

The Great Prologue

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It surely is inspirational to see this building also completely filled with you wonderful young people. I am humbled in your presence. I am humbled every time I come to this great University. I love it wholeheartedly. I love and respect most highly the great men who operate this school, and I would like to say in the presence of President Oaks how much we love and admire him. I want you to know that we at the Church offices fully and completely sustain him. We hope that you will do likewise.

Tonight I would like to talk with you about the restoration of the gospel. That is why we are here, because there has been a restoration of the gospel. I would like to talk with you from the standpoint of seeing the Restoration in the true perspective that we Latter-day Saints should understand—a perspective of some two thousand years.

You remember that the Lord Jesus Christ established the truth when he was on the earth. We Latter-day Saints believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, as the Son of God, and as the Creator of all things. We are committed to the doctrine of a special creation, and we believe that Jesus, under the direction of his Father, was the Creator. As John said, “All things were made by him; and without

him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Christ came to the earth and gave to us his gospel.

Apostasy During the Savior’s Day

But it seems that always with the Christians there has been a spirit of dissension and division. Apostasy started even in the Savior’s own day. You remember that as early as the events that are recorded in the sixth chapter of John apostasy was evident. The people of his day professed to believe in the law of Moses, but as the Savior himself said, none of them lived it. When Christ began to preach his true and pure doctrines to the people of that day, in contrast to the false teachings of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the other *-enes* that were there, the people got angry with him. Do you remember that some of them sought to take his life? Do you remember too that many who had been following him fell away from him? As the scripture says:

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From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. [John 6:66–69]

Jesus continued in his work. He fed the four thousand. He fed the five thousand. But you remember that, when the time came for the first meeting on the day of Pentecost following the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, only 120 people came. That is all. The only ones who had the courage and the faith to come to the meeting were 120 people.

But then the missionary work got underway, and in one day after Peter's great sermon three thousand people were converted to the truth. Missionaries went abroad. The Savior had commanded that they go abroad unto all the nations kindreds, tongues, and people. They began to preach, and many converts were made; but almost as rapidly as conversions were made, apostasies likewise occurred.

Do you remember what happened in Corinth? The people there began even to repudiate the Christ and no longer believed in his resurrection. Paul argued with them about the Resurrection and testified that Christ truly was resurrected and that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Paul reminded them that in Corinth at least four different denominations had started even in Paul's own day.

The idea that there was just one Christian church in those early centuries is one of the great mistakes that people make. Within the first hundred years after Christ, Christianity was so splintered that there were about thirty different denominations, each one opposed to the others.

In Corinth at the time Paul wrote, some said, "I am of Paul"; others said, "I am of

Apollos"; others, "I am of Cephas"; and there were some who said, "I am of Christ." Paul upbraided them and said, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. . . . Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:10, 13). Christ wasn't divided, but his so-called followers certainly were, and they have been splintered and divided ever since.

Predictions of the Great Apostasy

This great apostasy was predicted, as you know very well. The people of that day had the idea that the second coming of Christ was going to take place in the day in which they themselves lived. The apostles began to dissuade them from this position and told them that there should come a great apostasy before the second coming of Christ. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

I have been very interested in the way the newest Catholic Bible puts this. The Catholics published a Bible just two years ago called the New American Bible. This verse in that version says, "We beg you brothers not to be so easily agitated or terrified into believing that the day of the Lord is here. Let no one seduce you, since the mass apostasy has not yet occurred." As you know, the Catholics put footnotes at the bottom of their pages, and the footnote on the particular scripture says, "They should not allow themselves to be duped into this way of thinking, for a religious apostasy is destined to precede the Lord's second coming."

When I was in England, I bought two or three of the Bible versions that the Catholics put out over there. One of them was published in 1947, and to this particular scripture it has this footnote: "This seems to refer to a great apostasy from the Christian faith preceding

Christ's return." I thought that was very interesting.

In 1955 the Catholic church in Great Britain published the Knox version of the Bible, and I will read you just a verse from that version on this reference: "Do not let anyone lead you astray, the apostasy must come first." You see, it was well established that there would be a great—to use the Catholics' word, a *mass*—apostasy from the Christian faith before the Second Coming.

These early brethren were also quite explicit in saying that likewise there would be a great restoration of the gospel before the Second Coming should take place. The Lord would not leave us without his truth. He knew by his foreknowledge that there would be this mass apostasy, but he also provided that there should be a restoration of the gospel preparatory to his second coming. And so a great new restorer came to the earth.

You remember what Peter said. He and John had come to the temple and had entered by the gate beautiful, where they saw a man begging who had been crippled from birth. Peter healed the man, attracting a great crowd. Peter, being the great advocate that he was, took advantage of this opportunity, called the people to repentance, and told them that the same Christ whom they had rejected would come again. His second coming, however, would not take place "until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21).

I was interested to look up some of the other Bible translations to see whether the King James was on target there also, and of course it was. The Knox Catholic Bible puts it this way: "Then he will send out Jesus Christ, who has now been made known unto you, but must have his dwelling place in heaven until the time when all is restored anew." Isn't that interesting? "Until all is restored anew."

The Catholic Bible of 1947, to which I first referred, says, "Whom heaven indeed must receive until the times of the restitution of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets from the beginning of the world."

The Revised Version of the Protestant Bible says, "Whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his Holy Prophets from of old."

The Rotherham Version uses the phrase "the new establishment of all things"; the Twentieth-century Version, "the universal restoration"; the Weymouth Version, "the reconstitution of all things"; and our King James version, which we love best of all, uses the phrase "the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

Preparing the Earth for the Restoration

We Latter-day Saints must realize that the restoration of the gospel was a mighty drama, the first steps having been taken long before Joseph Smith. If God was going to restore the gospel in the last days, where would it take place and under what conditions?

Of course, the scripture says that an angel would fly through the midst of heaven bringing the everlasting gospel back to the earth. The scripture says there would be a latter-day restorer, that the Lord would send forth his messenger, and that then he himself would suddenly come to his temple. We know these things, but the world doesn't. Too often we don't put this knowledge in its proper perspective. I would like you to see how the Lord prepared to restore the gospel step by step over a period of hundreds and hundreds of years—literally eighteen centuries.

The Lord knew that he could not restore the gospel for several centuries in any of the countries of the world. They were controlled by dictators or monarchs who were absolute rulers, and they prohibited religious freedom.

When my wife and I one day drove into a little town in England, we saw a public square. In it was a beautiful monument, about twenty feet high, a shaft of granite. We were curious and went over to look at that shaft. There on the tablet affixed to it was a statement that this monument marked the place where a seventeen-year-old boy was burned at the stake because he had read the Bible. As my wife and I stood there, I turned to her and said, "What in the world would they have done to a boy who said he had seen God?"

Preserving the Western Hemisphere

There was no religious freedom for many years, and God knew that. But he knew also that this restoration of the gospel was to come, and he prepared for it by reserving the Western Hemisphere as a place where he would work out the conditions under which the gospel could be restored. He did not allow any colonization of the Western Hemisphere until he was ready for it.

We know that various explorers discovered America anciently, well before Christopher Columbus. The Norsemen came over to what they called Vinland, as you remember, and there were others. It is interesting to read about them, but, mark you, not one of them established permanent colonies. God would not allow them here. Colonization was reserved for the people whom the Lord himself would bring to this country. Even though there were earlier discoveries of America, none of them counted so far as God was concerned because he had his eye upon Columbus.

I hope that when you read the Book of Mormon you will read carefully the last chapter of first Nephi, which refers to the day in which we are living. In this chapter Nephi talked about this land and the gentiles who in latter days would be brought here. Then he said:

And it meaneth that the time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and

confounded [the scattering of the ten tribes and the Jews to all parts of the world], that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land [the United States]; and by them shall our seed be scattered. [Through the Indian wars the Indians were scattered by the early Americans.]

And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.

And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. [1 Nephi 22:7–9]

What does that language mean? It means that in the latter days upon this Western Hemisphere a great nation of the gentiles would be established and that from this nation of the gentiles the true restored gospel would be taken to all the house of Israel all over the world. The Savior said essentially the same thing, and I would like to read just one verse that he said in regard to this subject. He also was talking about the gentiles who would occupy this land in these latter days:

For it is wisdom in the Father that they [the gentiles] should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things [the gospel] might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel. [3 Nephi 21:4]

Here is the Savior of the world talking to these Nephites in America after his resurrection, telling them that in the latter days many gentiles would come to this land and that the

Lord God would establish a mighty nation among them here in this land for one purpose: that these gentiles to whom the gospel would be restored would take it to the rest of the world. Isn't this significant scripture?

Columbus's Inspired Mission

How did all of this come about? Nephi gave us some further explanation when he told about the vision that he was given by the Lord at that time. One of the first things that he said, as he talked about the gentiles in Europe, was this:

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles [in Europe], who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land. [1 Nephi 13:12]

Now the time had come. The Lord had control of the discovery and the colonization of America. Nephi was told that there was a man among the gentiles who was "wrought upon" by the Spirit of God, and under that inspiration he came to America. Here is what Columbus himself said about his being guided from on high:

I have seen, and truly I have studied all books and cosmographies, histories, chronicles, and philosophies and other arts for which our Lord with provident hand unlocked my mind, sent me upon the seas and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my enterprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed, but who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me? [Jacob Wasserman, Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas, p. 18]

When Columbus went to King Ferdinand, he said, "I came to Your Majesty as the emissary of the Holy Ghost." When he stood before the clergy of San Esteban, he insisted to them that he must be regarded as a man inspired.

Columbus's own son, Fernando, in a biography of his father, quotes the discoverer as saying on one occasion, "God gave me the faith and afterward the courage so that I was quite willing to undertake the journey." And the last will and testament of Christopher Columbus includes this expression: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, who inspired me with the idea and afterward made perfectly clear to me that I could navigate and go to the Indies from Spain by traversing the ocean westward" (Wasserman, *Columbus*, pp. 46, 61). Columbus was inspired, and Nephi looked upon him and beheld him coming to the Western Hemisphere.

"And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters" (1 Nephi 13:13). Under the direction of the Almighty, colonization began. What kind of people did the Holy Spirit influence? Why, the Pilgrims and the Puritans and others like them! Weren't they worthy of the direction of the Spirit of God? They and many others came to America under divine guidance. Nephi said he saw that "they [the gentiles] did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceeding fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain" (1 Nephi 13:15).

Establishing Political and Religious Freedom

Then Nephi saw the Revolutionary War, through which God was planning to set up this nation. He first reserved the land so that undesirables did not colonize here, then sent his own man to discover it, then brought the colonization effort on, and after that gave to the colonists their political freedom.

Nephi said, "And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them" (1 Nephi 13:17). Who was the mother country? It is Great Britain, of course. Nephi knew that the mother country would battle against the colonists, and he knew that

they would come by land and by sea. I still enjoy reading “Paul Revere’s Ride.” Do you enjoy reading it? Do you remember the lanterns—one if by land and two if by sea? The British came both ways, by land and by sea, according to both history and prophecy.

And I beheld that the power of God was with them [the colonists], and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations. [1 Nephi 13:18–19]

God gave the colonies liberty. If I had another hour here, I would read to you what George Washington and some of the other patriots said about how God gave them the victory, this being in fulfillment of Nephi’s vision.

Constitutional Government

But just being set free wasn’t enough. They had to have a government, and so God provided that government also. You remember that it was a constitutional form and that God raised up the men to write the Constitution:

According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh [free agency for everybody], according to just and holy principles;

That every man may act in doctrine and principle . . . according to the moral agency which I have given him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

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

And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood. [D&C 101:77–80]

Do you understand the steps that were taken? There was the great apostasy, then the preservation of the Western Hemisphere, next Columbus and the colonization movement, the Revolutionary War to set the colonists free, and then a constitutional form of government which guaranteed free speech and free religion, free assembly and free press.

All of these events were acts of God leading up to one thing—the restoration of the gospel. It was only half a dozen years or so after America was established as a free constitutional nation that one of the great spirits in the preexistence was sent to earth to be born on December 23, 1805, in a little farmhouse; and he was named Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith was given this great and mighty mission. What a wonderful thing it was! It was under the umbrella of a marvelous, inspired constitution that this Church was restored. It couldn’t have been restored anywhere else because of the lack of religious freedom. God raised up Joseph Smith for the marvelous purpose of restoring the gospel.

Spreading the Gospel Abroad

And now what is happening? The gospel is being taken from this nation to the other nations. We have missionaries in 52 nations, but there are 145 independent nations plus 75 other political units. The scripture says that we are to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, and then shall the end come. Then will the Savior come.

The Book of Mormon has been translated into 39 languages and published in 25. But the Bible has been printed in ten times that many languages. The entire Bible has been published in 253 languages and portions of it, such as the New Testament, in 1,457 tongues and dialects.

We have a long way to go, but the Lord will shorten his work, he tells us. It hasn’t been so very long ago that we had merely a handful of missions in the world. Today we have 112, and if you don’t think the Lord is hastening his

work, just realize that in the last two years 11 new missions have been organized. Since last Christmas, 6 new missions have been organized.

Now let us consider another prophecy. Micah said:

In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. [Micah 4:1–2]

Who is going to build the new Zion?

We will, here in the United States, in Jackson County, Missouri. Some people are frightened of the United States collapsing. The United States will not collapse! The wicked in the United States will be destroyed. The Lord has said that, but the Lord will preserve the righteous, and the righteous will carry on until the second coming of Christ:

And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. . . .

. . . and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. [Micah 4:3, 7]

Nephi also prophesied that destruction would come to the wicked here in this land, but he said:

Wherefore, he will preserve the righteous by his power, even if it so be that the fulness of his wrath must come, and the righteous be preserved, even unto the destruction of their enemies by fire. Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus

saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire. . . .

For behold, the righteous shall not perish; for the time surely must come that all they who fight against Zion shall be cut off. . . .

And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded. But it is the kingdom of the devil, which shall be built up among the children of men, which kingdom is established among them which are in the flesh—

. . . and those who belong to the kingdom of the devil are they who need fear, and tremble, and quake; they are those who must be brought low in the dust; they are those who must be consumed as stubble; and this is according to the words of the prophet. [1 Nephi 22:17 ,19, 22, 23]

How long will the United States stand?

Keep in mind that the United States was established in order to provide the conditions under which the Lord would restore the gospel. The United States was established in order that the true church could be again on the earth, that it could be restored in our day here in this great nation of the gentiles.

Remember what the Savior said and what Nephi said: that this nation was to be set up with this one purpose in mind—bringing the gospel to the rest of the world. That is being done. The righteous will be preserved here in this land to do it, and this nation will be preserved although the wicked will be destroyed.

How long will the United States last? As long as the Lord needs a home base for carrying forward his work in the earth. America is home base. You from other lands don't need to become jealous of America. Who is jealous of Palestine, where Jesus was born? We are not jealous of that country; we merely recognize the hand of God in sending him there. We must also recognize the hand of God in sending the gospel here to this land. Learn to love America because it is God's land.

What does Brigham Young have to say about how long there will be an America?

When the day comes in which the Kingdom of God will bear rule, the flag of the United States will proudly flutter unsullied on the flagstaff of liberty and equal rights, without a spot to sully its fair surface; the glorious flag our fathers have bequeathed to us will then be unfurled to the breeze by those who have the power to hoist it aloft and defend its sanctity.

How long will it be before the words of the prophet Joseph will be fulfilled? He said if the Constitution of the United States were saved at all it must be done by this people. It will not be many years before these words come to pass. . . .

. . . if it is sustained on this land of Joseph, it will be done by us and our posterity. [Discourses of Brigham Young (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973), pp. 360, 361]

So what is our situation? It is that we are the covenant people of God, and the Lord depends on us to do this work. We must take the gospel to all the world, to all these scores of nations we haven't yet even touched. We will do it! You will do it! You are missionaries! You are under covenant with God, aren't you? Every one of you who has been baptized is under covenant with God; you have taken upon yourselves the name of Christ.

When you have partaken of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, you have pledged to high heaven that you will be true to him, taking his name on you, keeping his commandments, always remembering him, never forgetting him, and being willing to do the work that must be done.

So what must you do? You must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Of course, seek careers as well. We need to build the kingdom, we need strength, and we need careers in the world to help us to do that. But remember that earthly careers must be secondary to the great career, which is to be the Latter-day Saints who are to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ. That is our great career—to be good Latter-day Saints, to build the kingdom, to prepare for the second coming of Christ.

Let us be true to our covenants. Let us never forget that we have taken upon ourselves the name of Christ and that we have pledged in a most sacred manner always to remember him, always to keep his commandments which he has given us, that we may always have his Spirit to be with us. That we may be thus true I earnestly pray in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.