

JANUARY 4-10, 2021

Joseph Smith History 1:1–26

“I SAW A PILLAR OF LIGHT”

Summary: *Joseph Smith tells of his ancestry, family members, and their early abodes—An unusual excitement about religion prevails in western New York—He determines to seek wisdom as directed by James—The Father and the Son appear, and Joseph is called to his prophetic ministry. (Verses 1–20.)*

Some preachers and other professors of religion reject the account of the First Vision—Persecution is heaped upon Joseph Smith—He testifies of the reality of the vision. (Verses 21–26.)

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What can I learn from the occurrences of heavenly visions?

The phenomenon of heavenly visions has occurred throughout time. Whether it was Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Ezekiel or any of the prophets of old, the people’s reaction was either very negative or supportive. Some of those visions happened outside of Israel (Ezekiel) and even came to what Jews call “Gentile Prophets,” (Baalam). Many of those visions foresaw the time of the restoration. “Ezekiel was the only prophet to prophesy outside the Land of Israel. Ezekiel saw the entire history of Israel as one continuous breach of the Covenant, for which the destruction of the Temple was the just and predicted punishment. From the prophet’s call until the start of Jerusalem’s siege the prophecies are condemnatory. During the siege years and briefly thereafter the prophecies condemn Israel’s neighbors who were involved in Judah’s revolt but failed to support her. However, although the Book of Ezekiel starts on a note of doom, it continues with consolation, and the news of Jerusalem’s fall is followed by consolatory prophecies of its restoration. Ezekiel is transported in a vision to the future Jerusalem and describes the future Temple in detail. He also gives a blueprint for the reorganization of the priesthood and the allocation of the Land of Israel to the respective tribes. Among the most striking prophecies in the Bible is Ezekiel’s vision in Babylonia, of the valley of dry bones which become miraculously

reconstructed and come to life. Such a message must have been of great encouragement to the depressed exiles of Judah. “In his vision of the end of days, the prophet Zechariah foretells that all the nations of the world will assemble for the festival of Sukkot in Jerusalem to worship God.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What causes heavenly visions to cease?

When visions and revelations were interrupted for a time, because the people were not worthy to accept such divine manifestations, their importance faded and hope for future revelation diminished. “Dreams have fascinated people through the ages. The Biblical view was that dreams are divine communication—events transpiring on a supernatural plane. Thus, dreams were regarded as omens, which could be interpreted only by visionaries or prophets, who were in touch with this ‘divine dimension.’ In the Bible, ‘dreamer,’ ‘prophet,’ and ‘magician’ are related terms.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What differentiates heavenly dreams from normal dreams?

The Biblical accounts of Joseph and Daniel have a great basis in dreams. Some irritated family or friends, and others brought redemption, as well as condemnation, of people in the lands where they lived. For many Moslems, Mohammed is called a Prophet although he apparently never claimed to be one. His writings did not particularly predict the future because he still held the Bible as he interpreted it to be as accurate. “From

about 610 C.E. Muhammad claimed to have visions and to have been commanded, as messenger of God [Allah] to recite certain verses which came to his mind. In order to win over the Arabs to his new religion Muhammad realized that his appeal would have to be national and not aligned to either the Christianity of Byzantium or the Judaism of Babylonia. The holy book of Islam, the Koran, soon attracted a small community of devotees, and its message at this time concentrated on God's goodness and power, the return to God and final judgment, the necessity for man to be humble and grateful to God and to worship Him, and the obligation of generosity and respect for the rights of the poor and defenseless." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What consistencies can I expect from heavenly visions?

The prophecies of the "Colonization of America" in the Book of Mormon echo the blessings, prophecies and visions given to Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel). The fascinating geographic connection in his blessing is the term, "everlasting hills." Mountainous Israel is the "Crossroads of the East." On the other hand, Utah ("Tops of the Mountains" in the Navaho language) is the "Crossroads of the West." There are only two land masses on this planet that have a perpetual, unending range of mountains or "everlasting hills," Israel and USA. The connection to God's everlasting ways is also noted. "In the blessing given by Jacob to his son Joseph, the inheritance of America is foreshadowed and predicted in the following words: 'Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall . . . The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.' (**Genesis 49:26**)" (**Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation Vol.3, Pg.68**)

How do visions reveal the eternal order of heaven and earth?

"Whenever God has called and authorized

men to perform a work in any age or dispensation, it has been done by revelations, and not by mere impressions, or some undefinable, internal feelings, which leave the mind in uncertainty and doubt. Noah was called by the word of the Lord to be a preacher of righteousness, and to build an ark. Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, were called by revelation to perform a great variety of duties. Moses and Aaron were called to the priest's office by the word of the great Jehovah. Seventy elders of Israel were called by revelation to assist Moses. Joshua was appointed by the word of the Lord through Moses to be his successor in leading Israel. The successors of Aaron were appointed to the priesthood by revelation. The Judges of Israel were called by visions, by angels and by the inspiration of the Spirit. Samuel was called by the voice of the Lord. And finally, all their officers, wise men and prophets, down to the days of Malachi, were called by new revelation." (**Orson Pratt Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon, No. 2 (1850), p.17**)

How do Jews still anticipate future heavenly intervention?

There are rabbinic suggestions of expected heaven-sent visitors that include a latter-day Messiah, Ben-Joseph, who will receive the keys of the gathering of Israel and restore temple worship. "According to the Talmud, the Messiah will be a descendant of the House of David and will be preceded by a secondary Messiah, from the House of Joseph . . ." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) When the Chief Rabbi, Avraham HaKohen Kook (1865-1935), was appointed in Palestine (1919-1935), he was asked if the Jews could now build the Temple (destroyed since year 70 A.D.). His response was that the priestly rights were gone and referred to the great 11th and 12th century rabbis, Rashi (1040-1105) as well as Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), they said, in effect, "We are waiting for a Messiah Ben-Joseph, to him will be given the keys of the gathering of

Israel, he will restore Temple worship.” There is a chiasmus here that memorializes ancient Joseph, who saved his family, yet they did not know who he was. Latter-day Joseph is saving his brothers again, (more foreign aid goes to Israel from the U.S.A., the land of Joseph, than from all other countries combined) and they don’t know that it is “Joseph.” In the meridian of times there was “One” who saved us all – and still most people don’t know it.

How does history present itself as prophecy?

Anciently, when his brothers sought “foreign aid” from the Egyptians, their own brother, Joseph, was the “servant” to save them. First, he did so without revealing his true identity. When he finally revealed himself it was in humble family circumstance and he apparently prophesied that in latter days another Joseph would save his family again. From the Book of Mormon we find a reiteration of that prophecy: “. . . For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt. And great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph. Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity

unto freedom . . . Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers . . . And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation . . . who shall do much good, both in word and in deed, being an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.”

(Excerpts from 2 Nephi 3)

How do history and prophecy testify of Christ?

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints know that this prophecy has been fulfilled in the nineteenth century through the mission of the prophet Joseph Smith Jr. Ancient Joseph overcame his “pride” and served his brothers forgivingly (at first without identifying himself). He, thereby, established a pattern for a latter-day Joseph, who, for the time being, is keeping his identity from Judah and will have to release all forms of pride to serve his whole family, forgivingly and lovingly. In between the two Josephs is the Savior, unknown to so many, yet he lovingly forgives us all . . . as we recognize and accept Him.