

DISCOURSE,

By Elder ORSON PRATT, delivered
in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City,
Sunday, Aug. 11, 1867.

Reported by David W. Evans.

I have long looked forward with joyful anticipations to the time, when I should again meet with the people of God in these mountains, and have the privilege of standing before them. I feel very thankful to my Father in heaven for this great privilege. I have been absent from this city and place over three years, and have performed one of the longest missions of my life. I feel thankful to God that you gave me this privilege, and that I have had the opportunity of adding one more lengthy mission to the long catalogue of missions which I have taken abroad among the nations. It is a great satisfaction to me to have the privilege of being numbered with this people, and to have my name enrolled among those who profess to be Latter-day Saints. With them is safety; with them are joy, peace and satisfaction. And I feel to say; as one said in old times—that with this people I desire to live, and, if it is necessary to die, I desire to have the privilege of dying with them. But I do not know whether it will be necessary for all of us to die, perhaps there may be some who will escape this curse in some measure, and who may meet with a change equivalent to that of death.

I have been abroad for the purpose of doing good; that was the only object I had in view in leaving this Territory three years ago last spring. Whether I have done much good or not remains for the day of judgment to reveal; it is not altogether for me to judge in relation to this matter. We are well assured that our Father, who reigns in yonder heavens, keeps a journal, or, in other words, a record—a great record in which He records the doings of the children of men. We know, from a certain declaration of Jesus in the Book of Mormon, concerning the records of heaven, that the acts and doings of all men are recorded by the Father in that book, and the time is fast hastening, when I, as an individual; and all others must be brought before the Judge of all the earth, and our acts and doings here, in this short space of time appointed to us as a probation, will be read before us, or if not read they will be perfectly remembered by us and by those who sit in judgment, so that a righteous judgment will be rendered on our heads, and we will receive the reward of our doings, whether they be good or evil. I have enjoyed myself remarkably well on this mission. I hope that some good has been done, and that the Lord will remember the good that I have intended to do, even though it may not have been fully accomplished. He knows the desire of my heart has been to fulfil the numerous missions which I have taken during the last thirty-seven years of my life.

Since I came home, I have contrasted the present condition of myself and this people with what existed when I first became acquainted with this gospel. Then we were a little handful of people—there were, perhaps, not a hundred persons in all the States who had received the truth. I received it about five months after the organization of this Church, and, although but a boy, was immediately called to the ministry. In my inexperience I went forth, with gladness of heart, to bear my humble testimony to what I knew to be true. You may ask me, if I had a knowledge before I commenced preaching this gospel. I answer, yes. I went forth from a farming occupation in the eastern part of the State of New York, and traveled alone between two hundred and three hundred miles, for the purpose of beholding the Prophet Joseph Smith. I found him in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, at the house of father Whitmer, where this Church was organized with only six members. In that house I not only found Joseph, the Prophet, but David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Christian Whitmer and many of those witnesses, whose names are recorded in the Book of Mormon. Those were happy days to me. To see a prophet of the living God, to look on a man whom the Lord had raised up to bring forth one of the most glorious records that ever saluted the ears of mortal man, was to me almost equal to beholding the face of an holy angel! Yet, when I took that journey, and first beheld his countenance,

I did not certainly know that he was a prophet. I believed him to be such because of the purity of the doctrine that I had heard preached which he had brought forth. I knew it was a scriptural doctrine, agreeing in every respect with the ancient gospel. For although but a boy, I had already become acquainted, in some measure, with the doctrines of the various religious sects of the day; but none of them satisfied me; none of them seemed to coincide with the word of God. I stood aloof from all, until I heard this, when my mind became fully satisfied that God had raised up a people, to proclaim the gospel in all its ancient beauty and simplicity, with power to administer in its ordinances. That was a great satisfaction, so far as faith was concerned, but still I sought for a knowledge. I felt as though I was not qualified to stand before the people, and tell them that the Book of Mormon was a divine revelation, and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, unless I had a stronger testimony than that afforded by ancient prophets. However great my assurance might be, it seemed to me, that to know for myself, it required a witness independent of the testimony of others. I sought for this witness. I did not receive it immediately; but when the Lord saw the integrity of my heart, and the anxiety of my mind—when He saw that I was willing to travel hundreds of miles for the sake of learning the principles of the truth, He gave me a testimony for myself, which conferred upon me the most perfect knowledge that Joseph Smith was a true prophet and that this book, called the Book of Mormon, was in reality a Divine revelation, and that God had once more, in reality, spoken to the human family. What joy this knowledge gave me! No language that I am acquainted with could describe the sensations I experienced when I received a knowledge from Heaven of the truth of this work.

In that early day the prophet Joseph said to me that the Lord had revealed that twelve men were to be chosen as Apostles. A manuscript revelation to this effect, given in 1829—before the rise of this Church—was laid before me and I read it. Joseph said to me, although I was young, weak, inexperienced, especially in public speaking; and ignorant of many important things which we now all understand, that I should be one of this Twelve. It seemed to me a very great saying. I looked upon the Twelve Apostles who lived in ancient days with a great deal of reverence—as being almost superhuman. They were indeed great men—not by virtue of the flesh, nor their own natural capacities; but they were great because God called them. When Joseph told me that I would be one of the Twelve, I knew all things were possible with God, but it seemed to me that I would have to be altogether changed to occupy such a great position in the Church and Kingdom of our God.

But I will pass over the first years of the organization of the Church and come down to the time, when the Twelve were chosen. It was in the year 1835. In the preceding year a few of us, by commandment and revelation from God, went up to the State of Missouri in company with the Prophet Joseph Smith. By the direction of Joseph I was requested to stay in Clay County for a few months, to visit the Saints scattered through those regions, to preach to and comfort them, and to lay before them the manuscript revelations; for they were not then fully acquainted with all the revelations which had been given. After having accomplished this work, and proclaimed the gospel to many branches of the Church in the western part of Missouri, I returned again a thousand miles to the State of Ohio, preaching by the way, suffering much from the chills, and the fever and ague, while passing through those low sickly countries, wading swamps and sloughs, lying down on the prairies in the hot sun, fifteen or twenty miles from any habitation, and having a hearty shake of the ague, then a violent fever, thus wandering along for months before getting back to Kirtland, Ohio, where the Prophet lived. In the meantime, however, I built up some few branches of the Church, and then started for the capital of the State of Ohio—the city of Columbus. I entered the city, a stranger, on foot and alone, not knowing that there was a Latter-day Saint within many miles; but while passing along the crowded streets, I caught a glimpse of the countenance of a man who passed, and whirling around

instantly, I went after him, and enquired of him if he new whether there were any people, called "Mormons" in the city of Columbus. Said he: "I am one of that people and the only one that resides in the city." I looked upon this as a great marvel. "How is it," said I, that here in this great and populous city, where hundreds are passing to and fro that I should be influenced to turn and accost the only Latter-day Saint residing here." I looked upon it as a revelation, as a manifestation of the power of God in my behalf. He took me to his house, and when there, presented me with a paper published by our people in Kirtland. In that paper I saw an advertisement in which br. Pratt was requested to be at Kirtland on such a day and at such an hour to attend meeting in the Temple, that he might be ready to take his departure with the Twelve who had been chosen. The day and hour designated were right at hand; the Twelve were chosen and were soon to start on their first mission, as a Council. I had been traveling among strangers for months and had not seen the paper.

I saw that I had not time to reach Kirtland on foot, as I had been accustomed to travel, and consequently could not thus comply with the request; but with a little assistance, I got into the very first stage that went out, and started post-haste for Kirtland, and landed at Willoughby, or what was then called Chagim, three miles from Kirtland, to which I traveled on foot, reaching there on Sunday morning at the very hour appointed for the meeting, which I entered, valise in hand, not having had time to deposit it by the way. There I met with Joseph, Oliver Cowdry, David Whitmer, Martin Harris and others of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, besides several of the Twelve who had been chosen and ordained a short time previous. They were meeting on that day in order to be fully organized and qualified for their first mission, as a council. And, strange to relate, it had been prophesied in that meeting, and in prior meetings I would be there on that day. They had predicted this, although they had not heard of me for some time, and did not know where I was. They knew I had been in Missouri, and that I had started from there, several months before, but the Lord poured out the spirit of prophecy upon them, and they predicted I would be there at that meeting. When they saw me walk into the meeting, many of the Saints could scarcely believe their own eyes, the prediction was fulfilled before them so perfectly. I look at these things as miraculous manifestations of the Spirit of God.

I was ordained, and went forth with the Council of the Twelve. We performed an extended mission through the eastern States, built up churches, and returned again to Kirtland.

It is not my intention to give many items of our history, I merely touch upon these points, as they present themselves to my mind. I have continued from that day until the present, to bear testimony to that which I know to be true. I do not speak enthusiastically when I say I know. It is not a spirit of excitement which prompts me to declare these things, but I testify now, to that which I know by revelation to me from heaven, as I have testified to hundreds and thousands of people, both in America, in England, and on the Continent in Europe. I know this great work which you, Latter-day Saints, have received, to be the work of Almighty God. I have the same certainty that I have that you are now sitting on these seats. This religion is not a whim; it is not a wild enthusiastic creed, invented by human wisdom; but the origin of this Church is divine. This book, called the Book of Mormon, God gave by the inspiration of His holy Spirit to Joseph Smith, whom you and I believe, and not only believe, but know to be a prophet. This book, I consider the choicest book, communicated to the children of men for many centuries. The choicest! Why do I say the choicest? Are there not many useful and interesting books of great value, containing much information and many things of importance, that have been sought out by the judgment, skill and learning of men? Yes; but among all those which have appeared since the first century of the Christian era, there is one common characteristic, viz.,—they were written by the wisdom of man. No doubt, in many respects, though unknown to their authors, they were measurably dictated by the inspiration

of the Spirit of the living God. But God Himself is the Author of the Book of Mormon. He inspired the ideas it contains, and gave them by the urim and thummim. He sent forth His angel from heaven, clothed in brightness and glory to chosen witnesses, commanding them to declare to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people that this precious book was a divine revelation. How great then is the importance of this work!

It was a very interesting period of my life, when but nineteen years of age, to visit the place where this Church was organized,—the room of old father Whitmer, where the Lord spoke to His servant Joseph and others, as printed in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. In that same room a revelation, through the prophet Joseph, was given to me, November 4th, 1830, which is also printed. That house will, no doubt, be celebrated for ages to come, as the one chosen by the Lord in which to make known the first elements of the organization of His Kingdom in the latter days.

But there are many wonderful things connected with this dispensation—not only in the manifestations of the Spirit of God to His servants, in the many revelations that were given to individuals, in healing the sick, in casting out devils, in restoring the blind to their sight, in making the deaf to hear, and in causing the lame man to leap as a hart, but what is still more wonderful the gathering of the people from distant nations. It is a wonder to me to look upon the great sea of faces now before me in this bowery. Twenty years ago on the twenty-first day of July, I stood solitary and alone on this great city plot, near the place where now stands bishop Hunter's house, being the first man of the Latter-day Saints that ever stood on this ground: this was in the afternoon of the twenty-first day of July, 1847. Brother Erastus Snow entered the valley with me in the afternoon. We traveled down to the southeast of the city. Br. Erastus lost his coat off his horse, and went back to hunt it up, and told me if I wanted to look over the country, he would wait for me at the mouth of what we now call Emigration Cañon. I started from where we parted, and came up and stood on the bank of City Creek. I gazed on the surrounding scenery with peculiar feelings in my heart. I felt as though it was the place for which we had so long sought. Brother Brigham had requested me to proceed on and search out the road. Several of the brethren had been taken sick at Yellow Creek, and they appointed me and a small company to go on and to see if we could find anything of Salt Lake Valley or a country suitable for a location. What did I see when I came into this valley? I saw some few green bushes on yonder bench, but saw but little life throughout the valley, except a certain insect that was afterwards called a cricket. I saw them cropping the few isolated bushes, and gnawing everything green around them. The land on yonder bench was all parched up, and the soil, as we went down still further, also dry and baked; but as we neared the waters we could see there was a little moisture round the banks. It was really a solitary place, and is well described by the prophet David in the 107th Psalm. He exclaims in this beautiful language: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south." But David describes the country to which this people were to be gathered. He calls it a dreary desolate land. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Are there not many sitting on these seats who can reflect back to the time, when they wandered over the solitary plains, the arid deserts, and rugged mountains? Are there not here some of the pioneers who were numbered among the one hundred and forty-three who traveled fifteen hundred miles from Nauvoo, and a thousand from our Winter Quarters on the Missouri river, who can bear testimony that we did "wander in the wilderness in a solitary way?" Oh, how solitary it was except for the red men, buffalo, a few antelope, some elk, deer and howling wolves! It was indeed solitary; no road broken for us, no bridges across the streams; we were unable to tell what latitude or longi-