

A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER

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 of Latter Day Saints
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SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 29:13,14,19,24

Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.....The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel..... They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.
 (Rev. 14:6)

In our last sermon we called your attention to the prophetic warnings of an apostasy in the church which Christ established on earth. We pointed out to you that in the twelfth chapter of John's book of Revelation, the church is represented as a woman clothed with the sun, who was persecuted by the great red dragon of paganism, and driven into the wilderness for 1260 days, or a time, times, and the dividing of a time, while her child which the dragon was waiting to devour was caught up again into heaven. We suggested that you read the 17th chapter of Revelation, which depicts the wanted woman who usurped the place of the woman who fled into the wilderness. The usurper was not being persecuted by the beast; she was riding on his back, completely at peace and in league with paganism and all the wickedness and corruption it stood for.

It was not God's will or intention that the church and the gospel which disappeared from the earth as a result of this apostasy should remain forever in the wilderness, lost to mankind. An indication of his purpose to restore them in due time is found in Revelation 14:6,7: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Several facts seem evident from a little study of this verse. If the gospel were still on the earth; if the gospel which had been preached on earth for 1900 years after Christ was the true and everlasting gospel, what need would there be for an angel to bring it again to earth in the last days? But the gospel was not to be found in any nation, or among any tongue or kindred or people; therefore the angel had to bring that gospel and restore it to earth again, that it might be preached for a witness in all the earth before the hour of his judgment -- or the end of the world -- should come.

How long was the apostasy to last? How long was there to be a famine for the word of God, with prophets and seers covered, and the people walking in darkness? How long was the church to remain in the wilderness, hidden from men? God has not left us without some indications as to the duration of this period. Revelation 12:6 says that the woman was to remain in the wilderness "a thousand, two hundred and threescore", or twelve hundred sixty days. Revelation 12:14 adds that it shall be for "a time, and times, and half a time."

The key to the duration of this period is that the ancient year consisted of twelve months of thirty days each, or 360 days. For example, Noah entered the ark on the seventeenth day of the second month, (Gen. 7:11) stayed 150 days (Gen. 7:24) and came out on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. (Gen. 8:14) He stayed in the ark 150 days, or five months, making thirty days to the month. This system of 360 days to the year was common throughout ancient times, and is the source of the 360 degrees into which mathematicians divide the circle. Allowing 360 days to the year, the 1260 days of John's prophecy would be three and a half years, or a "time", (one year) "times", (two years) and "half a time," (half a year).

But since the events covered by this prophecy are obviously too sweeping to be completely fulfilled in only three years and a half of actual time, we apply the rule of Ezekiel 4:6: "I have appointed thee each day for a year." As is often done in Biblical prophecy, notably in Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks or 490 days, every day stands for a year. The duration of the woman's stay in the wilderness was to be 1260 years.

Our next problem is to try to find out when this 1260 year period began. For this we turn to one of the prophecies of the apostasy which we included in last week's sermon, in the second chapter of **Second Thessalonians**. In this chapter Paul cautions the Thessalonian saints not to expect the second coming of Christ until after a great apostasy, or falling away, and gives them a sign by which they may know when that apostasy is complete. There is some power which "lets" or hinders, or prevents the full usurpation of power in the church by the forces of paganism, and the assumption of political as well as ecclesiastical dominion. When the power which prevents or hinders is taken out of the way, the apostasy will be complete, and the 1260 years will begin.

There are dozens of authorities whom we could quote to show that the Roman Emperor of the west was the restraining power, and that when he was taken out of the way, the church became a temporal power -- the only stable government in Italy. We quote from Cardinal Manning: ".....the successive invasions of barbaric hordes, and above all the invasions of the Lombards," extinguished utterly and destroyed the last vestige of the Roman Empire in Italy; it was utterly swept away, it existed no longer. Where thenceforward was the subjection of the Roman pontiff to an emperor whose empire had ceased to be?..... And when the last vestige of civil authority had perished there remained in Rome one sole person who had been the Father, the Pastor, Lawgiver, Protector, and Head of the People, to whom they turned as their supreme spiritual authority, around whom they gathered in all their perils. The line of the Roman pontiffs alone was left. The providence of God thus liberated the head of the church completely and altogether from any civil authority whatsoever." ("The Independence of the Holy See," by Cardinal Manning, pp. 13,14. London edition of 1877)

Cardinal Manning says that the church was freed from secular domination by the conquest of successive invasions of barbaric hordes, and above all, the Lombards. And when did the Lombards destroy the last remnants of the western Roman Empire? They began their march in April of 568 A.D., and completed their conquest of Italy in 570 A.D. Still later, after all vestiges of secular power had disappeared in the western empire, Phocas, emperor of the eastern empire, acknowledged the supremacy of the church and the bishop of Rome in 607 A.D.

Here we have a period of time extending from 570 A.D. to 607 A.D., or 37 years, in which this process of decay in the empire and ascendancy of the church was being worked out. Somewhere in this 37 year period the 1260 prophetic years began. If we take the date 570, and add to that the 1260 years, we arrive at the date of 1830 -- the year Latter Day Saints point to as the year of restoration -- the year when the angel flew through the midst of heaven with the everlasting gospel -- the year when
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the church was called forth from the wilderness.

But there are other kinds of years, in addition to the prophetic year of 360 days which we have used. There are solar years of $365\frac{1}{4}$ days each; and there are lunar years of $354\frac{1}{3}$ days each. To reduce the 1260 prophetic years of 360 days each to solar years of $365\frac{1}{4}$ days each, multiply 1260 by 360 to get the total number of days in the prophetic years, then divide by $365\frac{1}{4}$, the number of days in a solar year. The answer is 1241, with a remainder of 325; in other words, approximately 1242 solar years. If we take the mid-point of our 37 year period, 588 A.D., and add 1242, the answer still comes out 1830. To reduce 1260 lunar years of $354\frac{1}{3}$ days each to solar years, let us multiply the 1260 years by the $354\frac{1}{3}$ days in a lunar year, and then divide by $365\frac{1}{4}$, and we get $1222\frac{1}{3}$ lunar years. Add this figure to the closing date of the 37 year era, 607 A.D., and the resulting date is $1829\frac{1}{3}$, or just short of 1830.

There are some other clear prophetic indications of a restoration of the church and the gospel which were lost in the apostasy. The 29th chapter of Isaiah speaks of a book which is to come forth, and simultaneously, God says, "behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder....." This book we believe to be the Book of Mormon. Inasmuch as we intend to devote several sermons to this book in the near future, we shall not discuss it further this morning; but we are interested in some indications of the time when this was to take place. Verse 10 indicates that it will be in a time when prophets and seers are covered -- when there is no more prophecy or revelation. Verse 17 gives another indication of the time: "It is not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the word of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." The coming forth of the book was to be accompanied by a marvelous work and a wonder; and both these events were to occur "a little while" before Lebanon became a fruitful field. About the middle of the 19th century, a little while after 1830, there began to be an increase in the rainfall of Palestine; the Jews began to gather back a few at a time to restore the irrigation systems and the fertility of the land. The return of the Jews to Palestine received an added impetus after World War I, and again during World War II. Today Lebanon is again a fruitful field; and the beginning of her rehabilitation came "a little while" after the return of the church of Christ from the wilderness in 1830.

It is interesting, though coincidental, to observe the great advances which have occurred in the world since 1830. We are so accustomed to our modern conveniences that we do not stop to realize that the railroad, the telephone, telegraph, radio, television, aseptic surgery, a knowledge of the part germs play in illness and infection, refrigeration, the automobile, paved highways, the airplane -- all these things and many more have been given to the world since the dawning of that great era of restoration in the year 1830.

The years 1829-30 mark the formal organization of Christ's church under the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith, the restoration of priesthood authority which had been lost in the apostasy, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The story begins, however, in the spring of 1823, when a young lad in his fourteenth year became confused by the conflicting claims of the various denominations cooperating in a union revival service near his home in upper New York State. In reading his Bible one day, he encountered James 1:5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." With naive faith, he retired to the woods to test this promise, and began to pray. A shaft of light enveloped him, and as he looked upward through that shaft, he saw two personages. One of them, turning to the other, said, "This is my beloved Son; hear him." Young Joseph put his question, "Which of the churches shall I join?" The answer came clearly, bluntly: "Join none of them, for they are all wrong, and their creeds are an abomination in my sight."

The following September, while young Joseph was praying in his bedroom after retiring, an angel appeared to him to tell him of a book written on golden plates, and buried in a nearby hill, containing a record of ancient American peoples. Later John the Baptist, who had been the forerunner of Jesus' first mission, conferred the priesthood, and gave instructions for the organization of the church, which event was formally consummated on April 6, 1830.

In a later sermon we shall tell you some of the history of these days in more detail, particularly the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. In conclusion, Latter Day Saints believe that the apostasy was foretold in prophecy, but that a restoration was also foretold; that there were indications that this restoration would take place about 1830; shortly before Lebanon became a fruitful field; that it would be accompanied by the coming forth of a book; that it would be effected by an angel flying in the midst of heaven. We claim to be the church thus restored; to have the ~~gospel~~ ~~thus~~ ~~restored~~; to have the priesthood authority thus restored. These are bold claims. We make them humbly, ~~and invite you to receive them with equal humility~~; to check them with the scriptural evidence we have presented, and to claim God's promise that he will give wisdom to those who lack, if they will ask of him in faith.

PRAYER:

Our heavenly Father, we thank thee for the clear prophetic insight which has foretold to the world the restoration of thy church and thy gospel in the latter days. We thank thee for the angel who flew through the midst of heaven with the everlasting gospel to preach to man on the earth, and for the prophetic ministry of the young man to whom this angel came. Give unto us the open mind, the understanding heart, the eager and inquiring intellect, and bless us with the spirit of wisdom and knowledge, that we may comprehend the wonder, the magnitude, and the mystery of thy provisions for mankind. And grant that we who know the joy that comes from a knowledge and acceptance of the great truths of the Restoration, may be worthy of that which we have received, and valiant in our testimony of thy goodness to us, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.