

Podcast Episode 30: How the Restoration Has Fallen

QUESTION: Nearly 200 years after God appeared to Joseph in the Sacred Grove, we still don't have Zion. What happened to the Restoration? Why has it failed to produce Zion as prophesied? What can we do to help it get back on track?

DENVER: There was a time when the landscape of the restoration had the Brighamites in Utah and the Josephites in Missouri, both claiming that they were the authorized successor to Joseph Smith—Brighamites, because Brigham Young eventually claimed the right to succeed Joseph as leader; Josephites, because Joseph Smith III was the direct lineal descendant of the slain founder.

Both of the two largest Mormon divisions have experienced significant splintering. The institutions claiming to be an authentic version of what Joseph Smith founded have failed to produce the results Joseph foretold. This failure is due, in large measure, because Joseph's teachings have been abandoned or contradicted. There is still a great deal left undone. Joseph told us to expect great events among the gentiles, Native Americans, and remnant of Jewish people before Christ's victorious return. He did not live to see this happen. Upon his death, he left a great deal for others to complete.

Assuming the work Joseph began is to be finished, it will not happen by heaven laboring independent of us. We have work to do. The answer, according to the *Book of Mormon*, is that we must do the work while God, as Master of the Vineyard, labors alongside us. But fault lies with us. God has been willing to do His part of the labor from Joseph Smith's day until now. God directs the work, and in this way "labors alongside" us. We must resist the temptation to insert our own agenda for God's. If we fail to grasp that the direction must come from heaven rather than as part of an agenda created by uninspired corporate planners, imaginative (and even well-intended) individuals, then we risk working at odds with heaven. God's kingdom is a kingdom in every sense of the word, and the King is entitled to direct all of its affairs.

Today, we see all of the quarreling restoration mothers, daughters, and siblings accusing the others of apostasy and preaching falsely. If you are trying to find a "true" version of what Joseph Smith founded from the quarreling contenders of today, you face the same query Joseph posed at the beginning: "*Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? And if any one of them be right, which is it? And how shall I know it?*" (*Teachings and Commandments 1:2:3*).

Sadly, it seems now as the Lord said to Isaiah: *“The daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes”* (Isaiah 1:11 OC; 2 Nephi 8:7 NC). These daughters lust after women and property, power, authority, and make merchandise of the souls of men.

I was a one-time member of the largest branch but, as some of you know, was excommunicated over the demand I retract things I had written about their history. The resulting independence has allowed me to pursue a more unfettered search into Mormon origins, miscarriages, and missteps. Latter-day history has been so radically revised by revelations in the recent records released that anyone reading is left reeling. LDS history written before 1980 is antiquated. And we never had the more complete panoply of Brigham Young’s conjectures, rants, and vulgarities until 2009.

The vast expansion of available and reliable historical materials, for those interested, has increased the schism rate for all the restorationist groups. There is a lot more kicking and pricking afoot, but it’s increasingly more difficult to distinguish between kicks and pricks. The tapestry expands as more threads arrive.

But Mormonism’s tapestry is not limited to the committed or devout. It now includes hundreds of thousands, perhaps more, disaffected former-Mormons who remain unable to fully depart. Mormonism exerts a religious gravitational pull almost impossible to fully escape. It remains with all of us, whether you are active in one of the two mother churches or one of their progeny. Mormon denominational splintering continues unabated.

The religion Joseph Smith ignited echoes with the wonder and appeal of God doing among us what He once did long ago with the people in the Bible. The restoration suggests that the long-awaited moment of Christ’s return is at last approaching. Therefore, we either hope this to be true or need it to be exposed as a fraud. Either way, our fears or hopes are emphatic.

Accordingly, we all must decide what to make of Joseph Smith. All our fear, wonder, and hope rests on resolving what to make of the life of Joseph. This frames the dichotomy in the legacy of that man:

- With hope in his authenticity, we see him as God’s messenger.
- With doubts about him, we see him as a charlatan.

These polar opposites are inherent in his life and were foretold at the beginning and reconfirmed toward the end of his life.

The angel who appeared to Joseph in September 1823 said: *“He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me and that his name was*

Nephi, that God had a work for me to do, and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Teachings and Commandments 1:3:3).

My mother taught me to hold Joseph for evil. I’ve studied his life carefully, read what his critics and admirers have claimed for and about him. I’ve tried not to be hasty in reaching a conclusion. After four-and-a-half decades I have decided to hold Joseph for good. I’m all in. To me he is the real thing: a messenger sent from God to deliver a message that we reject at our peril and accept for our blessing. He had a great soul that searched, stretched, believed, hoped, fought fiercely, defied pain and persecution, and bore the hallmarks we should expect from a prophet-messenger from God. He was a brilliant light—rough cut, homespun, and rustic. But he was ablaze with insight, keen and penetrating, able to capture with a phrase a glimpse of the infinite.

At the beginning, Joseph’s restored religion included noble, thrilling, and aspirational words, worthy enough for them to belong to God. If you divorce these words from an opinion of Joseph and allow them to be independent ideas, they are worthy of meditation. Joseph Smith left religious writings and sermons that are the equal of the *New Testament*. They are the equivalent to the *Vedas*. They are as worthy as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. They stand alongside the *Tao Te Ching*. But they trace their origin to Joseph Smith, and therein lies the rub.

I was raised among those who had Joseph’s name for evil. Baptists regard Joseph as a deceiver, liar, and imposter. They find the English vocabulary has an insufficient supply of caustic adjectives to heap enough scorn on him. To paraphrase Billy Beane’s description of his Oakland A’s: “There are bad men; and there’s devils. And there’s 50 feet of crap. And then there’s Joseph Smith.”

When Mormon missionaries began pestering me in New Hampshire, I was amused at their sincerity and could not take seriously anything they offered. To me, they defended a false cult founded by a charlatan. I experienced an internal conflict between my mother’s credo to be polite to others and her instruction that Joseph Smith was a fraud. Without resolving that conflict, I listened politely while pondering profanity.

Having nothing better to do one weekend, I went with the Mormons to a campout in Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace of Joseph Smith. There I obtained a copy of the *Doctrine and Covenants* from the visitor’s center. Steve Klaproth, himself a convert, showed me Section 76. Reading it was the first time I took seriously anything that came from Joseph. The words gripped me. They inspired my mind to deep reflection. They had value. It shattered the paradigm and left me unable to trust a dismissive view for Joseph. He required evaluation. Joseph’s words inspired my investigation of the restoration.

In Joseph Smith's History there is a passage that still appeals to my heart and mind. He wrote: *"During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three, (having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly—and if they supposed me to be deluded, to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me)..."* (Teachings and Commandments 1:2:10). That is still going on. Joseph is still being posthumously persecuted.

Persecution is what happens when an idea cannot be opposed on its merit. Persecution is the product of fear typically experienced by those lacking knowledge. There are two great competing forces in the whole of creation: love and fear. I think God's love for us is exemplified in Him speaking to Joseph Smith. And I am grateful for how that has enriched my life.

Here are some of the great thoughts God inspired and Joseph Smith conveyed to us:

"It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God. Nevertheless, they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart, only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word. And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until they know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries" (Alma 9:3 NC).

This is one of the great and succinct declarations about coming to know God. Finding Them is deeply personal. We come to God by giving "heed and diligence" to what God asks of us. I cannot do that for you, nor can you do that for me. It is the sojourn of every individual.

The path requires motion. We remain in motion all the time. There is no stasis, no holding a position. We advance (that is, experience restoration) or we recede (that is, experience apostasy). There is no avoiding movement.

The mysteries of God are hidden but simple truths. They set a man's bones on fire. To pay heed to God requires that we not harden our hearts. When we have hard hearts we know less. Even what we once knew can be lost. Eventually, we know nothing of God's mysteries, and we are left alone, without God in the world.

Another similar inspired thought:

“Woe be unto him that crieth, All is well. Yea, woe be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men and denieth the power of God and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yea, woe be unto him that saith, We have received and we need no more. And in fine, woe unto all those who tremble and are angry because of the truth of God. For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness, and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth, lest he shall fall. Woe be unto him that shall say, We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God for we have enough” (2 Nephi 12:5-6 NC).

All truth must come from God. The precepts of men are not only unreliable, but they are corrupted by their source. God’s truths do not end. This thought, like the one before, reminds us that we must seek the constant nourishment of our minds and souls to be in God’s path. When God is silent, then you are cut off from truth. Those God can save are those who will listen for His voice. No matter how unlikely the source from which God’s voice comes, if it is God’s word, it’s to be prized. Even when it comes from the Joseph Smith your mother warned you about.

The hallmark reaction from those disinterested in what God is saying is their angry rejection and refusal to acknowledge more. When you are content, you perish. When you hunger and thirst, you live. Living organisms require constant additional nourishment. That’s how you know they’re alive.

There’s another profound declaration along the same line:

“And because that I have spoken one word, ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another, for my work is not yet finished, neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. Wherefore, because that ye have a bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words, neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written” (2 Nephi 12:10 NC).

Last year I delivered a talk at the Sunstone Symposium titled “Other Sheep Indeed.” In it I invited others with sacred writings to come and bring them. That invitation was first offered by Joseph Smith in 1840. He anticipated a temple to be built in Nauvoo, to which records would be brought from all over the world: “bring every thing you can bring and build the house of God and we will have a tremendous City which shall reverberate afar... then comes all the ancient records dig them up... where the Saints g[ather] is Zion.” Not all of God’s words are in the Bible. God has spoken to every nation (meaning every religious division of people). Truth is everywhere, among all people. If we love God and truth we will want to search for it. We will not be content to leave it unexplored and undiscovered. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after more righteousness” (see 3 Nephi 5:10 NC). Blessed are those who are “followers of

righteousness, desiring to possess great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness and to possess greater knowledge” (see Abraham 1:1 TC). And blessed are those who do not suppose the scriptures contain all God’s words and They (the Gods) have not provided more.

One of the world’s greatest religious epistles was composed in Liberty Jail. It includes the following passage:

“[T]he things of God are of deep import, and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Your mind, O man, if you will lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal expanse. You must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God than the vain imagination of the human heart? None but fools will trifle with the souls of men. How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations: too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God, according to the purposes of his will from before the foundation of the world...” (Teachings and Commandments 138:18-19).

These words enlarge the soul. Only a great religion challenges us to stretch as high as the utmost heavens, search into, and contemplate the darkest abyss—an expansive religion that urges us to become godlike in our interest, in our search for truth. We are clearly directed to turn our attention to the heavens and learn how they function, what they are, and who is to be found there. This is a vast religion. It is not confined to the earthly and certainly not under the control of any institution’s administrative regimentation or stifling controls. It cannot be what institutional Mormonism has become:

“O God, God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of [modern Mormonism]!
Fie on’t! ah fie! ‘tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!”
(*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2)

The restoration is far too great to have been reduced to the vain, trifling, low, mean, vulgar, and condescending versions presented in today’s Mormon institutions. If we’re going to hold a conference, it should aspire to stretch our minds upward—to make us reach beyond and never remain content.

This search into the highest heaven is the search to find holiness. Joseph Smith wanted us to ascend, like the ancients, into that realm of light and truth. How can any of us be content to listen to the institutional fare? It is incapable of sustaining spiritual life. Joseph's ideas and teachings are as far above those teachings of today as the heavens are above the earth. The restoration once sought to find what God declared as "His way" to Isaiah: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 20:2 OC). How the restoration has fallen! It is little wonder so many now hold Mormonism in contempt. It has become unnecessarily contemptible when it ought to be inspiring.

The restoration's delight has turned to dismay; its ingenuity turned to ineptitude. Silk has become burlap. How have we allowed it to become so?

During confinement in Liberty Jail, Joseph reflected on the tragic and sudden disarray that priesthood leaders inflicted on the restoration. Whereas Joseph first envisioned an authoritative administration for the incipient faith, in Liberty Jail he stripped priesthood of all its right to exercise control and dominion. These inspired words not only undo Joseph's initial investiture of priestly authority, it also rejects the long-established Roman Catholic decision to make priesthood non-forfeitable and independent of individual worthiness:

"Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen, and why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set...upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—that the rights of the Priesthood are inseparably connected with the Powers of Heaven, and that the Powers of Heaven cannot be controlled nor handled, only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true, but when we undertake to cover our sins or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control, or dominion, or compulsion, upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the Heavens withdraw themselves, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved, and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the Priesthood...of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left...to kick against the pricks, to persecute the Saints, and to fight against God. We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the Priesthood; only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned, by kindness and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul..." (Teachings and Commandments 139:5-6).

Consider how these ideas affect religion. A calling to priesthood does not accomplish anything if the individual is not "chosen" by God. We can ordain men, but heaven must ratify and elect that

man. No one is permitted to function on God's behalf without God's personal imprimatur of approval.

Priesthood is connected to heaven. Without a connection to heaven, there is no priesthood. The "powers of heaven" are, of course, the angels themselves. Priests must have angelic accompaniment to claim priesthood. And angels cannot be manipulated by the ambition, self-will, or worldly ambition of men.

The "called but unchosen" use office and position to cover their sins or to gratify their pride and vain ambition. They are like the Jews who persecuted Christ, while sitting in the chief seats. Likewise, there is no priesthood in the possession of any man who exercises control, dominion, or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men in the current sects of Mormonism. Christ's gentle example of kneeling to serve presents a neon-bright example of how priesthood is to be used. He came to serve, not to be served.

He taught, invited, bid others to repent, and clarified a better understanding of the scriptures for others. He did not demand support. He ministered light and truth for all who would listen. Any other kind of conduct antagonizes the heavens, which then withdraw themselves. The Spirit of the Lord is grieved, and when it's withdrawn, that's an end to the priesthood.

Imagine how different things are when you know that there is no power or authority in the priesthood itself but the power to influence others comes only by persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, and by kindly presenting pure knowledge. Imagine that a teacher must greatly enlarge your soul to actually claim priesthood. How different would that be for you? You would be drawn to attend a meeting for what great light it could provide you. You would no longer endure those meetings, conferences, and conversations that are low, mean, vulgar, and condescending—leave if they do, if you're not edified, and your soul is not enlightened. Religious classes and meetings that bore us are an obscenity. Discussions filled with a myriad of unenlightened personal opinion are the real pornography of today's Mormonism.

Joseph Smith revoked the right of priesthood to govern, and replaced it with the priesthood's obligation to teach and inspire. This ideal should be central. We should all repent and forsake the false models of a controlling hierarchy. All the accretions of power, wealth, compulsion, and dominion of the various Mormon sects should end this instant.

Another statement from Joseph makes it clear the restoration was intended to reintroduce the original religion of the Bible, not the diluted "Christianity" of his day. The original faith, in the first dispensations, had more understanding than what we find preserved in the Bible. Joseph was searching back into these beginnings. His heart was "turned to the fathers" of the first

generations. He wanted a return of their original as part of the end. It was to be nothing less. Consider this declaration:

“[H]as the day of miracles ceased? Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he so long as time shall last, or the Earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. For it is by faith that miracles are wrought. And it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men. Wherefore, if these things have ceased, woe be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain. For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name. Wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also, and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made” (Moroni 7:7 NC).

If the heavens are open to us, we have faith. If the heavens are brass, we are faithless. Without faith, it is as if Christ provided us no redemption. These words are as inspiring as they are sobering.

At the conclusion of the vision of the three-heavens, Joseph wrote the following. It clarifies that we are supposed to access heaven and see for ourselves the glory to be found there:

“But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his Kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpasses all understanding, in glory, and in might, and in dominion, which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for men to utter, neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy [Ghost], which God bestows on those who love him and purify themselves before him, to whom he grants the privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves that through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory” (Teachings and Commandments 69:29).

This privilege of seeing and knowing for ourselves is available to us “while in the flesh.” The restoration aimed to reconnect us to heaven in a literal way. This is the same that transpired with Enoch and others in earlier dispensations.

The *Book of Mormon* is filled with ascension lessons and examples. There is one verse that captures Joseph Smith’s ascent theology. That verse compresses into a single sentence, it explains why the *Book of Mormon* contains the “fullness of the gospel,” and it’s perhaps Joseph’s most inspired declaration:

“Verily thus says the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsakes their sins, and comes unto me, and calls on my name, and obeys my Voice, and keeps all my commandments, shall see my face and know that I Am, and that I am the true light that lights every man who comes into the world” (Teachings and Commandments 93:1).

“Every soul” includes you and me. Every one of us has equal access to the Lord. The conditions are the same for all: forsake sins, come to Christ, call on His name, obey His voice, keep His commandments. This is far more challenging than obedience to a handful of “thou shalt nots” because so much is required to be *done*, so much required to be *known*. A great deal of study and prayer is required to stand in the presence of the Lord. Once done, we shall see His face and know that He is the true light that enlightens everyone. He’s the God of the whole world.

Immediately after His resurrection, Christ did not minister to gentiles. But after the *Book of Mormon* came forth, gentiles are also eligible for Christ’s ministry in very deed:

“And it shall come to pass that if the gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks” (1 Nephi 3:25 NC).

His promise to us is predicated on “hearkening” to the Lamb. Gentiles failed to do so, and upon Joseph’s death, a great dearth set upon the restoration. Until there is gentile repenting and returning, it will continue to unwind. Since June 27, 1844 we have a restoration slow-moving car wreck. The pace of that decay is accelerating. We must rage against the fading of that light, *“And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience you may possess your souls, and have Eternal life” (Teachings and Commandments 101:6).*

Evidence of Christ is everywhere. Joseph used cosmological terms in a passage describing the importance of light coming from Christ and His Father:

“[H]e is in the sun and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. ...[H]e is in the moon and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made, as also the light of the stars and the power thereof by which they were made, and the earth also...” (Teachings and Commandments 86:1).

If you are alive, you are connected to Christ. If you detect the light of the sun, you detect a testimony of Christ. If you behold the moon moving in her cycles overhead, you behold a testimony of Christ.

False traditions are as destructive for us as outright disobedience. The result is the same. The difference is that when we know we disobey, we feel guilt. But false traditions fool us into thinking we're obedient when we are merely misled.

The angel who visited Joseph in 1823 said his name would be had for good and evil among all people. A similar message was repeated 16 years later in March 1839 when the voice of the Lord spoke to Joseph in Liberty Jail. God said to Joseph:

“The ends of the earth shall inquire after your name, and fools shall have you in derision, and Hell shall rage against you, while the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under your hand. And your people shall never be turned against you by the testimony of traitors, and although their influence shall cast you into trouble, and into bars and walls, you shall be had in honor” (Teachings and Commandments 139:7).

Although these two are similar, there is a profound difference between the angel's statement in 1823 and the voice of God in 1839. The angel only said people would speak good and evil of Joseph. But God added a *description* of those who would speak evil and those who would speak good of Joseph.

That voice of God said fools shall have Joseph in derision. Because I accept this statement as God's, I am led to conclude all who have spoken derisively of Joseph have done so foolishly. We ought to stop our foolishness. We need to end the derision of Joseph.

God also condemned the “testimony of traitors” against Joseph. While alive, Joseph identified some of his contemporary traitors and named them: George Hinkle, John Corrill, Reed Peck, David Whitmer, W.W. Phelps, Sampson Avard, William McLellin, John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, Thomas Marsh, and Orson Hyde. These had been prominent leaders, trusted friends, and one-time believers in Mormonism. It was false testimony from those from within the flock that led to imprisonment of Joseph and other leaders.

The traitors of 1838 were joined by yet more traitors between 1842-44. In Missouri, Joseph was accused of treason and inciting violence. In 1842-44 Joseph's traitors accused him of adultery, polygamy, and lying. John C. Bennett was a sexual predator who claimed amidst his secret seductions that Joseph Smith authorized him to engage in his promiscuity.

When his misconduct came to light, Bennett admitted Joseph authorized no such wickedness. He swore under oath that he “never was taught any thing in the least contrary to the strictest principles of the Gospel, or of virtue, or of the laws of God, or man, under any circumstances, or

upon any occasion either directly or indirectly, in word or deed, by Joseph Smith: and that he never knew the said Smith to countenance any improper conduct whatever, either in public or private; and that he never did teach me in private that an illegal illicit intercourse with the females was, under any circumstances, justifiable; and that I never knew him so to teach others.”

William Law was also involved in secret adultery, and Joseph Smith refused to seal Law’s marriage. A conspiracy of traitors in 1844 included William Law, Charles Ivins, Francis Higbee, Chauncey Higbee, Reed [Robert] Foster and Charles Foster (who published the *Nauvoo Expositor*) accusing Joseph Smith of the very evil Joseph had been hunting down and eradicating through high council proceedings since the Bennett affair had become public two years earlier.

Joseph was unequivocal in his opposition to adultery and plural wife-taking. About the time Bennett’s misconduct was beginning to come to light, Joseph Smith organized the Female Relief Society to encourage moral and chaste conduct in Nauvoo. In addition to the steps he took privately to discipline those involved directly, he made many public declarations against plural wives and in favor of chastity and moral purity.

He also encouraged the Relief Society to adopt a declaration titled “A Voice of Innocence.” It was read publicly by W.W. Phelps on March 7, 1844, then edited by Emma Smith, adopted by the Relief Society, and published in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on March 20, 1844.

Because of the testimony of traitors, Joseph Smith has been held in derision from 1842 to the present. He is accused of being a sexual predator, liar, and adulterer. Fools have repeated the accusations originally made by the confessed adulterer John C. Bennett, though Bennett testified under oath that Joseph was not responsible and never behaved in any improper way toward women.

In the derision of Joseph Smith today, we now have a chorus that includes the LDS Church, which claims him as their founder. It comes from Brian Hales, who claims to be an accurate biographer. It comes from anti-Mormons and Christian ministers and fundamentalists who have created a caricature they claim to be Joseph. There is little difference between these people and William Law, Charles Ivins, Francis Higbee, Chauncey Higbee, Robert Foster and Charles Foster (who published the *Nauvoo Expositor*). There is an immense chorus of fools holding Joseph in derision, even among those who claim to be devout followers of the faith he restored.

I think the voice Joseph heard in Liberty Jail was God’s. If I’m right, then God’s advice to the pure in heart, wise, noble, and virtuous is to seek counsel, authority, and blessing from Joseph. God’s advice leads me to adopt a view of Joseph that is consistent with nobility and virtue. I do not believe you can regard Joseph as a sexual predator, liar, and adulterer without holding him in

derision. The chief and unavoidable result of thinking of Joseph in those terms has been a legacy of excusing institutional lying and promoting adulterous thoughts and inappropriately entertaining the concept of women as mere breeding stock for the use of men.

It is not possible to harbor lustful, deceitful, and adulterous thoughts in your heart and claim to be pure in heart. I do not believe you can conspire to commit bigamy and adultery and claim to be virtuous. I do not believe you can decide to trust the words of traitors and villains who contradict Joseph's account of his marital fidelity to Emma and to claim to seek counsel from Joseph. In short, those who claim to accept the restoration but believe Joseph was a sexual predator do not qualify as noble, wise, virtuous, or pure in thought.

It is important to realize the restoration was hijacked by polygamy and has never regained the momentum Joseph envisioned. That abomination has darkened men's hearts and broken women's hearts. It is used to justify looking upon women with lust in men's hearts, contrary to the Lord's command in the Sermon on the Mount.

I hold Joseph in some considerable esteem. On the lightning-rod issue of plural wives, I've decided the historical record does not convict Joseph of polygamy, lying, deception, sexual improprieties, or exploitation of women. If I thought of Joseph Smith as a man capable of such things I would join his traitors in deriding him. I prefer to think him virtuous and noble. I think it is only possible for any person whose heart is pure and who prizes virtue, wisdom, and nobility to respect Joseph Smith by regarding him as pure, wise, noble, and virtuous. To me, adultery, promiscuity, and deceit are none of those things.

I reject adultery by any name or description. It's morally wrong if you call it plural wives, polygamy, "celestial marriage," or any other misnomer. Adultery is prohibited in the Ten Commandments and remains an important prohibition for any moral society.

Mormonism should never have been saddled with Brigham Young's program of making adultery a sacrament. But Mormonism should not have been saddled with many institutional accretions. Between June 27, 1844 and today, there have been too many incorrect subtractions and far too many uninspired additions. Mormonism today requires both dramatic subtractions and necessary additions. No one seems willing to do that with the precision required to "*Strive to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (Timothy 1:6 NC).

Brigham Young was not the only one who betrayed Joseph and caused his memory to be held in derision. David Whitmer betrayed Joseph in 1838, testified against him, and helped cause his Missouri imprisonment. Many years later, Whitmer's testimony as a traitor and accuser was

published in “An Address to All Believers in Christ.” Though he had been excommunicated in 1838 and never lived in Nauvoo, he accepted and echoed the *Nauvoo Expositor*’s claims about Joseph and polygamy.

Bastille posed the question in a song, “Pompeii”: “Where do we begin? The rubble or our sins?” I think it begins with our sins. They first have to be set aside through Christ. But afterwards we have a Mormon landscape filled with rubble, out of joint, out of level, out of plumb, collapsed or collapsing. Mormonism’s founding texts tell us this is as it should be for the present. We were never supposed to see Zion before the witnessed gentile failure and apostasy.

Christ declared to the Nephites a warning to the gentiles:

“And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you, At that day when the gentiles shall sin against my gospel and shall reject the fullness of my gospel and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings and of deceits and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy and murders and priestcrafts and whoredoms and of secret abominations, and if they shall do all those things and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, Behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them” (3 Nephi 7:5 NC).

This is not phrased as a possibility but as an inevitability. It was never a question of *if* the gentiles would reject the fullness. It has always been only a matter of *when* it would take place. The various institutions quarrel over whether it has happened. Some of them deny it can or will happen. The soothing mantra “we will never lead you astray” defies the message Christ was commanded by the Father to declare to us.

Joseph Smith has been held in derision for too long. Even those who claim to follow the commandments from God that came through him, deride his memory. This has gone on unchecked for far too long. The saints fell under condemnation in 1831 for taking lightly the *Book of Mormon* and former commandments given through Joseph Smith, then eight years later were warned it was foolish to hold Joseph in derision. Reclaiming the restoration requires repentance—first, recovering and accepting the text of the *Book of Mormon*, and restoring the former commandments to what God originally spoke. That’s been done by a small group of remnant believers. But second, we need to end the derision of Joseph and acknowledge that he was pure of heart, noble, and virtuous, and to act accordingly. It’s foolish to magnify his errors to justify our own. It’s wicked to attribute uncommitted sins to him to give ourselves a license to sin. Generations have been cursed for this error.

We have been led astray! All of us in every branch of Mormonism err. We stumble, and we have fallen down. We have discarded the expansive theology of Joseph Smith. The earliest dispensations had truth from heaven as their guide. Joseph began re-assembling what was lost but was slain before it was completed. We are the offspring of heaven and are capable of reuniting with heaven while mortal. We also have the opportunity, through eons of progression, to become as our Parents, the Gods.

Now is the time to awaken, arise, and shake off the dust. Some will awaken, arise, shake off the dust, and push forward to recover the restoration. God will set His hand a second time to accomplish His covenants. We are promised there will be a last-days' Zion established on this, the American continent. We know that when it is here:

“[E]very man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety, and there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under Heaven, and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another. And it shall be said among the wicked, Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible, wherefore we cannot stand. And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion singing with songs of everlasting joy” (Teachings and Commandments 31:15).

The restoration has indeed squandered many opportunities by those who went before. Most of those who accept Joseph Smith as a founder of their religion are still squandering the opportunity to see the work continue. But God's purposes do not fail, and we have the option to proceed now. Some generation, at some point, still has a glorious, promised completion to anticipate. As long as some, even a very few, are willing to walk in God's path, they will see the completion of this glorious, final work. *“This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (2 Nephi 10:8 NC).*

Why not now? Why not us? All that's required is to repent and return. The promise we have in exchange for our returning to the path is the stuff all the prophets and righteous from the days of Adam have eagerly anticipated.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from the presentation of Denver's paper entitled "The Restoration's Shattered Promises and Great Hope" at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, UT on July 28, 2018.