



Type: Book Chapter

---

## Fitness in the Development of the New Dispensation

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

Source: *New Witnesses for God: Volume I - Joseph Smith, The Prophet*

Published: Salt Lake City; Deseret News, 1911 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

Pages: 221-227

---

---

## CHAPTER XV.

### FITNESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW DISPENSATION.

Having considered the objections urged against Joseph Smith and ascertained their value, I am now prepared to proceed with the testimony and argument which sustain my fourth thesis; viz:—Joseph Smith is a New Witness for God, a Prophet divinely authorized to teach the gospel and establish the Church of Christ on earth.

I have already argued at some length that the only way the gospel could be restored to the earth when once taken from it was by a new revelation. It was upon the principle of revelation that Jesus promised to build his church; it was through the ministration of an angel that the Apostle John foresaw that the gospel would be restored in the hour of God's judgment; and it was at this particular point that Joseph Smith started, thus differing from all other religious teachers who have arisen in modern times.

He appealed to God for wisdom, as we have seen; and that appeal brought a revelation from God the Father, who introduced his Son Jesus Christ. The lad was informed that God accepted none of the religious societies as his church or kingdom, but was promised that the Church of Christ would be restored to the earth and that he should be an instrument in the hands of the Lord in bringing the event to pass.<sup>a</sup> Subsequently, the angel Moroni visited him, revealing the existence of the Book of Mormon and finally giving it into his hands to translate into the English language. This book it-

---

<sup>a</sup> Wentworth Letter, "History of the Church," Vol. IV, p. 535 et seq.

self contains the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ as taught to the ancient inhabitants of the western hemisphere; but in addition to this the angel Moroni met with Joseph Smith at the hill Cumorah on the 22nd of September for four successive years, and from him, at each of the annual meetings, he “received instruction and intelligence \* \* \* respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.”<sup>b</sup> Thus Joseph Smith started right. He started upon the only principle that the church could again be re-established; he received the gospel through the ministration of an angel—in just the manner a recognized prophet of God had foretold it would be restored.

All this, however, I may be told, was but a bold stroke of genius on the part of a bold imposter. That might answer for an explanation if it were not for the fact that it all happened in connection with a youth not yet parted from the innocence of childhood. Then, again, why is it, if this happiness on the part of Joseph Smith in starting right is to be attributed to the master stroke of genius—why is it that some one of the many imposters who have arisen among Christians, and founded sects, have not hit upon the plan of announcing a new revelation from God and the restoration of the gospel through the ministration of an angel? Surely among the many imposters and “reformers” who have arisen since the days of Jesus there have been some who were not lacking that which men recognize as genius! Why was it left for a mere lad in the wilds of Western New York to display more “genius” than all the imposters since the days of Christ? The fact that one so unsophisticated in the ways of the world had the boldness to announce a new revelation to the world, and proclaim a restoration of the gospel through the ministration

---

<sup>b</sup> Pearl of Great Price, p. 94.

of an angel, carries on the face of it much evidence of its truth.

Not only, however, did our Prophet start right but he continued right. He not only received the gospel through the ministration of an angel; but he received his authority to preach it, administer its ordinances and build up the Church of Christ from those who last held the keys of that authority on earth. From John who, when on earth, was called the Baptist, now raised from the dead and become an angel of God,<sup>c</sup> he received the Aaronic Priesthood, which gave him power to preach repentance and baptize for the remission of sins; from Peter, James and John, the three chief apostles of the dispensation, ushered in by the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus, he received the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood—the Holy Apostleship, which gave him power to establish the church of Christ to the uttermost and regulate all its affairs; from Moses he received the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four quarters of the earth and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north;<sup>d</sup> from Elijah the keys of the priesthood to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, according to the prediction of Malachi.<sup>e</sup>

Thus he was called and ordained of God through divinely appointed agents as was Aaron, and therefore fulfilled the law which provides that those who minister for men in things pertaining to God, must be called of God as Aaron was, by prophecy and revelation.

---

<sup>c</sup> And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, see thou do it not. I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren, that have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev. xix: 10). John's account of the visitation of an angel to him; and he was John's fellow servant, had lived on earth and had received the testimony of Jesus as John had.

<sup>d</sup> Doc. and Cov. Sec. cx.

<sup>e</sup> Doc. and Cov. Sec. cx.

In this development of the work of God, one sees a fitness of things. Look for a moment at the work God has proposed to himself to accomplish. The time has come for the restoration of the gospel; for the re-establishment of his church; for the ushering in of the dispensation of the fullness of times in which he has promised to gather together in one all things in Christ, "both which are in heaven, and which are on earth."<sup>f</sup> A reign of peace, a reign of righteousness is about to be inaugurated—the Millennium which the scriptures promised—long looked for by earth's troubled children—despaired of—given up—is about to be realized! The remnant of Israel is to be gathered to Zion; Jerusalem is to be established, no more to be thrown down; the nations are to beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more—the earth is to rest from its wickedness. To bring this to pass, the co-operation of man is necessary—his obedience, his righteousness. To secure that obedience, that co-operation, faith is needed; and as faith is based on evidence, God proceeds to create the evidence by bringing a witness into existence who can not only testify of God's existence, but also of his purposes. He then enlarges the evidence by bringing forth the Book of Mormon, the voice of entire nations of people speaking out of the dust of ages, testifying that the Lord is God, that Jesus is the Christ, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation; and by thus increasing the evidence the foundation for faith was enlarged; and by establishing faith in the hearts of men the seed of obedience was planted. For faith is the incentive to action, the cause of obedience, and the foundation of all righteousness.

When the work reached that stage of development that

---

<sup>f</sup> Eph. i: 10.

men could be taught repentance, and receive baptism for the remission of sins, who so qualified or who with more propriety could be sent to deliver the keys of the priesthood that is especially appointed to cry repentance and administer baptism than *the* teacher of repentance and *the* Baptist? Or, when the time came for the restoration of the apostleship, who could restore it save those who last held the keys of it on earth—Peter, James and John? Who so fit to restore the keys of the gathering of Israel and leading the ten tribes back from the north as Moses, the great prophet of Israel? Who so fitting to restore the keys of the priesthood which should turn the hearts of the fathers and children towards each other as Elijah, of whom it was prophesied that he would do that work?<sup>g</sup> Thus throughout there was a fitness in the development of the great work of God in the last days—an appropriateness to be observed in the personages employed to restore the keys of authority which opened up the several departments of the great dispensation. And it is to be observed, too, that this fitness of things as here pointed out was not the result of working to a well-matured plan in the mind of Joseph Smith; he was too young and too inexperienced to preconceive it all and then set himself at work to unfold it in such beautiful order. It was of course working to a well-matured plan, but the plan existed in the mind of God; and it was given to Joseph Smith piece-meal—incident following incident without an apparent suspicion in his mind that each incident was a step in the progress of the mighty march of events matured in the mind of God—each key of authority, or part of the gospel but a fragment of a mighty and consistent whole that God was unfolding. The consistency and appropriateness of the development Joseph Smith never spoke of; it was left for others to note these things after the work

---

<sup>g</sup> Malachi iv: 5, 6.

was well advanced in the course of its development. The Prophet received the messengers God sent to him, and under their instruction proceeded with the unfoldment of the purposes of the Lord, and left it to others to admire the work and note the evidences of God's directing hand in the order of the events and the appropriateness of the parties entrusted with the introduction of the various departments of it.

I am not claiming for this appropriateness in the development of the work of the Lord, as thus far seen, absolute proof that Joseph Smith was divinely inspired and commissioned of God, it is only one item of the cumulative evidence, and the inference but part of the cumulative argument it is my purpose to present; but certainly as part of such evidence and argument it is not insignificant. To see the strength of it, one needs to think what the pretensions of Joseph Smith would amount to, if this fitness of things did not exist. Having affirmed that the gospel had been taken from the earth and the church of Christ destroyed, suppose he had claimed to have obtained the former and founded the latter upon any other basis than through a revelation from God; how easy it would have been to show both from reason and from scripture, that the only way the gospel and the church could be re-established, would be by a new dispensation from God through a new revelation! Had he claimed to have received the gospel through any other means than by the ministration of an angel, how easy it would be to confound him and his followers, by showing that a recognized prophet of God had predicted its restoration in the hour of God's judgment through an angel! Had he claimed to have received divine authority in any other manner than through a revelation, and the ordination of one already known to hold authority from God, how easy it would have been to refute his claim by quoting the law of God to the effect that no man taketh the honor

of administering in things pertaining to God upon himself, except he that is called of God as was Aaron!<sup>h</sup> But when in all these things it is seen that the pretensions of Joseph Smith were parallel with both reason and the prophecies and laws of scripture, and that there is a propriety in all the heavenly messengers doing just what Joseph Smith claims they did—because of their known relation to the work of God in former dispensations—it all forms a strong presumptive evidence, at least, that his claims are genuine—that he was called of God.

---

<sup>h</sup> Heb. v. 4-10.