

Reverend Mr. Lane of the Methodist church preached a sermon on the subject, "What church shall I join?" He quoted the golden text of James—

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and up-braideth not, and it shall be given him."

The text made a deep impression on the mind of the Prophet. He read it on returning home, and pondered it deeply. Here was a message from the word of God. A message to all men; but to him especially, since he had been made to feel that of all men he lacked wisdom, in respect of a matter to him vital.

Some years later he made the comment:

"Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God I did, for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible."

JOSEPH SMITH'S VENTURE IN FAITH

After much reflection of this nature, he at last took his resolution. He would put the doctrine of James to the test. He would ask God for wisdom. Reasoning that if God gave wisdom to them that lacked it, and would give liberally and not upbraid, he might venture. [Situating directly west of the Smith home, a few hundred yards distant, yet on their own farm, was a beautiful grove sufficiently dense and removed from the road to give the necessary seclusion the youth desired; and here on the morning of a beautiful, clear day in

discourses on the scripture, and in common with others, our brother's [Joseph Smith's] mind became awakened" (*Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Oliver Cowdery's Third Letter.)

7. James i:5. The context reads: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James i:6, 7).

that early spring time, he knelt for the first time in all his life to make a personal, direct, verbal appeal to God in prayer.

And now something strange happened. The youth had just began timidly to express the desires of his heart in words, when he was seized upon by an invisible power that overcame him; his tongue was bound so that he could not speak. Darkness gathered about him, and it seemed for a time that he was doomed to sudden destruction. He exerted all his powers to call upon God for deliverance from this enemy—not from a merely “imaginary ruin,” as he assures us, “but from the power of some actual being from the unseen world,” who possessed such strength as the youth had never before encountered. Despair seized upon him, and he felt that he must abandon himself to destruction. At this moment of dreadful alarm he saw a pillar of light exactly over his head which shone out above the brightness of the sun, and began gradually descending towards him, until he was enveloped within it. As soon as the light appeared, the youth found himself freed from the power of the enemy that had held him bound. As the light rested upon him, he beheld within it two personages, exactly resembling each other in form and features, standing above him in the air. One of these, calling Joseph by name, and pointing to the other, said:

“This is My Beloved Son, hear Him.”

It gives evidence of the intellectual tenacity of Joseph Smith that in the midst of all these bewildering occurrences he held clearly in his mind the purpose for which he had come to this secluded spot, the object he had in view in seeking the Lord. As soon, therefore, as he could get sufficient self-possession to speak, he asked the Personages in whose resplendent presence he stood, which of the sects was right, and which he should join. He was answered that he must join none of them; for they were all wrong. And the Personage who addressed him said, that all their creeds were an abomination

in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that they drew near to him with their lips, but their hearts were far from him; they taught for doctrine the commandments of men: they had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. Joseph was again forbidden to join any of these sects, at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel would at some future time be made known unto him.⁸

When the lad came entirely to himself he found that he was lying on his back, looking up into heaven. With the passing of the vision he was left without strength; but soon recovering from his weakness he returned home.⁹

8. The above description of this vision is a blending of two narratives of the occurrence left by Joseph Smith. Not that there are any irreconcilable differences in the two statements, but one is given in greater detail than the other, and in each there are some details not mentioned in the other, hence the blending of the narratives. The principal account of this great vision of the Prophet's is found in his *History of the Church*, Period I, the first publication of which, was begun in volume ii of the *Times and Seasons*, and of which, at the time of the publication of said journal (March 15, 1842), the Prophet himself was the editor. (See note 8, chapter iii of this *History* for further remarks on that work). The other account is found in what is called the *Wentworth Letter*, which was written to Mr. John Wentworth, editor and proprietor of the *Chicago Democrat*, at the latter's solicitation, as he wished to present the Prophet's statement of the origin and progress of "Mormonism" to his friend, a Mr. Bastow, who was then writing a history of New Hampshire. The letter is one of the choicest documents in our church literature; as also it is the earliest published document by the Prophet personally, making any pretension to consecutive narrative of those events in which the great Latter-day work had its origin. The *Wentworth Letter* was published in number 9, of volume iii of the *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842: while the publication of that more pretentious *History of the Church* under title *History of Joseph Smith*, above referred to as *The History of the Church*, Period I, was not commenced until number 10, of volume iii, of the *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1842. Introducing this "History of Joseph Smith" in the *Times and Seasons* (vol. iii, p. 726) is the following note referring to the *Wentworth Letter* and the more pretentious *History*. "In the last number I gave a brief history of the rise and progress of the church, I now enter more particularly into that history, and extract from my journal." Referring again to this *Wentworth Letter*, I may say that for combining conciseness of statement with comprehensiveness of treatment of the subject with which it deals, it has few equals among historical documents, and certainly none that excel it in our church literature. In it one has in a few pages (less than six of these pages) a remarkably clear statement of the leading events in the church history up to that time, and an epitome of her doctrines, from the beginning—the birth of the Prophet, in 1805—up to the date of publication, March, 1842, a period of thirty-six years. The epitome of the doctrines of the church, since called *The Articles of Faith*, have been published by millions, and carried to all the nations of the earth and tribes of men where the New Dispensation of the gospel has been preached.

9. The effects of young Smith's remarkable experiences were doubtless still visible upon him after reaching home; for while he was leaning against the fire place his mother inquired what the matter was; to which he answered—"Never mind.

A few days after the vision occurred, young Joseph was in conversation with one of the Methodist preachers who was very active in the before mentioned revival,¹⁰ and gave him an account of the vision. The reception of the story by the minister was most surprising to the youth. Says the Prophet:

“He treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying, it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.”

In fact Joseph Smith soon found that by telling the story he had excited a great deal of prejudice against himself among many professors of religion. His experience indicated how far removed men were from a sincere belief in those scriptures so frequently found upon their lips. Here a text of scripture had been used as the foundation of a public discourse upon a most important subject. A subsequent reading of it had deepened the impression made upon the mind of a sincere believer in the scriptures, until it became to him a veritable message from the word of God—the voice of God to his soul. He acted upon the message thus received. That act of faith brought forth its results, which were now ridiculed and denounced by the teachers of the word of God. Though but an obscure boy, and in such circumstances of life as to render his existence of little consequence in the world, “yet,” as he puts it in his own narrative—

REACTION OF THE YOUNG PROPHET'S MESSAGE

“Yet, men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution. It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance

all is well—I am well enough off. I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.” Which remark, taking into account the fact that his mother had but recently joined the Presbyterian church, and the discussion of the question “which church shall I join” was still in the air—was a bit of sly humor decidedly rich.

10. Doubtless this was the Reverend Mr. Lane, since he was at least the most active minister of the Methodist persuasion in the revival, if not the only one; and, moreover, it was he who had preached the sermon on “What church shall I join;” and had used James 1:5 as his text.