

D&C Lesson # 3  
I Had Seen a Vision  
Joseph Smith History 1:1-26  
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is inspirational background and evidence supporting the Restoration).

I. The trials Joseph Smith endured strengthened his faith to prepare him for his future destiny.

A. When my own mother was miraculously healed from Hodgkin's disease, I found my faith greatly enlarged. That enlarged faith helped me through many trials in my own life.

B. Joseph's experience with his diseased leg was also a faith enlarging event.

C. It has recently been revealed just how miraculous was the preservation of Joseph's leg.

1. A modern LDS physician, Dr. LeRoy Wirthlin, was the first to discover the miracle behind Joseph's surgery. He shared it in the March 1978 Ensign (in "Discovery").

He quoted Lucy Mack Smith's description of the operation in 1813. Dr. Wirthlin expressed his initial amazement. "What Lucy Smith is here describing is the technique that became known [only] in 1874! How was such a surgical feat possible eighty years before its time in the tiny community of Lebanon, New Hampshire?"

Dr. Wirthlin researched the situation, which led him to one conclusion. Joseph's leg was saved only by miracle.

The Manuscript History of the Church notes Joseph's doctors. That information led Wirthlin to learn of Dr. Nathan Smith, a doctor who had developed a new technique. Dr. Smith was trying to teach it to others, but it was not yet accepted. Blessedly, his medical facilities were just five miles from the Smith home at Dartmouth. This is one part of the miracle.

Another was that Lucy absolutely refused to accept the usual procedure, which was amputation. She had the faith there was another way.

Because of (1) Lucy's faith; (2) Hyrum's attending college in Dartmouth where Dr. Nathan Smith taught; (3) Dr. Smith's new technique --- a miracle transpired. Joseph's leg was saved.

It is now recognized that Dr. Smith was the only doctor who could have saved the leg. Interestingly, while Dr. Smith used this technique on Joseph, his procedure remained unaccepted, and amputations remained the major solution for another eighty years.

D. Ronald Esplin, a church historian working with the Joseph Smith papers, concurs with Dr. Wirthlin. Esplin not only agreed that the event with Joseph's leg was a miracle, but he also stressed that the event was the only one of Joseph's boyhood years which was recorded by Joseph and his mother. Esplin said. "In their minds, it's one of the most significant (events) of his pre-teen years --- the most significant. For them, this loomed huge. It was the major event." (Quoted by Aaron Shill, "Joseph Smith's Doc Only Man Who Could Save Leg," *Deseret News*, July 12, 2008).

E. Since both Lucy and Joseph recognized this event as a great miracle, their faith was thus enlarged --- which faith would see them through their extremely challenging future. And it helped Joseph develop the faith needed to fulfill his destiny.

Obviously, the greatest need for total faith would come when he needed to seek God in prayer, with absolute assurance he would be heard and he would be answered.

II. Joseph became an instrument in God's hands due to his earnest desire to obtain the truth.

A. Why was Joseph Smith called to be the prophet of the Latter-day Restoration?

1. Certainly there were many reasons why he was so foreordained. But one must have been that Joseph had a great desire to know the truth. From the beginning he was someone who sought truth, both by study and also by the faith of praying and pondering.

2. Lucy's description of Joseph as a boy included that he was given to serious reflection. Others only saw his pondering as "dreaming."

3. Joseph says of himself, "During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit." (Joseph Smith --- History v. 8).

4. Then and throughout his life, Joseph Smith pondered and sought for the truths of eternity.

5. **His seeking was rewarded.** As the Lord had promised, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

III. Joseph's seeking an answer from the Lord arose from a question regarding which church was right. However, the Joseph Smith papers have shown **he was also very concerned about whether he was saved.** This question may have come from the false teachings of the apostasy.

A. The Calvinist philosophy underlying many Christian sects, was that God had elected some to be saved and some to be damned. It came from misreading New Testament references to the "elect" [meaning the foreordained]. But that left many with the question, "How do I know if I am saved?" For it was made clear that good works is not the determining factor; only God's grace and election determine such. [I heard a religion professor in graduate school indicate he was still troubled by the question in regards to himself]. Author George MacDonald said stern scriptorians had created this ugly egg in their own image (George MacDonald, *The Maiden's Bequest*, p. 87).

B. But faith-filled Joseph was prompted by James 1:5 to "ask of God."

C. The question arising out of "being saved" explains Joseph's statement to his mother. "I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true." (Joseph Smith --- History v. 20). He had learned that men were not "elected" to heaven nor to damnation according to whim of God.

IV. Joseph's sincere **and earnest searching of the scriptures** also prepared him.

A. There is strong evidence that one major purpose of a Bible translated into English was to prepare a ready instrument in the hands of Joseph Smith --- for the sake of the Restoration.

1. When William Tyndale undertook that translation, he met great resistance. His response was that if God would spare his life, before many years **the boy who guided the plough would know more scriptures than those who were supposedly learned.** (F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 29).

2. More than one general authority has openly said this foresight pointed to Joseph Smith.

V. Joseph's experience with Satan in the Grove is entirely consistent with Satan's efforts to prevent great watershed events in God's works of salvation.

A. Jesus encountered many devils because His Coming was the greatest watershed event of all. Satan knew his powers were totally threatened. Jesus was the Only One who could destroy it.

B. Consider the experience of Moses (Moses 1:12). "Moses, thou son of man, worship me." And Satan used fear as well as bribery.

C. The brethren first going to England to preach was another watershed in the regathering of Israel. Thus, Satan and his minions were there, trying to prevent this vital step for the establishment of God's Kingdom.

D. Lucifer has tried to prevent the coming of light in every dispensation. It could be no less when "the dispensation of the fullness of times" was about to come forth.

#### VI. Joseph Smith's story is a vital key to conversion

A. Dr. Robert Millet, a BYU religion professor, told of the time of his actual conversion. It happened when he was serving a mission. While he had been raised in the church he had never seriously questioned the things he had been taught. His parents had a testimony, as did others, and he accepted theirs and other's testimonies with some degree of simple belief and faith.

But on his mission, he and his companion were sent to a certain town in New Jersey. The Protestant ministers there had prepared for the Mormons. They had distributed many different anti-Mormon pamphlets throughout the town. And as the missionaries would knock on door after door, they were not only refused a listening ear, but greeted by the gift of an anti-Mormon pamphlet. They let the pamphlets collect in their apartment for a while, as they continued hours of fruitless tracting. Finally, one day, they read some of the pamphlets. And their testimonies were shaken by the claims made. They continued to go through their rounds tracting, but their hearts were not in the work. Finally, they dared openly express to each other their deep concerns. Those concerns contained questions whether the church was true, after all.

They might have given up trying to do missionary work, except one of them suggested that they at least were not doing any harm. They continued with this faint hope.

However, this was no real answer, and Brother Millett began to pray for a witness, with an earnestness he had never felt before. He did so for some time. He had even concluded that if it did not come, he would go home, because he could no longer endure the empty feelings he had.

A few days after this conclusion, during their lunch break in their apartment, he picked up one of their own pamphlets. "Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story." As he began to read it, he was completely enveloped in a warm, spiritual witness that Joseph spoke the truth. All the things Joseph said had happened had happened. And the Holy Ghost confirmed it.

He also received a witness that while many questions had been raised in his mind for which he had no answer yet, in time with experience and study, he would receive those answers. And in time, this came to be so (Robert L. Millett, *Within Reach*. Deseret Book, 1995, pp. 30-34).

#### VII. Many non-believers have a sense of awe at the residual power felt in the Sacred Grove.

A. While I served as a Temple Missionary in Palmyra, I attended a Family Home Evening where Bob Parrot, who has been hired by the Church to care for the Grove, spoke. He showed in every way, though not a member, his deep reverence for the grove, and for Joseph.

He pointed out that when the Smiths left Palmyra, it was under extreme duress, amidst great hatred and hostility.

So, he indicated, it was quite remarkable that the person who actually owned the Sacred Grove, (The Smiths were only renters), could never bring himself to do anything to harm the woods nor even to harvest any of it during the decades after they had left. [Timber is a valuable commodity].

Parrot showed this was no accident. For, some time before his death, he told his son, who would be inheriting the woods, to treat it the same: to never do anything to harm it, nor to harvest its timber.

Obviously they could not overcome the feeling that in this sacred place a young boy had a vision of God.