

The Martyrdom: Joseph and Hyrum Smith as Testators

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Early in Truman Madsen's academic studies, as an undergraduate at the University of Utah, he was called to be a member of the Ensign Stake genealogical committee. He served with my father, Lynn A McKinlay, who was the chairman. Stemming from that association were countless conversations about a number of issues for which the restored gospel gives persuasive, exhilarating, and satisfying responses. Truman and my father corresponded while Truman pursued graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Southern California and at Harvard. In Truman's early years as a faculty member at Brigham Young University, he and my father codirected three church history tours, two before Truman's call as president of the New England Mission and one the year after his release. As a seventeen-year-old, I was privileged to participate in the last of the three tours, which took place in 1966. The two directors began each day with prayer and then took turns lecturing at various sites. One of Truman's assigned lecture sites was Carthage Jail. I was impressed at how moved he was as he highlighted from memory the events associated with the martyrdom. I am pleased that he has preserved in audiotape lectures a similar recounting of that heart-rending event.¹ As a representative of the Lynn and Sann McKinlay family, I am honored to demonstrate our love and admiration for Truman by trying to contextualize in this essay one of the ramifications of that tragic yet triumphant episode of 27 June 1844.

Perhaps a preliminary note on the Prophet Joseph Smith is in order. The veneration of Joseph Smith and his mission by Latter-day Saints is sometimes misconstrued. Some assume that we place the Prophet above the Savior in spiritual significance. One of our apostolic doctrinal giants, Charles W. Penrose, corrects this misapprehension and clarifies the perspective of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

We frequently bear testimony concerning Joseph the Prophet, as we ought to do, for we should "praise the man who communed with Jehovah," and whom "Jesus anointed as prophet and seer," but when we bear testimony that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God we do in effect proclaim the truth that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Redeemer of the World, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way and the Truth, and that only by and through Him can we approach the Father. That is the great doctrine for which Joseph Smith stood, and lived, and died as a martyr.²

This role of the Prophet as a witness to the second member of the Godhead should ever be kept in mind; I emphasize here that Joseph's death was a witness.

When Elder John Taylor drew up a document announcing the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, which the Church of Jesus Christ subsequently canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 135, he proclaimed that "the testators are now dead, and their testament is in force" (v. 5). His words recall the following passage in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV): "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Hebrews 9:16–17). Taylor's proposition that the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum validated their witness of Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind has impressed several of our leaders.³ It is the purpose of this paper to defend and elaborate on John Taylor's statement and to discuss several doctrinal issues relative to the martyrdom. I begin by addressing some exegetical challenges associated with Hebrews 9:16–17. At issue is the meaning of several Greek words within their contexts in this passage.

Covenant and Testament

When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into the Greek Septuagint (LXX), the translators chose the Greek word *διαθηκη* (*diathēkē*) to represent the Hebrew word *tyrb* (*berit*), which means “treaty or covenant.” In the common Greek of New Testament times, *diathēkē* meant “will or testament,” signifying that the death of the testator was necessary to fulfill the conditions of the inheritance. “Testament” is the translation chosen to represent the Greek *diathēkē* in Hebrews 9:16–17 in several modern English translations of the Bible, including the KJV. But since that same word—*diathēkē*—is translated as “covenant” elsewhere in Hebrews (including 9:15–22, the larger pericope in which verses 16–17 appear), as well as in most other places in the New Testament, some exegetes argue that it should also be translated as “covenant” rather than “testament” in the two verses under consideration. G. D. Kilpatrick states outright, “Basically the idea of testament fits into the passage very clumsily.”⁴

In alignment with those who agree that “covenant” and not “testament” is the appropriate translation, John J. Hughes, a New Testament scholar, has published a lengthy study.⁵ Many of his viewpoints could likely be compatible with a Latter-day Saint perspective. He notes that the passage in Hebrews 9:15–22 elucidates the doctrine of covenants in the early church in relation to that motif in the Old Testament and later Judaism.⁶ He also acknowledges that from a Hellenistic legal perspective, *diathēkē* was the ideal counterpart for *berit*, or covenant.⁷ Nevertheless, he challenges the textual practice of using “testament” in those verses, which practice goes back to earlier English translations. For Hughes, “to confuse the meaning of *διαθηκη* in the LXX with its meaning in the papyri and classical sources [i.e., “will” or “testament”] has been, in my opinion, the fundamental error in several notable studies.”⁸

In examining a sampling of commentaries on Hebrews since Hughes published his imposing essay in 1979, I am astonished to find how many have ignored it. Although some of these writers are aware of studies suggesting that *diathēkē* should always be rendered “covenant” in Hebrews, none that I have seen even acknowledges Hughes’s frankly ambitious piece.

Alternatively, a number of scholars argue in favor of a translation that coincides with the KJV translation of “testament,” with which we are familiar. Here is a sampling from John F. MacArthur:

A testament, by its very nature, requires **the death** of the testator. **Covenant**, or testament, is from the Greek *diathēkē*, the basic meaning of which corresponds closely to that of our present-day *will*. A will does not take effect until the one who made it dies. Until that time, its benefits and provisions are only promises, and necessarily future. The point being made in verses 16–17 is simple and obvious. Its relevance to the Old Covenant, however, was anything but obvious to the Jews being addressed here, so the writer briefly explains how it applies. Building on verse 15, he is saying that God gave a legacy, an eternal inheritance, to Israel in the form of a covenant, a will. As with any will, it was only a type of promis[s]ory note until the provider of the will died. At this point, no mention is made of who the testator is or of how Christ fills that role in life and death.⁹

Barnabas Lindars points out the rich wordplay with the word *diathēkē*. He notes that this passage “takes advantage of the range of meaning of the Greek word for covenant (*diathēkē*), which can also be used to denote a last will and testament. [The author of Hebrews] points out that a will does not come into force until the testator has died. Therefore, he argues, a death is necessary for a covenant to come into force.” Lindars ties this to the Sinai covenant as found in Exodus 24:4–8 and points out that “it was necessary for the inauguration of the new covenant too.” While some scholars, Lindars continues, have rejected the possibility that the word signifies a covenant only and not a testament or will,

this can be done only by a very strained exegesis. In fact, [the author of] Hebrews is not juggling with words so as to take advantage of double meanings to slip in an invalid argument. From his point of view ‘testament’ is part of the meaning of *diathēkē*, and it suggests to him a useful *comparison*. It is no more than that. Just as the death of a person brings that person’s testament into effect, so the ratification of a covenant by means of a sacrifice brings the covenant into force. To put it another way, a *diathēkē*, which means both covenant and testament, normally requires a death to bring it into effect.¹⁰

In response to MacArthur’s comment above, I would say that “the death of the testator” indicated in Hebrews 9:16–17 that brings his testament or covenant into force is the atoning death of Christ. Without that atonement, none of the promises of the inheritance could be fulfilled. I would, however, add a qualification. In my reading of the Book of Mormon, I sense in the time immediately preceding Christ’s birth—when the New World prophets testified so passionately—a kind of anticipatory acceptance of salvation. The prophets and their believing audiences were influenced by a promissory gift of salvation and experienced in rich measure the sustaining influence of the Spirit, as if the atonement had already been realized. Several of the latter-day prophets have also spoken of another aspect of the execution of a spiritual testament, or witness, in that the death of a testator is particularly relevant to the testator’s own generation, or dispensation, as will be seen below.

Hughes also has problems with the context of *διαθεμενος* (*diathemenos*) in the traditional translation of Hebrews 9:16–17. The KJV translates this word as “testator,” which in the Hellenistic milieu had reference to the maker of a will or testament. Hughes sees this word in the Hebrews passage as meaning the “ratifier of a covenant.”¹¹ In effect, Hughes proposes that the context demands that a covenant had to be ratified by the death of some person or animal (the Greek does not say “when men are dead”—it just refers to the necessity of deaths, the word being dative plural, *νεκροῖς* [*nekrois*]). He argues that the deaths spoken of here were substitutionary and representative of the ratifier,¹² but he rejects the idea of the ratifier being a testator of a will. However, from some of the comments of scholars quoted above, a case can be made that if *diathēkē* in Hebrews 9:16–17 indeed means a testament or will, the person outlining the will—the testator—must die in order for the inheritance to be offered without stipulation. In other words, the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum fulfilled the conditions of being testators, thus validating the use of the word *testament* in Taylor’s reference to those biblical verses.

Doctrinal Significance of the Martyrdom

Having examined exegetically the passage in Hebrews to which John Taylor referred in *Doctrine and Covenants* 135:5, I now turn to a consideration of the doctrinal meaning of what Elder Franklin D. Richards called the Prophet’s “mighty martyrdom,”¹³ a scene that President J. Reuben Clark Jr. labeled “tragic beauty.”¹⁴

The Prophet was martyred when he was thirty-eight and a half years old. It is well documented that he did not expect to live to the age of forty, though he was assured that his life would not be taken until his work was accomplished.¹⁵ Musing over this theme, Brigham Young offered this reflection:

Who delivered Joseph Smith from the hands of his enemies to the day of his death? It was God; though he was brought to the brink of death time and time again, and, to all human appearances, could not be delivered, and there was no probability of his being saved. ... Though he had prophesied that he would not live to be forty years of age, yet we all cherished hopes that *that* would be a false prophecy, and we should keep him for ever with us; we thought our faith would outreach it, but we were mistaken—he at last fell a martyr to his religion.¹⁶

In spite of knowing his impending fate, the Prophet himself apparently entertained a hope for a reversal: "It is more and more evident that [Thomas] Carlin is determined to have me taken to Missouri, if he can. But may the Almighty Jehovah shield and defend me from all their power, and prolong my days in peace, that I may guide His people in righteousness, until my head is white with old age."¹⁷ Referring to the Prophet's "last charge" meeting, when he informed the apostles he was going to rest from his labors, Elder Orson Hyde remembered that the group "did not consider, at the time he bore this testimony, that he was going to die or be taken from us; but we considered that as he had been borne down with excessive labors, by day and night, he was going to retire to rest and regain his health, and we should act under his direction and bear the responsibility of the work."¹⁸

As the end drew near, the Prophet felt a definite presentiment of his death. While visiting Nauvoo nearly forty years after the exodus of the Latter-day Saints, Richards recalled: "From this improvised platform he made his last public speech. He felt that the cup had been prepared for him, and that to fill the sacrifice unto which he had been called, he must drink it to the fatal, cruel dregs."¹⁹

After the martyrdom, the Saints sought to make sense of the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum. The Lord addressed this matter in a revelation to Brigham Young at Winter Quarters: "Many have marveled because of his death; but it was needful that he should seal his testimony with his blood, that he might be honored and the wicked might be condemned" (D&C 136:39).

President Wilford Woodruff acknowledged that he was one who had "marveled":

I used to have peculiar feelings about his death and the way in which his life was taken. I felt that if, with the consent and good feelings of the brethren that waited on him after he crossed the river to leave Nauvoo, Joseph could have had his desire, he would have pioneered the way to the Rocky Mountains. But since then I have been fully reconciled to the fact that it was according to the programme, that it was required of him, as the head of this dispensation, that he should seal his testimony with his blood.²⁰

Elsewhere Woodruff more explicitly said, "If I were to tell what I think about it, I would say it was ordained of God that our Prophet and head should be sacrificed in the manner that he was."²¹ Decades later, President Stephen L. Richards, a grandson of Willard Richards, expressed the conviction "that Joseph of his own volition gave his life for the cause entrusted to him, which is the real essence of martyrdom." But he added, "I believe the martyrdom was inevitable. By that I mean that it was foreordained and in the divine plan."²²

President Brigham Young taught that if the Prophet had "been destined to live he would have lived."²³ If the world in general had accepted his testimony, according to Young, the Prophet's martyrdom might have been avoided. But because he was largely rejected, the Prophet *did* seal his testimony with his blood, and it is in force in the world.²⁴ On another occasion Young stated that the Prophet "sealed his testimony with his blood, consequently we can, with impunity, believe on him a little better than if he were living. When he was living, his testimony was not in force upon the people as it is now."²⁵

The efficacy of Joseph's martyrdom as a pure witness to those living in the dispensation of the fulness of times depends partially on those of us who are not required to die as martyrs. Elder Henry D. Moyle maintained: "We who through the inspiration of the Almighty have received his testimony and that of his faithful brother Hyrum,

are charged with responsibility to accept and to perpetuate and add our solemn witness thereto, that the blood of this generation shall not be upon us.”²⁶

Elder Delbert L. Stapley, sidestepping mere allusion, positively identifies the Prophet’s martyrdom with the language of Hebrews 9:16–17: “Where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of a testator, and surely this was a testament unfolding and revealing again God’s kingdom with all of its saving ordinances, principles, and divine powers. A testament is not of force until after men are dead. The Prophet gave his life to seal that testimony, and thus the sacrifice of his life becomes a witness to all men of the truth and power of his holy calling and ministry.”²⁷

As seen above, the passage in Hebrews 9 deals primarily with the legitimizing of covenants, with a supplementary reference to wills or testaments. The Christian world divides the Bible into the Old and New Testaments. Now, in addition to those witnesses, church leaders have subtitled the Book of Mormon “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” All three of those works could appropriately be known alternatively as “covenants.” John Taylor explicitly says in the first verse of Doctrine and Covenants 135: “To seal the testimony of this book [that is, the Doctrine and Covenants] and the Book of Mormon, we announce the martyrdom of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and Hyrum Smith the Patriarch.” On the title page of the Book of Mormon, Moroni describes one of the book’s purposes: “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” In his 1842 letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, Joseph Smith quoted the angel Moroni as telling him in his initial visit that he was “sent to bring the joyful tidings, that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled.”²⁸ A perusal of the Book of Mormon reveals that covenants figure prominently. So it is clear that Joseph and Hyrum as testators have ratified the scriptural books of covenants that pertain to our own dispensation.

Although Hebrews 9:16–17 refers to a general principle, it is meant in its context to refer to Christ’s consummation of a new testament or covenant through the enactment of the atonement. In his role of atoner, Jesus is absolutely peerless. But since several of the apostles who survived Joseph Smith have applied the role of testator to him, is there a subordinate sense in which that passage also pertains to him? A few church leaders have so taught. Speaking of the Prophet, Elder Erastus Snow affirmed that “the Lord suffered his enemies to destroy him in the flesh, to take away his life, and he was made an offering—what shall I say? an offering for sin. Not in the sense in which the Savior was offered, but he was made a martyr for the truth and his blood was shed to attest the testimony that he bore to the world.”²⁹

President Joseph F. Smith summarizes the zenith of the Prophet’s mortal mission in the following statement: “Joseph Smith was true to the covenants that he made with the Lord, true to his mission, and the Lord enabled him to accomplish his work, even to the sealing of his testimony with his shed blood. His testimony is now, and has been, in force among the children of men as verily as the blood of Jesus Christ is in force and a binding testimony upon all the world, and it has been from the day it was shed until now, and will continue until the winding up scene.”³⁰ Brigham Young testified, “God suffered him to be slain for His testimony, that it might become a law through being sealed by his blood, which was the case the moment his blood was spilled, the same as with the law of Jesus Christ when he spilled his blood. Then the testimony became in force. It must be so; God suffered it.”³¹

Again, it should be emphasized that the Prophet’s martyrdom is not on the same level as Christ’s universal atoning sacrifice, but the law of witnesses as it relates to the shedding of consecrated blood is at work here. The violent death of the Prophet was necessary to enforce the spiritual powers of the restoration, his death thus indirectly

ratifying the atonement, which is universal. It is interesting to note that a few days before his death the Prophet exclaimed that he was “going like a lamb to the slaughter” (D&C 135:4), a simile redolent of the sacrificial imagery found in Isaiah 53:7. This chapter of Isaiah is associated in Christian circles with Jesus as the “suffering servant,” or the vicarious sacrifice for sin. Several of the General Authorities, as noted in this essay, have spoken of the Prophet’s murder as a sacrifice. Joseph Smith was witnessing to the truth of those aspects of the everlasting gospel that pertained specifically to *his* realm or stewardship. Some prophets in past dispensations also sealed their testimonies with their blood by dying a martyr’s death and thus left their generations without excuse. An example of this is Abinadi, whose death at the hands of King Noah and his priests (except Alma) bound them to his testimony, for which they were and are required to answer. Even indirectly, we are also held responsible for his witness since it has come to us through the Book of Mormon. In other words, either we accept his teachings and repent and become clean or we “assent unto his death” and share blame with those who killed him. All prophets in the history of the world who have laid down their lives as a witness have been under the auspices of the atonement; it is the atonement that makes their sacrifices binding.

The Prophet’s pronouncement that he was going like a lamb to the slaughter has telling implications concerning his spiritual status. When he made that statement, he added that he had “a conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men” (D&C 135:4). There were times in his youth when the Prophet sought forgiveness for sin—this was one of his concerns that led to the first vision, and it was a major issue in his prayer that resulted in the initial visits of Moroni—and he was rebuked and forgiven several times during his early ministry. But by the time he rode to Carthage, he had applied the atoning blood of Christ in his life to the extent that he was ready to die. BYU professor Lynn A McKinlay asserts that “in order for the testimony to be valid in heaven, the testator must be clean—the sacrifice must be without spot or blemish.” He affirms “that what Joseph said [about his clear conscience] was true, and because he was a clean, pure sacrifice, like a[n unspotted] lamb, that which he did at Carthage is valid in the heavens.”³²

In gratitude and reverence, we can list individuals, in some cases family members, who have given their lives for the gospel. But the Prophet’s death carries special significance. Elder Robert D. Hales, one of the Twelve, addresses this point:

True religious martyrs are part of an eternal gospel plan and earn an eternal reward: “Whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name’s sake [and the gospel’s], shall find it again, even life eternal” (D&C 98:13; see also Mark 8:35). The pioneers who gave their lives in the westward trek are martyrs also, but not in the same way as the prophet who held the priesthood keys and willingly gave his life in testimony to seal his work in this dispensation.³³

When Latter-day Saints call the Prophet a martyr, they are faithful to the root meaning of the Greek word **μαρτυς** (*martyrs*), which means a witness. Several of the latter-day apostles quoted refer to that very idea—through his death the Prophet left an inevitable witness of the whole restoration. It was after the inception of the Christian era that the term *martyr* began to be associated with the laying down of one’s life for a cause. The culmination of the Prophet’s ministry combines the earlier and later meanings.³⁴

Latter-day prophets have testified that the law of witnesses had a wider application to the events at Carthage than just the death of the Prophet. As Elder Marvin J. Ashton taught: “When Oliver Cowdery lost his standing the Lord transferred to Hyrum Smith all the power and authority that had been given to Oliver Cowdery, and Hyrum Smith became the Associate President of the Church—holding these keys jointly with his brother Joseph and standing

with him at the head of the great and last dispensation. It was because of this great honor that Hyrum Smith was called to be the companion of the Prophet Joseph in martyrdom.”³⁵

The presence of John Taylor and Willard Richards, both members of the Twelve, and their subsequent testimony strengthen the witness of the martyrdom. Those who have studied the martyrdom know that prior to 27 June the Prophet was in company with several devoted friends, including Stephen Markham, John S. Fullmer, and Dan Jones. But these friends left to fulfill errands, leaving only the two members of the Twelve with Joseph and Hyrum.

Some gainsayers have alleged that the Prophet’s murder did not qualify him as a martyr because he used a pistol (although not a very effective one) as a defense. But I believe that Elder Thomas S. Monson catches the true spirit of that awful moment:

You remember in Carthage Jail, where he was incarcerated with Hyrum and with John Taylor and Willard Richards, the angry mob stormed the jail, they came up the stairway, blasphemous in their cursing, heavily armed, and began to fire at will. You remember that Hyrum dropped dead, exclaiming, “I am a dead man.” John Taylor took several balls of fire within his bosom. The Prophet Joseph, with his pistol in hand, was attempting to defend his life and that of his brethren [I would here emphasize “his brethren”], and yet he could hear from the pounding on the door and sense that this mob would storm that door and would take the life, if there was any life remaining in John Taylor, and would take the life of Willard Richards. Why? Because they were anxious to kill the Prophet. And so his last great act here upon the earth was to leave the door and lead Willard Richards to safety, throw the gun on the floor and go to the window that they might see him, that the attention of this ruthless mob might be focused upon him rather than others.³⁶

I agree with Elder Monson that the Prophet sought to deflect attention from Willard Richards (and perhaps John Taylor) so that they could survive the scene. They each lived to record and distribute apostolic proclamations concerning the martyrdom. Thus the two apostles, who by definition are special witnesses of Christ, also observed the final witness of Joseph and Hyrum. We see manifested here, in a very comprehensive way, the law of witnesses.

Several decades after the martyrdom, Franklin D. Richards recalled that a pall of gloom pervaded Nauvoo when the news was released to the Saints.³⁷ The afflicted condition of the community is well documented.³⁸ We are now removed by several generations from that mood of mourning and can only try to experience vicariously the keenness of feeling. But perhaps this distance affords our generation an advantage, as suggested by Elder Melvin J. Ballard:

It has taken one or two generations to elapse before men began to see the worth and the merit of those who have been the world’s greatest benefactors. And so it has been with “Mormonism,” and with the Prophet Joseph Smith. He was too close to the men and the women of his own time. They felt with him as they did with Jesus. Wasn’t Jesus the carpenter’s son? Didn’t they know his father and his brothers? Just so men thought that they knew all about Joseph Smith, and that he did not have a message of any particular consequence to them! And so they chose to turn their faces away from him. But as we recede from his day, and contemplate the man and his message, we discover that he begins to rise to his own place and position, for he will stand as one of the pinnacles in the midst of the children of men; and that which he did, men shall yet come to acknowledge was given of God, for the salvation not only of a few Latter-day Saints, but of the whole world.³⁹

More recently, Elder James E. Faust has forecast the place of Joseph Smith in the world:

As the years pass since Joseph's life and death, his history will no doubt be analyzed, picked at, criticized, challenged, and pored over. But the evidences of the truthfulness of his statements will continue to mount. The devotion and commitment of those who accept the restored gospel will continue to be severely tested. Their faith will be sorely tried, as has been the case with so many in the past. But like Joseph himself, millions will live and die faithful to the gospel he restored. As time moves on, the stature of Joseph Smith will loom ever larger. He will stand higher and higher in the esteem of mankind.⁴⁰

This is consonant with a seemingly grandiose claim made by John Taylor: "Brought up a poor farmer's boy, with very limited advantages of education, he [Joseph Smith] nevertheless introduced a system of religion that was bold, energetic, and commanding."⁴¹ Plainly, the Prophet's blood-sealed message is here permanently, both to bless and to provoke.

The Prophet was transferred to another realm, but as Elder Marriner W. Merrill testified, "Joseph Smith, the great prophet of the last dispensation, has a watchcare over us today, just as he had while he was on the earth; and he is not so very far off, either."⁴² Elder Ezra Taft Benson spoke in a similar vein when he proclaimed that "the Prophet Joseph Smith was not only 'one of the noble and great ones,' but he gave and continues to give attention to important matters here on the earth even today from the realms above. For in the eyes of the Lord—the God of this world under the Father—it is all one great eternal program in which the Prophet plays an important role—all through the eternal priesthood and authority of God."⁴³

A few leaders have spoken majestically about the martyrdom. At the funeral of fellow apostle Ezra T. Benson, President George A. Smith averred that Joseph's "martyrdom and that of his brother Hyrum were crowns upon their heads, to prepare them for that exaltation which their services to the world, as servants of God and apostles of Jesus Christ sealed upon them."⁴⁴ In an epistle to the saints in Britain, Woodruff wrote: "You do know [that] Joseph Smith, the prophet, left his testimony upon the earth, and sealed that testimony with his own life and blood, and that testament is in force 'upon all the world,' and that testament is filled with the revelation of God, that stand[s] upon its pages like flames of living fire, ready to be fulfilled upon all the inhabitants of the earth."⁴⁵ B. H. Roberts expressed the view that "when Joseph Smith fell by the old well-curb at Carthage jail, pierced by the bullets of assassins, he placed the cap-stone upon his mission by sealing it with his blood."⁴⁶

I cannot think of a better finale for this essay than to quote the testimony of Truman Madsen's grandfather, President Heber J. Grant:

I bear witness to you here today, that I know God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of the true and living God, that he was a martyr, that he gave his life for this cause, and that his blood bears witness to the integrity, the honesty and inspiration of his mission as a prophet of the living God, because he was true even unto death.⁴⁷

Notes

1. Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet*, audiotapes of lectures (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998); and Truman G. Madsen, *The Presidents of the Church: Insights into the Life and Teachings of Each Church President*, audiotapes of lectures (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999).

2. Charles W. Penrose, Conference Report, April 1906, 87.
3. See my section on “Doctrinal Significance of the Martyrdom,” pp. 482–92.
4. George D. Kilpatrick, “**Διαθηκη** in Hebrews,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 68 (1977): 263.
5. John J. Hughes, “Hebrews IX 15ff. and Galatians III 15ff.: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure,” *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979): 27–96.
6. *Ibid.*, 27.
7. *Ibid.*, 30–31.
8. *Ibid.*, 31; see also 58.
9. John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 236, emphasis in original.
10. Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 95–96. Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1997), 98–99, sees *diathēkē* in the Hebrews passage as a “pun and an analogy.” Marie E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1992), 120, agrees with Lindars about the tie of covenant with the Sinai incident in Exodus 24:4–8, and with use of *diathēkē* in Hebrews as a “double entendre” in the sense of “the necessity for the death of a testator before a will may be proved.” Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 462–63, argues for a blending of the two meanings through the use of grammatical tools. He points out how Hebrews 9 juxtaposes the old and new covenants using the imagery of the shedding of blood: “The structure of the comparison brings together the old and new covenants by implicitly comparing them both with a will. . . . The value of the illustration is thus limited to the fact that it compares two institutions in which a death plays an essential role: on the one hand, God’s covenants with his people, sealed respectively by animal sacrifices, and by the death of Christ; on the other hand, a will, which comes into effect on the testator’s death. Who it is that dies, and the nature of that death (violent or natural, voluntary or involuntary) are for the moment excluded from consideration. All that matters is the death itself.” Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 253–54, argues substantially the same thing. R. McL. Wilson, *New Century Bible Commentary: Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 157–59, sees the traditional translation as valid and believes that the main point is clear, but he believes that the flow of thought is in some measure illogical and not fully cogent.
11. Hughes, “Hebrews IX 15ff.,” 40.
12. *Ibid.*, 42–43.
13. Franklin D. Richards, “Visit to Pueblo, Independence, Carthage, Nauvoo, Richmond, etc.,” *Millennial Star* 47 (27 July 1885): 468. The fuller quotation of Richards reads: “To-day it [Carthage Jail] seems a place of peace. To the casual observer it would possess not even a passing interest. But to us who held the knowledge of the mighty events which had transpired within its walls, of the dark cloud of sin which had rested upon it, and of the mighty

martyrdom which had cried aloud to heaven and the ages from its bullet-torn frame—there was something so impressive in its every stone that our hearts were filled with solemnity, and our eyes with tears.”

14. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “The Prophet Joseph—Equally Burdened with Moses,” in *The Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons* (Logan, Utah: LDS Institute of Religion, 1966), 1:73 (speech given 4 December 1949).

15. See, for example, Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:361 (6 May 1877); *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 258, 274, 328, 366. For a collection of Joseph Smith’s predictions concerning the completion of his mission as well as his forthcoming death, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Prophecies of Martyrdom,” in *Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, January 26, 1980: A Sesquicentennial Look at Church History* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Instruction and CES, 1980), 1–14. Ronald K. Esplin, “Joseph Smith’s Mission and Timetable: ‘God Will Protect Me until My Work Is Done,’” in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 280–319, presents a scintillating overview of the Prophet’s life, with emphasis on the reassurance he received at different points in his life that he would be spared death until his mission was complete. As cited by Esplin, in *ibid.*, 307, the Prophet’s views “at the present time [31 August 1842] are that inasmuch as the Lord Almighty has preserved me until today, he will continue to preserve me by the united faith and prayers of the Saints, until I fully accomplished my mission in this life and so fully established the dispensation of the fulness of the Priesthood ... that all the powers of Earth and Hell can never prevail against it” (taken from the minutes of the Relief Society, 31 August 1842).

16. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:364 (1 August 1852).

17. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 5:168.

18. Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:180 (6 October 1869).

19. Richards, “Visit to Pueblo,” 471.

20. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:54 (27 January 1883).

21. *Ibid.*, 22:232 (26 June 1881).

22. Stephen L Richards, “Joseph Smith, Prophet-Martyr,” in *The Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons*, 1:103 (speech given 7 December 1952).

23. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:95 (2 January 1870).

24. *Journal of Discourses*, 11:262 (12 August 1866).

25. *Journal of Discourses*, 18:242 (23 June 1874).

26. Henry D. Moyle, “The Greatest Gift,” *Improvement Era* 60 (June 1957): 412.

27. Delbert L. Stapley, Conference Report, October 1954, 49; see also Delbert L. Stapley, “An Unwavering Faith,” *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970): 75–76.

28. Published in *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1842): 707.
29. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 25:33 (2 February 1884).
30. Joseph F. Smith, Conference Report, October 1917, 3.
31. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:352 (7 June 1857).
32. Lynn A McKinlay, "A Trumpet with a Certain Sound," in *California Know Your Religion Speeches, 1973–74* (California: BYU California Center, 1974), 117; also in Daniel B. McKinlay, ed., *The Divine Journey Home: A Lynn A McKinlay Odyssey: An Assembly of Discourses* (Provo, Utah: n.p., 2001), 213; copy located in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
33. Robert D. Hales, "A Testimony of Prophets," *BYU 1993–94 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1994), 164.
34. Danel W. Bachman discusses the blending of the two definitions in "Joseph Smith, a True Martyr," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1993), 321–23.
35. Marvin J. Ashton, "He Loveth That Which Is Right," in *BYU 1988–89 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, Utah: BYU Print Services, 1989), 108. During an address given in general conference in April 1930 during the centennial celebration of the church, Joseph Fielding Smith said substantially the same thing, and he added his opinion that if Oliver had continued as associate president with the Prophet, he would have died at Carthage. See Conference Report, April 1930, 91–92. Robert L. Marrott, "Witnesses, Law of," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1569–70, writes: "The Prophet Joseph was likewise accompanied in his martyr's death by his brother Hyrum, a second martyr or witness, making their testimony valid forever (D&C 135:3; 136:39)."
36. Thomas S. Monson, "Joseph Smith—Teacher by Example," in *The Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons* (11 December 1963), 5–6. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:267 (8 October 1873), referred to the fact that the lives of Joseph and Hyrum "were taken by the hands of wicked and ungodly men. Why was his life taken? Why were not John Taylor and Willard Richards, the only two of the Twelve at that time in Nauvoo and with him, also sacrificed? Why did Willard Richards, the largest man in the prison, stand in the midst of that shower of balls and escape without a hole in his robe or garment, or clothing? Because these things were all governed and controlled by the revelations of God and the word of the Lord. The Lord took whom he would take, and he preserved whom he would preserve."
37. Franklin D. Richards, Conference Report, October 1898, 29.
38. Given that state of affairs from the vantage point of the Saints, it is eerie to contemplate what George A. Smith reported about the mood of those on the other side of the conflict: "Men in high places sent gifts congratulating each other on their death; thanks were returned in the pulpit that these false prophets had been destroyed. Many acknowledged that their murder was an outrage upon the laws of the country, and discreditable to the State, but then it was a good thing they were dead." George A. Smith, *Millennial Star* 31 (18 September 1869): 603 (speech given 25 July 1869).
39. Melvin J. Ballard, Conference Report, April 1918, 138–39.

40. James E. Faust, "The Expanding Inheritance from Joseph Smith," *Ensign* 11 (November 1981): 77.
41. John Taylor, *Millennial Star* 13 (28 March 1857): 195 (speech given in New York, 2 November 1856).
42. Marriner W. Merrill, Conference Report, October 1902, 65.
43. Ezra Taft Benson, "Joseph Smith Memorial Sermon," in *The Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Sermons* (3 December 1967), 3–4.
44. George A. Smith, *Millennial Star* 31 (6 October 1869): 655 (speech given 5 September 1869).
45. Wilford Woodruff, *Millennial Star* 41 (21 April 1879): 242.
46. B. H. Roberts, in *Journal of Discourses*, 25:143 (28 January 1884).
47. Heber J. Grant, Conference Report, April 1925, 11.