

Seeds of Greatness

By Buddy Youngreen

The lives of the Joseph Smith, Senior, family are closely interwoven with the stirring drama of the Restoration. Their faith, experiences, and testimonies inspire the honest in heart to faith, appreciation and courage. In addition to the life-record of the man himself, it is in the recollections of his wife, children, and grandchildren that we can know and love the patriarch of the Smith Family.

Hear the words of his wife:

When I, Lucy Mack Smith, was in my eighteenth year, during a visit to the home of my brother Stephen in Tunbridge, Vermont, I became acquainted with a young man by the name of Joseph Smith, to whom I was subsequently married.

My beloved husband and affectionate companion of forty-four years was as tender a father as ever blessed the confidence of a family.

My children and I stood by his death bed September 14, 1840, and heard those last words from his lips, "I shall live seven or eight minutes." We then witnessed his straightening himself and lying his hands together; after which he began to breathe shorter, and in about eight minutes his breath stopped without even a struggle or a sigh, and his spirit took its flight for the regions where the justified ones rest from their labors. He departed so calmly that for sometime we could not believe but that he would breathe again. After we had deposited his last remains in their narrow house . . . I returned to my desolate home; and I thought that the greatest grief which it was possible for me to feel had fallen upon me in the death of my beloved husband . . . my tender and affectionate companion.

Joseph Smith, Junior, The Prophet, recorded the following concerning his father:

He was six feet, two inches high, was very straight, and remarkably well-proportioned. His ordinary weight was about two hundred pounds, and he was very strong and active. In his younger days he was famed as a wrestler, and like Jacob, he never wrestled with but one man

whom he could not throw. He was one of the most benevolent of men; opening his house to all who were destitute. While at Quincy, Illinois, he fed hundreds of the poor Saints who were flying from the Missouri persecutions, although he had arrived there penniless himself.

His son William, shortly before his death, gave evidence that his father was a religious God-fearing person:

Yes, we always had family prayers since I can remember. I well remember Father used to carry his spectacles in his vest pocket and when us boys saw him feel for his specs, we knew that was a signal to get ready for prayer, and if we did not notice it mother would say, "William," or whoever was the negligent one, "get ready for prayer." After the prayer, we had a song we would sing. . . .

Joseph F. Smith, a grandson of Father Smith, gives his impressions of his grandfather and parents of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

Though poor, his parents were honest and good; they delighted in the truth, and it was their honest desire to live according to the best light within them. Love and good will to all found expressions in their hearts and acts; and their children were imbued with like sentiments. They were firm believers in God, and trusted in His watchful care over His children. They had frequently received manifestations of His loving kindness in dreams, visions, and inspirations; and God had healed their little ones in answer to prayer, when they were nigh unto death.

Joseph Smith III, another grandson of Father Smith, tells of his remembrance of his grandfather:

I remember grandfather well. I suppose that one of the reasons why I remember him so well is that when he died, I could not shed a tear, and did not. And when I was by Aunt Lucy she asked if I was not sorry he was dead, I said no. And when they berated me for it I finally grew indignant and said: "You have all said he is better off than he was here; why should I be sorry

that he has gone?" I know that it was the feeling that he was a grand man. His example was worth following. In stature he had no superior in the family. Not one of his sons excelled him in physical appearance . . . not one to my memory.

Many were the significant occurrences in the life of Joseph Smith, Senior. On December 18th, 1833, in Kirtland, Ohio, Father Smith was ordained a Patriarch and President of the High Priesthood under the hands of his son Joseph, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. At this time Joseph Smith, Senior, was blessed by his son Joseph. His blessing was given by vision and the spirit of prophecy:

Blessed of the Lord is my father for he shall stand in the midst of his posterity and shall be comforted by their blessings when he is old and bowed down with years, and shall be called a prince over them and shall be numbered among those who hold the right of patriarchal priesthood, even the keys of that ministry, for he shall assemble together his posterity like unto Adam; and the assembly which he called shall be an example for my father, for thus it is written of him: Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch and Methuselah who were high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing. And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the Prince, the Arch-angel. And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him, I have set thee to be at the head: a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever. So shall it be with my father: he shall be called a prince over his posterity; holding the keys of the patriarchal priesthood over the kingdom of God on earth, even the church of the Latter-day Saints, and he shall sit in the general assembly of patriarchs, even in council with the Ancient of Days, when he shall sit and all the patriarchs with him, and he shall enjoy his rights and authority under the direction of the Ancient of Days.

And again blessed is my father, for the hands

of the Lord shall be over him and he shall be full of the Holy Ghost, for he shall predict whatsoever shall befall his posterity unto the latest generation and shall see the affliction of his children pass away, and their enemies under their feet; and when his head is fully ripe he shall behold himself as an olive tree whose branches are bowed down with much fruit. Behold the blessings of Joseph by the hand of his progenitor, shall come upon the head of my father and his seed after him, to the uttermost; even he shall be a fruitful bough, he shall be as a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well whose branches run over the wall, and his seed shall abide in strength, and the arms of their hands shall be made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob, and the God of his fathers: even the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, shall help him; even the Almighty shall bless him with blessings of heaven above and his seed after him and the blessings of the deep that lieth under; and his seed shall rise up and call him blessed. He shall be as the vine of the choice grapes when her clusters are fully ripe; and he shall also possess a mansion on high even in the celestial kingdom. His counsel shall be sought for by the thousands, and he shall have place in the house of the Lord; for he shall be mighty in the council of the elders, and his days shall yet be lengthened out: and when he shall go hence he shall go in peace, and his rest shall be glorious, and his name shall be had in remembrance to the end.

And blessed also is my mother, for she is a mother in Israel, and shall be a partaker with my father in all his patriarchal blessings. Blessed is my mother, for her soul is ever filled with benevolence and philanthropy; and notwithstanding her age, she shall yet receive strength and be comforted in the midst of her house: and thus saith the Lord, she shall have eternal life.

Joseph Smith, Senior, Patriarch to the Church of Jesus Christ and father of the Prophet Joseph Smith, was born July 12, 1771, in Topsfield, Essex County, Massachusetts; he was the second son of Asael Smith and Mary Duty. He married Lucy, daughter of Solomon and Lydia Mack, Janaury 24, 1796, by whom he had eleven children: a son who did not survive his birth about

1797; Alvin, born February 11, 1798; Hyrum, born February 9, 1800; Sophronia, born May 16, 1803; Joseph, born December 23, 1805; Samuel Harrison, born March 13, 1808; Ephraim, born March 13, 1810; William, born March 13, 1811; Katherine, born July 28, 1813; Don Carlos, born March 25, 1816; and Lucy, born July 18, 1821.

In addition to farming, Joseph Smith, Senior, engaged in the merchantile business and school teaching. His unsuccessful venture in selling ginseng, along with three successive crop failures on his farm, caused him to move to Palmyra, New York, in 1816, where he renewed his attempt at farming. For the next 14 years, with the aid of his family, he struggled to maintain and support a decent and respectable family and home. No one thought otherwise of his home and family until his son Joseph revealed his experience of the first vision of the Father and Son and the visit of the angel, Moroni. From this time on the reputation of the Smith family was for good and ill.

Father Smith lent his support and encouragement to the divine mission of his son and served as one of the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon record. He became a devout member of the Church and spent time on a mission to his father's family in Northern New York.

Joseph Smith Senior's life was drastically changed as a result of his son's work in the Restoration. Persecution was thrust upon the Smith Family and eventually caused them to move away to Ohio.

While living in Ohio, from 1831 to 1838, he was called to be Patriarch to the Church. Father Smith pronounced Patriarchal blessings on his family assembled at the Kirtland, Ohio, home of his son Joseph on the ninth day of December, 1834, at a feast prepared for that purpose. The Patriarch's family was arranged according to their ages and he made some remarks in substance as follows:

My children, I am now old, and my head is white: I have seen many years compared to those enjoyed by many: I am now in my sixty-third year, and my frame is feeble because of the many trials and fatigues which I have endured in

this life. I have not attained to the age of my fathers, neither do I now know that I shall, but I desire, and for a long time have, to bless my children before I go home. It is a source of grief to me that I have not been more faithful to the Lord, in days which are passed than I have; I have not always set that example before my family that I ought: I have not been diligent in teaching them the commandments of the Lord, but have rather manifested a light and trifling mind; but in all this I have never denied the Lord. Notwithstanding all this my folly, which has been a cause of grief to my family, the Lord has often visited me in visions and in dreams, and has brought me, with my family, through many afflictions, and I this day thank his holy name. I look round upon you before me, and I behold a lack; three seats are, as it were, empty. The Lord, in his just providence has taken from me at an untimely birth, a son: this has been a matter of affliction; but the Lord's ways are just. My next son, Alvin, as you are all aware,



was taken from us in the vigor of life, in the bloom of youth: my heart often mourns his loss, but I have no disposition to complain against the Lord, another has been taken also, in his infancy. I pray that my loss may be abundantly supplied, and made up in additional blessings and that his grace may attend me, and his Holy Spirit be shed abroad in my heart, that I may pronounce such blessings upon your heads, as will be fulfilled.

The following are parts of these blessings:



William V. Johnston 1911

Lucy MacK Smith