



The Organization and Destiny of the True and Living Church

“You know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. You don’t comprehend it. . . . This Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In June 1829, the Prophet Joseph Smith completed the translation of the Book of Mormon. “Our translation drawing to a close,” the Prophet stated, “we went to Palmyra, Wayne county, New York, secured the copyright, and agreed with Mr. Egbert B. Grandin to print five thousand copies for the sum of three thousand dollars.”¹ Egbert B. Grandin was a young man, a year younger than Joseph Smith, who owned a printing shop in Palmyra. He had just purchased a new press with technology that made the printing process considerably faster. It was remarkable that the Prophet was able to find a printer in the rural town of Palmyra capable of printing so many copies of a lengthy volume like the Book of Mormon. Because printing the Book of Mormon was such a large and expensive project, Martin Harris mortgaged his farm to Mr. Grandin to ensure payment of the printing costs.

In the late summer of 1829, Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and several others gathered at the printing shop to inspect the proof of the title page of the Book of Mormon, the first page of the book to be printed. When the Prophet declared that he was pleased with the appearance of the page, the printing went forward as quickly as possible. The work took about seven months to complete, and copies of the Book of Mormon were made available to the public on March 26, 1830.



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With the work of translating and publishing the Book of Mormon now completed, Joseph Smith moved forward to organize the Church. In the revelation now found in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord revealed to the Prophet “the precise day upon which, according to His will and commandment, we should proceed to organize His Church once more here upon the earth.”² The day specified was April 6, 1830.

“We . . . made known to our brethren,” the Prophet said, “that we had received a commandment to organize the Church; and accordingly we met together for that purpose, at the house of Mr. Peter Whitmer, Sen., (being six in number,) on Tuesday, the sixth day of April, A.D., one thousand eight hundred and thirty.”³ Approximately 60 people crowded into the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, completely filling two rooms in the home. Six of the men present were identified as the incorporators of the new Church in order to fulfill the law of New York—the Prophet Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Peter Whitmer Jr., Samuel Smith, and David Whitmer.⁴

Although the Church was very small in the beginning, Joseph Smith had a prophetic sense of its grand destiny. Wilford Woodruff recalled that during a priesthood meeting at Kirtland, Ohio, in April 1834, the Prophet tried to awaken the brethren to a realization of the future state of God’s kingdom on earth:

“The Prophet called on all who held the Priesthood to gather into the little log school house they had there. It was a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. But it held the whole of the Priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were then in the town of Kirtland. . . . When we got together the Prophet called upon the Elders of Israel with him to bear testimony of this work. . . . When they got through the Prophet said, ‘Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. You don’t comprehend it.’ I was rather surprised. He said, ‘It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world.’ ”⁵

Teachings of Joseph Smith

The true Church of Jesus Christ was organized by Joseph Smith in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

Joseph Smith reported the events of the meeting held on April 6, 1830, to organize the Church: “Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father, we proceeded, according to previous commandment, to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these several propositions they consented by a unanimous vote.

“I then laid my hands upon Oliver Cowdery, and ordained him an Elder of the ‘Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints;’ after which, he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, and brake it with them; also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present, that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree—some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord, and rejoiced exceedingly. . . .

“We now proceeded to call out and ordain some others of the brethren to different offices of the Priesthood, according as the Spirit manifested unto us: and after a happy time spent in witnessing and feeling for ourselves the powers and blessings of the Holy Ghost, through the grace of God bestowed upon us, we dismissed with the pleasing knowledge that we were now individually members of, and acknowledged of God, ‘The Church of Jesus Christ,’ organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by Him to ourselves in these last days, as well as according to the order of the Church as recorded in the New Testament.”⁶

At the first general conference of the Church, held in Fayette, New York, on June 9, 1830, the sacrament was administered, several people were confirmed members of the Church, others

*were ordained to offices in the priesthood, and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Saints. The Prophet Joseph Smith recorded: “Such scenes as these were calculated to inspire our hearts with joy unspeakable, and fill us with awe and reverence for that Almighty Being, by whose grace we had been called to be instrumental in bringing about, for the children of men, the enjoyment of such glorious blessings as were now at this time poured out upon us. To find ourselves engaged in the very same order of things as observed by the holy Apostles of old; to realize the importance and solemnity of such proceedings; and to witness and feel with our own natural senses, the like glorious manifestations of the powers of the Priesthood, the gifts and blessings of the Holy Ghost, and the goodness and condescension of a merciful God unto such as obey the everlasting Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, combined to create within us sensations of rapturous gratitude, and inspire us with fresh zeal and energy in the cause of truth.”*⁷

Christ’s Church is organized according to the order of God.

“Christ was the head of the Church, the chief cornerstone, the spiritual rock upon which the Church was built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it [see Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20]. He built up the Kingdom, chose Apostles and ordained them to the Melchizedek Priesthood, giving them power to administer in the ordinances of the gospel.”⁸

“ ‘Christ . . . gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers’ [Ephesians 4:11]. And how were Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists chosen? By prophecy (revelation) and by laying on of hands:—by a divine communication, and a divinely appointed ordinance—through the medium of the Priesthood, organized according to the order of God, by divine appointment.”⁹

“[The Book of Mormon] tells us that our Savior made His appearance upon this [the American] continent after His resurrection; that He planted the Gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing; that they had Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, and Evangelists; the same order, the same

priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessings, as were enjoyed on the eastern continent.”¹⁰

“An evangelist is a Patriarch. . . . Wherever the Church of Christ is established in the earth, there should be a Patriarch for the benefit of the posterity of the Saints, as it was with Jacob in giving his patriarchal blessing unto his sons.”¹¹

Articles of Faith 1:6: “We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.”¹²



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was formally organized by the Prophet Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830, at the home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette, New York. The latter-day Church is organized in the same way as the Church in the Savior’s time, with “apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.”

The Church is led by the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Quorums of the Seventy.

“I firmly believe in the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, and speak as one having authority among them, and not as the scribes.”¹³

“The Presidents or [First] Presidency are over the Church; and revelations of the mind and will of God to the Church, are to come through the Presidency. This is the order of heaven, and the power and privilege of [the Melchizedek] Priesthood.”¹⁴

“What importance is there attached to the calling of these Twelve Apostles, different from the other callings or officers of the Church? . . . They are the Twelve Apostles, who are called to the office of the Traveling High Council, who are to preside over the churches of the Saints. . . . They are to hold the keys of this ministry, to unlock the door of the Kingdom of heaven unto all nations, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. This is the power, authority, and virtue of their apostleship.”¹⁵

Orson Pratt, who served in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, reported: “The Lord . . . directed that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles should be organized, whose business it would be to preach the Gospel to the nations, to the Gentiles first and then to the Jews. The Priesthood were called together after the building of the Kirtland Temple, and, in speaking of the Twelve Apostles, the Prophet Joseph said they had received the Apostleship with all the powers pertaining to the same, just as the ancient Apostles.”¹⁶

Wilford Woodruff, the fourth President of the Church, reported: “Joseph called twelve Apostles. Who were they? The Lord said to him: ‘The twelve are they who shall desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart; and if they desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart, they are called to go into all the world to preach my gospel unto every creature.’ [D&C 18:27–28.] . . . When the Prophet Joseph organized the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he taught [the] principle of union to them. He gave them to understand that they must be of one heart and one mind, and they must take upon

themselves fully the name of Christ; that if God commanded them to do anything they must go and do it.”¹⁷

“The Seventies are to constitute traveling quorums, to go into all the earth, whithersoever the Twelve Apostles shall call them.”¹⁸

“The Seventies are not called to serve tables [see Acts 6:1–2], . . . but are to preach the Gospel and build [the churches] up, and set others, who do not belong to these quorums, to preside over [the churches], who are High Priests. The Twelve also are . . . to bear the keys of the Kingdom to all nations, and unlock the door of the Gospel to them, and call upon the Seventies to follow after them, and assist them.”¹⁹

Although the forces of evil may seek to destroy the Church, “no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing.”

“Since the organization of the Church of Christ, . . . on the 6th of April, 1830, we have had the satisfaction of witnessing the spread of the truth into various parts of our land, notwithstanding its enemies have exerted their unceasing diligence to stop its course and prevent its progress; though evil and designing men have combined to destroy the innocent, . . . yet the glorious Gospel in its fullness is spreading and daily gaining converts; and our prayer to God is, that it may continue, and numbers be added of such as shall be eternally saved.”²⁰

“The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”²¹

“And again, another parable put [the Savior] forth unto them, having an allusion to the Kingdom that should be set up just previous to or at the time of the harvest, which reads as follows—‘The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and

becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.' [Matthew 13:31–32.] Now we can discover plainly that this figure is given to represent the Church as it shall come forth in the last days. Behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto it. Now, what is like unto it?

“Let us take the Book of Mormon, which a man took and hid in his field, securing it by his faith, to spring up in the last days, or in due time; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth, yea, even towering with lofty branches and God-like majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven [see Psalm 85:11; Moses 7:62], and God is sending down His powers, gifts, and angels to lodge in the branches thereof.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a mustard seed. Behold, then, is not this the Kingdom of Heaven that is raising its head in the last days in the majesty of its God, even the Church of the Latter-day Saints, like an impenetrable, immovable rock in the midst of the mighty deep, exposed to the storms and tempests of Satan, that has, thus far, remained steadfast, and is still braving the mountain waves of opposition, which are driven by the tempestuous winds of sinking crafts, which have [dashed] and are still dashing with tremendous foam across its triumphant brow; urged onward with redoubled fury by the enemy of righteousness?”²²

As part of his prayer at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 109:72–76, the Prophet Joseph Smith said: “Remember all thy church, O Lord, with all their families, and all their immediate connections, with all their sick and afflicted ones, with all the poor and meek of the earth; that the kingdom, which thou hast set up without hands, may become a great mountain and fill the whole earth; that thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners; and be adorned as a bride for that day when thou shalt unveil the heavens, and cause the mountains to flow

down at thy presence, and the valleys to be exalted, the rough places made smooth; that thy glory may fill the earth; that when the trump shall sound for the dead, we shall be caught up in the cloud to meet thee, that we may ever be with the Lord; that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with robes of righteousness, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy for all our sufferings.”²³

We each have the responsibility to strengthen the Church and do our part in building up the kingdom of God.

“The cause of God is one common cause, in which the Saints are alike all interested; we are all members of the one common body, and all partake of the same spirit, and are baptized into one baptism and possess alike the same glorious hope. The advancement of the cause of God and the building up of Zion is as much one man’s business as another’s. The only difference is, that one is called to fulfill one duty, and another another duty; ‘but if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, and if one member is honored all the rest rejoice with it, and the eye cannot say to the ear, I have no need of thee, nor the head to the foot, I have no need of thee;’ party feelings, separate interests, exclusive designs should be lost sight of in the one common cause, in the interest of the whole [see 1 Corinthians 12:21, 26].”²⁴

“Brethren and sisters, be faithful, be diligent, contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints [see Jude 1:3]; let every man, woman and child realize the importance of the work, and act as if success depended on his individual exertion alone; let all feel an interest in it, and then consider they live in a day, the contemplation of which animated the bosoms of kings, Prophets, and righteous men thousands of years ago—the prospect of which inspired their sweetest notes, and most exalted lays, and caused them to break out in such rapturous strains as are recorded in the Scriptures; and by and by we will have to exclaim, in the language of inspiration—

“ ‘The Lord has brought again Zion,
The Lord hath redeemed His people Israel.’ [D&C 84:99.]”²⁵



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As recalled by Wilford Woodruff, Joseph Smith made the following declaration to members of the Twelve who were leaving for a mission to Great Britain in 1839: “No matter what may come upon you, round up your shoulders and bear it, and always sustain and defend the interests of the Church and Kingdom of God.”²⁶

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Imagine what it was like to attend the priesthood meeting described on page 137. How do you think you would have felt if you had heard Joseph Smith prophesy that the Church would someday fill the world? Looking back now on that prophecy, what are your thoughts or feelings?
- Review pages 138–39, noting the actions taken at the organization of the Church and the first general conference. Joseph

Smith said, “Such scenes as these were calculated to inspire our hearts with joy unspeakable, and fill us with awe and reverence for [God]” (page 139). When have you had the feelings Joseph Smith described?

- Review Joseph Smith’s teachings about the Church in Jesus’s day and in Book of Mormon times (pages 139–40). How does the Church follow the same pattern today?
- Why do you think we need leaders who preside over the worldwide Church? (For some examples, see pages 141–42.) How have you been blessed through the service of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the Quorums of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric?
- What are your thoughts or feelings as you read Joseph Smith’s prophecies about the Church’s destiny? (See pages 142–44.) In what ways can we participate in this work? (For some examples, see pages 144–45.)
- Joseph Smith taught, “Let every man, woman and child realize the importance of the work, and act as if success depended on his individual exertion alone” (page 144). Think about particular ways in which you can apply this counsel in your life.
- If someone asked you why you are a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what would you say?

Related Scriptures: Daniel 2:31–45; Mosiah 18:17–29; D&C 20:1–4; 65:1–6; 115:4–5

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 1:71; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 34, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *History of the Church*, 1:64; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 29, Church Archives.
3. *History of the Church*, 1:75–77; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 37, Church Archives.
4. New York law required from three to nine persons to organize or transact the business of a church. The Prophet chose to use six persons.
5. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, Apr. 1898, p. 57; punctuation and capitalization modernized.
6. *History of the Church*, 1:77–79; paragraph divisions altered; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, pp. 37–38, Church Archives.
7. *History of the Church*, 1:85–86; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 42, Church Archives.
8. Discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 23, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; Joseph Smith, Collection, Addresses, July 23, 1843, Church Archives.

9. *History of the Church*, 4:574; from “Try the Spirits,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 1, 1842, pp. 744–45; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
10. *History of the Church*, 4:538; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, pp. 707–8.
11. *History of the Church*, 3:381; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
12. Articles of Faith 1:6.
13. Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, p. 53; punctuation and capitalization modernized.
14. *History of the Church*, 2:477; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 6, 1837, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by *Messenger and Advocate*, Apr. 1837, p. 487.
15. *History of the Church*, 2:200; paragraph divisions altered; from the minutes of a Church council meeting held on Feb. 27, 1835, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by Oliver Cowdery.
16. Orson Pratt, *Millennial Star*, Nov. 10, 1869, p. 732.
17. Wilford Woodruff, *Deseret Weekly*, Aug. 30, 1890, p. 306; capitalization modernized.
18. *History of the Church*, 2:202; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book B-1, p. 577, Church Archives.
19. *History of the Church*, 2:431–32; from instructions given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 30, 1836, in Kirtland, Ohio.
20. *History of the Church*, 2:22; from “The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Apr. 1834, p. 152.
21. *History of the Church*, 4:540; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, p. 709.
22. *History of the Church*, 2:268; final bracketed word in original; punctuation, capitalization, and grammar modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the elders of the Church, Dec. 1835, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, p. 227.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 109:72–76; prayer offered by Joseph Smith on Mar. 27, 1836, at the dedication of the temple in Kirtland, Ohio.
24. *History of the Church*, 4:609; from “The Temple,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, May 2, 1842, p. 776; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
25. *History of the Church*, 4:214; from a report from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency, Oct. 4, 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 188.
26. Quoted by Wilford Woodruff, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Mar. 20, 1883, p. 1.