

# GOSPEL DOCTRINE Lesson 32: “To Seal the Testimony”

(D&C 135)

**LESSON GOAL:** To teach us about the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and to strengthen our testimonies of his calling as a prophet of God

The Saints prospered for a few years in Nauvoo. The Church and the city grew rapidly, rivaling Chicago in size, as work on the temple progressed, and the Prophet Joseph Smith received many revelations. However, during 1843 and 1844, animosity against the Church increased. Enemies both inside and outside the Church began trying to destroy it. This opposition climaxed on 27 June 1844. The martyrdom was the most tragic event in the Church’s early history. However, it was not unexpected.

## 1. God protected Joseph Smith until his earthly mission was complete.

**August 1842, Joseph Smith:** “My feelings at the present time are that, inasmuch as the Lord Almighty has preserved me until today, He will continue **to preserve me**, by the united faith and prayers of the Saints, **until I have fully accomplished my mission in this life**, and so firmly established the dispensation of the fullness of the priesthood in the last days, **that all the powers of earth and hell can never prevail against it**” (*History of the Church* 5:139-140).

**October 1843, the Prophet said:** “I defy all the world to destroy the work of God; and I prophesy **they never will have power to kill me till my work is accomplished**, and I am ready to die” (*History of the Church*, 6:58).

**May 1844, the Prophet said:** “God will always protect me **until my mission is fulfilled**” (*History of the Church*, 6:365).

**June 1844, the Prophet said:** “I do not regard my own life. **I am ready to be offered a sacrifice** for this people; for what can our enemies do? Only kill the body, and their power is then at an end. **Stand firm, my friends; never flinch.** Do not seek to save your lives, for **he that is afraid to die for the truth, will lose eternal life.** Hold out to the end, and we shall be resurrected and become like Gods, and reign in celestial kingdoms, principalities, and eternal dominions” (*History of the Church*, 6:500).

**Early on June 27, 1844, in Carthage Jail, Joseph Smith wrote in a hasty letter to Emma Smith:** “I am very much resigned to my lot, knowing I am justified and have done the best that could be done. Give my love to the children and all my friends ... ; and as for treason, I know that I have not committed any, and they cannot prove one appearance of anything of the kind, so you need not have any fears that any harm can happen to us on that score. May God bless you all. Amen”

**D&C 5:22** And that you be firm in keeping the commandments wherewith I have commanded you; and if you do this, **behold I grant unto you eternal life, even if you should be slain.**

**D&C 6:30** And even if they do unto you even as they have done unto me, **blessed are ye, for you shall dwell with me in glory.**

## 2. The Prophet Joseph Smith sealed his testimony with his blood.

**D&C 135:4-6:** “When Joseph went to Carthage to deliver himself up to the pretended requirements of the law, two or three days previous to his assassination, he said: ‘I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer’s morning; I have a conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men. I shall die innocent, and it shall yet be said of me—he was murdered in cold blood.’—The same morning, after Hyrum had made ready to go—shall it be said to the slaughter? yes, for so it was—he read the following paragraph, near the close of the twelfth chapter of Ether, in the Book of Mormon, and turned down the leaf upon it:

*“And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity. And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, **thou hast been faithful; wherefore thy garments shall be made clean.** And because thou hast seen thy weakness, thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place, which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father. And now I ... bid farewell unto the Gentiles; yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know **that my garments are not spotted with your blood.**”* The testators are now dead, and their testament is in force. (Ether 12:36–38)

“Hyrum Smith was forty-four years old in February, 1844, and Joseph Smith was **thirty-eight** in December, 1843; and henceforward their names will be classed among the martyrs of religion; and the reader in every nation will be reminded that the Book of Mormon, and this book of Doctrine and Covenants of the church, cost the best blood of the nineteenth century to bring them forth **for the salvation of a ruined world**; and that **if the fire can scathe a green tree for the glory of God, how easy it will burn up the dry trees to purify the vineyard of corruption.** They lived for glory; they died for glory; and glory is their eternal reward. **From age to age shall their names go down to posterity as gems for the sanctified.**”

## Two Minutes in Jail

Elder Willard Richards, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and a close friend of the Prophet, was present at the jail during the mob's attack and gave this account, which begins as the mob arrived just after 5:00 pm on 27 June 1844:

"A shower of musket balls were thrown up the stairway against the door of the prison in the second story, followed by many rapid footsteps...A ball was sent through the door, which passed between us, and showed that our enemies were desperados... Joseph Smith, Mr. Taylor, and myself sprang back to the front part of the room, and...Hyrum Smith retreated two-thirds across the chamber directly in front of and facing the door. A ball was sent through the door which hit Hyrum on the side of his nose, when he fell backwards, extended at length, without moving his feet. From the holes in his [clothing], it appears evident that a ball must have been thrown from without, through the window, which entered his back on the right side, and passing through, lodged against his watch ...

At the same instant the ball from the door entered his nose. As he struck the floor, he exclaimed emphatically, "I am a dead man." Joseph looked towards him and responded, 'Oh, dear brother Hyrum!' and opening the door two or three inches with his left hand, discharged one barrel of a six shooter (pistol) at random in the entry...A ball [from a musket of one of the mob] grazed Hyrum's breast, and entering his throat passed into his head, while other muskets were aimed at him and some balls hit him. Joseph continued snapping his revolver round the casing of the door into the space as before..., while Mr. Taylor with a walking stick stood by his side and knocked down the bayonets and muskets which were constantly discharged through the doorway ...

When the revolver failed, we had no more firearms, and expected an immediate rush of the mob, and the doorway full of muskets, half way in the room, and no hope but instant death from within. Mr. Taylor rushed into the window, which is some fifteen or twenty feet from the ground. When his body was nearly on balance, a ball from the door within entered his leg, and a ball from without struck his watch...in his vest pocket near the left breast, ... the force of which ball threw him back on the floor, and he rolled under the bed which stood by his side ...

Joseph attempted, a the last resort, to leap [from] the same window from whence Mr. Taylor fell, when two balls pierced him from the door, and one entered his right breast from without, and he fell outward, exclaiming, 'Oh Lord, my God!' ... He fell on his left side a dead man ...

At this instant the cry was raised, "He's leaping the window!" and the mob on the stairs and in the entry way ran out. I ... caught Mr. Taylor under my arm and rushed by the stairs into the dungeon, or inner prison, stretched him on the floor and covered him with a bed in such a manner as not likely to perceived, expecting an immediate return of the mob. I said to Mr. Taylor, "This is a hard case to lay you on the floor, but if your wounds are not fatal, I want you to live to tell the story." I expected to be shot the next moment, and stood before the door, awaiting the onset" (*History of the Church*, 6:619-21).

Willard Richards' life was spared in fulfillment of a prophecy given by Joseph Smith more than a year before in which Joseph told him that "the time would come that the balls would fly around him like hail, and he should see his hands fall on the right and on the left, but that there should not be a hole in his garment" (*History of the Church*, VI, 619).

**Wilford Woodruff testified:** "I used to have peculiar feelings about his death and the way in which his life was taken. I felt that if ... Joseph could have had his desire, he would have pioneered the way to the Rocky Mountains. But since then I have been fully reconciled to the fact that **it was according to the program, that it was required of him**, as the head of this dispensation, that **he should seal his testimony with his blood**, and go hence to the spirit world, holding the keys of this dispensation, to open up the mission that is now being performed by way of preaching the Gospel to the 'spirits in prison.'" (*Deseret News*, March 28, 1883, 146).

**President Gordon B. Hinckley:** "So certain was [Joseph Smith] of the cause he led, **so sure of his divinely given calling**, that he placed them above the value of his own life. With prescient knowledge of his forthcoming death, he surrendered himself to those who would deliver him defenseless into the hands of a mob. **He sealed his testimony with his life's blood**" (*Conference Report*, Oct. 1981; *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 7).

### **3. The Prophet Joseph Smith did more for the salvation of men in this world than anyone except Jesus.**

Joseph Smith's work blessed the Saints of this dispensation, but also the billions of people who have lived at all other times without receiving the blessings of the gospel or the saving ordinances of the priesthood.

**We can better appreciate the Prophet's life and mission**

**when we review how his many contributions bless our daily lives and will bless us eternally.**

## Truths about the Godhead

**D&C 130:22** The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us. A man may receive the Holy Ghost, and it may descend upon him and not tarry with him.

In a sermon given at the funeral of Elder King Follett on 7 April 1844, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

"God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, **you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man**; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 345).

**Bruce R. McConkie**: "Knowledge of God is the greatest truth in all eternity. ... Joseph Smith came to reveal God, in a day of almost total spiritual darkness, in a day when men no longer knew the nature and kind of Being whom they should worship" ("This Generation Shall Have My Word through You," *Ensign*, June 1980, 55).

## The authority of the priesthood

Through the prophet Joseph Smith, heavenly messengers restored the Aaronic Priesthood, the Melchizedek Priesthood, and the keys of the priesthood. Then, the Lord gave revelations about priesthood offices, organization, covenants, ordinances, duties, and blessings. Without those revelations, we would not understand the priesthood power or its operations.

**D&C 110:11-16**: "... **Moses** appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north. After this, **Elias** appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed. After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for **Elijah** the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said: Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of **Malachi**—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come— To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—Therefore, **the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands**; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors."

## Truths about our origin and relationship to God

**D&C 76:23-24**: For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—**That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.**

**Abraham 3:22-25**: Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, **the intelligences that were organized before the world was**; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: **We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.**"

## Scriptures

**Elder Gordon B. Hinckley**, while serving in the Quorum of the Twelve: "[Joseph Smith] translated and published the **Book of Mormon, a volume of 522 pages** which has since been retranslated into [many] languages and which is accepted by millions across the earth as the word of God. **The revelations he received and other writings he produced are likewise scripture to these millions.** The total in book pages constitutes the equivalent of almost the entire Old Testament of the Bible, and it came through one man in the space of a few years" (*Ensign*, May 1977, 65).

## Truths about the plan of salvation

**The plan of salvation can be divided into three parts:**

**Premortal life**--Heavenly Father chose and foreordained noble spirits to carry forth His work on the earth

**Mortal life**--Because of our faithfulness, we gained the opportunity to come to earth, which is our "second estate"

**Life after death**--We will inherit a place in the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, or the telestial kingdom based on the manner in which we have "received the testimony of Jesus"

## Truths about the salvation of the dead

The Prophet taught that those who died without an opportunity to receive gospel ordinances and covenants would have an opportunity to accept or reject these ordinances and blessings just as if they had had the opportunity in this life. He also taught that we need our dead and they need us for the whole human family to be joined together as the Father intended.

**D&C 128:18:** "It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. Neither can they nor we be made perfect without those who have died in the gospel also; for it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time."

## The building of temples and the performance of temple ordinances

The receipt of endowments and the sealing of families together forever were revealed through Joseph so that we might enjoy the blessings of eternal families.

## Other contributions of Joseph Smith

- a. The Church was restored through him.
- b. He began the work in this dispensation of taking the gospel to all nations and gathering Israel.
- c. The law of consecration was revealed through him.
- d. The Word of Wisdom was revealed through him.
- e. Information about the building of the latter-day Zion was revealed through him.
- f. He wrote the Articles of Faith:

The Articles of Faith were written by the Prophet Joseph Smith as part of a letter to John Wentworth, a newspaper editor in Chicago who had requested a statement on the Church's history and beliefs. They were later canonized as scripture in the Pearl of Great Price.

**President Spencer W. Kimball:** "How many of you know the Articles of Faith? ... Do you know them? Have you repeated them? **You are always prepared with a sermon when you know the Articles of Faith.** And they are basic, aren't they? I would think it would be a wonderful thing if [we] would learn them word-perfect. That means that you don't miss and you don't forget" (Conference Report, Ensign, Nov. 1975, 79).

**Gordon B. Hinckley:** "How great indeed is our debt to [Joseph Smith] ... It was he who brought us a true knowledge of God, the Eternal Father, and His Risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ ... He brought us the marvelous Book of Mormon as another witness for the living reality of the Son of God. ... Through him were restored the keys of the holy temples, that men and women might enter into eternal covenants with God and that the great work for the dead might be accomplished to open the way for eternal blessings" (A Season for Gratitude," Ensign, Dec. 1997, 2).

## Questions to deepen our insights and testimonies of Joseph Smith:

1. What have you thought about, realized, pondered about Joseph Smith today?
2. What impresses you the most about Joseph Smith?
3. What contributions has Joseph Smith made to your own life?
4. Why is it important to have a personal testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God?
5. How did your testimony of Joseph Smith's calling develop?
6. How can you strengthen your testimony of Joseph Smith as a prophet?
7. How can you show your gratitude for the life and mission of Joseph Smith?