

Experience in Missionary Labors—Ancient Prophecies Concerning the People of God in the Last Days

Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, delivered in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, Sunday, August 11th, 1867.

I have long looked forward with joyful anticipations to the time, when I should again meet with the people of God in these mountains, and have the privilege of standing before them. I feel very thankful to my Father in heaven for this great privilege. I have been absent from this city and place over three years, and have performed one of the longest missions of my life. I feel thankful to God that you gave me this privilege, and that I have had the opportunity of adding one more lengthy mission to the long catalogue of missions which I have taken abroad among the nations. It is a great satisfaction to me to have the privilege of being numbered with this people, and to have my name enrolled among those who profess to be Latter-day Saints. With them is safety; with them are joy, peace, and satisfaction. And I feel to say, as one said in old times—that with this people I desire to live, and, if it is necessary to die, I desire to have the privilege of dying with them. But I do not know whether it will be necessary for all of us to die, perhaps there may be some who will escape this curse in some measure, and who may meet with a change equivalent to that of death.

I have been abroad for the purpose of doing good, that was the only object I had in view in leaving this Territory three years ago last spring. Whether I have done much good or not remains for the day of judgment to reveal; it is not altogether for me to judge in relation to this matter. We are well assured that our Father, who reigns in yonder heavens, keeps a journal, or, in other words, a record—a great record in which He records the doings of the children of men. We know, from a certain declaration of Jesus in the Book of Mormon, concerning the records of heaven, that the acts and doings of all men are recorded by the Father in that book, and the time is fast hastening when I, as an individual, and all others, must be brought before the Judge of all the earth, and our acts and doings here, in this short space of time appointed to us as a probation, will be read before us, or if not read they will be perfectly remembered by us and by those who sit in judgment, so that a righteous judgment will be rendered on our heads, and we will receive the reward of our doings, whether they be good or evil. I have enjoyed myself remarkably well on this mission. I hope that some good has been done, and that the Lord will remember the good that I have intended to do, even though it may not have been fully accomplished. He knows the desire of my heart has been to fulfil the numerous missions which I have taken during the last thirty-seven years of my life.

Since I came home, I have contrasted the present condition of myself and this people with what existed when I first became acquainted with this gospel. Then we were a little handful of people—there were, perhaps, not a hundred persons in all the States who had received the truth. I received it about five months after the organization of this Church, and, although but a boy, was immediately called to the ministry. In my inexperience I went forth, with gladness of heart, to bear my humble testimony to what I knew to be true. You may ask me if I had a knowledge before I commenced preaching this gospel. I answer, yes. I went forth from a farming occupation in the eastern part of the State of New York, and traveled alone between two hundred and three hundred miles, for the purpose of beholding the Prophet Joseph Smith. I found him in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, at the house of father Whitmer, where this Church was organized with only six members. In that house I found not only Joseph, the Prophet, but David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, and many of those witnesses whose names are recorded in the Book of Mormon. Those were happy days to me. To see a prophet of the living God, to look on a man whom the Lord had raised up to bring forth one of the most glorious records that ever saluted the ears of mortal man, was to me almost equal to beholding the face of an holy angel! Yet, when I took that journey, and first beheld his countenance, I did not certainly know that he was a prophet. I believed him to be such because of the purity of the doctrine that I had heard preached which he had brought forth. I knew it was a scriptural doctrine, agreeing in every respect with the ancient gospel. For although but a boy, I had already become acquainted, in some measure, with the doctrines of the various religious sects of the day, but none of them satisfied me, none of them seemed to coincide with the word of God. I stood aloof from all, until I heard this, when my mind became fully satisfied that God had raised up a people to proclaim the gospel in all its ancient beauty and simplicity, with power to administer in its ordinances. That was a great satisfaction, so far as faith was concerned, but still I sought for a

knowledge. I felt as though I was not qualified to stand before the people, and tell them that the Book of Mormon was a divine revelation, and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, unless I had a stronger testimony than that afforded by ancient prophets. However great my assurance might be, it seemed to me, that to know for myself, it required a witness independent of the testimony of others. I sought for this witness. I did not receive it immediately, but when the Lord saw the integrity of my heart and the anxiety of my mind—when He saw that I was willing to travel hundreds of miles for the sake of learning the principles of the truth, He gave me a testimony for myself, which conferred upon me the most perfect knowledge that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and that this book, called the Book of Mormon, was in reality a Divine revelation, and that God had once more, in reality, spoken to the human family. What joy this knowledge gave me! No language that I am acquainted with could describe the sensations I experienced when I received a knowledge from Heaven of the truth of this work.

In that early day the prophet Joseph said to me that the Lord had revealed that twelve men were to be chosen as Apostles. A manuscript revelation to this effect, given in 1829—before the rise of this Church—was laid before me, and I read it. Joseph said to me, although I was young, weak, inexperienced, especially in public speaking, and ignorant of many important things which we now all understand, that I should be one of this Twelve. It seemed to me a very great saying. I looked upon the Twelve Apostles who lived in ancient days with a great deal of reverence—as being almost superhuman. They were, indeed, great men—not by virtue of the flesh, nor their own natural capacities, but they were great because God called them. When Joseph told me that I would be one of the Twelve, I knew all things were possible with God, but it seemed to me that I would have to be altogether changed to occupy such a great position in the Church and Kingdom of our God.

But I will pass over the first years of the organization of the Church and come down to the time when the Twelve were chosen. It was in the year 1835. In the preceding year a few of us, by commandment and revelation from God, went up to the State of Missouri in company with the Prophet Joseph Smith. By the direction of Joseph I was requested to stay in Clay County for a few months, to visit the Saints scattered through those regions, to preach to and comfort them, and to lay before them the manuscript revelations, for they were not then fully acquainted with all the revelations which had been given. After having accomplished this work, and proclaimed the gospel to many branches of the Church in the western part of Missouri, I returned again a thousand miles to the State of Ohio, preaching by the way, suffering much from the chills, and the fever and ague, while passing through those low sickly countries, wading swamps and sloughs, lying down on the prairies in the hot sun, fifteen or twenty miles from any habitation, and having a hearty shake of the ague, then a violent fever, thus wandering along for months before getting back to Kirtland, Ohio, where the Prophet lived. In the meantime, however, I built up some few branches of the Church, and then started for the capital of the State of Ohio—the city of Columbus. I entered the city, a stranger, on foot, and alone, not knowing that there was a Latter-day Saint within many miles, but, while passing along the crowded streets, I caught a glimpse of the countenance of a man who passed, and whirling around instantly, I went after him, and inquired of him if he knew whether there were any people called “Mormons” in the city of Columbus. Said he: “I am one of that people, and the only one that resides in the city.” I looked upon this as a great marvel. “How is it,” said I, “that here in this great and populous city, where hundreds are passing to and fro, that I should be influenced to turn and accost the only Latter-day Saint residing here.” I look upon it as a revelation, as a manifestation of the power of God in my behalf. He took me to his house, and, when there, presented me with a paper published by our people in Kirtland. In that paper I saw an advertisement, in which br. Pratt was requested to be at Kirtland on such a day and at such an hour, to attend meeting in the Temple, that he might be ready in take his departure with the Twelve who had been chosen. The day and hour designated were right at hand; the Twelve were chosen, and were soon to start on their first mission as a Council. I had been traveling among strangers for months, and had not seen the paper.

I saw that I had not time to reach Kirtland on foot, as I had been accustomed to travel, and consequently could not thus comply with the request; but, with a little assistance, I got into the very first stage that went out, and started post-haste for Kirtland, and landed at Willoughby, or what was then called Chagim, three miles from Kirtland, to which I traveled on foot, reaching there on Sunday morning at the very hour appointed for the meeting, which I entered, valise in hand, not having had time to deposit it by the way. There I met with Joseph, Oliver Cowdery,

David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and others of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, besides several of the Twelve who had been chosen and ordained a short time previous. They were meeting on that day in order to be fully organized and qualified for their first mission as a council. And, strange to relate, it had been prophesied in that meeting, and in prior meetings, I would be there on that day. They had predicted this, although they had not heard of me for some time, and did not know where I was. They knew I had been in Missouri, and that I had started from there, several months before, but the Lord poured out the spirit of prophecy upon them, and they predicted I would be there at that meeting. When they saw me walk into the meeting, many of the Saints could scarcely believe their own eyes, the prediction was fulfilled before them so perfectly. I look at these things as miraculous manifestations of the Spirit of God.

I was ordained, and went forth with the Council of the Twelve. We performed an extended mission through the eastern States, built up churches, and returned again to Kirtland.

It is not my intention to give many items of our history. I merely touch upon these points, as they present themselves to my mind. I have continued, from that day until the present, to bear testimony to that which I know to be true. I do not speak enthusiastically when I say I KNOW. It is not a spirit of excitement which prompts me to declare these things, but I testify now, to that which I know by revelation to me from heaven, as I have testified to hundreds and thousands of people, both in America, in England, and on the Continent in Europe. I know this great work which you, Latter-day Saints, have received, to be the work of Almighty God. I have the same certainty that I have that you are now sitting on these seats. This religion is not a whim; it is not a wild enthusiastic creed, invented by human wisdom, but the origin of this Church is divine. This book, called the Book of Mormon, God gave, by the inspiration of His holy Spirit, to Joseph Smith, whom you and I believe, and not only believe, but know to be, a prophet. This book I consider the choicest book communicated to the children of men for many centuries. The choicest! Why do I say the choicest? Are there not many useful and interesting books of great value, containing much information and many things of importance, that have been sought out by the judgment, skill, and learning of men? Yes; but among all those which have appeared since the first century of the Christian era, there is one common characteristic—viz., they were written by the wisdom of man. No doubt, in many respects, though unknown to their authors, they were measurably dictated by the inspiration of the Spirit of the living God. But God Himself is the author of the Book of Mormon. He inspired the ideas it contains, and gave them by the Urim and Thummim. He sent forth His angel from heaven, clothed in brightness and glory, to chosen witnesses, commanding them to declare to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that this precious book was a divine revelation. How great, then, is the importance of this work!

It was a very interesting period of my life, when but nineteen years of age, to visit the place where this Church was organized—the room of old father Whitmer—where the Lord spoke to His servant Joseph and others, as printed in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. In that same room a revelation, through the prophet Joseph, was given to me, November 4th, 1830, which is also printed. That house will, no doubt, be celebrated for ages to come, as the one chosen by the Lord in which to make known the first elements of the organization of His Kingdom in the latter days.

But there are many wonderful things connected with this dispensation—not only in the manifestations of the Spirit of God to His servants in the many revelations that were given to individuals, in healing the sick, in casting out devils, in restoring the blind to their sight, in making the deaf to hear, and in causing the lame man to leap as a hart—but what is still more wonderful, the gathering of the people from distant nations. It is a wonder to me to look upon the great sea of faces now before me in this bowery. Twenty years ago on the twenty-first day of July, I stood solitary and alone on this great city plot, near the place where now stands bishop Hunter's house, being the first man of the Latter-day Saints that ever stood on this ground: this was in the afternoon of the twenty-first day of July, 1847. Brother Erastus Snow entered the valley with me in the afternoon. We traveled down to the southeast of the city. Br. Erastus lost his coat off his horse, and went back to hunt it up, and told me if I wanted to look over the country he would wait for me at the mouth of what we now call Emigration Canyon. I started from where we parted, and came up and stood on the bank of City Creek. I gazed on the surrounding scenery with peculiar feelings in my heart. I felt as though it was the place for which we had so long sought. Brother Brigham had requested me to proceed on and search out the road. Several of the brethren had been taken sick at Yellow Creek,

and they appointed me and a small company to go on and see if we could find anything of Salt Lake Valley or a country suitable for a location. What did I see when I came into this valley? I saw some few green bushes on yonder bench, but saw but little life throughout the valley, except a certain insect that was afterwards called a cricket. I saw them cropping the few isolated bushes, and gnawing everything green around them. The land on yonder bench was all parched up, and the soil, as we went down still further, also dry and baked; but as we neared the waters we could see there was a little moisture round the banks. It was really a solitary place, and is well described by the prophet David in the 107th Psalm. He exclaims in this beautiful language: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hands of the enemy; And gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north, and from the south." But David describes the country to which this people were to be gathered. He calls it a dreary desolate land. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Are there not many sitting on these seats who can reflect back to the time when they wandered over the solitary plains, the arid deserts, and rugged mountains? Are there not here some of the pioneers who were numbered among the one hundred and forty-three who traveled fifteen hundred miles from Nauvoo and a thousand from our Winter Quarters on the Missouri River, who can bear testimony that we did "wander in the wilderness in a solitary way?" Oh, how solitary it was except for the red men, buffalo, a few antelope, some elk, deer, and howling wolves! It was indeed solitary; no road broken for us, no bridges across the streams; we were unable to tell what latitude or longitude we were in only by taking astronomical observations—getting the altitude of the sun, moon, or stars, and determining our latitude and longitude to find out where we were, as sea captains do on the great deep. And thus we continued, month after month, to wander in this solitary way, in this wilderness, as it were, and when we entered these valleys we found no city already built for us. David said that the people who should be gathered from all lands would "find no city to dwell in"—no city already prepared for them.

Did we have any suffering, affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue? I can bear testimony that the pioneers, and many others who followed in their track that season, can look back to that period of their lives as to a time when they experienced the fulfillment of David's words—"Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainteth in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses." This was literally fulfilled, for we were faithful in calling on the Lord; we bowed before Him in the morning, we humbled ourselves before Him in the evening, and we prostrated ourselves before Him in our secret places. Some of us went out upon the hills by ourselves, and called upon the Lord, according to the order of the Holy Priesthood, which order many of you who have received your endowments understand. Many times we were thirsty, and our souls were ready to faint within us, but we came forth by the direction of the Almighty. His hand was with us, He heard our cries, our prayers came up before Him, and He delivered us from all our afflictions. Yet we found no city to dwell in, no splendid houses, mansions, and palaces, and everything conducive to happiness and comfort, as our emigration from foreign countries find in these times.

Finding no city to dwell in, the Lord permitted us to prepare a city for habitation. I have stated that the Lord had accomplished wonders—great wonders—besides healing the sick and doing those things already named, and one of those great wonders is the city of Great Salt Lake. It is a miracle to my eyes, it is a miracle to the Latter-day Saints who dwell within it, it is a miracle to all the inhabitants of the Territory, it is a miracle to all our enemies scattered abroad, and a wonder to all the nations of the earth who have read its description. Let me tell a secret that some of you, perhaps, have not fully understood. Do you know, Latter-day Saints, that this city is already celebrated in distant nations, across the sea, as one of the most beautiful cities upon the American Continent? It is even so. What renders it beautiful? It is not because all the houses have been joined house to house, and story piled on story. No; that does not add to the beauty of a city. That is after the fashion of old Babylon, or like the cities of the nations. They, it is true, build some very superb buildings, of the most beautiful and costly materials—granite and marble stone, magnificent in style, and adorned with all the beauties of modern architecture. We see this in the cities of the eastern states, in old England, on the Continent of Europe, and wherever modern civilization extends; but what is all this when compared to the beauty of our habitations? When emerging from Parley's Canyon in the stage, I put my head out of the window to look for the city of Great Salt Lake, but it was so completely shrouded in trees that I could scarcely get a glimpse of it. Now and then I caught sight of a chimney peeping out above the stately shade trees and smiling orchards; I could also see this great tabernacle

that you are now building, towering up, like a little mountain; but it was impossible to get a full view of the city generally, it was so completely covered with orchards and ornamental shade trees. I thought to myself that I never saw a grander sight. Where did these trees come from? You brought them down from the mountains, then little saplings; many of you brought them on your shoulders, others piled them on their wagons, and then you set them out on land that had the appearance of being a parched desert, and in soil that to all human appearance was unproductive. And during the twenty years that have rolled over your heads, you have beautified this city, and made it a paradise. It surpasses all the cities of the east in beauty, and your industry is spoken of abroad as something wonderful and marvelous. For a people without capital driven from their former homes, having nothing, as it were, but bone and sinew, to bring to pass the marvels we now behold, is considered without a parallel.

But David says, that this people, gathered from all nations, who would find no city to dwell in, should finally prepare a city for habitation. Thank you, brethren, for having fulfilled the prophecy. Many other things, in this same Psalm, are now being fulfilled. The inspired psalmist predicts that the Lord would cause waters to break out in the wilderness, and in the desert springs of water, and that the thirsty ground should become pools of water. Has this been fulfilled? What aspect is presented over the country, for miles and miles around, when you irrigate your farming lands? Do you cast your eyes over them sometimes, and see standing pools of water? If you do you behold the fulfillment of the psalm. In the twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah—the very place where this book (the Book of Mormon) is spoken of, and the marvelous work that should be accomplished by its means, we also read that a forest “shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest.” David also says, that you were not only to make a city for habitation, but you were to plant vineyards, sow fields, and eat the increase thereof, and he would not suffer your cattle to decrease.

I have been gone about three years, and I would like to inquire of those who keep cattle, whether they are on the increase in this Territory? I think if they were to answer they would say they are. Brother Kimball says the Territory is perfectly alive with them, and I have no doubt that the hills, mountains, and valleys are sprinkled over with them, and that they are on the increase. This is what David says—“He suffers not their cattle to decrease;” and he also informs us that that barren, thirsty land, that solitary place, that wilderness through which His people should be led, should become, as it were, a fruitful field—this you know has been literally fulfilled. We are further informed that “blessed are they who sow beside all waters and send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.” How do you farm in this land? You answer, by the side of the water streams. They do not farm in this way in the old countries, but wherever they find a beautiful piece of soil, whether on mountain or plain, they convert it into a farm, it is no matter if it be many miles from the water. But Isaiah saw that this people would be put in possession of a land where it would be necessary to “sow beside all waters,” and in passing up and down this Territory it is universally the case that all our farming lands are located alongside the water streams which come out of the mountains.

Do you want a blessing, brethren? If you do, Isaiah has given you one, for he exclaims, “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.” David also declares, in the Psalm already referred to, that “He setteth the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.” What does the Psalmist mean? Does he mean to say that the families of a poor man who has been gathered should increase like a flock? This is what he predicts; why do the world find fault with it? Are there not some faultfinders? I hope not. Br. Kimball says they are all dead; if so, it is to be hoped that we will be troubled with them no more.

We should rejoice to think that God has brought us into this desert country, and made it so fruitful, like the Garden of Eden, where the poor man, who in the old countries could scarcely live, has, in the course of the twenty years, not only got flocks and herds, but “families” (for David actually puts in the plural) “like a flock.” To go around these valleys, and occasionally count the families of a poor man, is like counting a flock of sheep. Gentiles (we merely repeat the name they have given themselves) feel like finding fault with us in regard to this matter, but if we are satisfied, why should they find fault? If the poor man has been lifted up on high, just as David said he should be, and if the Lord has made him to have families like a flock, why should you find fault with this poor man? Is he not better off here than in the old countries, where for twelve or sixteen hours daily labor he received only eight shillings per week, for himself and family—and was scarcely able to keep body and soul together—living and dying in the most squalid poverty?

I cannot see any harm in the people coming to this distant land, and gathering around them flocks, and herds, and fields, and each multiplying his own families, till they resemble a flock. All seem to feel tolerably well about it. The wives of these poor men have smiling faces, and seem happy. I do not know but some of them quarrel, but that does not prove that the principle is not good and true. Monogamist families also quarrel sometimes, but you would not do away with marriage, and say that a man ought not to have one wife, because they pull hair occasionally. Why find fault, then, with the poor man David speaks about, whose families should be like a flock, because now and then one gets up a quarrel? The system is good; the quarrel is no part of the system, but is a violation of it, and is the introduction of discord into that which the Lord intended to harmonize. Plurality of wives is something a little different from what our fathers have taught us, and it will take us a little while to learn this ancient scriptural order. You would not find fault with a little child because it did not learn the alphabet, spelling lessons, and get into reading in one day. Let all have a chance to learn by experience, and by that which God has revealed in ancient and modern times, to rule, govern, and control these great flocks and families so that they may be worthy to rule in the Kingdom of God.

There are many curious things written in the ancient prophecies and in the writings of the Psalmist. The people abroad in the world generally think a great deal of what David said. There are some churches so pious that they would not have a hymn, composed in modern times, sung by their congregations. They would think their chapels were polluted by singing a hymn composed by any poet or poetess in these days. You may think I am misrepresenting them, but I am not. You go to Scotland if you wish to see the truth of these words. Will the Scotch Presbyterians permit hymns of their own composition to be sung in their sanctuaries? No; what do they substitute? The Psalms of David—the man after God’s own heart, who was so righteous when but a boy that God was with him, and who, long before he was raised to the throne of Israel, and while yet a youth, as it were, had eight wives, and into whose bosom God afterwards gave all the wives of his master Saul. This man knew how to make psalms, for he made them by inspiration for the Scotch Church to sing; he understood it, and when he looked upon and realized what a flock of wives and children he had, he no doubt felt a glow of pleasure in anticipation of the time when the same order should be established among that people who were to be gathered from all lands. When have any people ever fulfilled these ancient prophecies if this people are not doing it now.

Go back, now, historians, and tell us what people have ever fulfilled these sayings, except the Latter-day Saints. Did the ancient church ever fulfil these prophecies? No; why not? Because the dispensation of gathering had not then come. They were commanded to build up churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and various parts of the earth, and when they had built up these churches they were permitted to stay at home. David says the people of God are to be gathered from all lands, and we see that it was not done by the ancient church. Now come down from the days of the introduction of Christianity into Palestine to the present period and place your finger, if you can, on a people who have fulfilled these prophecies. You can find nothing that has had the appearance of it until the appearance of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Since his day you can see what the Lord has done in sending abroad His missionaries, as swift messengers, to preach the gospel to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, baptizing all who would repent, and building up churches to His holy name, then proclaiming in the ears of all the Saints, “Go from all these nations to the great western hemisphere, locate yourselves on the high portions of the North American Continent in the midst of the mountains, and be gathered in one, that you may fulfil the prophecies that have been uttered concerning you.” When we see this, we see God fulfilling that which He spake many long centuries ago. And the work is still rolling on, just as fast as the wheels of time can roll it. The Prophet Isaiah, in the 35th chapter, says “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

Latter-day Saints lift up your hearts and rejoice with joy unspeakable, for you are the very ones who have the privilege of fulfilling this, you see it directly before you. Has this prophecy been fulfilled here? Was there a wilderness here? Was there a desert here, and does it blossom as the rose? I was not here this spring, but I will venture to say that if I had been within three miles of this city, in April or May, I should have seen, for five or six square miles, peach, pear, plum, and apple trees all in bloom, literally making the wilderness to blossom as the rose. What a miracle compared with twenty years ago, when I stood, solitary and alone, by the side of City Creek, near this temple block, and surveyed the scene! The prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled, thanks be to Him who

rules, controls, and guides all these things.

If there ever was a people that needed blessings, it seems to me that the Latter-day Saints are the ones. How much you have suffered in years past and gone! How great have been your trials for the truth's sake! How great your exertions to gather out from among the nations of the earth! How great has been your toil in this desert country to fulfil these prophecies! God bless you, and your generations for evermore, and give you a hundred fold, besides these valleys, to make you and your posterity rejoice, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.