

D&C Lesson # 28
“O God, Where Art Thou?”
(D&C 121, 122, 123)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is inspirational background and evidences supporting the Restoration)

I. These sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were taken from many letters sent by Joseph Smith during his incarceration in Liberty Jail.

- A. They are sublime in their insights into suffering and in their consolations to the suffering.
- B. They also possess spiritual beauty.

II. When one visits Liberty Jail, one sees the terrible conditions that Joseph and his companions endured. However, when we read these revelations, we find **Joseph speaks very little of his own sufferings. He speaks mostly of the trials of the Saints and of his personal *spiritual* trials.**

- A. Joseph’s laments imply that he has been rejected for “the word,” which is after all, the precious word of the Lord.
- B. But the Lord promises that in time “The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name.”

This prophecy has literally been fulfilled, not once but repeatedly.

- During a Fast and Testimony Meeting in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Ward in the early 1990’s, a stranger took the pulpit to bear his testimony. He began by saying, “I have just seen prophecy fulfilled.” He then told of how he had just returned from Africa. There he had literally heard someone from that culture ask, “Tell us about the prophet, Joseph Smith.” It had touched and moved him greatly, for he knew the Lord had promised this very thing to Joseph.
- But this incident is only a drop in the bucket of fulfillment. Missionaries went into Africa in 1978 because there had been multiple pleadings from persons in various African nations for the Gospel to be sent them. Many earnest souls there had been seeking for the true Church established by a prophet. **Blessings resulting from their seeking the prophet’s word are still being poured out on many thousands today.**

III. The Lord addressed specifically the suffering caused by those who charged Joseph falsely. “They who do charge thee with transgression, their hopes shall be blasted, and their prospects shall melt away as the hoar frost melteth before the burning rays of the rising sun” (D&C:121:11).

- A. We likely do not understand how potent these words are unless we understand just how much this was a source of Joseph’s trials.
 - 1. In Kirtland a group of men had claimed he was a fallen prophet, blaming him for financial losses they suffered. He was forced to flee in winter time, (*History of the Church* 3:1). And he had not found peace for very long in Missouri.
 - 2. He was soon falsely accused of organizing a marauding band (Danites) and of claiming he would be like another Mohammed. His local enemies falsely accused him of massacring members of a militia, and of burning the town of Richmond. At his trial in Richmond he was accused of treason, murder, arson and theft, among other things. Surely he must have suffered most when witnesses against him included William W. Phelps and John Whitmer. Thus **the bearing of false witness had resulted in his imprisonment.**
- B. Here the Lord promised Joseph “Thou shalt triumph over all thine enemies.”

1. Many of those who falsely accused him later came back into the church, and he received them back with love.
2. Joseph urged a record be kept of those who had born false witness [See D&C 123]: to “gather up the libelous publications that are afloat. And all that are in the magazines, and in the encyclopedias, and all the libelous histories that are published ... and by whom” (v. 4-5).
3. Since that time many more libelous things have been written and spoken of the Saints and the prophets. One of Joseph’s major purposes for assembling such a record was: “there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it” (v. 12).
4. **Men should always remember that their lives are being recorded as history.** In the future, that history will all be revealed, every portion. The enemies of truth and the supporters of truth will both be revealed. And those involved will experience either shame or honor accordingly.
5. This was shown very powerfully in the film made of the life of Jackie Robinson, the legendary baseball player. [Titled “42” after his uniform number]. He, as the first black player to play in the all-white major leagues, underwent tremendous persecution. [And those who know his history, say it is accurately told]. **The film reveals the names of real persons and how they each related to this challenge to their integrity.** Not only are those who fought against him now shamed by this retelling, but it is also made abundantly clear how those who fought against him eventually were “cast down.” While those who supported him are now not only honored, but eventually enjoyed significant success in their lives.
6. Someday, Joseph Smith’s role as a true prophet will be made known to the world. Every day men and women have the opportunity to make choices of how they respond to the “Lord’s Latter-day prophet.” In making those choices, they will eventually feel shame, or know honor, be blessed, or be cast down.

IV. Joseph was comforted by the promise his trials would be “but for a small moment.”

A. While actually undergoing them, trials seem to last indefinitely. But I have personally come to see their brevity from a special experience in my life.

1. When I lived in San Francisco, I was fortunate to live near the Golden Gate Bridge. I loved to walk along the Bay, and often went to the bridge. In coming up under, it loomed huge, blocking out the view of everything else around it.

My father passed away while I lived there. When I flew out to his funeral, the airplane banked in such a way that I could look down at the Golden Gate Bridge from on high. **How its view had changed! What had loomed huge** was now just this tiny little connection between two land masses. And I realized that the land on the south would continue until the tip of South America. And that land on the north would continue until the top of the Arctic.

A saying found in India came to my mind. **“Life is a bridge meant to be hurried over and not lingered on.”**

This scene, and my own father’s death, made me realize how our whole life truly is just a tiny bridge and “but a moment,” when fit into the vastness of pre-mortal existence and Eternal Life.

V. The Lord promises trials can lead to greater knowledge through greater outpouring of the Spirit.

A. The chief source of the hatred toward Joseph was that he claimed to possess greater spiritual knowledge than others. After all, he claimed to have received direct revelation from God, from angels, and from secret golden plates.

B. But that hatred and persecution which such claims aroused brought forth **an outpouring of even greater knowledge to him.**

1. “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now.”

“How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its course or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints?” (D&C 121:26, 33).

2. These were not false sayings. The remarkable truth is that shortly after these sufferings, **greater knowledge was poured out upon Joseph.** For he soon received some of the greatest of his revelations, including the magnificent revelations concerning salvation for the dead [D&C 124, 127-128] and the amazing revelations about Celestial Marriage [D&C 132].

VI. The Lord further promised Joseph’s sufferings will “give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.” (D&C 122:7).

A. This promise too was fulfilled. Joseph’s sufferings are reported to have developed in him a stoic serenity. When taken in bonds to Independence, many hundreds of people gathered to see this person who had been so vilified and made to seem so terrible. They were thus astonished to see someone who was so mild and harmless.

B. But his voice, as promised, would one day be “terrible in judgment.” His guards in another jail experienced this judgment when he rebuked them, though in chains, for speaking in a vile manner. Parley P. Pratt observed that although in chains, “‘Dignity and Majesty’ had become his clothing.”

C. In fact, when he was taken prisoner again in Nauvoo, going to his sure death, his faith and his experiences had purified him so that he could now go as “a lamb to the slaughter,” and “as calm as a summer’s morning.”