

Episode 61: Witness in All the World

QUESTION: Who or what is the Witness spoken of by John the Revelator, about which Joseph Smith prophesied on May 12, 1844 (just before his death) saying, That Witness would be “ordained and prepared” to “preach the everlasting gospel to all nations in the last days”?

...all the testimony is, that the Lord in the last days would commit the keys of the Priesthood to a witness over all people—has the Gospel of the Kingdom commenced in the last days? and will God take it from the man, until he takes him, himself? I have read it precisely as the words flowed from the lips of Jesus Christ—John the Revelator saw an angel flying thro' the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, &c. the Scripture is ready to be fulfilled when great wars, famines, pestilence, great distress, judgements, &c are ready to be poured out on the Inhabitants of the Earth—John saw the angel having the holy Priesthood who should preach the everlasting gospel to all nations,—God had an angel, a special messenger, ordained, & prepared for that purpose in the last days—Woe! Woe! be to that man, or set of men, who lift up their hands against God and his Witness in these last days. —for they shall deceive almost the very chosen ones—my enemies say that I have been a true prophet—& I had rather be a fallen true prophet, than a false prophet. (Thomas Bullock Report, 12 May 1844)

Who is the angel that is flying through the midst of heaven to have the everlasting [Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth]? Who was this Witness in the last days?

DENVER: Um yeah, here's the problem. We tend to look at events as having a singular fulfillment and that it um, it's an on/off switch, K? The fact is, that Christ has a lamentation that appears in scripture a number of times, which is: *How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings...and ye would not* (3 Nephi 4:9 RE). Um, the Lord can't make that lamentation unless He extends a bonafide opportunity for that gathering to take place. The prophecies about the last days—from the New Testament and Old Testament perspective—generally, are pointing you to the actual accomplishment and fulfillment. The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, is pointing to the last days in which offering is made, and it's rejected.

The allegory in now-Jacob chapter 3 of The New Covenants (Jacob chapter 5 in the traditional way of numbering it) suggests that the process of that labor of the master in the vineyard in the last days with servants includes an extended period of work in which there's activity going on—dunging, digging, and then pruning—and that this labor occurs over a long-enough period of time for natural fruit to begin to appear. And then as it begins to appear, then there's an ongoing process of cutting and discarding, pruning away, and development.

The prophecy that you've got, that Joseph is referring to (and probably, at that time, the expectation that Joseph had about what was gonna happen was it was gonna be a complete culmination, vindication, and fulfillment in his generation), it's very clear that when the fulfillment of the prophecies occurs, it will occur in a single generation. It's not gonna be one generation building upon the work of a prior generation, which built upon the work of yet another prior generation, that culminates in the work. It happens with a single generation. That's what the prophecies all say. And because Joseph was there, because the opportunity was actually bonafide, in existence, and God was working with them, from Joseph's perspective the fulfillment of that prophecy could happen right then. From the Lord's perspective, *How oft would I have gathered you as a hen [gathers her chicks], and ye would not*, He was saying, I will do this; I will do this now and with you; or if not, I will do it three and four generations from now when the condemnation of your rejection has been sufficiently long-endured to justify making another offering.

If you ask specifically who will rise up and fulfill that prophecy, I don't think anyone has the right to claim that they are going to do it. I think the only claim that can be made is: I have done it. Until you can say, in the past tense, that it is a real accomplishment, all it is is vanity and foolishness and pride—because men are literally not going to bring about Zion. The Lord takes credit. Everywhere you see this future prophesied—Zion accomplishing— It's **God's** accomplishment; it's not men doing it. The Lord says, "I will bring again Zion." It's more than foolhardy; it's prideful, it's vanity, and it's just likely to provoke the ire of Heaven for someone to claim that they are going to accomplish something without having first accomplished it. Because that then moves from the Lord asserting that it's Him, and Him alone, that is going to bring again Zion down to the level of some mere mortal—that they're going to accomplish some great thing. And mortals simply aren't going to accomplish it.

If God is willing to gather and if God is willing to bring the purposes about, then men cooperating with Him—the Lord of the Vineyard laboring alongside—is really the reason why the work gets done. It's the Lord of the Vineyard that agreed that the work would be done. It's the Lord of the Vineyard who owns all of the trees that determines that they're going to take the approach of cutting and grafting and in restoring, in laboring, because the Lord of the Vineyard had the right to just burn the whole thing down. And He elected not to do so. So when you get to the fulfillment of the work, the only one that gets to accept the credit is the Lord of the Vineyard. The only credit that we can take, assuming that we are actually involved, is that we were meek and humble enough to cooperate with Him and to do what He said; and He lifted us out of a state of condemnation and decay, and so we cooperated. But the only appropriate reaction is gratitude to Him and not, you know, boasting about our own wisdom and strength, 'cause we don't have much of that—none of us.

Now the question that you asked a few minutes ago, Paul, about that witness to all the world is actually Joseph Smith correcting a misapprehension about what that witness is. Because the way that the New Testament in the King James Version is worded, it suggests that the gospel itself has to be preached everywhere in the world, as a witness, before the end come. Joseph changed that in

his commentary and in his alterations of the text to say the world, everywhere, is going to be put on notice by God calling someone to stand as a witness. Whether they heed the witness, whether they're interested in the witness, it doesn't matter; because it's like Amos says: *Surely the Lord God will do nothing [save] he [reveal His] secret unto his servants the [prophet]* (Amos 1:9 RE). It doesn't matter that you don't like the prophet. It doesn't matter you won't listen to the prophet. The world is still bound by the words that God entrusts, and therefore, like 'em, don't like 'em; listen, don't listen! It's not necessary to fulfill Christ's prophecy and promise that every single door get knocked on and that every single person get confronted on their front porch by someone that says, I'm a witness, and you have to follow my religion! What is necessary, instead, is exactly what has now become possible.

We have a new root of scripture. They are available as a witness to the whole world online; you don't have to spend one cent. You can read every word of them, online, for free. For a modest amount of money, you can hold them in your hands by ordering them through Amazon. And in fairly short order, they'll be available in a very portable, leather-bound, thin-paper version that'll be available as soon as we can get the printer identified and the order placed. That witness—that witness that a whole group of people stand behind and labored to produce—is coming out at a very time when it has, for the first time, become technologically possible to produce it. As soon [as] it was possible, it exists. That's one of the signs that the moment has arrived, when—in a single generation—a whole lot of things are prophesied to occur.

All the prophecies in scripture are primarily about two generations of time—and only two generations of time. The first is a generation to which Jesus Christ came, and not much of the world took note of that. Inside the Western-European world, Rome was largely oblivious to the Savior's coming. In other places—*islands of the seas*—the Book of Mormon testifies there were still those who got a witness of it. But His sermon at Bountiful was to about twenty-five hundred people, and so the rest of the continent in North and South America, word may have leaked out over time, but it was comparatively few. That first generation, that all those prophecies focused on, a small group of people heard about 'em; Christ came; He ministered; He lived; He performed His sacrifice; He was resurrected; and then He taught in Jerusalem and in various other places as a resurrected being, and the world took very little note of it.

The Second Coming is the other generation about which all the prophecies are focused, and like that first generation, it really isn't necessary that the world sit up and take note and say, Oh my word—look—it's all happening; His words are being vindicated; the signs are being given! The world is perfectly entitled to remain oblivious to what's going on. The only thing that needs to happen is that the Savior be born, and that He come into the world as a descendant (genealogically and legally) through David, and that He be exactly who and what He was—modest though the notice was taken of Him, in the world at large.

The Second Coming is going to be just as inconsequential to those who say, *Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die* (2 Nephi 12:1), because this world provides plenty of distractions. You do not have to be focused upon the fulfillment of the prophecies. The only thing that's necessary is

that the prophecies be fulfilled. And I think it's a mistake to always assume that we should have a macro view of the fulfillment when, in fact, so much of the first coming of the Lord was fulfilled in micro, fulfilled in the modest. I mean, they who sit in darkness shall see a Great Light—Jesus gets up in an obscure synagogue and preaches a lesson based upon the text of Isaiah to a small congregation of people that weren't particularly impressed with Him, and when He finishes His sermon, His commentary on the passage that is read, He says, *This day [has] this scripture [been] fulfilled in your ears* (Luke 4:3 RE).

That doesn't seem like much. And it certainly didn't seem like much to many of the people who were present that day. It seems so fabulously pretentious and unlikely to be true that they threw Him out of the synagogue, and they tried to kill Him because they thought it was blasphemous for Him to apply such a passage to Himself.

So we don't have to accept the witness. We don't have to notice the witness. It's only required that God send the witness. If He sends the witness, God's done His part. In a perfect world—with perfect people whose ideals were based upon finding and following every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God—in that world, everyone would take note. Everyone would be eagerly looking, eagerly waiting, instead of having this profound indifference to what's happening in our day.

The foregoing was recorded on March 2nd, 2019 in Sandy, UT.