Joseph Smith and His Apostasy and Restoration Culture

Trevan Hatch
Brigham Young University - Provo, trevan_hatch@byu.edu

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Jesus Christ told Joseph Smith Jr. in the spring of 1820 that he must not join any church because they were all wrong: “all their creeds are an abomination in my sight. . . . Their hearts are far from me [and] they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.” This commandment prohibiting Joseph from joining a church due to corruption will be discussed at length in this chapter.

The previous statement that Latter-day Saints attribute to Christ offends Christians, especially Protestants. Note, however, that the Prophet Joseph did not preach animosity toward fellow Christians throughout his ministry. He taught that Christians of other faiths are good people who teach truth but have allowed error and falsehoods to creep into their doctrines. “Have the Presbyterians any truth?” he asked. “Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists, etc., any truth? Yes. They all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true ‘Mormons.’” The Prophet also taught, “Rail not against the sects, neither talk against their tenets. But preach Christ and him crucified, love to God, and love to man.” Consider also his teaching on another occasion: “We ought always to be
aware of those prejudices which sometimes so strangely present themselves, and are so congenial to human nature, against our friends, neighbors, and brethren of the world, who choose to differ from us in opinion and in matters of faith. Our religion is between us and our God. Their religion is between them and their God."49

That the Prophet Joseph did not believe all Christian sects were evil but that they lacked the necessary ordinances, authority, and apostolic succession is clear. Latter-day Saint doctrine affirms that an apostasy from Christ's original Church followed the death of Jesus and his Apostles. Latter-day Saint doctrine also affirms that Christ's Church was restored in the nineteenth century. Most people, both inside and outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, assume that Latter-day Saints are alone in teaching of an apostasy and restoration. This is not the case! Many Christians at different stages throughout history, but especially in Joseph Smith's generation, believed in an apostasy and the need for a restoration of Christ's original Church.

**Apostasy and Christians**

Regarding the belief in an apostasy among Protestant Christians, biblical and early Christian scholar Stephen Robinson, a Latter-day Saint, explained,

It is surprising that Protestants would criticize the Latter-day Saints for believing in an apostasy and rejecting subsequent developments, since Protestants have essentially done the same thing—only instead of rejecting the authority of the traditional church after the first century, they reject it after the fifteenth. Protestant Reformers used many of the same Bible passages . . . to prove that the Roman church was corrupt and to justify their own attempts at reform. . . . If some Protestants argue that Mormons aren't Christians because they reject the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), couldn't Catholics argue that Protestants aren't Christians because they reject the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545–47)? . . . Thus, in terms of the doctrine of an apostasy—that is, that at some point in time the historical church was no longer the true
Church—most Protestants agree with the Latter-day Saints in principle; they just differ on the dates.\textsuperscript{50}

Robinson articulated that both Latter-day Saints and Protestants believe that during a certain point in history, Christ’s Church was no longer on the earth. One of these Protestant Christians was Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther began his study of theology in his early twenties and later became an Augustinian monk. In 1510, Luther traveled to Rome. He became critical of the Catholic Church and was especially disgusted with some of its teachings and practices. Indulgences and their corruption, according to Luther, of sacramental ordinances disturbed him the most. In an attempt to combat these heresies, Luther nailed his now famous Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, in October 1517. The Catholic Church excommunicated Luther and labeled him a heretic. Many followers of Luther began calling themselves Lutherans. In response, Luther stated, “I pray you leave my name alone and call yourselves not ‘Lutherans’ but ‘Christians.’ Who is Luther? My teaching is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone. . . . How then does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; let us call ourselves only ‘Christians’ after Him from whom our teaching comes.”\textsuperscript{51} Luther recognized an important principle later taught in the Book of Mormon:

Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses’ name then it be Moses’ church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel. (3 Nephi 27:7–8)

Throughout his ministry, Luther diverted attention away
from himself and placed it on Jesus Christ. One of Luther’s main objectives during his life was to restore true Christianity.52

William Tyndale (1494–1536), another well known religious reformer and scholar, sacrificed much of his life studying the doctrines of the scriptures and translating the Bible into English. Referring to a falling away from Christ’s Church, Tyndale wrote, “they that had the plough by the tail looked back, the plough went awry; faith waxed feeble and fainty; love waxed cold; the scriptures waxed dark; Christ was no more seen.”53 John Wesley (1703–1791), founder of Methodism, also referred to a falling away from Christ’s Church, as well as a loss of spiritual gifts among Christians, “It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were common in the Church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian. . . . From this time they almost totally ceased. . . . The extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian Church; because the Christians were turned Heathens again, and had only a dead form left.”54 Speaking of the latter days Wesley stated, “The times which we have reason to believe are at hand, (if they are not already begun) are what pious men have termed ‘the latter day glory’; meaning the time wherein God would gloriously display his power and love in the fulfillment of his gracious promise that ‘the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.'”55 Wesley preached this sermon in the late eighteenth century, a short time
preceding the birth of Joseph Smith and the establishment of God's latter-day kingdom.

Concerning an apostasy of the first-century Church, Roger Williams (1603–1684), a Baptist theologian, concluded that there occurred “a total routing of the Church and Ministry of Christ Jesus, put to flight, and retired into the Wilderness of Desolation,” and that it would not return until God once again commissioned apostles and prophets like the days of old. 56 On another occasion Williams opined that “There is no regularly constituted church on earth, nor any person authorized to administer any church ordinance; nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the Great Head of the Church for whose coming I am seeking.” 57 United Minister Pierre Van Paassen (1895–1968) similarly recognized a need for apostles and prophets in the last days: “A world without prophets is a world that knows not its signs. It is like a ship without rudder or compass floundering about helplessly, aimlessly drifting toward perdition.” 58

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969) a Baptist minister from Buffalo, New York, was concerned that Christianity had become largely an organization of mythologies and creeds that Christ already rejected.

A religious reformation is afoot, and at heart it is the endeavor to recover for our modern life the religion of Jesus as against the vast, intricate, largely inadequate and often positively false religion about Jesus. Christianity today has largely left the religion which he preached, taught and lived, and has substituted another kind of religion altogether. If Jesus should come back to earth now, hear the mythologies built up around him, see the creedalism, denominationalism, sacramentalism, carried on in his name, he would certainly say, “If this is Christianity, I am not a Christian.” 59

Philosopher and author Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) was born into the Unitarian faith of which his father was a minister. He soon became disaffected with their doctrines. While speaking to students at Harvard Divinity School Emerson said, “It
is my duty to say to you that the need was never greater [for] new revelation than now. The doctrine of inspiration is lost. . . . Men have come to speak of . . . revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead. . . . It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake."60

In the late eighteenth century, Elias Smith (mentioned in the previous chapter) saw a vision of the Savior standing atop mount Zion. During this vision, he learned that all denominations of Christianity were in error. Smith struggled in knowing exactly what God wanted him to do. "My mind was ensnared," he recalled, "and I felt myself in a situation from which it was not in my power to extricate myself. I found that my mind was still entangled with the old Calvinistic doctrine, and that about all the difference between Calvinism and Universalism was in the number." He subsequently prayed for guidance and described hearing a "gentile [sic] whisper" commanding him to "drop them both and search the scriptures." In 1805, Smith left the ministry as a Baptist minister and established a movement called the Church of Christ. Smith believed that his church was the only one that possessed the truth of Christ.61

In 1820, shortly following the organization and subsequent collapse of Elias Smith's restoration movement, a Presbyterian minister named Barton W. Stone left his ministry and founded his own Springfield Presbytery movement. Stone's primary objective was to "restore apostolic Christianity." He later merged with a similar movement led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell.62 This movement, of which Sidney Rigdon was a key figure before joining with Joseph Smith, also
sought to restore primitive Christianity. “Some new revelation,” stated Alexander Campbell, “or some new development of the revelation of God must be made. . . . We want the old gospel back that is sustained by the ancient order of things.” Speaking of the corruption in Christianity, Campbell wrote, “We argue that all Christian sects are more or less apostatized from the institutions of the Savior: that by all the obligations of the Christian religion, they that fear and love the Lord are bound to [see] . . . a restoration of the ancient order of things.”

The difference between Joseph Smith and Alexander Campbell regarding a restoration was their view on authority. As one non-LDS historian observed, Joseph Smith viewed himself as called of God to usher in the restoration of that “golden age of direct revelation.” Alexander Campbell, on the other hand, claimed that one received authority through the Bible and that restoring the primitive gospel would be rational to anyone who understood the Bible. Note that Campbell preached heavily concerning a restoration of the ancient gospel while Joseph Smith was in the process of restoring the ancient gospel.

In 1831, John H. Noyes of Vermont attended Yale Theological Seminary to become a minister. He preached that the Second Coming of Christ had already passed. He taught that Christ returned in AD 70, the year of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. He also taught that the re-establishment of God’s kingdom was imminent. Shortly after Joseph Smith organized the Church of Jesus Christ in 1830, Noyes prophetically stated that a church on earth “is now rising to meet the approaching kingdom in
the heavens, and to become its duplicate and representative on earth . . . and the men who usher in the kingdom of God, will be guided, not merely by theoretical truth, but by the Spirit of God.” Noyes most likely had not encountered the Mormons up to this point, which makes his prophecy much more intriguing for Latter-day Saints. In 1848, Noyes established the Oneida Community in Oneida, New York. His movement sought to restore the church that Christ had established during his earthly ministry. Noyes died in 1886 and the Oneida Community dwindled shortly thereafter.66

A few Catholic popes and theologians have also recognized a problem with corruption in Christianity and the succession of apostles. “We know well,” stated Pope Adrian VI (1459–1523), “that for many years things deserving of abhorrence have gathered round. . . . Sacred things have been misused, ordinances transgressed, so that in everything there has been a change for the worse. Thus, it is not surprising that the malady has crept down from the head to the members, from the popes to the hierarchy. We all, prelates and clergy, have gone astray from the right way.”67

Consider also the following statement of a Catholic theologian who, after careful study of the apostolic succession of Christ’s apostles, said, “One conclusion seems obvious: Neither the New Testament nor early Christian history offers support for a notion of apostolic succession as an unbroken line of episcopal ordination from Christ through the apostles down through the centuries to the bishops of today.”68

Orson F. Whitney recounted a discussion that he had with a Catholic theologian regarding apostolic succession.

I bear in mind another noted visitor, a great scholar, who came here many years after the advent of the railroad. I became well acquainted with him, and we had more than one conversation together. I admired his vast erudition. He seemed to know all about law, literature, science, philosophy, and had a dozen languages at his tongue’s end. He said to me one day: “You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You don’t even know the strength of
your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world, and that is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. *The issue is between Mormonism and Catholicism. If you are right, we are wrong. If we are right, you are wrong. And that's all there is to it.* These Protestant sects haven't a leg to stand on; for if we are right, we cut them off long ago as apostates; and if we are wrong, they are wrong with us, for they were part of us and came out of us. *If we have the apostolic succession from St. Peter as we claim, there was no need for Joseph Smith and Mormonism; but if we have not that succession, such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary and Mormonism's position is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the gospel from ancient times, or the restoration of the gospel in latter days.*

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) recognized the need for a restoration of the ancient gospel. “The religion builders,” wrote Jefferson, “have so distorted and deformed the doctrines of Jesus, so muffled them in mysticisms, fancies and falsehoods, have caricatured them into forms so inconceivable—as to shock reasonable thinkers.” Jefferson also stated that he was “Happy in the prospect of a restoration of primitive Christianity,” and that he felt he “must leave to younger persons to encounter and lop off the false branches which have been engrafted into it by the mythologists of the middle and modern ages.” Six years before his death, Jefferson opined that “If the freedom of religion . . . can ever rise in practice under the overbearing inquisition of public opinion, truth will prevail over fanaticism, and the genuine doctrines of Jesus . . . will again be restored to their original purity.” This restoration, he stated, “will advance with the other improvements of the human mind, but too late for me to witness it.”

Perhaps the most striking statement of Jefferson regarding a restoration was also written six years before his death: “The genuine and simple religion of Jesus will one day be restored; such as it was preached and practiced by himself. Very soon after his death it became muffled up in mysteries, and has been ever since kept in concealment from the vulgar eye.” Jefferson offered these two statements in 1820, the same year in which Joseph Smith saw the
First Vision. Jefferson stated that when the doctrines of Jesus were "restored," it would be too late for him "to witness it." He died in 1826, just four years prior to the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ. Note that Jefferson's idea of a restoration was different than what Latter-day Saints today define as restoration that involves the spirit of prophecy and the spirit of revelation.

America was divinely guided in its establishment and founded upon religious principles that were taught and practiced by primitive Christians and Jews. The Constitution of the United States was essentially proof that America had entered a covenant with God. Several figures that help found the United States of America believed that the establishment of America was the beginning of the restored order of the ages. Consequently, they associated themselves with many of the customs and practices of the ancient Israelites. For instance, certain groups attempted to make Hebrew the official language of the newly founded nation and many towns were named after those found in the Bible (for example, Salem, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Virginia; Jericho, Vermont; Hebron, Connecticut; Goshen, New Hampshire; Bethlehem, New York and Pennsylvania; Damascus, Virginia; Bethel, Connecticut; Old Canaan, Connecticut).

One non-LDS scholar who specializes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century restoration movements has highlighted the "popularity of the restoration vision in early nineteenth-century America" and said that the idea of restoring primitive Christianity was "an important theme built into the heart and soul of American culture in the early nineteenth century." He also explained that the seal of the United States carries the message of a restoration as follows:

The great seal of the United States makes precisely the same point. There, an unfinished pyramid grows from arid desert sands. Inscribed on the pyramid's base is that notable date, 1776. Clearly, the pyramid represents a new nation. The barren desert terrain, above which the pyramid towers and from which it seems to grow, signifies all human history prior to 1776. For all their
glories and achievements, past civilizations were essentially barren compared to the glories that would mark the new American state. The pyramid is unfinished since other nations have not yet emulated the American example and thrown off the yoke of tyranny. But as the American example penetrates the dark places of the world and as nation after nation and tribe after tribe rise up and reject the rule of tyrants, the world will become increasingly free, and when the world is free, the Millennium will have dawned. God clearly approves of this vision since above the pyramid we find his eye and, above that eye, the Latin phrase *annuit coeptis,* “He has smiled on our beginnings.” And beneath the pyramid stands the most critical phrase of all, *novus ordo seclorum,* “a new order of the ages.”

Christians throughout the world since the passing of the New Testament Apostles believed that the Church established by Jesus was no longer on the earth and that a restoration was necessary. Restorationism was not prevalent among just a few religious groups or social classes but among everyone. One restorationist stated in 1830 that discussions and sermons regarding restorationism, millennialism, and the latter-day glory was “heard all over the land, and men [were] required to use all their exertions to usher in the glory of the last days, by converting the world.” Another scholar, in commenting on the culture of antebellum America, wrote that restorationism, millennialism, and biblicism was “truly so omnipresent in the American culture of 1800 or 1820 that historians have as much difficulty taking cognizance of it as of the air people breathed.” In 1848, after reading articles and statements of faith of fifty-three American religions, John W. Nevin concluded that discussions of restoring primitive Christianity was the major feature of American religion before the Civil War.
Woman seen by John the Revelator in vision
Apostasy and Nineteenth-Century Restoration Culture

The interpretation of biblical prophecies was a major component of restorationism that seemed to peak during the Second Great Awakening. People of every religious demographic, especially theologians and preachers, justified a restoration using certain biblical prophecies, usually from the books of Daniel and Revelation. It was common to find interpretations of these prophecies in books, pamphlets, sermons, magazines, and newspapers. A process referred to as *prophetic numerology* helped interpret the prophecies. The following explanation may be helpful.

In Revelation 12:1-14, John the Revelator recorded a vision he saw of a woman wearing a crown containing twelve stars. The woman was pregnant with a “man child” who would eventually rule “all nations with a rod of iron” (vv. 2-5). John saw that the woman would flee into the “wilderness” and return after “twelve-hundred and sixty days” (vv. 6, 14). Joseph Smith, as well as many other biblical commentators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interpreted John’s vision to mean that the “woman,” who represents “Christ’s Church,” would flee into the “wilderness,” which represents apostasy. The Prophet Joseph explained that the Church would not return until the passing of a 1,260-day apostasy. In Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, “days” was changed to “years” (see JST Revelation 12:6).Daniel 7:18-25 contains a similar prophecy explaining that in the last days the “saints of the most High” and the “kingdom” of God would be restored after 1,260 days. While Revelation 12:6 states, “twelve-hundred and sixty days” (NRSV), Revelation 12:14 states, “a time, and times, and a half a time.” Daniel 7:25 similarly designated the length of the apostasy as, “a time and times and the dividing of time.” What does this mean? “Time” refers to one year, “times” refers to two years, and “a dividing of time” or “a half a time” refers to one-half of a year, totaling three and one-half years. Notice that three and
one-half years equals 1,260 days. In scripture, “twelve hundred and sixty days” or three and one-half years, symbolized a period of time that was limited. Three and one-half is half of seven. Note that the number seven symbolizes completeness, wholeness, and perfection. Thus, three and one-half is not complete but “arrested midway in its normal course.” Therefore, when John the Revelator saw that the Church would flee into wilderness and return after “twelve hundred and sixty days,” he understood that to mean the Church would flee into apostasy for a limited time, and Satan, in his attempts to destroy the Church, would be “arrested midway in its normal course.”

Many biblical scholars understood *days* or *times* to mean “years,” based on at least two passages in the Bible:

I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

And when thou hast accomplished them . . . thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.” (Ezekiel 4:5–6; emphasis added)

And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.” (Numbers 14:34; emphasis added)

Although some understood “twelve hundred and sixty years” to be figurative, many Christians throughout the centuries interpreted it literally. It seemed clear that these prophecies state that Christ’s Church would enter into apostasy and then be restored after 1,260 years. So, according to these Christians, when did the 1,260-year apostasy begin? They understood that the apostasy began with the arrival of the “antichrist,” the “dragon” in Revelation 12 and the “beasts” and “kings” in Daniel 7. Fascinating, at least for Latter-day Saints, is that many Christians
believed that the "antichrist" appeared when the Lombards, a Germanic people from Northern Europe, invaded Rome in AD 570, thus causing the Church to flee into the wilderness for 1260 years until 1830! Other Christians believed that the birth of the prophet Muhammad and the rise of Islam, or the rise of medieval papacy (office of pope) beginning with the career of Gregory the Great, signified the arrival of the "antichrist." Note that the birth of Muhammad and the rise of papacy in the Catholic Church also occurred in AD 570, placing the return of the Church, or Restoration in 1830. The end of the sixth century AD is significant in the history of Christianity because it marks the beginning of the appropriately titled "Dark Ages."

Keep in mind that neither the Catholic Church nor Islam is the "antichrist." A large majority of Muslims are good people. They try to live by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who taught his followers to display charity and peace. It is uncertain as to who exactly is the "antichrist." The Apostle John explained that the "antichrist" is anyone, or any organization who denies Jesus Christ (see 1 John 2:22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7). Clearly, Catholics do not reject Christ, and neither do Muslims. Islam venerates Jesus and views him as a great prophet but not an Atoner and Savior.

Virtually every eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theologian who published an interpretation of the relevant biblical prophecies placed the Apostasy sometime between 533 CE and 606 CE, which means they believed that the 1,260-year apostasy would end, depending on their interpretation, sometime
in the first half of the nineteenth century. One Christian who believed that the Church fell into apostasy in AD 570 was the well-known reformer, John Calvin (1509–1564). Commenting on these events, as well as on Paul’s prophecy of a “falling away” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–8), Calvin wrote,

We may at once conclude how useful this prediction of Paul’s is. For it might have seemed that a building [the Christian Church] which . . . lay for so long in ruins, could not have been the work of God had Paul not warned them long before, that this would take place. . . . Paul, however, is not speaking of one individual but of a kingdom that was to be seized by Satan for the purpose of setting up a seat of abomination in the midst of God’s temple. This we see accomplished in Popery. . . . The sect of Mohammed [570f A.D.] was like a raging overflow which in its violence tore away about half of the Church. It remained for Antichrist to infect the part which was left. 85

Notice that Calvin believed that the Catholic popes and the “sect of Mohammed” were not the antichrist, but that the antichrist would “infect” the portion of the Church that had not already been torn away by the popes and the “sect of Mohammed.”

Biblical scholar and Methodist theologian Adam Clarke (1762–1832), speaking of the decline of Rome and the Church falling into apostasy, stated, “The establishment of the Lombards in Italy [AD 570] was more likely to produce the utter subversion of the Christian Church than the irruptions of so many barbarous nations into the Roman empire.”86 In 1847, Edward Elliot explained why the fall of the Roman Empire caused the Great Apostasy. A few years after the Lombard conquest in AD 570, concluded Elliott, “The Emperor Phocas confirmed the right of the Roman . . . Bishop to the Headship of all churches,” which only invited corruption. This, he concluded, was just another sign “of commencement to the 1260 years.”87 Reverend John Dowling further explained that before Emperor Phocas, “the bishop of Rome had no power to enforce his decisions upon other churches
and bishops. Now by the sovereign decrees of his holiness, the Pope, all must be conformed to the [new] standard or be branded with the name of heretics.”

In 1809, a magazine published by the Friends of Evangelical Truth printed the following interpretation of the 1,260-year apostasy: “This period of twelve hundred and sixty years is the duration of the great apostasy in its dominant state, or the reign of the two little horns of the beast, one in the East, and the other in the West, or Mohammedism and Popery. These two apostate horns arose together in the same year [A.D. 570], and will continue to depress the church to the time of the end.” In his 1829 biblical commentary, Philip Allwood explained that the “North of Italy falling under the dominion of the Lombards [AD 570] commenced the period of the one thousand two hundred and sixty years; and the first decisive overt-acts of the two great Systems of the Apostasy.” Thus we see, according to the aforementioned Christian accounts, how the Church was corrupted.

Like many other theologians, Martin Luther believed in the necessity of a restoration of primitive Christianity. He said, “I persuade myself verily, that the [Church] will not be absent full three hundred years. God will not, can not, suffer this wicked world much longer. The great day is drawing near in which the kingdom of abominations shall be overthrown.” Note that Luther wrote this statement during his ministry, sometime between 1510 and 1546, which would place the return of the Church, according to Luther, sometime between 1810 and 1846.

Although John Calvin, Adam Clarke, Edward Elliot, Philip Allwood, and the Friends of Evangelical Truth did not specifically state that the Church would return in 1830, it is clear that they believed that the 1,260-year apostasy began in AD 570. One scholar who did specifically state that the Restoration of the Church would occur in 1830 was Reverend William Ward of the Church of England. Sometime between 1810 and 1820, Ward wrote,
In 568 the Lombard invasion began, and in three years intercepted all communication between Rome and the Exarchate, by which the popes became sole masters of Rome and acquired all the civil and military power, as well as spiritual authority in the city, A.D. 570. . . . But having traced the first exercise of independent temporal sovereignty by the pope from A.D. 570, I propose the following test of my opinion. . . . The 1260 years will also coincide with this conclusion . . . by reckoning from the pope's temporal dominion in Rome, in consequence of the Lombard invasion, 570 to 1830.92

Ward also concluded that the year of 1830 would be "a year of spiritual revival and triumph, the greatest year in the calendar of the world."93 Another scholar who recognized 1830 as a monumental year in history of Christianity was Errett Gates, who wrote in 1905, "It is apparent by the year 1830 that a new period has dawned in the movement for the union of all Christians by the restoration of primitive Christianity."94 Although Gates was referring to the work of Alexander Campbell and the Disciples of Christ in restoring primitive Christianity, it is significant that he recognized 1830 as the year of the fulfillment of the prophecies and a turning point for Christ's Church. In 1830, Adam Clarke reported that people were beginning to experience an increase of the Holy Ghost and that "never were there times more favorable; never were spiritual advantages more numerous; never was light more abundant" than during this generation.95

Latter-day Saint documents show that Joseph Smith and the Saints knew of these predictions by other Christians. The Times and Seasons reported, "We are informed by the renowned historian, Whelpley . . . that the church of Jesus Christ was overrun, and driven into the wilderness, A.D. 570, and John the Revelator informs us it must remain there 1260 years, which makes exactly the time, the year 1830, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints was organized, with the gifts and blessings."96 In a later issue, the Times and Seasons offered the following commentary on Revelation 12:5 in a series of questions and answers: "What was the rod? A. It was the power and priesthood after the holy order
When the lights came on of the son of God, which the church had; and was delivered of it, or rather, it was taken from her in the year 570, and the church fell into the hands of the Pope of Rome.”

Since the year 1830 is a theme of this chapter, the visionary account of Margaret Macdonald is worth mentioning here. The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church, published in 1861, recounted a vision seen in early 1830 by fifteen-year-old Margaret Macdonald of Scotland. One afternoon while listening to a sermon on the last days, Margaret saw a vision that she later related to her minister. It was recorded that she saw a “people of God” who were now waiting for the “sign of the Son of Man” and that soon, a “glorious temple” was “about to be reared.” Macdonald also saw that there would soon “be an outpouring of the Spirit on the body [of the Church], such as has not been [before]” and that God wished “all should be filled.”

Questions that must be explored regarding the restoration culture of the nineteenth century are: How widespread were discussions of restorationism and prophetic numerology? Were they discussed by only a select few? If so, who? Were these topics explored by people of every Christian denomination? In 1810, Reverend Samuel Davies answered these questions when he stated that not everyone agreed on the exact date when the Church would return but that “it is generally agreed, that we are not far from the end of it.” Another scholar of nineteenth-century restorationism stated that between the years of 1790 and 1840, discussions of biblical prophecy and a restoration were salient among all groups, not just ministers and theologians. Biblical scholar William Cuninghame agreed when he wrote in 1843 that from 1828 to 1833, “a greater number of tracts and works on the subject of the advent and declaring its nearness went forth to the public and . . . in the leading religious journals of the day than had previously appeared in any whole century, in the whole period that had elapsed from the age of the apostles.” In 1828, minister and biblical scholar Robert Reid explained that virtually all of his fellow Protestant ministers and biblical commentators,
as well as many Catholics, believed that the 1,260-year apostasy would end in their generation.102

The previous statements and accounts are quite fascinating. Many people do not realize that Latter-day Saints are not the only people who have taught, and continue to teach, the occurrence of an apostasy. Hundreds of biblical commentaries, books, and pamphlets published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discussed prophetic numerology and claimed that Christ’s Church fell into apostasy during the late sixth century and, therefore, was restored sometime during the early- to mid-nineteenth century.

**Visions, Apostasy, and a Restoration**

Information in the previous sections, when coupled with the accounts in this section, provides a clearer picture into the restoration culture in which the Lord chose to reestablish his Church. It seems that the idea of a restoration spread rapidly as the Lord began to enlighten the minds of people to prepare them for his latter-day work. This section contains nine accounts of individuals who were told in dreams or visions that all religious sects were in error, or that in a short time, God would restore his Church to the earth. All of the manifestations occurred during this restoration generation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The first of these individuals is Caleb Rich of Warwick, Massachusetts, who was raised a Baptist but converted to Universalism after seeing a vision in 1772. One day, Rich heard “a still small voice” that said to him, “your motive is from selfish principles, for fear of future and endless misery; you always have been and now are excited to pray from the same false motives.” At that moment, he saw a “celestial” being who told him he was a “stone” that was “placed by unerring wisdom into God’s building before the foundation of the world.” Rich followed this “celestial” being to “Mount Zion” where he was commanded to avoid the Baptists. When they reached the summit, Rich saw “the house of
God and the gate of heaven.” Instantly, the vision closed. Rich never returned to the Baptist Church but joined the Universalists. He soon became influential in that church and was eventually ordained a New England Universalist leader. One evening in April 1778, Rich saw another vision just after retiring to bed. He saw “a person, or the likeness of one” enter his room carrying a bible. The personage quoted verses from the New Testament and then stated, "There [is] not one formal church among them... that stood in the Apostolic rectitude or that contended for the Faith once delivered to the saints.” He was instructed to “proclaim the same gospel” that Christ preached.  

Robert Mason, resident of Sainsbury, Connecticut, and family friend of the Woodruffs, was considered by many to be a prophet. In 1800, Mason saw the Restoration of the gospel in vision and later related it to Wilford Woodruff, who learned of the vision in 1830. Woodruff described Mason’s experience in his journal.

The last time I ever saw him he related to me the following vision, which he had in his field in open day: “I was carried away in a vision and found myself in the midst of a vast orchard of fruit trees. I became hungry and wandered through this vast orchard searching for fruit to eat, but I found none. While I stood in amazement finding no fruit in the midst of so many trees, they began to fall to the ground as if torn up by a whirlwind. They continued to fall until there was not a tree standing in the whole orchard. I immediately saw thereafter shoots springing up from the roots and forming themselves into young and beautiful trees. These budded, blossomed, and brought forth fruit, which ripened and was the most beautiful to look upon of anything my eyes had ever beheld. I stretched forth my hand and plucked some of the fruit. I gazed upon it with delight; but when I was about to eat of it, the vision closed and I did not taste the fruit. At the close of the vision I bowed down in humble prayer and asked the Lord to show me the meaning of the vision. Then the voice of the Lord came to me saying: ‘Son of man, thou hast sought me diligently to know the truth concerning my Church and Kingdom among men. This is to show you that my Church is not organized among men in the generation to which you belong; but in the days of your children the Church and Kingdom of God shall be made manifest
with all the gifts and the blessings enjoyed by the Saints in past ages. You shall live to be made acquainted with it, but shall not partake of its blessings before you depart this life. You will be blest of the Lord after death because you have followed the dictation of my Spirit in this life.’

When Father Mason had finished relating the vision and its interpretation, he said, calling me by my name: “Wilford, I shall never partake of this fruit in the flesh, but you will and you will become a conspicuous actor in the new kingdom.” He then turned and left me. These were the last words he ever spoke to me upon the earth. To me this was a very striking circumstance. I had passed many days during a period of twenty years with this old Father Mason. He had never mentioned this vision to me before. On this occasion he said he felt impelled by the Spirit of the Lord to relate it to me. 104

This vision caused Woodruff to search for the same organization that governed Christ’s New Testament Church. He also searched for a church who manifested “all the gifts and the blessings enjoyed by the Saints in past ages.” When Woodruff first encountered Mormon missionaries in 1833, he did not hesitate to join the Church.

In 1810, Chloe Willey of Goshen, New Hampshire, published visions she saw of the last days in which an angelic personage explained the Restoration to her as follows:

In the glorious day, which was shortly to take place, the purity of Christ’s church should be established; that miracles should be wrought by his faithful servants; that cripples, with those possessed with diseases, might be restored, which this angel told me, must be done by anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayers of two godly persons, or ministers; and that they must have faith, and in that day the Lord would do great things for Zion, and her watchmen should be of one mind.... He said, the time shall shortly come, when the stone, cut out of the mountain, without hands, which we read of in Daniel II. 34 and 35, should become great, and fill the whole earth; that there would be glorious days in America; and that Christ should be their king, and reign from the rising sun to the setting sun.105

Willey recorded that the restoration of miracles and healing
would soon occur. In addition, these miracles and healings would be performed by at least “two godly persons” who would “anoint” the sick with “oil” in the “name of the Lord.” On February 9, 1831, just twenty-one years after Willey’s vision, the Lord told Joseph Smith in a revelation: “And the elders of the church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for and lay their hands upon them in my name” (D&C 42:44). Since that revelation, thousands of accounts of miraculous healings and even raisings of the dead have been recorded by Latter-day Saints. The angel also told Willey that the prophecy in Daniel 2 that speaks of God’s Church (the stone cut out of the mountains without hands) filling the “whole earth,” would soon be fulfilled. Regarding this prophecy Joseph Smith taught,

I will correct the idea in regard to the little stone rolling forth, as foretold in Daniel, chapter 2. This is not so. It is stationary, like a grind stone, and revolves. (He made a motion with his hands showing how it turned.) When the Elders go abroad to preach the gospel, and the people become believers in the Book of Mormon and are baptized, they are added to the little stone. Thus, they are gathered around it so that it grows larger and larger until it begins to pinch the toes of the image, and finally breaks it into pieces to be carried away like the chaff of a summer’s threshing, while the stone will keep growing until it fills the whole earth.

Joseph Smith Sr., as mentioned previously, also had significant dreams and visions. Specifically, his wife Lucy recorded seven manifestations from 1811 to 1819. The two most significant manifestations were his visions of the Restoration and the tree of life similar to Lehi’s account in the Book of Mormon. At the time, Joseph Smith Sr. had not joined a church, as he felt that none of them fit the organization that Christ established during his ministry. He sought for a church that was patterned after “the ancient order, as established by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and his apostles.” His first manifestation took place in Tunbridge, Vermont, in April 1811.
I seemed to be traveling in an open, barren field, and as I was traveling, I turned my eyes towards the east, the west, the north and the south, but could see nothing save dead, fallen timber. Not a vestige of life, either animal or vegetable, could be seen; besides, to render the scene still more dreary, the most death-like silence prevailed, no sound of anything animate could be heard in all the field. I was alone in this gloomy desert, with the exception of an attendant spirit, who kept constantly by my side. Of him I inquired the meaning of what I saw, and why I was thus traveling in such a dismal place. He answered thus: “This field is the world, which now lieth inanimate and dumb, in regard to the true religion, or plan of salvation; but travel on, and by the wayside you will find on a certain log a box, the contents of which, if you eat thereof, will make you wise, and give unto you wisdom and understanding.” I carefully observed what was told me by my guide, and proceeding a short distance, I came to the box. I immediately took it up, and placed it under my left arm; then with eagerness I raised the lid, and began to taste of its contents; upon which all manner of beasts, horned cattle, and roaring animals, rose up on every side in the most threatening manner possible, tearing the earth, tossing their horns, and bellowing most terrifically all around me, and they finally came so close upon me, that I was compelled to drop the box and fly for my life. Yet, in the midst of all this I was perfectly happy, though I awoke trembling.

Regarding her husband’s vision, Lucy Mack Smith recorded, “From this forward my husband seemed more confirmed than ever in the opinion that there was no order or class of religionists that knew any more concerning the Kingdom of God than those of the world, or such as made no profession of religion whatever.”

In 1815, just five years before Joseph’s First Vision, Norris Stearns of Greenfield, Massachusetts, published a vision that he saw, as cited in the previous chapter. The latter portion of Stearns’ account was reserved for this chapter because of the nature of the message. Following his description of what he saw and felt while experiencing a manifestation of God the Father and Jesus Christ, Stearns recorded that they gave him “an introduction to a greater work that will soon be manifest; for the Angel that has the Everlasting Gospel to preach is coming . . . to do his work.”
When the Lights Came On

claimed authority to deliver this message and considered himself a “prophet.” He wrote, “By permission of the Lord God, whose servant and Prophet I am, I inform the people that part of the 14th Chapter of Revelation is now fulfilling: and that the Lord has already begun to deliver His People.” Notice, as stated in the conclusion to chapter 1, that even though Stearns claimed to be a prophet, he did not claim authority to restore the “Everlasting Gospel.” He simply claimed authority to spread the word concerning a “greater work that will soon be manifest.”

One year after Norris Stearns published his vision, Solomon Chamberlain, a Reformed Methodist from Old Canaan, Connecticut, recorded a remarkable vision. An angel told Chamberlain that no true church presently existed on earth and that the Lord would soon “raise up a church” with the “apostolic order.” In 1830, fourteen years following his vision, Chamberlain met the Smith family and subsequently recorded his interaction with them. As Chamberlain related his vision to the Smith family, those present, including Hyrum, were overcome with emotion.

The Lord showed me in a vision that there were no people on the earth that were right, and that faith was gone from the earth, excepting a few, and that all churches were corrupt. I further saw in the vision that he would soon raise up a church that would be after the apostolic order, that there would be in it the same powers and gifts that were in the days of Christ, and that I should live to see the day, and that there would [be] a book come forth, like unto the Bible, and the people would be guided by it, as well as the Bible. . . .

[About 1830] I had occasion to go on a visit into Upper Canada . . . When the boat came to Palmyra, I felt as if some Genii or good spirit told me to leave the boat. This was a few miles from where the record [Book of Mormon] was found. After leaving the boat, the Spirit manifested to me to travel a south course. I did so for about 3 miles. . . . From the time I left the boat until now, I was wholly led by the Spirit or my Genii. I soon made my way across lots to Father Smith’s and found Hyrum walking the floor as I entered the door. I said, “Peace be to this house.”
He [Hyrum Smith] looked at me as one astonished and said, "I hope it will be peace." I then said, "Is there anyone here that believes in visions and revelations?" He said, "Yes, we are a visionary house." I said, "Then I will give you one of my pamphlets, which was visionary and of my own experience." They then called the people together which consisted of 5 or 6 men who were out at the door. Father Smith was one and some of the Whitmer's. They then sat down and read my pamphlet. Hyrum read first, but was so affected, he could not read it. He then gave it to a man, which I learned was Christian Whitmer. He finished reading it. I then opened my mouth and began to preach to them in the words that the angel had made known to me in the vision, that all churches and denominations on the earth had become corrupt and [that] no church of God [was] on the earth but that he would shortly raise up a church that would never be confounded or brought down, and be like unto the apostolic church. They wondered greatly who had been telling me these things, for said they, we have the same things written down in our house, taken from the Gold record that you are preaching to us... I then said, "If you are a visionary house, I wish you would make known some of your discoveries, for I think I can bear them." They then made known to me that they had obtained a gold record and [had] just finished translating it. Now the Lord revealed to me by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost that this was the work I had been looking for. I stayed 2 days and they instructed me in the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon.112

Daniel Tyler, a Methodist from Springfield, Pennsylvania, related his grandfather's prophecy and visionary experience in 1823. At the time, Tyler's grandfather was not affiliated with a church. Tyler also related the event of his grandfather—following his death—appearing to his father.

One day my father happened to open to Mark, 16th chapter, 16th and 17th verses. After reading them several times carefully he said, "There is not a true believer in the world," as the promise was that the signs spoken of should follow those who believed. He showed the passage to several ministers, mostly Methodists, and argued with them. The more he argued the more convinced he was that the gospel was not on the earth, and he was able to confound the most learned divines, although he was quite illiterate.
My grandfather also had the same views and he prophecied that he would die, but my father would live to see the true church organized with all the apostolic gifts and blessings. . . .

After my grandfather [became sick] with his last illness, he told my parents that an angel appeared to him clothed in white, and told him he would not recover, for his sickness was unto death. Ten days later he died. To save ridicule, however, this vision was kept secret and only told me afterwards by my mother.  

Several years later in 1832, Samuel Smith and Orson Hyde were preaching in the community. After hearing their message and reading the Book of Mormon, all but Tyler’s parents requested baptism; his father seemed to be the most skeptical. Tyler recorded, “Soon after [my baptism], my grandfather appeared to my father in a dream, and told him that this was the people he prophesied of while living, and my parents were baptized.”  

In 1830, Newel and Elizabeth Whitney, Campbellites from Kirtland, Ohio, searched desperately for a church that taught the doctrines of the Bible. They prayed that God would guide them to a church that manifested spiritual gifts and claimed authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Campbellites baptized for the remission of sins and taught that spiritual gifts were for the blessing of all people, but they did not claim authority to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost. One night while Newel and Elizabeth Whitney prayed, they saw a vision. Elizabeth recorded the event as follows:

My husband and I were in our house at Kirtland, praying to the Father to be shown the way when the Spirit rested upon us and a cloud overshadowed the house. It was as though we were out of doors. The house passed away from our vision. We were not conscious of anything but the presence of the spirit and the cloud that was over us. We were wrapped in the cloud. A solemn awe pervaded us. We saw the cloud and felt the Spirit of the Lord. Then we heard a voice out of the cloud saying, “Prepare to receive the word of the Lord, for it is coming.” At this we marveled greatly, but from that moment we knew that the word of the Lord was coming to Kirtland.
Several months later, a carriage stopped at the Sidney Gilbert and Newel Whitney store in Kirtland. A pleasant and charismatic man got out of the carriage and walked into the store. "Newel K. Whitney," said the man enthusiastically as he offered his hand. Whitney replied, not knowing the man, "I could not call you by name as you have me." "I am Joseph the Prophet. You’ve prayed me here; now what do you want of me?" The astonished Whitney invited the Prophet Joseph, his wife Emma, and the two other men who accompanied them to his home that was located across the street. The Prophet accepted the invitation and followed Mr. Whitney to his home where he introduced his wife to the company. Elizabeth welcomed them into her home, and before the conclusion of their meeting, she said to her husband, "This [is] the fulfillment of the vision we had seen of a cloud, as of glory, resting upon our house."  

When the Prophet Joseph was asked in an interview with President Martin Van Buren what differed in the Mormon religion from all the others, Joseph replied that the Latter-day Saints differ "in mode of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands." 117 Joseph Smith taught that only those persons who have received proper authority from God are permitted to perform baptism and bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost upon a person. "You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man," stated the Prophet, "if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost." 118

Asa Wild, a Methodist from West Fairlee, Vermont, was another visionary who published a manifestation similar to Stearns’s mentioned previously. The Lord appeared to Wild and informed him that all denominations had become corrupt and that a restoration of Christ’s Church would occur in the near future. This account was first published in the Mohawk Herald in Amsterdam, New York, on October 1, 1823, just ten days following Moroni’s first appearance to Joseph Smith. E. B. Grandin and
Pomeroy Tucker published Wild’s account in the Wayne Sentinel, also printed in Amsterdam, on October 22, 1823. Wild recorded,

The Lord in his boundless goodness was pleased to communicate the following Revelation, having in the first place presented me with a very glorious Vision . . . It seemed as if my mind though active in its very nature, had lost all its activity, and was struck motionless, as well as into nothing, before the awful and glorious majesty of the Great Jehovah. He then spake to the following purport; and in such a manner as I could not describe if I should attempt. He told me that . . . every denomination of professing Christians had become extremely corrupt; many of which had never had any true faith at all; but are guided only by depraved reason, refusing the teaching of that Spirit which indited the scriptures, and which alone can teach us the true meaning of the same; even as the diamond alone can cut its fellow. He told me further, that he had raised up, and was now raising up, that class of persons signified by the Angel mentioned by the Revelator [Revelation 14:6–7], which flew in the midst of heaven; having the everlasting gospel to preach; that these persons are in an inferior class, and small learning; that they will be rejected by every denomination as a body; but soon, God will open their way, by miracles, judgments, etc; that they will have higher authority, greater power, superior inspiration, and a greater degree of holiness, than was ever experienced before; inasmuch as this is far the most glorious dispensation of divine grace and glory.¹¹⁹

Note that the Lord informed Wild not only of an imminent Restoration, but that the Restoration would be accompanied by “miracles” and “great power,” which is the essence of this book! As far as we know, Wild never came in contact with Joseph Smith and was never baptized into the Church, which makes this account, as well as others mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, more remarkable.

Jesus Christ told Norris Stearns and Asa Wild that all existing churches were corrupt and that in the near future, the angel with the “Everlasting Gospel” would “fly in the midst of heaven” and would instigate a great work. John the Revelator saw the angel with the “Everlasting Gospel” in vision and subsequently
Nineteenth century rendition of the angel flying in the midst of heaven with a book containing the everlasting gospel.
recorded the following: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6). Today, a statue of an angel can be seen standing atop many LDS temples holding a trumpet to his mouth. The trumpet symbolizes the preaching of the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. On November 3, 1831, the Lord revealed to Joseph in vision that the angel referred to in Revelation 14 had come. “I have sent forth mine angel,” revealed the Lord, “flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel, who hath appeared unto some and hath committed it unto man, who shall appear unto many that dwell on the earth. And this gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (D&C 133:36–37). One year earlier, the Lord told Joseph that Moroni came “to reveal the Book of Mormon, containing the fullness of my everlasting gospel” (D&C 27:5; emphasis added). In 1817, biblical scholar William Cuninghame, in commenting on Revelation 14:6, observed that it is “remarkable that this angel goes forth, not preaching by word of mouth only, but having the everlasting Gospel, (the book of the Gospel), the scriptures of truth, in his hand.”120 John Taylor, who as a child saw a vision of an angel flying in the heavens with a trumpet to his mouth (see chapter 3), described the everlasting gospel as follows:

The everlasting gospel made known in the last days is nothing more or less than the ancient religion restored. It is the commencement of the “restitution of all things, spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world was.” It is the bringing back of ancient, eternal principles, whereby men can know God as they knew him formerly; not a vague fantasy, not a simple form,
but a living reality. Its doctrines, its ordinances, its principles, its priesthood are from above, revealed from the heavens, and yet strictly in conformity with all former revelations . . . It is adapted to the wants of the human family, to the world morally, socially, religiously and politically. It is not a sickly, sentimental, effeminate plaything; not a ghostly, spiritual, sing-song, ethereal dream, but a living, sober, matter-of-fact reality adapted to body and spirit, to earth and heaven, to time and eternity. It enters into all the ramifications of life. It does not adapt itself to the philosophy, politics, creeds, and opinions of men, but fashions them in its divine mold. It . . . lifts all that are in the world, who will be subject to its precepts . . . It searches all truth, and grasps at all intelligence. It is the revealed living and abiding will of God to man; a connection between the heavens and the earth. It is nature, philosophy, heavens and earth, time and eternity united. It is the philosophy of the heavens and the earth, of God, and angels, and saints.121

Conclusion

What can we conclude from the manifestations cited in this, as well as in the previous chapter? Were they the product of Satan’s attempts to imitate the miracles of the Restoration of Christ’s Church? Was Satan attempting to drown out the claims of Joseph Smith with noise, making him just another crazy religious fanatic claiming visionary experiences and trying to establish his own church? Or were these visionary experiences God’s way of preparing the world for the Restoration of His Church by gradually enlightening the minds of men to the reality of angels, prophets, and revelation? “Unfortunately,” explained Latter-day Saint scholar Richard Bushman, “we have no way to judge the authenticity of these visionary accounts: Some present fabulous, cumbersome stories that sound like the fantasies of troubled souls, straining one’s credulity. Others . . . may have sobered readers and turned them to God . . . Inspired or not . . . the writings of . . . visionaries dispel the idea that revelations were unknown until the First Vision opened the heavens in 1820.”122
After reviewing numerous accounts and statements in chapters 1 and 2, we learn that the claims of Joseph Smith were not as crazy and unprecedented as his critics have made them appear. Latter-day Saints teach of an apostasy, the necessity of a restoration, and that God and Christ are two separate individuals. All of these doctrines are supported in the aforementioned visionary accounts and statements, many of which were recorded and published by individuals not familiar with Joseph Smith and the Mormons.

We may also conclude that if God wanted to prepare the world—and especially a particular region—for the Restoration of His Church, then the way to accomplish that would be to open the minds of those people to accept angels, prophets, visions, and even evil spirits. One non-LDS scholar, Robert Remini, in discussing the inhabitants of the early American republic wrote, “These people believed in devils and witches as well as angels and divine messengers. And nothing in their occult practices was regarded as contrary to accepted Christian values or beliefs. It was a generation of seekers in search of faith by which they could govern their lives to the satisfaction of the Almighty.”

Despite all the arguments that can be posited regarding the manifestations presented in chapters 1 and 2, many valuable insights and themes emerge: (1) The heavens are not sealed and revelation did not cease, as many Christian denominations teach today. Revelation was as much a part of their world as it was to the ancient Israelites. (2) God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared numerous times as separate individuals with bodies like a man’s. (3) Satan and evil spirits are real and often appear either in bodily form or as an unseen force to counter manifestations and revelations from heaven. (4) A restoration of Christ’s Church was necessary according to scholars of various Christian denominations in past centuries. This belief prepared many to accept the restored gospel when it was presented to them. (5) Joseph Smith was not alone in claiming manifestations that taught of a restoration (see the map of visionaries in the northeastern states). (6) Heavenly
manifestations often motivate individuals to do much good in their families and communities.

In short, the outpouring of spiritual manifestations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries prepared individuals, families, and communities to accept the Restoration of Christ's Church. At minimum, the visionary and restoration culture of Joseph Smith's generation (and the previous generation) caused people to question some of the false traditions of their fathers and to reconsider their devotion to the Christ of the New Testament rather than the Christ of the creeds.

38. *A Wonderful Account of a Little Girl of nine years old, Who lives in the Town of Jericho, in the State of Vermont; by the Name of Hannah Coy* (Windsor, VT: n.p., 1800); emphasis added; see also Ann Kirschner, *Early American Studies*, 198, 203, 207.

39. Nathan Barlow, *A Vision Seen By Nathan Barlow, of Freetown (Called so by the Inhabitants) Adjacent to the North End of Harlem, in the County of Kennebec, District of Maine. January 8, 1801* (Greenfield, MA: n.p., 1802); emphasis added.

40. *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command, Shewing the Marvellous Dealings of God to His Soul, and the Miraculous Manner in which He Was Delivered from the Jaws of Death and Hell; and His Soul Set at Liberty, Likewise His Appointment to the Ministry; and Commision from on High, to Preach the Gospel to Every Creature* (Greenfield, MA: 1815); emphasis added.


**Chapter 2**


52. David W. Bercot, *Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up: A New Look At Today's Evangelical Church in the Light of Early Christianity* (Tyler, TX: Scroll, 1999), 149.


55. Ibid., vol. 2, sermon 66; emphasis added.


57. William Cullen Bryant, ed., *Picturesque America, or the Land We Live In* (New York: Appleton, 1894), 502; emphasis added.


72. Ibid., 15:288; emphasis added.


75. Hughes, “Joseph Smith as an American Restorationist,” 36.


77. *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 3 (November 1836): 404.


85. Lee, "Anti-Preterist Historicism"; emphasis added.


100. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, 16–17.


104. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, 16–17; Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves From My Journal* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005), 2–4; emphasis added. Speaking of Robert Mason, Wilford Woodruff said, “The first opportunity I had after the truth of baptism for the dead was revealed, I went forth and was baptized for him in the temple font at Nauvoo. He was a good man, a true prophet; for his prophecies have been fulfilled. There was so much reason in the teachings of this man, and such harmony between
them and the prophecies and teachings of Christ and of the apostles and prophets of old, that I believed in them with all my heart” (Cowley, Wilford Woodruff, 18).


107. Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 154.

108. For the description of many of these visions see Lucy Mack Smith, The History of Joseph Smith by His Mother (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2000), 68–73, 297–98.


110. Ibid.

111. The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command, Shewing the Marvellous Dealings of God to His Soul, and the Miraculous Manner in which He Was Delivered from the Jaws of Death and Hell; and His Soul Set at Liberty, Likewise His Appointment to the Ministry; and Commision from on High, to Preach the Gospel to Every Creature (Greenfield, MA: n.p. 1815); emphasis added.


114. Ibid., 26; emphasis added.
115. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saints Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901), 1:224; emphasis added.
117. *History of The Church*, 4:42.

**Chapter 3**