

DISCOURSE

By Pres. GEO. A. SMITH, delivered in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, July 25, 1869.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots:

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.—Isaiah, Chap. XI, 1st to 9th verses.

In my youth or childhood, while attending Sunday School, this was one of my lessons and one which, I was taught to believe, required, to a very great extent, to be spiritualized in order to be understood. It has been in accordance with the traditions of the various religious sects for a long time, to believe that a large portion of the scriptures possessed a two-fold and sometimes a three-fold spiritual meaning, and it is probable that this belief gave rise, to a great extent, to the system of text preaching, which has been reduced to an art, that is, a certain rule is applied to any portion of scripture taken as a text, according to which rule the sermon or discourse must be just so long or short as prescribed by the rule. It must be divided and subdivided, each division being devoted to one of the several subjects treated upon by the preacher. To such an extent has this system of preaching been carried in the Christian world that published skeletons of sermons are necessary, and have become an appendage with almost every minister. When a text is selected perhaps the opinions of certain learned divines have to be consulted, in order to throw increased light upon the subject under consideration; for it has been a feeling among ministers that they must explain the meaning of every passage in the Bible, and to be unable to do so is considered derogatory to their profession. This, I presume, has given rise to the great variety of opinions which has arisen concerning the meaning of certain passages in the Bible; and this same cause may have contributed to increase the number of religious sects.

About the year 1820, there was in the western portion of New York State considerable excitement upon the subject of religion, and what are termed "revivals" were quite common. Joseph Smith, at that time, lived in Manchester, Ontario county, in that State, and attended these meetings. The testimony which he heard from the pulpit of the actual necessity of men preparing themselves for a future state had more or less influence upon him in awakening those solemn reflections in his mind which they were designed to awaken.

These religious meetings were conducted by several Protestant sects, among whom the principal ones were Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists. These denominations united together to a certain extent during the excitement, but at its close there arose a kind of wrangle among them as to who should have the converts. A considerable number of persons had been converted and had obtained what was termed a "hope," and the question was "Which society shall they join?" Considerable ill-feeling grew out of this excitement or wrangle over the divisions of the spoils.

Joseph Smith had reflected much during this period, especially at its close,

when he saw these Christian people get up feelings of vindictiveness towards each other in relation to the converts. He sought the Lord by prayer and fasting to know which one of these several denominations it would be proper for him to join. His mother, two of his brothers and one of his sisters had joined the Presbyterian Church; but he remained undecided. While in this state of mind he read in the epistle of the Apostle James: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." He accordingly sought the Lord for a knowledge of these things, and when about fifteen years of age he received a vision from the Almighty. An angel made him a visit, and of him he made the inquiry as to which of the sects he should join. He was somewhat astonished at being told that they had all gone out of the way. He had naturally concluded that some one of them must be right, but the angel informed him that they had all gone out of the way; they all had some truth, but not one came up to the standard and it was not his duty to attach himself to any of them; but that it was the design of the Almighty to reveal the principles of the gospel in their original purity for the salvation of the human family. He was instructed to be humble and to seek the Lord by prayer and he would receive instructions from time to time as he might be prepared. These visions were repeated unto him occasionally, commencing when he was near fifteen years old, and remaining with him more or less until the day of his death.

The question which naturally arose in the mind of Joseph at this time of religious excitement was Which of the sects is right; and that question was answered as I have indicated.

After the death of the ancient Apostles the Church had gone astray and had wandered into darkness. In the course of four hundred years it became the dominant religion, and was established through the Roman empire. The heathen temples were transformed into Christian churches. But with this change came a degeneration, which continued until the times generally denominated by Protestants the "Reformation," when such men as Waldo, Luther, Calvin and others came, denouncing the errors, follies and corruptions which had crept into the Church, which they undertook to reform. This work was continued by subsequent Reformers in the English Church, and from them down to the present day.

I remember in my childhood inquiring of my father where the Presbyterian Church, of which he was a member, had its origin. He said it originated with the Apostles. I then inquired where the Methodists had their origin. He told me they originated with Mr. Wesley, nearly a hundred years ago in England. This led me to inquire why it was that they did not all join the Presbyterians, who had their origin with the Apostles. "Well," said my father, "they all think they have their authority and origin from the Apostles." I found out by this that it was a mere question of opinion. I felt very anxious in my youth to become acquainted with the plan of salvation, and I attended religious meetings for that purpose. There was in my native town, Potsdam, in the State of New York, a great number of what were called "protracted meetings," at which many very eloquent sermons were delivered to make known to us the way of life and salvation, or the certain destruction that awaited the wicked, and the great necessity of repenting and obtaining a knowledge of the Lord. I heard these discourses for days. One of these meetings lasted twelve days, three meetings a day; another lasted seventeen days, most of which I attended—very zealously endeavoring to obtain a change of heart; but I could not feel as many felt, and in consequence of that I was sealed up by the minister to eternal damnation in the name of Jesus Christ, being the only sinner in the gallery, the minister pointing his finger directly at me, and using the singular number, repeating it over three times, and then repeating it again three times, and again three times more. I came to the conclusion that if any authority existed in the Presbyterian Church it was very little use for me to trouble myself any further on the subject of religion.

That brought me to investigate the question, where did the Rev. Frederick E. Canon, who had sealed me up to eternal damnation obtain his authority to do so? I learned that the Protestants were apostates from the Church of Rome, and the Church of Rome, they said, was the "Mother of harlots and

the abominations of the earth." The question immediately arose, "Can a stream rise higher than its fountain?" Can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit? I was told that the Savior sent His Apostles to all the world to preach the gospel to every creature, and they took their authority from that. The reflections that would then arise were like this: "If I should present myself at the Court of St. James with a copy of a commission issued by the President of the United States, to John Adams, and ask to be accredited as agent to that nation, would I not subject myself to ridicule?" Then, as a matter of course, if I present myself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, claiming my authority by virtue of a commission given to the Twelve Apostles by the Saviour, would I not place myself in the same position? I certainly would. If a man preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ he must have authority given to him directly to do so. Ask these various denominations if they have had revelations for themselves, and they will unanimously say "No," and they will tell you that revelations ceased with the writings of John the Divine. This is the general opinion amongst them. The result is that a new source must be opened up, and it was on this account that Joseph Smith, by calling upon the Lord with all his might and faith, received this authority by special revelation, a special revelation of the holy priesthood to organize the Church and to administer in its ordinances.

The church was organized on the 6th of April 1830. It was composed of six members, and no sooner was it organized than a persecution was commenced against it, in the shape of vexatious lawsuits and mob violence; and a great variety of abuse was heaped upon the head of Jos. Smith and his fellow laborers. However, they continued to bear testimony and administered the ordinances of the gospel to others, and ordained them, and so the work was propagated and continued to increase, and he continued the mission with which he was intrusted for some fourteen years after the organization of the church, when he was slain, while under the protection of the State of Illinois, with the faith of the State pledged by the Governor for his safety and a fair trial. He was murdered by a mob of one hundred and fifty men with blackened faces who surrounded the prison where he was detained. They killed him and his brother Hyrum, Elder John Taylor who was with them, receiving four wounds.

Prior to his death Joseph had been brought before forty-seven tribunals, charged with a variety of crimes; but in every instance he had proved his innocence, and but once was he brought before a tribunal that was not opposed to him religiously. Through the labors of himself and his brethren a great number of persons had been brought into the church; a number of settlements had been established, which had as often been broken up, and at the time of his death there were residing in Nauvoo and its vicinity some twenty thousand persons. The people were remarkable for their industry, good order and civility, and nothing had been proved against them in any court, either civil, ecclesiastic or military. The records of the State, so far as our people were concerned were clean, and the whole persecution was an outrage upon the laws of the State and the Constitution of the United States.

From the organization of the church up to the death of Joseph the people had purchased a great quantity of land; in the State of Missouri they paid the Government of the United States 318,000 dollars for land, the most of which they still own. They were driven from this land because it was said that they preached and practiced a strange religion. The leaders of the mobs, themselves, acknowledged that there was no legal grounds for their persecutions; and Danl. Dunklin, the Governor of Missouri, declared in one of his communications that the Constitution and laws of the State were ample for the protection of the "Mormons," but the prejudices of the people of the State were so great that it was useless to attempt to enforce the laws. There is one comfort, however, in reflecting upon these things, and that is that whenever that glorious day arrives in which the Constitution of the United States becomes the supreme law of the land, and is respected as such, the Latter-day Saints can return and again inhabit and enjoy their homes in Missouri, for Jackson County, Missouri is the place which God selected for the Centre Stake of Zion, and the day will come when the most magnificent temple ever built on the face of the earth to the name of

Jehovah will be built there; and it will be the blessed privilege of the Latter-day Saints, in due time, to perform this work.

The death of the prophet and patriarch was, of course, a great blow to the feelings of the people; and it was believed throughout the world that it would put an end to the organization of the church. Men in high places sent gifts congratulating each other on their death; thanks were returned in the pulpit that these false prophets had been destroyed. Many acknowledged that their murder was an outrage upon the laws of the country, and discreditable to the State, but then it was a good thing they were dead. It however proved that the death of individuals was not the death of an organization or the destruction of a people. The work which Joseph had commenced was continued by his followers. Previous to his death it had been revealed to him, and he had told the brethren, in so many words, what was to befall him. He had designated the men to bear off the work. He had completed the organization, administered all the ordinances, had borne testimony to the Saints, and thousands were witnesses that upon the head of Brigham Young and the Twelve Apostles was laid the responsibility to go forth and carry on the work which he had commenced and the foundation of which he had so gloriously laid. His death rendered him a martyr, for it was well known that he was arrested on a trumped up fictitious charge, one on which his accusers dared not risk an investigation, knowing that he would be discharged. The result was that thousands and tens of thousands who had before looked on with the idea that he was a master spirit, and that he could preach doctrines and principles in a wonderful manner, now began to feel that there was a sanctity connected with him, and from being simply lookers on many became believers.

At the time of his death the Saints were engaged in building a temple, the pattern of which was given by revelation, and which they were commanded to build. They labored to complete this temple, and when it was discovered that the people were not broken up after their prophet's death, as had been anticipated, organizations were again formed for their destruction. These organizations commenced their attacks on the scattered settlements, burning the houses of the people and inflicting personal violence upon them. In one week they burned about 175 dwelling houses with their stacks, barns and other property. While doing this they sent abroad to the world the intelligence that the "Mormons" had made an attack on the other citizens. There being no resistance offered by the Saints, of course the truth of the matter soon became known and the sheriff of the county issued orders calling forth a posse to put a stop to these burnings. No sooner was this done than an army was marched into the neighborhood; but no attempt was made to arrest the house burners. A sham trial was held over four or five of the men engaged in the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, but they were acquitted. In fact during the time that intervened between their examination and trial they were allowed to go at large on their own recognizance, only a thousand dollars being required; and at the time of the TRIAL, as it was termed, they were HONORABLY acquitted, although it was very well understood by jury, witnesses, court and spectators that these men were guilty of the murders, and had taken a leading part in all the acts of violence, oppression and injustice against the Latter-day Saints, in Illinois; but not one of them, nor any who ever took part in any of these outrages were punished.

After this house burning had been stopped a convention, representing nine counties, was held at Carthage at which it was resolved that the Latter-day Saints could not remain in Illinois, and Thomas Ford, then Governor of the State, informed them through Hon. Stephen A. Douglass and Gen. John J. Harding that it was impossible for them to remain in the State. We then wrote letters to the Governors of every State in the Union, except Missouri; also to the President of the United States, asking for protection in these States. The letters were no doubt received; an answer was received only from Governor Thomas Drew of Arkansas, recommending the Latter-day Saints to settle in Oregon Territory. An arrangement was made with the mob that the Saints should leave Nauvoo and vicinity in a reasonable time, on condition that mob violence and vexatious law suits should cease and that assistance should be