



In 1876, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a revised edition of the Doctrine and Covenants which included, for the first time, section 130. This section includes the founding leader Joseph Smith's prophecy that if Smith lived "until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man." In 1879, Apostle Orson Pratt added extensive cross-references and explanatory foot-notes for the publication of the English mission edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. One foot-note Pratt added to section 130 was a "prophecy" from a

meeting in Kirtland Ohio, on February 14, 1835, which is discussed below. This edition was reprinted in Salt Lake City and then officially canonized at the October 1880 general conference of the Church. The timing of these changes in the Doctrine and Covenants should not be underestimated. The belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ near Smith's eighty-fifth birthday was very real for Utah Mormons, of the time, and it seems to have worked as a coping mechanism in the face of general "persecution" as they perceived it on several fronts, including the abandonment of the practice of plural marriage.

On February 14, 1835, a meeting was held in Kirtland, Ohio to ordain the newly called Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who had previously been selected by the three witnesses. Smith was the first speaker at the meeting, and made a stunning declaration "the coming of the Lord, which was nigh, even fifty six years, should wind up the scene." In other words, Christ should come sometime around February 1891.¹

A patriarchal blessing given by Joseph Smith Sr. to Seth Church on May 23, 1836 states that "thou shalt stand till the winding up scene of this generation and Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven. Satan shall have no power over you, and thou shalt stand on the earth & thy strength shall be great when thou art seventy five."

Church was born in 1814, which would make him 75 years old in 1889-1890. Also, in 1836, Smith Sr. gave Brother Fally St. John a blessing where he stated: "Thou shalt stand in the land of Zion and find an inheritance there. Lay hold on faith and thou shalt live to see 82 years. see the winding up scene of this generation. see the temple and the cloud resting on it and see Jesus Christ come in the clouds of heaven." St. John was born in 1808, so when he was 82, it would have been 1890.²

William Clayton records an important meeting at Benjamin F. Johnson's home in Ramus (later named Macedonia), Illinois on April 2, 1843. "During the day President Joseph made the following remarks on doctrine. 'I was once praying very e[a]rnestly to know the time of the coming of the son of man when I heard a voice repeat the following. "Joseph my son, if thou livest until thou art 84 years old thou shalt see the face of the son of man, therefore let this suffice and trouble me no more on this matter.'"" This entry later became D&C 130: 14-15.³



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Then, on April 6, 1843, President Smith spoke to a gathering of saints in Nauvoo, " I was once praying earnestly upon this subject and a voice said unto me, 'My son, if thou livest till thou art 85 years of age, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man.' I was left to draw my own conclusions concerning this and I took the liberty to conclude that if I did live till that time Jesus /he/ would make his appearance but I do not say whether he will make his appearance or I shall go where he is. I prophecy in the name of the Lord God, and let it be written, that the Son of Man will not come in the heavens till I am 85⁴ years old, 48 years hence or about 1890."⁵

As historian Dan Erickson writes, the "Saints deduced Smith would turn eighty-five on 23

December, 1890, thus making 1890-91 the appointed time."⁶ In his excellent book, *As a Thief in the Night*, Erickson discusses at length the effect of Smith's claim of Christ returning sometime around 1890-1891. Its influence can be found in addresses given by leaders, talks in local meetings, and diaries of the saints. For a full treatment of the idea of Jesus' return, see Erickson's Chapter 8, which explains the events of the 1860s-1890s, in context.⁷

In 1875 Oliver Huntington reflected, in his diary, upon Smith's 1835 declaration to the newly called Apostles that "God had revealed to him [i.e. Smith] that the coming of Christ would be within 56 years, which being added to 1835 shows that before 1891 and the 14th of Feb. the Savior of the world would make his appearance again upon the earth and the winding up scene take place."⁸ Further, in 1875, Andrew J. Allen reported that two elders told a congregation in one of the Salt Lake Valley wards to avoid the gentiles and their dress, and to "look forward to the time when the saviour would come on the earth which would be soon not more than sixteen years according to the revelations Joseph Smith had received." Henry Ballard recorded in his diary that in a Bishop's meeting in Logan, Utah, on January 15, 1876, Joseph F. Smith said, "that by the history of Joseph that it was only 15 years till the coming of the Son of man."⁹



Former Nauvoo Mormon calls Smith a "false" Prophet.



Such expression appears to have been common in southern Utah as well. On January 21, 1881, Charles Lowell Walker recorded a talk given at a prayer meeting by "Father McBride," who recalled some of Smith's teachings – among them, "that 56 years should wind up the scene and the Saviour should come to his people. It being the Feb 14, 1835." On September 16, 1882, Walker also recorded that the St. George, Utah, President of the Seventy "Spoke of the persecutions of the Saints in Missouri and Ill[inoi]s. and the duties of the Seventies and the great things that would transpire before the winding up scene in 1891."¹⁰

In the diary of future apostle Abraham H. Cannon, for October 14, 1886, is a record of a talk given by Apostle Moses Thatcher at Lewiston, Cache Co., Utah.

"It is my belief that every city, county, precinct and territorial office in this Territory will be in the hands of our enemies; that we shall be so burdened with taxes that it will be almost more than human nature can endure. That we shall cry to the Lord by night and by day for deliverance. That when our hearts are sufficiently subdued that our entire trust will be in the Lord, then shall that man like unto Moses be raised up, and shall lead us out of bondage back to Jackson County in the state of Missouri. There will be no hesitation; everything will be decisive and prompt. The mountains shall tremble before him and if there be a tree or anything else in the way of their progress, it shall be plucked up by the power of God. Then is the time the scriptures will be fulfilled that says: `One shall chase a thousand and two shall put ten thousand to flight.'"

"It is my belief that the time of our deliverance will be within five years, the time indicated being February 14th, 1891. And that the man raised up will be no other than the Prophet Joseph Smith in his resurrected body. The power to lead Israel in the latter days as Moses led them anciently having been sealed upon his head by his father, Joseph Smith, the Patriarch of the Church at that time. If Father Smith had the power to bless, and that he had the power is most certain from the fact that he was ordained to this office and calling by his son, the Prophet, before the above blessing was pronounced upon the head of Joseph, no other man can perform this mission but the Prophet Joseph Smith. I do not say all the people of the nation will be destroyed within the time mentioned, but I do say,

that in consequence of the wickedness and corruption of the officers of the nation, the government will pass into the hands of the Saints, and that within five years. There will not be a city in the Union that will not be in danger of disruption by the Knights of Labor, who are becoming a formidable power in the land. You people in quiet Lewiston need not be surprised if within the next four years the rails are torn up from Ogden to the Missouri River and to San Francisco and into Montana in the North, leaving us as isolated as we were when we first came to this Territory. There is a power to do this and a disposition to—meaning the Knights of Labor." (A servant of God, holding the power and keys of the Holy Apostleship does not speak in this manner for mere pastime. There is more in these utterances than we are apt to attach to them, unless we are aided by the Spirit of God.)



Moses Thatcher, Sr.

"I have known for years that our people would go to Mexico in great numbers. God will deal out to this Nation the measure they deal out to us. The battle axe of the Lord, the Lamanites, will have a hand in humbling this nation." -

Moses Thatcher

While Thatcher's words above do not specifically mention the return of Christ, they express relevant collateral themes found in patriarchal blessings, in revelations of

Smith, in talks and sermons of leaders, and in personal writings of the early Mormons. These include ideas of redeeming Zion (Jackson County Missouri); that the United States is corrupt and can't be saved, which will lead to its destruction; and that the righteous will be gathered and saved. There were also the problems of polygamy and the manifesto, where the Twelve discuss over two days, the implication of the Woodruff Manifesto. These meetings are recorded by Apostle Heber J. Grant in his diary, on September 30 and October 1, 1890, where Thatcher told the Twelve: "I have known for years that our people would go to Mexico in great numbers. God will deal out to this Nation the measure they deal out to us. The battle axe of the Lord, the Lamanites, will have a hand in humbling this nation."¹¹

With no second coming of Christ occurring in 1891, Charles Walker wrote on the last day of that year how he was able to reconcile that non-event:¹² "This is the end of the Great eventful year as some have choosed to call it, and as many have been looking for many years, some wiseacres have even boldly asserted and even prophesied that Christ would come and that the Saints would controll all the Kingdoms of the Earth, and some have written and published Books with diagrams showing the great Image that Daniel refers to, and have calculated as they thought to a nicety the Times, time, and half times, etc., etc., etc., and have set forth startling things to come to pass, which has all proved that they with all their learning and vast researches knew nothing about the set times of the Great Eternal. The only remarkable thing that has occurred this year is the suppression of the Revelation on celestial Marriage by the Heads of the Church. And for how long I know not."¹³

Most likely, Walker was not the only person in Utah who had to modify his world view. To early Mormons (as D. Michael Quinn said in his Sunstone presentation in 1990)¹⁴, two events had originally seemed unimaginable: that Joseph Smith could be murdered, or that plural marriage should end. What might look to us today like a curiously specific expectation of an 1890-91 second coming of Christ – perhaps with a resurrected Smith at the forefront – appears to have given badly-needed hope to Latter-day Saints' yearning for that event. A transient prophecy uttered by their first prophet, over half a century earlier, made their troubled times feel right – at least for a short while.

¹ To See Holograph Minutes Click Here

² H. Michael Marquardt, Early Patriarchal Blessings, pp. 74 & 143. See Also Under the Date and Name. Click Here

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