶⁸ Joseph Smith was to designate who should settle there. “Behold, I, the Lord, will give unto my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., power that he shall be enabled to discern by the Spirit those who shall go up unto the land of Zion” (D&C 63:41). The responsibility to establish and build Zion was a significant part of the Prophet's calling.

As Joseph Smith received and recorded revelations in 1831, “a few wondered about the capacity of an uneducated young man to do justice to his own revelations.”⁶⁹ The Prophet's revelations were not in question, but his language. William E. McLellin, one of the Twelve, felt the language of the revelations were not impressive and befitting God's prophet. The Lord sustained his prophet with these words: “Your eyes have been upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and his language you have known, and his imperfections you have known; and you have sought in your hearts knowledge that you might express beyond his language” (D&C 67:5). Accordingly, the Lord issued a challenge: “Now, seek ye out of the Book of Commandments, even the least that is among them, and appoint him that is the most wise among you; or, if there be any among you that shall make one like unto it, then ye are justified in saying that ye do not know that they are true” (D&C 67:6-7). Joseph Smith reported what followed in his journal:

After the foregoing was received, William E. McLellin, as the wisest man, in his own estimation, having more learning than sense, endeavored to write a

68 The New Jerusalem is mentioned in the following verses of scripture: Revelation 3:12; 21:2; 3 Nephi 20:22; 21:23-24; Ether 13:3-6,10; Doctrine and Covenants 42:9,35,62,67; 45:66; 84:2,4; 133:56; Moses 7:62; and Article of Faith 10.

69 Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 174.

commandment like unto one of the least of the Lord's, but failed; it was an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord. The Elders and all present that witnessed this vain attempt of a man to imitate the language of Jesus Christ, renewed their faith in the fulness of the Gospel, and in the truth of the commandments and revelations which the Lord had given to the Church through my instrumentality; and the Elders signified a willingness to bear testimony of their truth to all the world.⁷⁰

The Prophet regarded the language of the revelations as the “language of Jesus Christ,” and therefore indisputable. However on November 8, 1831 a conference of Elders (at which Joseph Smith was present) passed the resolution that the Prophet should review the revelations and “correct those errors or mistakes which he may discover by the Holy Spirit.”⁷¹ However, it turned out that the errors were not attributed to mistakes in the revelations themselves, but mistakes committed by scribes.⁷² Joseph Smith felt that the revelations were from God, and thus above criticism or correction.

Because of the preceding revelations, it would be easy to conclude that Joseph Smith was the only one eligible to receive revelation in the Church. However, in section 68 the Lord revealed an empowering principle about others who are ordained to the priesthood, and called to preach: “Whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:4). Even inspired church

70 Joseph Smith, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols., Dean C. Jessee, ed. [1989], 1:367.

71 Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844*, [1983], 29. As found in LDS Collectors Library [2005].

72 Ibid. The Far West Record reports: “Remarks by br. Sidney Rigdon on the errors or mistakes which are in commandments and revelations, made either by the scribe translation in consequence of the slow way of the scribe at the time of receiving or by the scribes themselves.”

members' words could be considered scripture. This revelation clarifies that Joseph Smith's calling did not give him a monopoly on revelation. It is true that Joseph Smith was the only one with the right to receive church-wide revelation, but this verse declares that others could receive significant revelations as well. Joseph Smith had a monopoly on revelation for the Church, but not on all revelation.⁷³ This was a significant concept that provided that “every man might speak in the name of God” (D&C 1:20⁷⁴), not just Joseph Smith.

Keys to the Kingdom

Throughout the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord declared that Joseph Smith held the keys of the kingdom of God. This doctrine of priesthood keys was significant to Joseph Smith's understanding of his calling. The following is a list of the keys that the Prophet possessed as mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants:

1. Key of the gift of translation (D&C 6:25-28).
2. “Keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins” (D&C 13).⁷⁵
3. “Keys of the mysteries, and the revelations which are sealed” (D&C 28:7).
4. “Keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed, even things which were from the foundation of the world, and the things which shall come from this time until the time of my coming” (D&C 35:18).
5. “Keys of the church” (D&C 42:69).⁷⁶

⁷³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 175.

⁷⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 1:20 was also given in November, 1831, around the same time that section 68 was given. So the doctrine that all men could speak for God (in certain circumstances) was revealed at this time in two separate revelations (D&C 1:20 and 68:4).

⁷⁵ These keys were conferred as John the Baptist ordained Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic Priesthood on May 15, 1829. Since both the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery were ordained together, these keys were not necessarily held exclusively by Joseph Smith.

⁷⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 42 is directed from the Lord to the “elders of my church” (D&C 42:1). So the keys referred to herein are not held only by Joseph Smith.

6. “Keys of the mysteries of my kingdom” (D&C 64:5).
7. “Keys of the kingdom” (D&C 81:2).⁷⁷
8. “Keys of the school of the prophets” (D&C 90:7).⁷⁸
9. “Keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north” (D&C 110:11).⁷⁹
10. Keys of the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham (D&C 110:12).⁸⁰
11. “Keys of this dispensation” (D&C 110:16).⁸¹
12. “Keys of this kingdom and ministry” (D&C 115:19).
13. “Keys of the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 128:20).
14. Keys and power to make earthly contracts binding after death (D&C 132:7).
15. “Keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things, and make known unto you all things in due time” (D&C 132:45).

The one who holds the keys of the kingdom has the responsibility to lead the kingdom of God on the earth. The Lord stated, “Israel shall be saved in mine own due time; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led, and no more be confounded at all” (D&C 35:25). Not only did the keys give Joseph Smith the right to lead, but they also gave him the right to revelation in that leadership. The Prophet explained, “For him to whom these keys are given there is no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men,

77 These keys “belong always to the Presidency of the High Priesthood” (D&C 81:2). Thus, Joseph Smith held these keys jointly with the other members of the Presidency. Doctrine and Covenants 90:6 states, “Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, their sins are forgiven them also, and they are accounted as equal with thee in holding the keys of this last kingdom.”

78 The school of the prophets met during the winter of 1832-1833 in Kirtland, Ohio under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

79 Moses appeared as angel in the Kirtland Temple and committed these keys to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on April 3, 1836.

80 These keys were conferred by Elias in the Kirtland Temple.

81 These keys were conferred by Elijah in fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13-15.

both as well for the dead as for the living” (D&C 128:11). Joseph Smith explained, “the fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the Church are vested in the keys of the kingdom.”⁸²

The keys have to be present to govern the Church of Christ. Joseph Smith stated, “the keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent.”⁸³ As Joseph Smith was visited by heavenly messengers, and received the keys of the kingdom, he grew in his knowledge of his calling and responsibilities. The Lord promised the Prophet, “the keys of this kingdom shall never be taken from you, while thou art in the world, neither in the world to come” (D&C 90:3). Joseph Smith came to understand that his calling would extend beyond mortal life because he would always hold the keys of the kingdom.

The organization of the First Presidency of the Church was a significant development affecting Joseph Smith's calling. It was formally organized on March 18, 1833. The First Presidency was designated as the highest Church council. In describing the authority of the First Presidency, the Lord explained that there were righteous and holy men who were called to this position anciently.⁸⁴ Once again, Joseph Smith was here being compared to ancient prophets.

In a revelation given on March 8, 1833, the Lord declared, “verily I say unto thy brethren, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, their sins are forgiven them also, and they are accounted as equal with thee in holding the keys of this last kingdom” (D&C 90:6). In an earlier revelation, the Lord had declared that the keys “belong always unto the Presidency of the High Priesthood” (D&C 81:2). These revelations left room for speculation that the counselors in the First Presidency held the same authority and keys as Joseph Smith. The Prophet clarified this issue in a meeting on January 16, 1836. He stated, “The Twelve are not subject to any other than

82 Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, [1979], 21.

83 *Ibid.*, 157.

84 See Doctrine and Covenants 107:29.

the First Presidency . . . and where I am not, there is no First Presidency over the Twelve.”⁸⁵ The counselors in the First Presidency held keys by association to the President of the Church. The counselors did not hold keys independent of the President. Though the counselors held keys with Joseph Smith, the responsibility of holding all the keys was ultimately the Prophet's.⁸⁶

The revelations explain that the First Presidency is the highest authority in administering disciplinary actions within the Church. “No bishop or high priest who shall be set apart for this ministry shall be tried or condemned for any crime, save it be before the First Presidency of the church; and inasmuch as he is found guilty before this Presidency, by testimony that cannot be impeached, he shall be condemned” (D&C 68:22-23). If any member of the Church was dissatisfied with a disciplinary decision made by a high council, they could appeal to the First Presidency and seek a re-hearing.⁸⁷ As part of his calling as a member of the First Presidency, Joseph Smith had the responsibility to pass judgment in church disciplinary cases.

In the first years of the Church, many offices of the priesthood were revealed and quorums were organized. On March 28, 1835, Joseph Smith received a revelation that specified the different offices of the priesthood, and explained their duties. Among the offices mentioned were deacon, teacher, priest, bishop, seventy, and the Twelve Apostles. After their offices and duties were named, the Lord named the highest office, “The duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses” (D&C 107:91). In addition to receiving revelation for the whole church, Joseph Smith was to have ultimate authority over it.

85 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:374.

86 To expound on this idea John A. Widstoe explained, “The Counselors do not possess the power of the President and cannot act in Church matters without direction and consent of the President.” (John A. Widstoe, *Joseph Smith*, [1957], 303). Another commentary explains, “The President of the Church himself is the only individual who exercises by right all the keys of the kingdom at one time. These keys are always extended through the President to his counselors in the presidency by virtue of their association with him in that quorum.” (Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 4 vols. [2004], 3:3.

87 See Doctrine and Covenants 102:27, 33.

The Lord continued to explain the President of the High Priesthood's position: "Behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church" (D&C 107:91-92). Here the title "revelator" is attributed to Joseph Smith, as President of the High Priesthood. This title is rare in scripture, appearing only once in the Book of Mormon, and six times in the Doctrine and Covenants.⁸⁸ It never appears in the Bible. In the revelations, "revelator" is used to mean "one who reveals." In a revelation to Sidney Rigdon, the Lord explained the relationship between Sidney Rigdon and the Prophet, "I will give unto thee power to be mighty in expounding all scriptures, that thou mayest be a spokesman unto him and he shall be a revelator unto thee" (D&C 100:11). Sidney Rigdon was to be an expounder, Joseph Smith was to be a revealer.

At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836, Joseph Smith offered the dedicatory prayer. The prayer is now part of the Doctrine and Covenants (section 109). An examination of his prayer further reveals what he understood his calling to be. In the prayer, Joseph Smith prays in behalf of all the saints. He rarely singles himself out in the prayer, instead including himself in the congregation simply as one of "thy servants."⁸⁹ During the prayer, the Prophet refers to an earlier revelation that he had received, and quotes from it word for word. He said, "As thou hast said in a revelation, given to us, calling us thy friends, saying . . ." (D&C 109:6). He then quotes verbatim from Doctrine and Covenants 88:117-120. He also stated that the revelation was "given to us," again placing himself among the multitude to whom the revelation was directed. He did not refer to himself as above or separate from the general membership of the Church. Also, the

88 See Mosiah 8:16; Doctrine and Covenants 77:2 (referring to John the Revelator, author of "The Revelation of St. John the Divine" in the New Testament); 100:11; 107:92; 124:94 (referring to Hyrum Smith, patriarch to the Church), 125; 128:6 (also referring to John the Revelator).

89 The phrase "thy servants" is used 16 times in the prayer. At one point in he does single himself out, pleading in his own behalf that the Lord remember that he has "sincerely striven to do thy will" (D&C 109:68). He also prays for his wife and children, and their immediate connections (see verses 70-71).

fact that he quoted section 88 word for word in his prayer is evidence that the Prophet viewed the revelations that he received as quotable (even in prayer) and binding. Though Joseph Smith received the revelations as a prophet, he viewed himself as among the general membership of the Church, and thus bound by the commandments he received.

In the dedicatory prayer the Prophet includes himself as one of the members pleading, “We ask thee to assist us, thy people, with thy grace, in calling our solemn assembly” (D&C 109:10). Despite his position, the Prophet recognized his need for the Lord's grace “to secure a fulfillment of the promises which thou hast made unto us, thy people, in the revelations given unto us” (D&C 109:11). This last phrase again shows that Joseph Smith viewed himself as among the audience of the revelations, not only as the revelator.

Joseph Smith offered a glimpse of his view of himself before the Lord as he gave the dedicatory prayer. He plead for himself, “O Lord, remember thy servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., and all his afflictions and persecutions—how he has covenanted with Jehovah, and vowed to thee, O Mighty God of Jacob—and the commandments which thou hast given unto him, and that he hath sincerely striven to do thy will” (D&C 109:68-69). It is apparent that Joseph Smith felt dependent upon the mercies of the Lord, and he felt that his own efforts in his calling had been sincere. He also plead for his family and others, “Have mercy, O Lord, upon his wife and children, that they may be exalted in thy presence, and preserved by thy fostering hand. Have mercy upon all their immediate connections” (D&C 109:69-70). This prayer reveals a prophet who felt he had to plead for the Lord's mercy just as much as his followers did.

The dedicatory prayer also illustrates that Joseph Smith understood that he is part of the work of the latter-day gathering of Israel. He prayed that “all the scattered remnants of Israel, who have been driven to the ends of the earth, come to a knowledge of the truth, believe in the

Messiah, and be redeemed from oppression, and rejoice before thee” (D&C 109:67). He saw himself as one of those called to gather scattered Israel. An earlier revelation called Joseph Smith and others, “the first laborers in this last kingdom” (D&C 88:74). He referred to himself and the Church as “us, who are identified with the Gentiles” (D&C 109:60). The Prophet perceived that he was involved in the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Gentiles would bring the gospel to the Jews in the last days.⁹⁰ He prayed, “We therefore ask thee to have mercy upon the children of Jacob, that Jerusalem from this hour, may begin to be redeemed” (D&C 109:62). The prayer further showed that the Prophet felt that he was part of the cause that fulfilled a prophecy of Daniel in the Old Testament. Daniel taught of a kingdom, “which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44), that would “become a great mountain and fill the whole earth” (D&C 109:72).⁹¹ And ultimately, Joseph Smith perceived himself as a part of the great latter-day work that would culminate in the appearance of the Savior. He plead, “That thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness . . . and be adorned as a bride . . . that when the trump shall sound for the dead, we shall be caught up in the cloud to meet thee” (D&C 109:73-75). The dedicatory prayer is a glimpse into the Prophet’s perceptions, as he sees himself as part of a magnificent work.

After the dedication of the Kirtland Temple there was a season of great joy among the Saints. Milton V. Backman, Jr., described that time, “While the Saints rejoiced as they attended one pentecostal meeting after another for more than a year, the peace and serenity of that season were marred by some strife and friction.”⁹² The days that followed were some of the darkest in the history of the Church.⁹³ Joseph Smith reported, “God revealed to me that something new

90 “And the times cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (1 Nephi 13:42). See also Matthew 20:8-16, Luke 13:24-30, Jacob 5:63.

91 See Daniel 2:44-45. See also Doctrine and Covenants 65:2.

92 Milton V. Backman, *The Heavens Resound – A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830-1838*, [1983], 308.

93 McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 898.

must be done for the salvation of His Church. And on or about the first of June, 1837, Heber C. Kimball, one of the Twelve, was set apart by the spirit of prophecy and revelation . . . to preside over a mission to England, to be the first foreign mission of the Church of Christ in the last days.”⁹⁴ This call from Joseph Smith to Heber C. Kimball caused further problems.

During this time, many of the apostles were challenging Joseph Smith's authority. Thomas B. Marsh, the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, felt that Joseph Smith had supplanted him in his duty to direct the twelve in foreign missionary work by calling Heber C. Kimball to serve a foreign mission.⁹⁵ In effect, Thomas B. Marsh challenged Joseph Smith's authority to call Heber C. Kimball to serve in England. As a result, the Lord specified in a revelation, “Verily, I say unto you, my servant Thomas, thou art the man whom I have chosen to hold the keys of my kingdom, as pertaining to the Twelve, abroad among all nations-- That thou mayest be my servant to unlock the door of the kingdom in all places where my servant Joseph, and my servant Sidney, and my servant Hyrum, cannot come” (D&C 112:17). Thomas B. Marsh was only to use his keys in situations where the First Presidency could not go. The Prophet's authority overrode Thomas B. Marsh's keys to direct the Twelve. This verse established an order to the keys of the kingdom. Thomas B. Marsh's were designed to be used only when the First Presidency was not present. As with the situations including Hiram Page, Ms. Hubble, and Oliver Cowdery, the Lord here asserts that Joseph Smith and the First Presidency are the ultimate authority, and always preside when they are present.

Section 112 also presents the concept of the dispensation of the fullness of times.⁹⁶ This

94 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:489.

95 Ronald K. Esplin, “Exalt Not Yourselves’: the Revelations and Thomas Marsh An Object Lesson for Our Day,” in Byron R. Merrill et al., comps., *The Heavens Are Open: The 1992 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*, [1992], 122.

96 “A gospel dispensation is a period of time in which the truths of salvation are dispensed anew from the heavens so that there is no dependency on the revelations given to those of an earlier age” (McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 203).

was an important concept for Joseph Smith to understand to come to a full understanding of his calling. As the one who held all the keys of the kingdom in the dispensation of the fullness of times, Joseph Smith occupied a unique position. Joseph Smith quoted Paul, explaining the concept: “In the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).⁹⁷ The dispensation of the fullness of times was to bring together all keys, knowledge, and ordinances that had been revealed in previous dispensations: “It is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.” (D&C 128:18).

As part of the gathering of keys into one, leaders of previous dispensations had appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple, and elsewhere, to commit keys to them.⁹⁸ The Lord explained the privilege of holding the keys of the last dispensation: “Which power you hold, in connection with all those who have received a dispensation at any time from the beginning of the creation . . . the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and last of all, being sent down from heaven unto you” (D&C 112:32). Joseph Smith's calling was placed in company with that of heads of previous

97 Joseph Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon B. Cook, comp. and ed. [1996], 10. Computer Edition as found in LDS Collector's Library Software [2005].

98 Doctrine and Covenants 27:12-13 and 128:20 indicate the Peter, James, and John conferred the keys of the dispensation of the fulness of times to Joseph Smith when he was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood. Section 110 contains accounts of other dispensation head delivering keys to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Doctrine and Covenants 128:21 records that Joseph Smith heard many prophets “declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood.”

dispensations such as Adam, Moses, and Elijah. The Prophet said that the dispensation of the fullness of times was “a dispensation to meet the promises made by Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world for the salvation of man.”⁹⁹ It was also a time when the Lord would “reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensations of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:41). The doctrine of the dispensation of the fullness of times was important to Joseph Smith’s understanding of the significance of his calling. He stood at the head of the last dispensation, which was the culmination of all previous dispensations. After teaching this doctrine to the Prophet, the Lord declared, “Behold, how great is your calling” (D&C 112:33). Joseph Smith was taught that he stood in a significant and unique position in the history of the Lord’s kingdom on earth.

While Joseph Smith was in Liberty Jail, the Lord spoke to him about the impact his calling would have on the world. “The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name” (D&C 122:1). This prophecy agrees with a statement by the Angel Moroni during his first appearance to Joseph Smith in 1823: “He said . . . that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith – History 1:33). Joseph Smith's calling would eventually influence people throughout the whole earth.

In section 124, the Lord expressed His feelings about how Joseph Smith had fulfilled his calling. “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Joseph Smith, I am well pleased with your offering and acknowledgements, which you have made; for unto this end have I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things of the earth” (D&C 124:1). As of this revelation on January 19, 1841, Joseph Smith knew that the Lord was pleased with his efforts to fulfill his calling.

⁹⁹ Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 346.

The Lord also taught the Prophet about his authority in comparison to the kings and rulers of the world. The Lord commanded Joseph Smith to make a proclamation “to all the kings of the world, to the four corners thereof, to the honorable president-elect, and the high-minded governors of the nation in which you live, and to all the nations of the earth scattered abroad” (D&C 124:3). The Lord taught Joseph Smith to have the proper perspective about the authority of earthly rulers, “Call ye, therefore, upon them with loud proclamation, and with your testimony, fearing them not for they are as grass, and all their glory as the flower thereof which soon falleth” (D&C 124:7). Joseph Smith's calling was far more significant than the positions of earthly kings and rulers.

Joseph Smith faced another challenge to his authority from Almon Babbitt. Brother Babbitt was encouraging members of the Church to settle in Kirtland, Ohio instead of following the Prophet's counsel for the members to settle near Nauvoo, Illinois. The Lord stated, “With my servant Almon Babbitt, there are many things with which I am not well pleased; behold, he aspireth to establish his counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church; and he setteth up a golden calf for the worship of my people” (D&C 124:84). In a letter to Oliver Granger written on July 22, 1840, Joseph Smith spoke of Almon Babbitt's actions: “When I think that others who have lately come into the Church should be led to Kirtland instead of to this place, by Elder Babbitt; and having their confidence in the authorities lessened by such observations as he (Elder Babbitt) has thought proper to make . . . I must say that I feel grieved in spirit, and cannot tolerate such proceedings—neither will I; but will endeavor to disabuse the minds of the Saints, and break down all such unhallowed proceedings. . . . If Brother Babbitt and the other brethren wish to reform the Church . . . they

must use other weapons than lies, or their object can never be effected.”¹⁰⁰

In the same letter, Joseph Smith acknowledged that such rebellion against his authority had occurred often: “How frequently has your humble servant been envied in his office by such characters, who endeavored to raise themselves to power at his expense.” Among those were some who were rebuked in the revelations for so doing, such as Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery. The Prophet also wrote of common tactics of those that envied his office. They “resorted to foul slander and abuse, and other means to effect his overthrow. Such characters have ever been the first to cry out against the Presidency, and publish their faults and foibles to the four winds of heaven.”¹⁰¹ Almon Babbitt's rebellion was another manifestation of the opposition that would often arise against Joseph Smith and his position. Section 124 reiterated what previous revelations had declared—no one had the authority to establish counsel contrary to the Prophet's.

Until section 124, Joseph Smith stood alone as the only one to hold the titles of prophet, seer, and revelator. However, in verse 94, these titles are given to Hyrum Smith: “And from this time forth I appoint unto him that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph.” Hyrum held these titles in connection with his calling as the patriarch of the church. These titles, however, did not give Hyrum equal authority with Joseph Smith. The Lord specified that Hyrum should “receive counsel from my servant Joseph” (D&C 124:95). This set an important precedent that multiple men could be prophets, seers, and revelators, without interfering with the rights of the head, or president of the Church.¹⁰²

Later in section 124, the Lord specified again what set Joseph Smith apart from other

100 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:166.

101 Ibid.

102 George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, Jerreld L. Newquist, ed., [1987], 204. Currently the Church sustains all the members of the First Presidency as well as the Quorum of the Twelve as prophets, seers, and revelators.

prophets, seers, and revelators. “I give unto you my servant Joseph to be a presiding elder over all my church, to be a translator, a revelator, a seer, and prophet” (D&C 124:125). He was to preside as well as to be part of the First Presidency and thus “receive oracles for the whole church” (D&C 124:126). No matter what titles or callings other men attained, Joseph Smith was to preside over all of them and receive revelation for the whole church.

In the summer of 1842, Joseph Smith was forced into hiding because of numerous persecutions and threats from his enemies. While in hiding, the Prophet contemplated and wrote about why he was so fiercely persecuted. “As for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world for some good end, or bad, as you may choose to call it. God knoweth all these things, whether it be bad or good” (D&C 127:2). In expressing these feelings, which are now found in section 127, Joseph Smith revealed that he felt he was ordained to his calling before the foundation of the world. The Prophet felt that his calling was significant enough to elicit pre-mortal preparation and ordination. In a discourse he concluded, “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council.”¹⁰³

The Prophet felt that the opposition he faced came from the same source as the opposition that Jesus Christ faced: “The enemy is on the alert, and as the Savior said, the prince of this world cometh, but he hath nothing in me” (D&C 128:11). At the close of his epistle, which is now found in section 127, Joseph Smith was certain enough about his calling and position to openly acknowledge it, “I subscribe myself your servant in the Lord, prophet and seer of The

103 Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 356.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (D&C 124:12).

Many of the final sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were not originally classified as revelations. Section 127 was an epistle written from Joseph Smith to the Church. It was added to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1844 shortly after the Prophet's death.¹⁰⁴ It included a portion that was in the Lord's voice, beginning with a phrase commonly used in the revelations, “Thus saith the Lord” (D&C 127:40).¹⁰⁵ The rest of the section is written in the Prophet's voice. This shows that the Church came to treat Joseph Smith's words as equal with those that he designated as a revelation from the Lord. Section 128 further illustrates this, as it is a letter from Joseph Smith, which is written entirely in the Prophet's voice, never using the phrase “thus saith the Lord.”

The fact that Sections 129, 130 and 131 are contained in the Doctrine and Covenants is an example of how the Church later viewed Joseph Smith's teachings.¹⁰⁶ These sections are excerpts of the Prophet's discourses given in the last two years of his life. The Church was willing to accept the Prophet's words as scripture, even when they were not given in the Lord's voice.

The Lord gave the Prophet greater responsibilities in Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In verse seven, the Lord declared that Joseph Smith was the only one that held the keys for all ordinances that were to extend beyond death into the afterlife: “Whatsoever you seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens” (D&C 132:46). As part of this duty, Joseph Smith had the authority to seal spouses in eternal marriage. “Whomsoever you give any one on earth, by my word and according to my law, it shall be . . . without condemnation on earth and in heaven” (D&C 132:48). As the holder of the keys of eternal marriage, Joseph Smith

104 Sections 103, 105, 112, 119, 124, 127, 128, and 135 were also added in the 1844 edition. See Robert J.

Woodford, “Doctrine and Covenants Editions,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. [1992], 1:426.

105 The phrase “thus saith the Lord” appears in 51 different verses in the Doctrine and Covenants.

106 Sections 129, 130 and 131 were first included in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.

also had the responsibility to govern the practice of plural marriage.¹⁰⁷ This is the same law lived by ancient prophets such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Lord gives justification for this practice in Doctrine and Covenants 132:28-40. The restoration of this practice under Joseph Smith constituted part of his responsibility to restore all things, even this practice of ancient prophets. “I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment, and restore all things. . . . For I have conferred upon you the keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things” (D&C 132:40, 45). Joseph Smith faced the practice of plural marriage with great reticence.¹⁰⁸ The Lord explained that He instituted it “to prove you all, as I did Abraham, and that I might require an offering at your hand, by covenant and sacrifice” (D&C 132:51).

Chronologically, section 132 is the last revelation that Joseph Smith received that is included in the Doctrine and Covenants. It contains the Lord's view of how Joseph Smith had fulfilled his calling to that point (July 12, 1843). “Behold, I have seen your sacrifices, and will forgive all your sins; I have seen your sacrifices in obedience to that which I have told you” (D&C 132:50). Because of his faithfulness to his calling Joseph Smith received a striking promise. The Lord declared, “I seal upon you your exaltation, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father” (D&C 132:49). After the heavy responsibilities that had been placed

107 The practice of plural marriage, or a man having multiple wives, was discontinued under President Wilford Woodruff in 1890. See Official Declaration #1 in the Doctrine and Covenants.

108 As illustration of Joseph Smith's hesitance to begin the practice of plural marriage, Eliza R. Snow explained, “It was at the private interview referred to above, that the Prophet Joseph unbosomed his heart, and described the trying mental ordeal he experienced in overcoming the repugnance of his feelings, the natural result of the force of education and social custom, relative to the introduction of plural marriage. He knew the voice of God—he knew the commandment of the Almighty to him was to go forward—to set the example, and establish Celestial plural marriage. He knew that he had not only his own prejudices and prepossessions to combat and to overcome, but those of the whole Christian world stared him in the face; but God, who is above all, had given the commandment, and He must be obeyed. Yet the Prophet hesitated and deferred from time to time, until an angel of God stood by him with a drawn sword, and told him that, unless he moved forward and established plural marriage, his Priesthood would be taken from him and he should be destroyed! This testimony he not only bore to my brother, but also to others—a testimony that cannot be gainsayed.” (Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*, 70. (As recorded in *LDS Collector's Library* [2005])).

upon the Prophet in the revelations, the promise of exaltation was a reward for faithfully bearing up those responsibilities.

The revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants proved to be one of the primary sources from which Joseph Smith learned of the duties of his calling. Through them, he came to know what was expected of him. He received counsel, rebukes, assignments, and encouragement. Since he viewed the revelations as the Lord's word, not his, he felt he was obligated to carry out the Lord's instructions contained therein. He did so diligently, and was ultimately praised for his faithfulness. The revelations served as an effective tool to train the Prophet Joseph Smith in his divine calling.

Joseph Smith's View of His Calling in His Writings

Joseph Smith often commented about his calling in his personal writings. A careful study of those comments is vital in understanding what he perceived his calling to be. He left many writings in the form of letters, journals and articles which he either wrote or dictated. Studying his writings to understand his view of his calling has both limitations and strengths.

One limitation of studying Joseph Smith's writings is the fact that he most often used a scribe. Dean C. Jessee wrote, "While the writings of those who helped Joseph keep his history are usually accurate in their presentation of subject matter and events, the deeper manifestations of thought and personality may at best be secondhand."¹⁰⁹ Those few existing documents which are written in Joseph Smith's own hand are the best existing autobiographical resources for discovering his thought. However, there is still much benefit in studying those texts that were dictated by the Prophet. Joseph Smith's journals, letters, and personal histories contain many statements which are beneficial in this study of the Prophet's view of his calling.

One of the great strengths of studying writings is that they are often more carefully crafted than spoken words. Throughout the Prophet's writings there are several instances where corrections were inserted, showing care in his wording so he would not be misunderstood. Joseph Smith would often have his clerks read a dictated document back to him so he could make needed corrections. In some instances, he read the documents and made the corrections himself.¹¹⁰ The Prophet Joseph was cautious that his writings correctly portray what he intended. Thus, his writings can generally be trusted as accurate sources.

Another benefit of studying the Prophet's writings is they highlight those things he

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, Dean C. Jessee, ed., comp. [2002], 5.

¹¹⁰ For example, in a letter to the Church at Quincy, Illinois, March 20, 1839, Joseph Smith personally wrote in the phrase "that are not of our faith" to clarify that he was speaking of non-Mormons. (Smith, *Personal Writings*, 445).

considered most important. In general, a person only records in writing those things which are most significant to them. Thus by examining Joseph Smith's writings it is revealed some of what he felt was most important. The extent of his written comments about his calling illustrates his concern about it. Through a careful study of Joseph Smith's writings, there are many insights gained about his perception of his calling.

Source of his authority and calling

In his writings, the Prophet insisted the source of his calling was God. In his first written account, recorded in 1832, he outlined four major points of his early history: "Firstly, he receiving the testimony from on high; Secondly, the ministering of Angels; thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministering of Angels . . . ; fourthly, a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood . . . from on high."¹¹¹ In all four of these points, Joseph Smith affirmed the source was either "on high" or angels. Joseph Smith considered it important that his calling came from God and not from man. In 1839, he explained to a non-Mormon, Isaac Galland, "We believe that no man can administer salvation through the gospel, to the souls of men, in the name of Jesus Christ, except he is authorized from God, by revelation, or by being ordained by some one whom God hath sent by revelation . . . I will ask, how can they be sent without a revelation, or some other visible display of the manifestation of God?"¹¹² The Prophet indicated that the strength of his calling lay in the fact that he had received a visible manifestation, and thus a direct calling from God, not man.

Joseph Smith's writings convey that he felt a great deal of responsibility concerning his calling. In a letter to Oliver Granger, he wrote, "I feel impressed to write what I have done from

111 "History, 1832," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 10.

112 "To Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 459.

a sense of duty which I owe to the Church of Christ.”¹¹³ Joseph Smith’s writings reveal several duties he felt were important to his calling.

Perceived Duties

As evidenced by his writings, one of the main responsibilities that weighed on Joseph Smith’s mind was that of translating ancient texts. This began in 1827 when he received the Gold Plates. The Prophet considered this to be the beginning of his calling.¹¹⁴ Throughout his life, he continued to feel a sense of urgency to translate those texts in his possession, including the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Egyptian scrolls.¹¹⁵ In 1835 he wrote, “We are now commencing to prepare and print the New Translation, together with all the revelations which God has been pleased to give us in these last days, and as we are in want of funds to go on with so great and glorious a work, brethren we want you should donate and loan us all the means or money you can that we may be enabled to accomplish the work as a great means towards the salvation of men.”¹¹⁶ It is clear the Prophet considered the work of translation pressing. The Prophet’s writings suggest he felt a sense of duty to use the gift of translation which the Lord had given him. In 1840 he manifested his anxiousness to translate with this plea to the Nauvoo High Council: “The time has now come when [I] should devote [myself] exclusively to . . . the work of translating the Egyptian Records – the Bible – and [receiving revelations for the Church].”¹¹⁷ Joseph Smith felt translation was one of his major responsibilities, since he was the sole possessor of the right to translate for the Church.¹¹⁸

113 “To Oliver Granger, 4 May 1841,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 528.

114 In 1835 he recorded that he had been “laboring in this cause for eight years.” *Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1 September, 1835 No. 12, 179.

115 The translation of the Egyptian scrolls resulted in what is now known as the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price, one of the standard works in LDS scripture.

116 “To Brethren in the Lord, 15 June 1835,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 363.

117 *History of the Church*, 4:137.

118 Oliver Cowdery was also given the opportunity to translate the Book of Mormon, but failed in his attempt. See Doctrine and Covenants 8 and 9. See also chapter two of this work.

The work of receiving revelations was also important to the Prophet. He felt it was his duty to “wait upon the Lord for such revelations as may be suited to the condition and circumstances of the church.”¹¹⁹ Some other religious leaders in his day were content to have the Lord’s word as contained in the Bible and nothing more, but the Prophet Joseph saw a need for current revelation. In a letter to his uncle Silas Smith, the Prophet explained, “Seeing that the Lord has never given the world to understand by anything heretofore revealed that he had ceased forever to speak to his creatures when sought unto in a proper manner, why should it be thought a thing incredible that he should be pleased to speak again in these last days for their salvation? Perhaps you may be surprised at this assertion that I should say for the salvation of his creatures in these last days since we have already in our possession a vast volume of his word which he has previously given. But you will admit that the word spoken to Noah was not sufficient for Abraham.”¹²⁰ The Prophet felt the Church needed current revelation instead of relying solely on revelation given through past prophets. As the prophet of the Church, it was his responsibility to declare the Lord’s current will for the Church.

When he did receive revelations, Joseph Smith considered them sacred and binding. He warned the printer William W. Phelps, “I will exhort you to be careful not to alter the sense of any of them for he that adds or diminishes to the prophecies must come under the condemnation written therein.”¹²¹ The Prophet understood it was his calling to declare what commandments were binding upon the Church. “If there should be any corrections by the word of the Lord they shall be freely transmitted, and your humble servant will approve all things whatsoever is acceptable unto God.”¹²² Joseph Smith’s writings indicate the import he placed upon receiving

119 “To the Nauvoo High Council, 18 June 1840,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 502.

120 Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, Preston Nibley, ed., [1979], 234

121 “To William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 273.

122 *History of the Church*, 2:344.

revelations and transmitting the Lord's word to the Church.

Though he was a prophet, Joseph Smith knew his knowledge was limited. His writings show he felt a duty to learn all he could so he could more effectively perform his calling. He often studied Hebrew and the scriptures. In 1835, he wrote in his journal, "Spent this day in endeavoring to treasure up knowledge for the benefit of my Calling."¹²³

The Prophet's writings suggest he felt a duty to seek to expand his mind as much as possible in order to effectively fulfill his calling. From Liberty Jail he wrote, "Thy mind O man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss."¹²⁴ In order to fulfill his duty to lead the Church to salvation, the Prophet felt a duty to develop and expand his mind.

At times Joseph Smith felt it was his duty to rebuke. While writing to his brother William he explained this duty: "In the spirit of my calling and in view of the authority of the priesthood that has been conferred upon me, it would be my duty to reprove whatever I esteemed to be wrong, fondly hoping in my heart that all parties, would consider it right, and therefore humble themselves, that Satan might not take the advantage of us."¹²⁵

The Prophet's writings suggest he felt his duty to rebuke included those both inside and outside of the Church. On one occasion, a visitor named Robert Mathias visited Kirtland. After listening to him at length, the Prophet reported, "I told him that my God told me that his God is the Devil."¹²⁶ He felt it his responsibility to bring to light the dark practices of false religious leaders of his day. "I cannot but be thankful, that I have been instrumental in the providence of our Heavenly Father in drawing forth, before the eyes of the world, the spirits by which certain

123 "Journal 1835-1836, 21 December 1835," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 144.

124 *Ibid.*, 436.

125 *History of the Church*, 2:340.

126 "Journal, 1835-1836, 10 November 1835," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 108.

ones, who profess to be ‘Reformers, and Restorers of ancient principles,’ are actuated! I have always had the satisfaction of seeing truth triumph over error.”¹²⁷ The Prophet believed he was obligated to expose the false teachers of his day.

As prophet, he considered it his duty to rebuke those living in iniquity.¹²⁸ “I believe in living a virtuous, upright and holy life,” he wrote, “and feel it my duty to persuade all men in my power to do the same.”¹²⁹ The Prophet Joseph felt it his responsibility to rebuke wickedness in order to encourage virtuous living.

The Prophet’s writings reveal his sense of duty to persuade his hearers to embrace the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel. Joseph Smith stated the first principles and ordinances in a letter to John Wentworth: “First, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”¹³⁰ In a letter to N.C. Saxton, the editor of the Rochester, New York newspaper, the Prophet expressed what he considered to be the will of God for the world:

I will proceed to tell you what the Lord requires of all people . . . in order that they may enjoy the holy spirit of God to a fullness, and escape the judgments of God, which are almost ready to burst upon the nations of the earth – Repent of all your sins and be baptized in water for the remission of them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and receive the ordinance of the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power, that ye may receive the holy spirit of God, and this according to the holy scriptures, and

127 *Evening and Morning Star*, 2:192.

128 This is one example of a general rebuke of the wicked by the Prophet: “The buffeting of the adversary be upon all those who are iniquitous persons and rebellious, I would inform them they do not have my right hand of fellowship.” (“To William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 271).

129 “To Mr. Editor, 20 January 1840,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 496.

130 “Historical Sketch, 1 March 1842,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 248.

the Book of Mormon; and the only way that man can enter in to the Celestial kingdom.¹³¹

Joseph Smith considered it his duty to encourage all people to exercise faith by repenting, being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. These principles and ordinances were necessary for admittance to the Celestial Kingdom.¹³² Thus, Joseph Smith considered it his duty to invite all to obey them.

The Prophet's writings indicate he regarded it one of his duties to share his testimony of the Book of Mormon. He ended an 1834 letter to Oliver Cowdery saying, "I am your brother in the testimony of the book of Mormon, and shall ever remain."¹³³ About a year later, in a letter to Hezekiah Peck he called himself a "fellow laborer in the testimony of the book of Mormon."¹³⁴ In addition to his efforts to translate and publish the Book of Mormon, he felt obligated to testify of it.

As prophet and seer of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith had numerous perceived administrative duties, as evidenced by his writings. His earliest revelations implied he would eventually be involved in the administration of the Church. When Moroni visited him each year from 1823 to 1827, the Prophet reported that he "received instruction and intelligence from him [Moroni] at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days" (Joseph Smith – History 1:54). These interviews prepared Joseph Smith to eventually preside over the Church.

The Prophet's writings suggest he felt responsible for establishing and maintaining order

131 *History of the Church*, 1:314-5.

132 The Prophet taught that the Celestial Kingdom is the highest kingdom of glory after this life. See Doctrine and Covenants 76.

133 "To Oliver Cowdery, 24 September 1834," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 353.

134 *History of the Church*, 2:237.

in the Church. When the Saints built a temple in Kirtland, Joseph Smith and others formed rules to keep order in the temple. These rules reveal the Prophet Joseph's understanding of his position as presiding Elder of the Church: "1st – It is according to the rules and regulations of all regular and legal organized bodies to have a president to keep order. 2nd – The body thus organized are under obligation to be in subjection to that authority."¹³⁵ Joseph Smith believed he was responsible for keeping order, and the Saints were under the obligation to subject themselves to his authority. Another significant rule stated, "An insult offered to the presiding Elder of said church, shall be considered an insult to the whole body."¹³⁶ Joseph Smith considered it a serious offense to speak evil of the Lord's anointed prophet.

Though he was the Lord's anointed, Joseph Smith believed he needed to humbly receive counsel from others. He acknowledged to his brother William, "It is my duty, to be humble and to receive rebuke and instruction from a brother or a friend."¹³⁷ The Prophet understood his calling to be one of humble service to others, lifting them up, not himself. Though he was called to preside over the Church, He once wrote, "I love to wait upon the Saints, and be a servant of all hoping that I may be exalted in the due time of the Lord."¹³⁸ Regarding some who had served him, he wrote, "I hope I shall see them again that I may toil for them and administer to their comfort also. They shall not want a friend while I live."¹³⁹ The Prophet felt his calling was to serve, not be served.

As the presiding officer of the Church, many important decisions fell to Joseph Smith. In making decisions, he felt it his duty to seek to do the Lord's will, not his own. At times when he did not know the Lord's will, the Prophet considered it his responsibility to do his best with the

135 *History of the Church*, 2:368.

136 *Ibid.*, 158-9.

137 "Journal 1835-1836," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 143.

138 *History of the Church*, 5:109.

139 "Journal Extract, 16 August 1842," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 562.

knowledge he possessed. A situation with Oliver Granger in Kirtland illustrates this point. In late 1840, the Prophet understood that Granger intended to return to Nauvoo from Kirtland. Because of this, Joseph Smith called Almon Babbitt to preside over the stake in Kirtland instead of Oliver Granger. The calling would have likely been given to Oliver Granger if the Prophet had known Granger was going to stay in Kirtland. In explanation, Joseph Smith wrote to Oliver Granger, “we probably might have acted differently at the last conference, but not having the information we desired, we acted to the best of our understanding, which I hope will prove advantageous to all parties.”¹⁴⁰ When he did not have specific direction from the Lord, the Prophet felt his duty was to “act to the best of his understanding.”

Joseph Smith’s writings indicate his belief that his declarations as leader of the Church were binding upon the members. He held the authority to call people to positions in the Church, and those people were bound by duty to perform their calling until he released them. In a letter to Oliver Granger, he explained, “Dear Sir, I wish you to stand in your lot and keep the station which was given you by revelation and the authorities of the Church; attend to the affairs of the Church with diligence and then rest assured on the blessings of heaven: It is binding on you to act as president of the Church in Kirtland until you are removed by the same Authority which put you in.”¹⁴¹ The Prophet understood that actions he performed as President of the Church could only be undone by himself.

Because of his position as the Lord’s anointed, the Prophet concluded that Saints who did not support him were sinning. “If the Saints in Kirtland deem me unworthy of their prayers when they assemble together, and neglect to bear me up at a throne of heavenly grace, it is a strong and

140 “To Oliver Granger, 26 January 1841,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 523.

141 “To Oliver Granger, July 1840,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 514.

convincing proof to me that they have not the spirit of God.”¹⁴² Joseph Smith seems to have felt that, due to his position, disloyalty to him was disloyalty to the Lord, and the Lord would withdraw His Spirit from those who did not support His prophet.

Though Joseph Smith held divine authority, his writings exhibit his respect for the agency of others. He felt his calling did not give him the right to force his will on anyone. When N.C. Saxton published only a portion of the Prophet’s letter in the *Rochester Observer*, Joseph Smith wrote, “I am quite anxious to have it all laid before the public for it is of importance to them. But I have no claim upon you; neither do I wish to urge you beyond that which is reasonable to do it. I have only to appeal to your extended generosity to all religious societies that claim that Christ has come in the flesh and also tell you what will be the consequence of a neglect to publish it.” Though he would not impose his will on others, at times Joseph Smith used strong language to persuade them to follow his counsel. In the above letter to Mr. Saxton, the Prophet vehemently urged Saxton to publish his letter, “I now say unto you that if you wish to clear your garments from the blood of your readers I exhort you to publish that letter entire but if not the sin be upon your head.”¹⁴³

Joseph Smith’s writings display his feeling that it was his duty to teach the people the Gospel, and then allow his hearers to choose for themselves whether they would follow his counsel. He wrote to Joseph L. Heywood, “I never feel to force my doctrines upon any person.”¹⁴⁴ Concerning those who did not accept the Gospel as he taught it, he declared, “Our religion is between us and our God, their religion is between them and their God.”¹⁴⁵ The Prophet’s writings illustrate that he felt his duty was to persuade people to accept and live the

142 Ibid., 512.

143 “To N.C. Saxton, 12 February 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 299.

144 “To Joseph L. Heywood, 13 February 1844,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 595.

145 “To the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 445.

Gospel of Christ, but not force them

In his writings, it is apparent Joseph Smith did not feel he needed to manage all the affairs of the Church himself. He considered it important to delegate some duties to others. He believed in empowering other Church leaders to make important decisions, thus giving them the opportunity to grow in their callings. For example, as members of the Quorum of the Twelve were on a mission to England, they wrote a letter to Joseph Smith asking for his counsel on various minor matters. The Prophet answered, “I feel great confidence in your united wisdom, therefore you will excuse me for not entering into detail.”¹⁴⁶ The Prophet expressed trust that the Twelve could make good decisions without his help. Due to this trust and empowerment, men such as Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff developed into great leaders under the Prophet Joseph’s direction.

Though the Prophet was often involved in the temporal affairs of the members of the Church, his writings illustrate he felt his calling was principally to administer over the spiritual affairs of the Church. In Nauvoo in 1840, the Prophet expressed concern that he needed to concentrate more on the spiritual needs of the Church. Referring to himself as “your Memorialist,” he wrote the following to the Nauvoo High Council:

Your Memorialist feels it a duty which he owes to God as well as to the Church to give his attention more particularly to those things connected with the spiritual welfare of the Saints (which have now become a great people) so that they may be built up in their most holy faith and be enabled to go on to perfection . . . The time has now come when he should devote himself exclusively to those things which relate to Spiritualities of the Church . . . and in order to attend those things, prays that your honorable body will relieve him from the anxiety and trouble necessarily

146 “To the Twelve, 15 December 1840,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 518.

attendant on business transactions by appointing some one to take charge of the City Plot and attend to the business transactions which have heretofore rested upon your Memorialist.¹⁴⁷

Evidently, in Joseph Smith's mind, his duty over the spiritual affairs of the Church far outweighed his temporal responsibilities.

Joseph Smith's writings reveal he felt his position enabled him to recommend souls for salvation. In his journal, he wrote of Newel and Joseph Knight, "whose names I record in the Book of the Law of the Lord, with unspeakable delight, for they are my friends."¹⁴⁸ He seemingly believed his calling enabled him to record the names of individuals in "the book of the Law of the Lord," meaning in essence, he recommended them for salvation. He also recorded that Porter Rockwell was "an innocent and a noble child, and my soul loves him. Let this be recorded for ever and ever. Let the blessings of salvation and honor be his portion."¹⁴⁹ After mentioning many of his faithful friends, the Prophet wrote he had "prayed for them with anxious and fervent desire . . . and the still small voice whispered to my soul, 'these that share your toils with such faithful hearts shall reign with you in the kingdom of their God.'"¹⁵⁰ With the many heavy duties that weighed upon the Prophet, he seemed to enjoy the privilege of recommending souls for salvation.

Joseph Smith's writings reveal one of his chief concerns was directing the great latter-day gathering of Israel.¹⁵¹ He believed his calling was to begin the fulfillment of ancient prophecies concerning the gathering. The Prophet wrote to N.C. Saxton, "The time has at last arrived when

147 "To the Nauvoo High Council," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 502.

148 "Journal Extract, 23 August 1842," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 562.

149 *Ibid.*, 563.

150 "Journal Extract, 16 August 1842," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 561.

151 In general, in LDS theology the gathering of Israel refers to the gathering of the righteous in the last days. See chapter one of this work.

the God of Abraham of Isaac and of Jacob has set his hand again the second time to recover the remnants of his people which have been left from Assyria, and from Egypt and from Pathros, &c.”¹⁵² This is an allusion to a prophecy of Isaiah, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea” (Isaiah 11:11). The Prophet saw his day as the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy which declares that the faithful throughout the whole world will be gathered together.

The writings of Joseph Smith show that the gathering of Israel was one of his foremost concerns. He said, “The item or subject of the gathering . . . which is an item which I esteem to be of the greatest importance to those who are looking for salvation in this generation, or in these what may be called ‘the latter times,’ as all the prophets that have written, from the days of righteous Abel down to the last man, that has left any testimony on record, for our consideration, in speaking of the salvation of Israel in the last days, goes directly to show, that it consists in the work of the gathering.”¹⁵³ Joseph Smith considered one of the primary goals of missionary work was to gather the faithful together. “The important subject of gathering”¹⁵⁴ was a priority for the Prophet.

Part of the great latter-day gathering included establishing the city of Zion. The Prophet revealed the location of the city to be in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 57:2-3). His interest in the establishment of the city of Zion was evidenced by numerous letters he wrote to the Saints who were chosen to settle there.¹⁵⁵ His earnestness concerning the city of Zion is further

152 “To N.C. Saxton, 4 January 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 295.

153 “To the Elders of the Church, September-December 1835,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 375.

154 *Ibid.*, 380.

155 See Smith, *Personal Writings*, vii-viii for a list of letters from Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, Edward

illustrated by his repeated journeys to Jackson County. He personally made the eight hundred-mile journey to Missouri three times between 1831 and 1834, before moving his family there in 1838.¹⁵⁶ The Prophet felt that establishing the city of Zion was one of the primary responsibilities of his calling.

Joseph Smith's writings illustrate that he felt he must act out of humility and love in order to righteously fulfill his calling. He counseled Oliver Granger, "In order to conduct the affairs of the kingdom in righteousness it is all important, that the most perfect harmony, kind feeling, good understanding and confidence should exist in the hearts of all the brethren and that true charity – love one toward another, should characterize all their proceedings. If there are any uncharitable feelings, any lack of confidence, then pride and arrogancy and envy will soon be manifested and confusion must inevitably prevail and the authorities of the church set at naught."¹⁵⁷ The Prophet believed he could not correctly fulfill his calling unless his motives were pure.

When he unjustly injured the feelings of others, he considered it his responsibility to ask forgiveness. His calling gave him no right to disregard the feelings of others. On one occasion he admitted to the Twelve, "I have sometimes spoken too harsh from the impulse of the moment and inasmuch as I have wounded your feelings brethren I ask your forgiveness, for I love you and will hold you up with all my heart in all righteousness before the Lord . . . wherever God in His providence may call us."¹⁵⁸

Joseph Smith had a keen sense of accountability to the Lord concerning the performance of his calling. He expressed his sense of duty to do the Lord's will to N.C. Saxton, "I declare

Partridge and others who lived in Missouri.

156 The Prophet made the journey to Missouri in June 1831, April 1832 and May 1834 before arriving to live there in March 1838.

157 "To Oliver Granger, July 1840," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 512.

158 Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 106.

unto you the warning which the Lord has commanded me to declare unto this generation, remembering that the eyes of my maker are upon me and that to him I am accountable for every word.”¹⁵⁹ The Prophet Joseph felt the need to be careful in the performance of his calling because he knew he would be held responsible for all he did.

Joseph Smith feared to do wrong in the Lord’s sight. In 1828, when he lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript by loaning them to Martin Harris, the Lord rebuked him for listening to Martin. “Behold, you should not have feared man more than God” (D&C 3:7). After this experience, it seems Joseph Smith was determined to fear God rather than man. This is illustrated in a letter to James Arlington Bennet about the influence of an anti-Mormon book written by John C. Bennett. The Prophet explained, “As to my having any fears of the influence that [John C. Bennett] may have against me, or any other man, or set of men may have is the most foreign from my heart. For I never knew what it was as yet, to fear the face of clay, or the influence of man. My fear, sir, is before God. I fear to offend him and strive to keep his commandments.”¹⁶⁰

Joseph Smith’s writings indicate he worried more about doing the Lord’s will than about pleasing man. When faced with the decision of whether to readmit W. W. Phelps into the Church after rebellion, Joseph Smith wrote, “I feel a disposition to act on your case in a manner that will meet the approbation of Jehovah (whose servant I am).”¹⁶¹ As evidenced by his writings, Joseph Smith’s first concern was to do the Lord’s will.

The Prophet’s writings indicate that he felt he may have to sacrifice his own life. He seemed to consider it his duty to do so. He wrote to James Arlington Bennet, “On my part, I am

159 “To N.C. Saxton, 4 January 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 298.

160 *History of the Church*, 5:157.

161 Smith, *Teachings*, 165.

ready to be offered up a sacrifice, in that way that can bring to pass the greatest benefit and good to those who must necessarily be interested in this important matter.”¹⁶² His writings show that he considered his calling to be more important than his life. From Liberty Jail, the Prophet wrote a letter to Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young declaring, “If we live we live, and if we die for the testimony of Jesus we die. But whether we live or die let the work of God go on.”¹⁶³ As early as 1832, he seemed to be preparing himself to die for the cause, he wrote to Emma, “I have given my life into his hands, I am prepared to go at his call, I desire to be with Christ.”¹⁶⁴

The Prophet’s writings indicate he felt it his duty to live worthily. From early on, Joseph Smith knew his ability to correctly perform his calling was contingent on his own righteousness. When he was to receive the Gold Plates from the angel Moroni, he was initially forbidden from taking the plates because he was “under transgression.”¹⁶⁵ He reported the requirements of the angel to him: “I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive but that of building his kingdom, otherwise I could not get them” (Joseph Smith – History 1:46). This experience set a poignant precedent for the Prophet: He would only be given the gifts he needed to perform his calling when living righteously. He explained this principle to the Church in a letter from Liberty Jail.

Every thing should be discussed with a great deal of care and propriety lest you grieve the Holy Spirit which shall be poured out at all times upon your heads when you are exercised with those principals of righteousness that are agreeable to the mind of God, and are properly affected one toward another . . . The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and the

162 “To James Arlington Bennet, 8 September 1842,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 579.

163 Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* [1945], 237.

164 “To Emma Smith, 6 June 1832,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 264-5.

165 “Journal 1835-6,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 106.

powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness . . . When we undertake to cover our sins or to gratify our pride or vain ambition or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men in any degree of unrighteousness behold the heavens withdraw themselves, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved and when it has withdrawn amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.¹⁶⁶

Joseph Smith's writings evidence that he believed he had to obey the principles of heaven in order to obtain the assistance of heaven to perform his calling.

The Prophet relied on the aid of the Spirit in his calling. He believed the Spirit would not help him unless his heart was pure. He counseled the Church, "If there are any among you who aspire after their own aggrandizement and seek their own opulence . . . they cannot be benefited by the intercessions of the Holy Spirit."¹⁶⁷ To the Prophet Joseph, the presence of the Spirit indicated a person's spiritual purity. He wrote to the Quorum of the Twelve, "I have no doubt but the Spirit of the Lord has directed you and this proves to my mind that you have been humble, and your desires have been for the salvation of your fellow man, and not your own aggrandizement and selfish interest."¹⁶⁸

Joseph Smith believed a key to righteously fulfilling his calling was to purify his heart, and then rely on the Lord to give him strength to do His will. He taught this principle to the Twelve in order to help them succeed in their callings.

The work in which we are unitedly engaged in, is one of no ordinary kind, the enemies we have to contend against are subtle and well skilled in maneuvering, it behooves us then to be on the alert, to concentrate our energies, and that the best

166 "To the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March, 1839," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 440. See also D&C 121:35-36. 167 *Times and Seasons*, 1:133.

168 "To the Twelve, 15 December 1840," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 518.

feelings should exist in our midst, and then by the help of the Almighty we shall go on from victory to victory and from conquest unto conquest, our evil passions will be subdued, our prejudices depart, we shall find no room in our bosoms for hatred, vice will hide its deformed head, and we shall stand approved in the sight of heaven and be acknowledged “the sons of God.” Let us realize that we are not to live to ourselves but to God. By so doing the greatest blessings will rest upon us both in time and in Eternity.¹⁶⁹

Joseph Smith performed his calling because he loved his fellow men, not simply out of a sense of duty.¹⁷⁰ His sincere care for others enabled him to have “the help of the Almighty.”

The Prophet acknowledged he had often fallen short of the standard of righteousness that his calling demanded. He admitted he inadvertently did many things which were not right in the Lord’s sight.¹⁷¹ He grieved deeply over the times he had lost the Spirit of the Lord. Expressing regret for his past sins, he wrote to Emma: “I have called to mind the past moments of my life and am left to mourn and shed tears of sorrow for my folly in suffering the adversary of my soul to have so much power over me as he has.” He felt guilty for his shortcomings, yet he declared, “But God is merciful, and has forgiven my sins.”¹⁷²

Duty to bear persecution

In July of 1830, the Lord told Joseph Smith his duty relative to upcoming trials, “be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days” (D&C 24:8). Joseph Smith was faced with almost constant persecution from the beginning of his ministry until his martyrdom. A few years later, he wrote to his brother

169 *History of the Church*, 4:231.

170 “To the Elders of the Church, September-December 1835,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 378.

171 “Journal 1835-1836,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 110.

172 “To Emma Smith, 6 June 1832,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 264.

William, “I am older than you and have endured more suffering, have been marred by mobs, the labours of my calling, a series of persecution, and injuries, continually heaped upon me.”¹⁷³

Throughout his life Joseph Smith felt constant pressure and heavy persecution, yet he felt it his duty to bear them patiently.

The Prophet’s writings prove he believed the persecution that was heaped upon the Church was a boon rather than a barrier. He wrote, “Persecution has not stopped the progress of truth, but has only added fuel to the flame.”¹⁷⁴ To the Saints suffering persecution in Missouri he declared, “The harder the persecution, the greater the gifts of God upon his Church.”¹⁷⁵ The Prophet Joseph felt that the Lord strengthened the Church in the face of persecution, and the ultimate outcome was positive.

According to his writings, the Prophet believed that the trials he faced personally also had a positive effect upon him. After enduring several months in Liberty Jail, he concluded, “it seems to me that my heart will always be more tender after this than ever it was before. My heart bleeds continually when I contemplate the distress of the Church. . . . For my part I think I never could have felt as I now do if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered all things shall work together for good to them that love God.”¹⁷⁶ It seems that his persecutions helped him become more Christ-like, and thus helped him more effectively fulfill his calling. He declared that persecution was but a part of being the Lord’s servant. He counseled, “Marvel not then, if you are persecuted, but remember the words of the Savior, ‘The servant is not above his Lord, if they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also.’”¹⁷⁷

The Prophet’s writings contain many statements claiming persecutions did more good

173 “Letter to William Smith, Journal 1835-1836,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 142.

174 *History of the Church*, 4:540.

175 “To William W. Phelps and Others, 18 August 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 311.

176 “To Presendia Huntington Buell, 5 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 427.

177 “From the Private Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 Nov. 1839, 9.

than harm. When Eber D. Howe published the first anti-Mormon book, called “Mormonism Unveiled,” Joseph Smith responded, “we hope that this adversary of truth will continue to stir up the sink of iniquity, that people may the more readily discern between the righteous and the wicked.”¹⁷⁸ The Prophet seemed to feel persecution drew attention to the Church, which often resulted in conversions. He concluded that persecution “often causes men to investigate and embrace the Book of Mormon, who might otherwise never have perused it.”¹⁷⁹ Joseph Smith had a unique perspective regarding persecution. He believed it brought attention, growth and strength to the Church. The Prophet seemed willing to pass through persecution for his own good and for the good of the Church and its growth.

Joseph Smith’s writings provide evidence that despite his high calling, he felt it his duty to submit to the laws of the land, and the Constitution of the United States. Even during the dangerous time immediately preceding his martyrdom, the Prophet vowed in all cases he would “adhere to the Constitution and Laws.”¹⁸⁰ In a letter to the Governor of Illinois, Thomas Ford, he affirmed, “We have ever held ourselves amenable to the law, and for myself Sir, I am ever ready to conform to and support the laws and constitution even at the expense of my life. I have never in the least offered any resistance to law, or lawful process which is a fact well known to the public.”¹⁸¹ Though Joseph Smith held the highest authority in the Church, he still considered it important that he submit to the laws of the land.

Joseph Smith saw his calling as comparable with ancient prophets

Joseph Smith’s writings show he perceived he had a similar calling to ancient prophets. In 1836, he received a blessing from his father that conferred upon him the blessings of Moses to

178 *History of the Church*, 2:268.

179 “To Oliver Cowdery, 24 September 1834,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 352.

180 “To Thomas Ford, 16 June 1844,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 608.

181 To Thomas Ford, 22 June 1844,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 613.

lead Israel in the latter-days as Moses had led them anciently.¹⁸²

He compared his calling to that of ancient prophets in a letter to John Wentworth, “We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church, viz: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists &c.”¹⁸³ This implies he saw himself as a prophet, holding the same position and responsibility as those prophets in the primitive church.

A letter from Joseph Smith to his Uncle Silas reveals why the Prophet Joseph felt he was given the same calling as ancient prophets. The Prophet wrote of the faith and righteousness of the ancient prophets and asked, “will not the same faithfulness, the same purity of heart and the same faith bring the same assurance of eternal life and that in the same manner to the children of men now in this age of the world?”¹⁸⁴ Joseph Smith believed God was unchangeable, so if he approached God with faith and purity like the ancients, he would receive revelation as the ancients did. He wrote, “Have I not an equal privilege with the ancient saints? And will not the Lord hear my prayers, and listen to my cries, as soon [as] he ever did to theirs if I come to him in the manner they did or is he a respecter of persons?”¹⁸⁵ The Prophet indicated that he received a calling like ancient prophets because he obeyed the principles required to receive it.

While in Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith wrote a letter to Isaac Galland which included many passages about the Lord’s earlier prophets and apostles and the persecutions they suffered.¹⁸⁶ The Prophet Joseph’s writings suggest that due to his calling and subsequent persecutions, he felt a kinship with ancient saints, especially Paul. He compared his persecutions following his first vision to Paul’s persecutions after his vision on the road to Damascus:

182 “Journal 1835-1836, 21 January 1836,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 175.

183 “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842, 709. Also found as Article of Faith #6.

184 “To Silas Smith, 26 September 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 323-324.

185 *Ibid.*, 324.

186 The following are the passages that the Prophet recommended that Isaac Galland read: 2 Timothy 1:5-7; 2:10-14; 4:2-7. Ephesians 4:10-18. 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; 8:3-6. Ephesians 4:1-8. 1 John. Matthew 3:13-17. John 3:1-16; 10:1-50; 28:18-20. Luke 24:45-53. “To Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 461.

I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me (Joseph Smith History 1:24-25).

Joseph Smith not only viewed his calling as comparable to that of ancient prophets, he compared his experiences to those endured by ancient saints.

The Prophet Joseph indicated his belief that he was foreordained to his calling before he was born. He wrote that the “called and chosen of God” were selected, “according to the purposes of his will from before the foundation of the world.”¹⁸⁷ He suggested that the magnitude of his persecutions were due to the magnitude of his calling. He felt that evil forces opposed his foreordained purpose.¹⁸⁸

Joseph Smith saw his calling having a direct impact on the destiny of the Church

The Prophet’s writings contain many examples of his grand vision of the destiny of the Church. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a mustard seed. Behold, then, is not this the kingdom of heaven that is raising its head in the last days, in the majesty of its God; even the church of the Latter-day saints, like an impenetrable, immovable rock in the midst of the mighty

187 “To the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 436.

188 See “Tidings,” *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 15, 1842, 919.

deep, exposed to storms and tempests of Satan, but has, thus far, remained steadfast and is still braving the mountain waves of opposition.”¹⁸⁹ Though the Church started small (like a mustard seed), the Prophet affirmed it would grow to fill the earth: “The Standard of truth has been erected: no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing, persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”¹⁹⁰ Joseph Smith felt that no earthly power could stop the Church he led. Though he was confined in Liberty Jail at the time, he wrote, “Hell may pour forth its rage like the burning lava of Mount Vesuvius . . . and yet shall Mormonism stand . . . Truth is Mormonism. God is the author of it . . . it was by his voice that we were called to a dispensation of his gospel in the beginning of the fullness of times it was by him we received the Book of Mormon, and it was by him that we remain unto this day.”¹⁹¹ The Prophet’s writings clearly show his conviction that the Church’s progress would not be stopped by opposition. It would grow until it filled the whole earth.

Joseph Smith’s writings show his awareness that his decisions were setting precedence for the future Church. He exhorted other church leaders of his time to recognize “the great responsibility we are all under to transact all our business in righteousness before God, inasmuch as our decisions will have a bearing upon all mankind and upon all generations to come.”¹⁹² The Prophet’s writings indicate he was conscious of his responsibility to set policies and procedures for those to follow. For example, Joseph Smith sent the minutes of a Kirtland meeting to John

189 “To the Elders of the Church, September-December 1835,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 384.

190 “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842, 709.

191 To the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 439.

192 “Kirtland Elders’ Quorum Record,” *Writings of Early Latter-day Saints*, [RLDS archives], 1. As found in *LDS Collector’s Library* [2005].

Corrill, who was a Church leader in Missouri, expecting the minutes to set precedent for the handling of matters in Missouri. The Prophet explained that the minutes would help them “that you my know how to proceed to set in order & regulate the affairs of the Church in Zion whenever they become disorganized.”¹⁹³ The Prophet Joseph was aware that as he performed his calling he was blazing a trail for those to follow.

Joseph Smith’s writings provide evidence that he understood the important position he held in relation to unfolding of the Restoration in the latter days. In several instances, when the Prophet recorded the history of the Church, he began with his birth.¹⁹⁴ He seemed to feel his personal history was an integral part of Church history.

The Prophet Joseph felt he was foreordained to lead the Church, and he had a duty to blaze a trail for those who would follow. He was setting the Church on the path to its destiny to fill whole earth and prepare the world for the second coming of Christ. His writings indicate he was keenly aware of the great destiny of the Church and felt he played a significant role in establishing it.

He compared his calling to other religious leaders of his day

Joseph Smith’s writings reveal that he felt his calling was very different from other religious leaders of his day. One of the principal differences he saw between himself and other religious leaders was that he possessed authority from God. To Isaac Galland, a non-Mormon, he wrote, “Now sir, the only difference between their religion and mine, is that I firmly believe in the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone, and speak as one having authority among them, and not as the scribes.”¹⁹⁵ He expounded further, “The difference between me and other religious teachers is in the Bible . . . as far as they teach the gospel of

193 “To John Corrill and Others, 4 September 1837,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 392.

194 Smith, *Personal Writings*, 10 (1832 account), 227 (1838 account), and 242 (1842 account).

195 “Copy of a Letter from J. Smith Jr. to Mr. Galland,” *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, 53.

Jesus Christ, as it is verily written, and are inspired, and called as was Aaron.”¹⁹⁶ If other leaders were to meet these requirements he said, “I feel myself bound to bow with all deference to their mandates and teachings.” Joseph Smith expressed in the letter to Galland that the strength of his calling lay in the fact that he was “called of God as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:4), as opposed to leaders of other religions.

The Prophet felt he had more authority than all other religious leaders. He believed he could declare the Lord’s will to all people, even leaders of other religions. To N.C. Saxton he declared, “I will proceed to tell you what the Lord requires of all people high and low, rich and poor, male and female, ministers & people, professors of religion, and nonprofessors.”¹⁹⁷ Joseph Smith felt his calling gave him authority to communicate the Lord’s will to all men.

The Prophet’s attitude toward the Bible and modern revelation distinguished him from other religious leaders. Some in his day were content to have the Lord’s word as contained in the Bible. Joseph Smith was not. As quoted earlier, he wrote, “The Lord has never given the world to understand . . . that he had ceased forever to speak to his creatures.”¹⁹⁸ One of the primary differences between Joseph Smith and other religious leaders of his day is that the Prophet saw a need for continual revelation. He felt that the heavens were still open, and he testified that the Lord spoke to him as He had spoken to prophets of old.

The Prophet saw himself as different from other religious leaders because he was called of God, so he could speak “as one having authority among them.”¹⁹⁹

Satan’s opposition

Joseph Smith’s writings affirm he felt that the ultimate source of the opposition he

196 Ibid., 461.

197 “To N.C. Saxton, 4 January 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 297.

198 “Letter to Silas Smith, 26 September 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 322. Partial quotation. Full quotation is found on page 60.

199 “To Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 457.

encountered was from Satan. The Prophet wrote, “It has been the plan of the Devil to hamper me and distress me from the beginning to keep me from explaining myself.”²⁰⁰ He felt that Satan had fought against him from the beginning of his ministry. In his 1838 history the Prophet Joseph surmised, “It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?” (Joseph Smith History 1:20).

The Prophet Joseph concluded that the devil was the instigator of the persecution both he and the Church faced. To Isaac Galland, he said the Mormons were persecuted “not for any thing, only that Mormonism is truth.”²⁰¹ The Prophet Joseph taught his followers to trust in the promise of Christ that great is the reward in heaven for those that are persecuted, because the ancients prophets were also persecuted (see Matthew 5:12). He wrote, “If any men ever had reason to claim this promise we are the men, for we know that the world not only hates us but speak all manner of evil of us falsely for no other reason than because we have been endeavoring to teach the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . What did they hate us for, purely because of the testimony of Jesus Christ.”²⁰² The Prophet felt that as long as he proclaimed the testimony of Christ, Satan would continue to oppose him.

The seriousness with which he viewed his calling

As evidenced by his writings, the Prophet took his calling seriously. His writings convey his sense of anxiety that he properly perform his duties. When N.C. Saxton published only a portion of Joseph Smith’s letter exhorting the people to follow the Gospel, the Prophet wrote to the editor, “The letter which I wrote you for publication I wrote by the commandment of God,

200 *History of the Church*, 3:285-6.

201 “To Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 457.

202 *History of the Church*, 3:229.

and I am quite anxious to have it all laid before the public for it is of importance to them.”²⁰³

His great concern about pleasing a higher power is evidence of the validity of his claim to be a prophet. Self-made leaders do not necessarily seem to feel such an obligation to please a higher power. But Joseph Smith wanted to stand blameless before the Lord, having faithfully fulfilled his calling. This desire was illustrated in his comments to N.C. Saxton, “I now say unto you that if you wish to clear your garments from the blood of your readers I exhort you to publish that letter entire but if not the sin be upon your head.”²⁰⁴ The Prophet was concerned about clearing his conscience by doing the Lord’s will.

The Prophet sent a plea to the Twelve in England that reveals his understanding of the great responsibility that he felt rested on his shoulders and his anxiousness to righteously fulfill his calling.

Beloved brethren, you must be aware in some measure of my feelings when I contemplate the great work which is now rolling on, and the relationship which I sustain to it; while it is extending to distant lands, and islands, and thousands are embracing it, I realize in some measure my responsibility and the need I have of support from above, and wisdom from on high; that I may be able to teach this people, which have now become a great people, the principles of righteousness, and lead them agreeable to the will of heaven so that they may be perfected and prepared to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, when He shall appear in great glory. Can I rely on your prayers to your heavenly Father in my behalf? . . . That I may be enabled to escape every stratagem of Satan, surmount every difficulty, and bring this people, to the enjoyment of those blessings, which are reserved for the

203 “To N.C. Saxton, 12 February 1833,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 299.

204 *Ibid.*, 300.

righteous. I ask this at your and their hands in the name of Jesus Christ.²⁰⁵

The Prophet Joseph acknowledged in his writings that he felt the threat of condemnation if he did not fulfill what God had commanded him to do. Even as early as 1820, after his first vision, the Prophet felt a duty to faithfully declare what he had seen. He shared his concern about staying true to his first vision: “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” (Joseph Smith History 1:25).

Joseph Smith felt his personal salvation was tied to his faithfulness in his calling.

The threat of condemnation caused the Prophet to feel considerable pressure at times. In 1836, he recorded in his journal, “I returned to my house being weary with continual anxiety and labor in putting all the authorities in and in striving to purify them for the solemn assembly according to the commandment of the Lord.”²⁰⁶

Joseph Smith’s writings reveal that he was considerably concerned about his personal salvation. He did not feel that his calling alone guaranteed him a place in heaven. In a letter to Emma from Liberty Jail, he stated, “The salvation of my soul is of the most importance to me for as much as I know for a certainty of eternal things . . . I must steer my bark safe which I intend to do.”²⁰⁷ Two weeks later he again confided to Emma, “I wish to act upon that principle of generosity that will acquit myself in the presence of [the Lord] through the mercy of God.”²⁰⁸

Joseph Smith was anxious both about his personal salvation and properly performing his calling, and he felt they were linked together.

The privilege of protection

In Joseph Smith’s writings, there are many statements declaring that he believed he was

205 *History of the Church*, 4:230.

206 “Journal 1835-1836, 30 January 1836,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 184.

207 “To Emma Smith, 21 March 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 449.

208 “To Emma Smith, 4 April 1839,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 465.

divinely protected.²⁰⁹ The Prophet reported that the Lord's hand protected him during his imprisonment in Liberty Jail: "I was in their hands as a prisoner about six months, but notwithstanding their determination to destroy me, with the rest of my brethren who were with me; and although at three different times (as I was informed) we were sentenced to be shot, without the least shadow of law, (as we were not military men,) and had the time, and place appointed for that purpose; yet, through the mercy of God, in answer to the prayers of the saints, I have been preserved, and delivered out of their hands."²¹⁰ He expressed his belief that the guards of the jail "were only kept back by the power of God from depriving us of life."²¹¹

Joseph Smith believed the Lord would protect him until his work was done. In February 1844, he was invited to visit Quincy, Illinois. It would have been a dangerous journey for the Prophet, but he stated with confidence, "The same kind hand which hath hitherto been my shield and support would save me from the power of my wicked persecutors."²¹²

The Prophet's faith in the Lord's protection gave him considerable comfort as he performed his calling. Even as he was taken prisoner in Missouri he felt peace:

I felt perfectly calm, and resigned to the will of my heavenly Father. I knew my innocency . . . consequently, I could look to that God, who has the hearts of all men in his hands and who had saved me frequently from the gates of death for deliverance, and notwithstanding that every avenue of escape seemed to be entirely closed . . . yet, from my first entrance into the camp, I felt an assurance that I with my brethren and our families should be delivered. Yes, that still small voice, which has so often whispered consolation to my soul, in the depth of

209 For examples of statements in his writings that express his feeling that the Lord was protecting him see Smith, *Personal Writings*, 471, 477, 480, and 596.

210 "From the Private Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr.," *Times and Seasons*, Nov. 1839, 7-8.

211 *Ibid.*, 6.

212 "To Joseph L. Heywood, 13 February 1844," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 595.

sorrow and distress, bade me be of good cheer, and promised deliverance, which gave me great comfort.²¹³

With all the responsibilities that weighed upon the Prophet Joseph Smith, his writings show he felt consolation in the fact that the Lord was protecting him.

Reliance on the Lord's grace

Joseph Smith recognized his weakness and need for divine help in order to carry out his responsibilities. "I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man 'subject to passion,' and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which all men are commanded to walk!"²¹⁴ He was aware of his imperfections, and he pled for the Lord's help to supplement his weakness.

One of Joseph Smith's weaknesses of which he was keenly aware was his lack of education. In his personal journal, he recorded a prayer pleading for the Lord to strengthen him in this weakness. "O may God give me learning even language and endue me with qualifications to magnify His name while I live."²¹⁵

Despite his perceived weakness, Joseph Smith was determined to fulfill his calling at all hazards. "As long as my brethren stand by me and encourage me I can combat the prejudices of the world, but when my brethren stand aloof – when they begin to faint and endeavor to retard my progress and enterprise, then I feel to mourn but am no less determined to prosecute my task, being confident that although my earthly friends may fail and even turn against me, yet my Heavenly Father will bear me off triumphant."²¹⁶

213 "Journal Extract, November 1839," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 480.

214 *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1834, 40.

215 "Journal 1835-1836, 22 December 1835," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 145.

216 "To Oliver Granger, July 1840," Smith, *Personal Writings*, 512-3.

Appraisal of his own success in his calling

Near the end of his life the Prophet Joseph seemed content with his performance of his calling. A few months before his martyrdom, he expressed satisfaction concerning the conditions in Nauvoo. “As respects things in Nauvoo I have nothing to say but good. . . . In fact things in general seem prosperous and pleasing and I never saw a better feeling amongst the saints than at the present time.”²¹⁷ Due in large part to the Prophet’s efforts, Nauvoo was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity. Joseph Smith was pleased with the fruits of his labors in his calling.

The most revealing statement in the Prophet’s writings concerning his own performance of his calling is found in the last letter he wrote to his wife, Emma. On the day of his martyrdom, from Carthage Jail, he penned, “I am very much resigned to my lot knowing I am justified and have done the best that could be done.”²¹⁸ Despite the numerous positions and duties which the Prophet Joseph held, at the end of his life he felt he had successfully fulfilled his calling.

Conclusion

Joseph Smith’s writings offer great insight into what he considered to be his calling. He felt his duties were both numerous and serious. He felt he had the duty to translate, to receive revelation and focus on the spiritual welfare of the Church. He also considered it his duty to treasure up knowledge, to rebuke the wicked and to lead the gathering of Israel. In all of these duties he was anxious to please the Lord and faithfully do his will. He felt that the performance of his duties would have a direct impact on the destiny of the Church. Joseph Smith’s writings also reveal his belief that the Lord protected him so he could fulfill his calling. He believed that his calling and responsibilities were similar to ancient prophets and apostles, and very different from other religious leaders of his day. The Prophet’s writings ultimately illustrate that he felt

217 “To Joseph L. Heywood, 13 February 1844,” Smith, *Personal Writings*, 596.

218 *History of the Church*, 6:605.

that he had done what was required of him, and he was satisfied with his own efforts in fulfilling his calling.

Joseph Smith's View of His Calling in His Discourses

Joseph Smith's discourses reveal his confidence in his calling as a prophet, his feeling that his authority was equal to that of ancient prophets and his zeal for temple work. They also reveal that he understood the scope of his calling and its importance in relation to earthly responsibilities. Ultimately, the Prophet Joseph's discourses exhibit his personal feelings about his performance and his standing before the Lord.

The Prophet rarely gave public discourses before his release from Liberty Jail in 1839. Before this point, Joseph Smith allowed others to do the majority of the public speaking. In 1833, Sidney Rigdon was called by revelation to be the spokesman of the Church: "It is expedient in me that you, my servant Sidney, should be a spokesman unto this people; yea, verily, I will ordain you unto this calling, even to be a spokesman unto my servant Joseph. And I will give unto him power to be mighty in testimony. And I will give unto thee power to be mighty in expounding all scriptures, that thou mayest be a spokesman unto him, and he shall be a revelator unto thee" (D&C 100:9-11). Joseph Smith revealed the Lord's will to Sidney Rigdon, and Sidney communicated it to the people.

After the Prophet's five month incarceration in Liberty Jail, the frequency of his public discourses increased dramatically. Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook describe this change:

Before 1839, Sidney Rigdon stood as the public spokesman of Mormonism . . .

But when he began to neglect this responsibility, in late 1839 Joseph Smith "came of age" in public discourse. After spending six months in a Missouri jail and seeing the entire Mormon population expelled from that state, the Prophet's desire for redress and justice compelled him to speak before national leaders. In many ways the 1839-40 trip to Washington, D.C., was a milestone in Joseph Smith's

career. Of particular significance is the fact that on this occasion Joseph Smith himself did the speaking. And the Prophet did the preaching. It was not Sidney Rigdon (as in previous visits to the East Coast) but Joseph Smith who local newspapers and reporters announced would preach. It seems that sheer necessity and commitment of purpose compelled the Prophet to stand for himself and his people and defend his mission.²¹⁹

One of the meetings at which the Prophet preached was also attended by Parley P. Pratt, who described the Prophet's discourse:

While visiting with Brother Joseph in Philadelphia, a very large church was opened for him to preach in, and about three thousand people assembled to hear him. Brother Rigdon spoke first, and dwelt on the Gospel, illustrating his doctrine by the Bible. When he was through, brother Joseph arose like a lion about to roar; and being full of the Holy Ghost, spoke in great power, bearing testimony of the visions he had seen, the ministering of angels which he had enjoyed; and how he had found the plates of the Book of Mormon, and translated them by the gift and power of God. He commenced by saying: "If nobody else had the courage to testify of so glorious a message from Heaven, and of the finding of so glorious a record, he felt to do it in justice to the people, and leave the event with God." The entire congregation were astounded; electrified, as it were, and overwhelmed with the sense of the truth and power by which he spoke, and the wonders which he related. A lasting impression was made; many souls were gathered into the fold . . . Multitudes were baptized in Philadelphia and in the regions around.²²⁰

219 Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, xviii-xix.

220 Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, [1985], 260.

This trip marked a shift in Joseph Smith's performance of his calling. On this trip he spoke for himself, and he spoke powerfully. From this point Joseph Smith blossomed both in his desire and his ability to speak publicly. During the Nauvoo period (1839-1844), the Prophet gave 177 separate discourses which were recorded in some degree by those present,²²¹ this in comparison to only a handful of previous discourses.

When the Prophet spoke, he did so extemporaneously. Of the 177 discourses given in the Nauvoo Period, he apparently prepared a text for only one of them.²²² In explanation, he "said he was not like other men. His mind was continually occupied with the business of the day, and he had to depend entirely upon the living God for every thing he said on such occasions."²²³ Thus, his discourses are often much less formal than were his writings, and thus they display more of his personality and character. Describing his zeal in public discourse, he stated, "I am bold to declare I have taught all the strong doctrines publicly, and always stronger than what I preach in private."²²⁴

The Prophet's discourses are full of references that cast light on his view of his calling. They convey a great sense of confidence that Joseph Smith had concerning his position as prophet. Ultimately, the discourses of Joseph Smith reveal that the Prophet felt he understood his calling and his responsibilities and was determined to boldly fulfill them, despite all opposition.

Confidence in his calling

Joseph Smith's discourses suggest that he was cognizant of his significant calling, and he drew much confidence from it. His Nauvoo discourses indicate he had a strong conviction that he was called of God. Expressing his assurance he knew what was expected of him, he once

221 Ibid., xii.

222 He apparently prepared a text for his discourse on the Priesthood, given October 5, 1840. See Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 50.

223 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 13 August 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 238.

224 "Thomas Bullock Report, 16 June 1844," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 378-379.

declared, “I know what I say, I understand my mission and business.”²²⁵

The Prophet’s discourses indicate that he felt he could teach with authority because he had received his doctrines directly from God, not from another man. “Did I build on another man’s foundation but my own? I have got all the truth and an independent revelation in the bargain.”²²⁶ He boldly made prophecies of the future in his discourses, and explained it was his calling to make such prophecies: “What are we to understand by a prophet? It is his character to predict things that are in the future.”²²⁷ Referring to himself as a boy, he once boldly prophesied about his own future: “I prophecy that all the powers of Earth and Hell shall never be able to overthrow this boy for I have obtained it by promise.”²²⁸ Joseph Smith’s confidence was obvious in his discourses as he prophesied and declared the revelations God had given him.

The Prophet Joseph saw himself in a unique position as the prophet of the Church. Not only did he receive his doctrines directly from God, he said he had received more of them than any other man. He declared, “I have the whole plan of the kingdom before me, and no other person has.”²²⁹ His awareness that God had revealed more to him than anyone else enabled him to teach with authority and not, “as the scribes” (Matt 7:29; Mark 1:22).

The Prophet’s discourses reveal he was confident because he believed he taught absolute truth. He stated, “In relation to the power over the minds of the mankind which I hold, I would say it is in consequence of the power of truth in the doctrines which I have been an instrument in the hands of God of presenting unto them . . . why do not my enemies strike a blow at the doctrine, they cannot do it, it is truth.”²³⁰ Since he taught truth, he felt had no reason to fear. “I

225 *History of the Church*, 5:259.

226 “Thomas Bullock Report, 16 June 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 381-2.

227 “James Burgess Notebook, 9 July 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 230.

228 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 27 August 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 245.

229 *History of the Church*, 5:139.

230 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 24 March 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 337.

will make every doctrine plain that I present and it shall stand upon a firm basis, and I am at the defiance of the world for I will take shelter under the broad cover of the wings of the work in which I am engaged, it matters not to me if all hell boils over I regard it only as I would the crackling of thorns under a pot.”²³¹

The Prophet explained in one discourse he was not anxious to prove his words, or have others seek to prove them for him. He expressed confidence God would prove them through the Spirit. Willard Richards recorded a discourse in August 1843, in which the Prophet said: “Every word that proceedeth from the mouth of Jehovah has such an influence over the human mind . . . that it is convincing without other testimony. Faith cometh by hearing. If 10,000 men testify to a truth you know, would it add to your faith? No, or will 1000 testimonies destroy your knowledge of a fact? No. I do not want anyone to tell I am a prophet or attempt to prove my word.”²³² Levi Richards recorded the same discourse noting that the Prophet said, “Truth carries its own influence and recommends itself.”²³³ Joseph Smith was confident the Lord would give his listeners a testimony that what he taught was true.

Samuel A. Prior, who was not a Mormon, was impressed by the Prophet’s confidence: “He glided along through a very interesting and elaborate discourse, with all the care and happy facility of one who was well aware of his important station, and his duty to God and man.”²³⁴ Joseph Smith’s discourses suggest that he was well aware of his important station, and he drew much confidence from knowing his position.

Despite the Prophet’s great confidence, his discourses indicate his humble dependence on the Lord. This is exhibited in his famous King Follett discourse, a sermon the Prophet preached

231 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 10 March 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 331.

232 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 6 August 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 237.

233 “Levi Richards Diary, 6 August 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 237.

234 “A Visit to Nauvoo,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 May 1843, 198.

in memory of King Follett, who had been killed in an accident in a well. Before the Prophet began he told his audience, “I want the prayers and faith of the saints that I may have the Holy Ghost that the testimony may carry conviction to your minds of the truth of what I shall say.”²³⁵ In his writings, Joseph Smith acknowledged his reliance on the Spirit. He also publicly acknowledged in his discourses that he needed the Holy Ghost in order to have power to perform his calling. Speaking to emigrants who had arrived in Nauvoo in April 1843, the Prophet said, “I am your servant, and it is only through the Holy Ghost that I can do you good. God is able to do his own work.”²³⁶

The Prophet admitted he was not in ultimate control of the Church, God was. “Man cannot steady the ark - my arm cannot do it - God must steady it.”²³⁷ In another instance he declared, “Henceforth the ax is laid unto the root of the tree and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, God Almighty (and not Joe Smith) shall hew down and cast it into the fire.”²³⁸ The Prophet’s discourses indicate that even though he was very confident, he possessed an underlying humility, a sense that the Lord was in control.

One reason Joseph Smith felt confident in his calling was due to the source of his authority. At one point he testified he was called of God saying, “If I had not actually got into this work, and been called of God, I would back out, but I cannot back out, I have no doubt of the truth.”²³⁹ In his discourses the Prophet publicly proclaimed that the source of his authority was divine: “How have we come at the priesthood in these last days? It came down, down in

235 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 7 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 343.

236 *History of the Church*, 5:355.

237 “Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, 26 May 1842,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 121. The reference to steadying the ark is an Old Testament reference. See 2 Samuel 6:6-7. It is to correct something without authority to do so. In the context in which Joseph Smith used it, it would be to correct the direction of the Church without God’s authorization.

238 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 24 March 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 337.

239 *History of the Church*, 5:336.

regular succession. Peter, James and John had it given to them and they gave it to others.”²⁴⁰

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained by Peter, James and John.²⁴¹ This made them legal administrators in the ordinances of the Gospel. The Prophet taught: “Whenever men can find out the will of God and find an Administrator legally authorized from God, there is the Kingdom of God. But where these are not, the Kingdom of God is not. All the ordinances, systems, and administrations on the earth are of no use to the Children of men unless they are ordained and authorized of God for nothing will save a man but a legal administrator for none others will be acknowledged either by God or Angels.”²⁴² The Prophet drew strength from knowing he was a legal administrator because his authority was from God.

Joseph Smith and Old Testament prophets

Joseph Smith’s discourses illustrate he was confident he possessed the same authority and position as Old Testament prophets. He declared his authority was equal to the authority of Ezekiel, Moses and Elijah.

John D. Lee recorded a discourse in which the Prophet declared simply, “As the word of the Lord was unto Pharoah, King of Egypt by the mouth of Ezekiel the Prophet . . . so is the word of the Lord unto this generation by the mouth of Joseph Smith.”²⁴³ The Prophet felt his role was the same as Ezekiel’s, which was to communicate the word of the Lord.

In his discourses, the Prophet also compared himself to Moses, and he compared his people to ancient Israel. The Lord had compared the Prophet Joseph to Moses early in the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants: “Behold, verily, verily, I say unto thee, no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this Church excepting my servant

240 *History of the Church*, 3:387-8.

241 See Doctrine and Covenants 27:12.

242 *History of the Church*, 5:259.

243 “John D. Lee Diary, 5 June 1842,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 122.

Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses” (D&C 28:2). Joseph Smith was also compared to Moses in 2 Nephi 3. The Prophet obviously believed in this comparison. He stated, “I thank God that I have the honor to lead so virtuous and honest people, to be your leader and lawyer as Moses to the Children of Israel.”²⁴⁴ On another occasion, when he was feeling too exhausted to speak to the people in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith quoted Exodus 4:16, “He will make me to be God in your stead and (they) be mouth for me.”²⁴⁵ By quoting this scripture, he was comparing himself to Moses, and the Elders, whom he wanted to address the saints, to Aaron, because they would be his mouthpiece while he could not speak for himself.²⁴⁶

Joseph Smith’s discourses indicate that he believed he was another in a long line of prophets. “I say in the name of the Lord that the kingdom of God was set up on earth from the days of Adam to the present time. Whenever there has been a righteous man on earth unto whom God revealed his word and gave power and authority to administer in his name. And where there is a Priest of God, a minister who has power and authority from God to administer in the ordinances of the Gospel and officiate in the Priesthood of God, there is the kingdom of God.”²⁴⁷ The Prophet believed the kingdom of God was on the earth because he held the authority from God to establish it.

Joseph Smith not only had the same authority as Old Testament prophets, but he saw himself fulfilling Daniel’s prophecy: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, [but] it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44). The Prophet believed God was using him to set up the prophesied kingdom. He boldly

244 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 30 June 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 221.

245 “William Clayton Report, 8 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 363.

246 At times Joseph could not speak for himself because he was exhausted by speaking to large audiences of over 10,000 in the open air. He had to speak very loudly in order to be heard by the whole audience.

247 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 22 January 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 155-6.

proclaimed, “I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the Kingdom of Daniel, by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.”²⁴⁸

In March 1844, the Prophet Joseph reported an incident which evidenced in his mind he held influence with the Lord as the prophet Elijah did: “The Lord once told me that what I asked for I should have, I have been afraid to ask God to kill my enemies lest some of them peradventure should repent. I asked a short time since for the Lord to deliver me out of the hands of the Governor of Missouri and if it must needs be to accomplish it to take him away, and the next news that came pouring down from there, was Governor Reynolds had shot himself. And I would now say, ‘Beware O earth how you fight against the Saints of God and shed innocent Blood, for in the days of Elijah his enemies came upon him and fire was Called down from heaven and destroyed them.’”²⁴⁹ The Prophet was confident that the Lord would watch over him as He watched over the ancient prophet Elijah.²⁵⁰ The fact that Joseph Smith publicly declared that he was comparable to Old Testament prophets is another illustration of his confidence in his calling.

The Prophet Joseph Smith believed that his calling gave him authority to correct errors in the Bible.²⁵¹ His discourses give valuable insight into why he felt this way. He recognized the fact that people in his day were sensitive to any teachings which were not found in the Bible. “I suppose that I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not in the Bible - you would cry treason.”²⁵² But the Prophet’s discourses suggest he felt the Holy Ghost was a higher authority than the Bible. “If ye are not led by revelation how can ye escape the damnation of

248 “Thomas Bullock Report, 12 May 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 367.

249 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 10 March 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 331. Thomas Reynolds was governor of Missouri from 1840-1844. “As governor he made several demands on the state of Illinois to extradite the Prophet Joseph Smith. He committed suicide 9 February 1844 in his executive office in Jefferson City, Missouri. (Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 391.)

250 See 1 Kings 18.

251 For more information on Joseph Smith’s revision of the Bible see chapter two of this work.

252 “William Clayton Report, 7 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 357.

Hell? Here we have the testimony of the oldest Book in the world and the Holy Ghost. I thank God for the old Book, but more for the Holy Ghost.”²⁵³ He further explained, “There are many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelation of the Holy Ghost to me.”²⁵⁴ His revision of the Bible was an effort to change those passages which the Holy Ghost indicated were not accurate. The Prophet expressed that the Bible was correct, “as it came from the pen of the original writers.”²⁵⁵ He believed his position, combined with the guidance of the Holy Ghost gave him the authority to make needed corrections to the Bible.

Joseph Smith’s discourses indicate that he considered the revelations he received as authoritative as the Bible. He proclaimed, “There is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”²⁵⁶ The Doctrine and Covenants was scripture on the same level as the Bible. Wilford Woodruff recorded that the Prophet grouped all scripture together: “See to it . . . that you do not betray the revelations of God whether in the Bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine and Covenants or any of the word of God.”²⁵⁷ Since Joseph Smith felt he held the same calling as biblical prophets, he believed the revelations he received were as authoritative as those found in the Bible.

There is indication in the Prophet’s discourses that he believed his calling was given to him before he was born, and he would retain it after he was dead. In one discourse, Joseph Smith taught of his own foreordination to his calling. “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the grand Council of Heaven before this world was. I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that grand Council.”²⁵⁸

253 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 7 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 345.

254 *History of the Church*, 5:425.

255 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 15 October 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 256.

256 “Thomas Bullock Report, 12 May 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 369.

257 “Wilford Woodruff Journal, 2 July 1839,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 7-8.

258 *History of the Church*, 6:364.

Joseph Smith alluded to the fact he would not live much longer in a discourse to the Nauvoo Relief Society in April 1842. He also spoke of passing on the keys he held, declaring that “according to his prayers God had appointed him elsewhere.”²⁵⁹ The Prophet taught that he would have responsibilities after his death. When some men approached him, telling him why he could not die at that time, Joseph Smith responded, “I will advance from prophet to priest and then to King. Not to the kingdoms of this earth but of the Most High God.”²⁶⁰ The Prophet Joseph believed he would hold significant positions and continue to progress after his death.²⁶¹

Focus on the temple

Joseph Smith felt temple work was a very important part of his calling. His drive to build temples is evidenced by the fact that he dedicated four different sites for temples: Kirtland, Independence, Far West and Nauvoo.²⁶² Richard Bushman described Joseph Smith’s passion for temples: “Beginning in Kirtland, temples became an obsession. For the rest of his life, no matter the cost of the temple to himself and his people, he made plans, raised money, mobilized workers, and required sacrifice.”²⁶³

In his discourses, the topic of temples or temple work arises frequently, especially toward the end of his life. Ehat and Cook stated that by 1839 Joseph Smith rarely gave a public speech without mentioning some aspect of temple theology.²⁶⁴

The Prophet’s discourses illustrate his view that the temple was central to the Gospel. In fact, Joseph Smith declared that the object of gathering the faithful together was in order to bring

259 *History of the Church*, 4:604.

260 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 23 July 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 234.

261 In 1876, John Taylor reported a teaching from Joseph Smith concerning the positions Priesthood holders would have after death. “The idea was that they should deliver up or give an account of their administrations, in their several dispensations, but that they would all retain their several positions and Priesthood.” (John Taylor, “A Funeral Sermon,” 31 December 1876, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [1876], 18:330.

262 Only the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples were completed, due to the expulsion of the Saints from Independence and Far West, Missouri.

263 Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith - Rough Stone Rolling*, 218.

264 Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, xix.

people to the temple.

What was the object of Gathering the Jews together or the people of God in any age of the world? The main object was to build unto the Lord an house whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and glories of his kingdom and teach the people the ways of salvation. For there are certain ordinances and principles that when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose. This was purposed in the mind of God before the world was, and it was for this purpose that God designed to gather together the Jews oft, but they would not. It is for the same purpose that God gathers together the people in the last days, to build unto the Lord a house to prepare them for the ordinances and endowment, washings and anointings, etc.²⁶⁵

The Prophet Joseph's Nauvoo discourses communicate a great sense of urgency to complete the building of the Nauvoo temple.²⁶⁶ He urged the Saints to give their time and means to building it so it could be finished as soon as possible. When speaking in Nauvoo, he would often refer to the temple that was being built. "I would to God that this temple was now done that we might go into it and go to work and improve our time."²⁶⁷ He promised, "finish that temple and God will fill it with power."²⁶⁸

The Prophet's discourses indicate that he considered temple ordinances essential to a fullness of salvation. "The question is frequently asked, 'Can we not be saved without going through with all these ordinances, &c.?' I would answer no, not the fullness of salvation."²⁶⁹ He

265 "Wilford Woodruff Diary, 11 June 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 212-3.

266 The Nauvoo Temple was not dedicated until 1846, almost two years after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. For more information see "Temples," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., 4 vols. [1992], 4:1447-65.

267 "Wilford Woodruff Diary, 21 January 1844," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 318.

268 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 27 August 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 245.

269 *History of the Church*, 6:184.

called the temple ordinances, the “last and most important ordinances.”²⁷⁰

One illustration of the Prophet’s great desire to finish the Temple in Nauvoo is illustrated by a short discourse he gave the day after he delivered the King Follett discourse. He was exhausted: “It is just as impossible for me to continue the subject as to raise the dead—my lungs are worn out.”²⁷¹ However, he felt strongly enough about the building of the Temple to encourage the people despite his weak lungs: “When the House is done, baptism font erected, and finished, and the worthy are washed, anointed, endowed and ordained kings and priests-- which must be done in this life--when the place is prepared you must go through all the ordinances of the house of the Lord so that you who have any dead friends must go through all the ordinances for them the same as for yourselves.”²⁷²

To the Prophet, temple ordinances were to precede missions. He counseled that the temple should be finished and the Elders receive their ordinances first, “then the Elders are to go through all America and build up Churches until all Zion is built up, but not to commence to do this until the Temple is built up here and the Elders endowed. Then go forth and accomplish the work and build up stakes in all North and South America.”²⁷³ The highest priority was to finish the Temple and have the Elders receive the ordinances.

Joseph Smith’s discourses indicate the great urgency he felt to build temples and encourage the saints to receive the ordinances given therein.

His calling and politics

As the Latter-day Saints grew in number, the Prophet Joseph’s ability to influence local politics increased. By the time the Saints were well established in Nauvoo, their numbers

270 “William Clayton Report, 8 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 363.

271 “Thomas Bullock Report, 8 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 365. This exhaustion is due to the strain of speaking to very large audiences outdoors, as noted earlier.

272 “Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 April 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 364.

273 Ibid.

affected the outcome of elections in Illinois.²⁷⁴ Due to the Saints' devotion to the Prophet, the great majority of them would have voted for any candidate that Joseph Smith counseled them to vote for. However, in Nauvoo Joseph Smith initially declared that he felt he should stay out of politics. In a discourse in April 1840, he declared that he "did not wish to have any political influence, but wished the saints to use their political franchise to the best of their knowledge."²⁷⁵ In 1843, he said, "with regard to elections some say we all vote together and vote as I say, but I never tell any man how to vote or who to vote for."²⁷⁶

The Prophet's discourses suggest he felt that politics were outside of the scope of his calling. "I have not come to tell you to vote this way, that way, or the other in relation to National matters I want it to [go] abroad to the whole world that every man should stand on his own merits. The Lord has not given me Revelation concerning politics. I have not asked the Lord for it. I am a third party. [I] stand independent and alone. I desire to see all parties protected in their rights."²⁷⁷

However, during the last year of his life, the line between the Prophet's calling and politics became blurred. Joseph Smith began a campaign for the Presidency of the United States. He began to give political speeches, which were sometimes followed by a hymn and a prayer, in the same manner as they would have concluded religious meetings. He would also speak about politics at the Temple site.²⁷⁸ This was a great change from the Prophet's former hands-off approach to politics. In a discourse given in February 1844, he explained his motives for his campaign:

274 A census taken the year after Joseph Smith was killed said the population of Nauvoo was 11,057. Many more Mormons lived close to Nauvoo, but outside of the city limits, perhaps a third more. "Mobocracy," *Times and Seasons*, Nov. 15, 1845, 1031.

275 "Commerce, Ill." *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 94.

276 "Wilford Woodruff Diary, 4 July 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 227-8.

277 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 6 August 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 236.

278 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 7 March 1844," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 325.

I would not have suffered my name to have been used by my friends on any wise as president of the United States or candidate for that office if I and my friends could have had the privilege of enjoying our religious and civil rights as American citizens--even those rights which the Constitution guarantees unto all her Citizens alike. But this we as a people have been denied from the beginning. Persecution has rolled upon our heads from time to time from portions of the United States like peels of thunder because of our religion and no portion of the government as yet has stepped forward for our relief and under view of these things I feel it to be my right and privilege to obtain what influence and power I can lawfully in the United States for the protection of injured innocence. And if I loose my life in a good cause I am will[ing] to be sacrificed on the alter of virtue, righteousness and truth in maintaining the laws and Constitution of the United States, if need be, for the general good of mankind.²⁷⁹

The Prophet felt a desire to defend his people and considered the Presidency a tool for doing so. He felt confident: "We will whip the mob by getting up a president."²⁸⁰ Though he was interested in his campaign for the Presidency, the Prophet felt much more strongly about his ecclesiastical calling, "I do not care 1/2 so much about the Presidential election as I do the office I have got."²⁸¹ Joseph Smith considered his calling as prophet to be much more important than the position of President of the United States.

Approach to other religions

Joseph Smith's discourses indicate he felt a responsibility to love and serve those of other religions. He did not limit his service to Latter-day Saints. In a July 1842 discourse, the Prophet

279 "Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 February 1844," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 320.s

280 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 7 March 1844," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 325.

281 Ibid.

posed a question, facetiously referring to himself as a babbler: "Why is it this babbler gains so many followers, and retains them?" He answered his own question, "Because I possess the principle of love. All I can offer the world [is] a good heart and a good hand. Mormons can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for a Mormon. If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a Mormon I am bold to declare before heaven that I am just as ready to die for a Presbyterian, a Baptist or any other denomination."²⁸²

The Prophet was sympathetic toward those who did not believe his claims. He declared, "I don't blame you for not believing my history. Had I not experienced it, [I] could not believe it myself."²⁸³ He reached out in love to those who rejected Mormonism. "'Mohammedans, Presbyterians, etc., if ye will not embrace our religion, embrace our hospitalities."²⁸⁴ The Prophet's ideal was to weld people from all religions together through love.²⁸⁵

The Prophet's love for those of other religions was not just spoken, but was also practiced. When a Methodist preacher visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, the Prophet invited him to preach. The Methodist preacher was surprised at the receptiveness of the Prophet and congregation: "In the evening I was invited to preach, and did so. The congregation was large and respectable--they paid the utmost attention. This surprised me a little, as I did not expect to find any such thing as a religious toleration among them. After I had closed, Elder Smith, who had attended, arose and begged leave to differ from me in some few points of doctrine, and this he did mildly, politely, and affectingly; like one who was more desirous to disseminate truth and expose error, than to love the malicious triumph of debate over me. I was truly edified with his

282 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 9 July 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229.

283 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 7 April 1844," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 343.

284 "Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 29 January 1843," Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 162.

285 *History of the Church*, 5:499.

remarks, and felt less prejudiced against the Mormons than ever.”²⁸⁶ Joseph Smith felt it his responsibility to love those of other faiths, and his actions reveal that he did.

Joseph Smith’s appraisal of his standing before the Lord

The Prophet was open in his discourses, and sometimes shared his feelings concerning his standing before the Lord. In July 1843, Willard Richards reported, “Joseph remarked that all was well between him and the heavens, that he had no enmity against any one. And as the prayer of Jesus, or his pattern, so prayed Joseph. Father forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me. For I freely forgive all men.”²⁸⁷

He openly declared he was not perfect, though people often expected perfection from him.²⁸⁸ On one occasion, when speaking to a group of new members who had arrived in Nauvoo, he reported, “I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them; but if they would bear with my infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, I would likewise bear with their infirmities.”²⁸⁹ On another occasion he stated, “Many think a prophet must be a great deal better than anybody else . . . I don’t want you to think I am very righteous, for I am not very righteous. God judgeth men according to the light he gives them.”²⁹⁰ Because of the light and knowledge which God had given him, Joseph Smith felt God required great obedience from him. He acknowledged that he fell short of the standard of righteousness up to which he should have lived.

Despite recognizing his own faults, Joseph Smith felt justified before God. Shortly before his death, the Prophet declared, “The great Jehovah has ever been with me, and the wisdom of God will direct me in the seventh hour; I feel in closer communion, and better standing with God

286 “A Visit to Nauvoo,” *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, 198.

287 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 9 July 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229.

288 “Thomas Bullock Report, 12 May 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 369.

289 *History of the Church*, 5:181.

290 “Joseph Smith Diary by Willard Richards, 21 May 1843,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 204.

than ever I felt before in my life.”²⁹¹ The Prophet’s final religious discourse exhibited a sense of confidence due to his good standing before the Lord. “I have got all truth . . . and God will bear me off triumphant.”²⁹²

In conclusion, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s discourses reveal his great sense of confidence in his calling. His confidence did not come from an inward pride, but from his belief that God was with him. He felt his authority was equal to that of ancient prophets, and that he had been called from before the foundation of the world. The Prophet’s discourses exhibit his love for temple building and temple work. They also reveal his feeling that his calling as a prophet was far more important than the political positions, even that of President of the United States. Ultimately, Joseph Smith’s discourses reveal he felt that despite his faults, he was closer to God at the end of his life than ever before. He was able to look back at his efforts throughout his life and feel that regardless of his weaknesses, God had made him strong and enabled him to fulfill his calling. The Prophet Joseph Smith died with a feeling of contentment that he had done what God had asked him to do.

291 “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1844, 522.

292 “Thomas Bullock Report, 16 June 1844,” Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 382.

Conclusion

Joseph Smith's view of his calling seemed to expand throughout his life. His first calling was as a translator. Soon thereafter, he became a Priesthood holder. When the Church was organized he was also called a prophet, seer, and apostle. Later, after his incarceration in Liberty Jail, the Prophet also became the spokesman for the Church. The Prophet recognized his many duties and his great responsibility to fulfill his calling in righteousness.

Beginning with his first vision, Joseph Smith was instructed from "on high" concerning his calling.²⁹³ He translated the Book of Mormon "by the power of God" (Mormon 8:16), and also worked on a revision of the Bible. During the translation process he was taught about his calling. He learned that he was to be a "choice seer" (2 Ne. 3:6), and that despite his weakness he would be made strong (see 2 Nephi 3:13). He also learned that he would have to pass through persecution, but the Lord would be with him, and He would perform a great and marvelous work through Joseph Smith (3 Ne. 21:9-10). As he worked on the revision of the Bible, he came across passages referring to him as "unlearned" (Isaiah 29) and as the Lord's messenger (Malachi 3:1). As Joseph Smith translated ancient scripture, he found that ancient prophets had prophesied about him, and his view of his calling expanded.

As the Prophet received the revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants he was further instructed about his responsibilities in his calling. He learned that he must live righteously or his gift would be taken from him (D&C 3:11). He also found that the Lord could speak through him to others. His duties further increased as he received the Priesthood through the ministration of angels. When the Church was organized on April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith received increased responsibilities. He became a seer, a prophet and an apostle (D&C 21:1), in

²⁹³ See page 58 of this work, under the heading "Source of his authority and calling."

addition to a translator. As the Prophet received further revelation he learned that he was to have the sole responsibility to receive revelation for the Church (see D&C 28:2). He also learned his responsibility to focus on the spiritual welfare of the Church, not on his own temporal labors (see D&C 24). The Prophet was instructed about the magnitude of his calling and told that “the ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name” (D&C 122:1). The revelations the Prophet received were invaluable in instructing him concerning his responsibilities and the magnitude of his calling.

Through his writings and discourses Joseph Smith revealed what he understood his calling to be. He felt he had many important duties to perform. He considered it his duty to treasure up knowledge, to rebuke the wicked and to lead the gathering of Israel. The Prophet felt strongly about his duty to build temples and encourage the Saints to receive the ordinances performed therein. He felt his calling was equal to ancient prophets, and that he held authority above any other religious leaders on the earth. He had great confidence because he knew he had been called of God, yet he recognized his own weakness. The Prophet Joseph knew he had to rely on the Lord to have power to properly fulfill his calling. He was anxious to please the Lord and faithfully do his will, and he felt that the Lord would protect him in his efforts. Though the Prophet began a campaign for the Presidency of the United States a few months before his death, he felt that his ecclesiastical calling was much more important. The Prophet believed that the performance of his duties would have a direct impact on the destiny of the Church and the future of the world.

At the end of his life, Joseph Smith felt he had done what the Lord had asked of him. Just before his martyrdom, he said to Dan Jones, “My work is finished.”²⁹⁴ The Prophet expressed

294 Daniel Jones, “The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith and His Brother Hyrum,” *BYU Studies*, 24, no. 1, [Winter 1984], 81.

satisfaction concerning his performance, and declared on the day of his death, “I am justified, and have done the best that could be done.”²⁹⁵ Despite the great weight of his many responsibilities, Joseph Smith ultimately felt content that he had faithfully fulfilled calling.

²⁹⁵ *History of the Church*, 6:605.

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