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Joseph Smith—History 1:1-26

“I SAW A PILLAR OF LIGHT”

Summary:

EXTRACTS FROM THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET

Joseph Smith—History 1; 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

How did Joseph Smith follow an ancient pattern of man seeking God’s guidance?

Joseph Smith relates: “While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* 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 . . .” (**Joseph Smith—History 1:11-12**) That pattern is the motivating factor in Biblical persons being called of God. For example, Patriarch Abraham had taught his servant Eliezer to “Ask of God” when he went to seek a wife for Abraham’s son, Isaac. “The Lord, before whom walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way;” (**Genesis 24:40**) “Eliezer said, “O Lord God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go . . .” (**Genesis 24:42**) The Proverbial counsel invites us to; “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy

paths. (**Proverbs 3:5-6**) In his Biblical upbringing, Joseph Smith related to this counsel; “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.” (**Proverbs 16:20-21**) In the New Testament, James added; “. . . let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (**James 1:6**)

How does Joseph Smith’s first vision match the oldest Biblical reference to “Gods” in the plural?

Asking God, “What is truth?” The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come. (**Doctrine and Covenants 93:24**) Another Prophet in the Book of Mormon wrote: “Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men; for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old.” (**Jacob 4:13**) Truth—being eternal is always the same. It makes sense to find the oldest statement of a doctrine and compare it to today’s. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of

the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (**Genesis 1:26**) The word “Elohim in Hebrew is plural. The God is “El,” the God’s is Elohim, (male plural).

What are occasions of visions throughout biblical history?

The phenomenon of heavenly visions 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,” (Balam). 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.**) When visions and revelations were interrupted for a time, because the people were not worthy of accepting such divine manifestations, their importance faded and hope for future revelation diminished.

What profound truth was restored in modern times?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints clearly states an eternal truth, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” (**Articles of Faith 1:1**) “These three beings make up the Godhead. They preside over this world and all other creations of our Father in Heaven. Latter-day Saints view the members of the Godhead in a manner that corresponds in a number of ways with the views of others in the Christian world, but with significant differences. Latter-day Saints pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. They acknowledge the Father as the ultimate object of their worship, the Son as Lord and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the messenger and revealer of the Father and the Son. But where Latter-day Saints differ from other Christian religions is in their belief that God and Jesus Christ are glorified, physical beings and that each member of the Godhead is a separate being. The true doctrine of the Godhead was lost in the apostasy that followed the Savior’s mortal ministry and the deaths of His Apostles. This doctrine began to be restored when 14-year-old Joseph Smith received his First vision.” (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/godhead?lang=eng>) Recorded in (**Joseph Smith—History 1:17**) “It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other— *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”