



Type: Book Chapter

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## Objections to the Witness Considered

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Source: *New Witnesses for God: Volume I - Joseph Smith, The Prophet*

Published: Salt Lake City; Deseret News, 1911 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

Pages: 202-211

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### OBJECTIONS TO THE WITNESS CONSIDERED.

Since, as we have seen, a new dispensation of the gospel in the last days is to be given to man; and as neither the "Reformers" of the sixteenth century, nor any person since their day and before Joseph Smith has even made any pretension that God by a new revelation and the ministry of angels restored the gospel; and as that is the manner in which God has promised to restore the gospel, may not Joseph Smith be the prophet of the New Dispensation, the instrument in the hands of God to bring to pass his purpose in the great work of the last days? Some man must be chosen, why not he?

These questions lead me to the consideration of those objections urged against Joseph Smith as reasons for believing that he was not a prophet of God. First of all, I shall consider the one made against him on account of his humble birth and lowly station in life.

It would be well-nigh an endless, as also a useless task to repeat what has been said of Joseph Smith on this score. Not content with the facts in the case, malice has employed misrepresentation to degrade his family in the estimation of the world; and sneer and ridicule have done what they could to cast discredit upon his pretensions, by pointing to the rock from whence he was hewn, and the supposed pit from whence he was digged. His friends and followers are prepared to admit the whole truth in respect to his humble origin and lowly station in life. The character of his parents, the circumstances under which he himself was reared are detailed in chapter ten of this book.

It will be remembered that his forefathers were among

the earlier settlers of New England; that his father was a farmer, industrious, honorable, though in humble circumstance; and under the necessity of laboring with his hands in wood or field to support his large family. It has already been said that the youthful Prophet Joseph shared these labors:

- But of what value is the objection of lowly birth and humble station? Is it to be argued that if the Lord had a communication to make to mankind, such as Joseph Smith claims to have received, he would have chosen some of the great ones of the earth, one of high birth, of vast fortune, of profound learning, of deep knowledge and famous for eloquence? Such a one man might choose, but how often has God done otherwise! Let the roll in part be called: Moses and Aaron, the sons of an Israelitish slave; Joshua, the same; David, a shepherd; the prophet Amos, a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees; the apostles of Jesus Christ, men of the lowliest birth and humblest occupations; Peter and Andrew his brother, were fishermen; John and James, the sons of Zebedee, also fishermen; Matthew, a despised tax-collector; Paul, a tent-maker; and while of the occupations of the rest of the apostles nothing is known definitely, we have every reason to believe that they were men of humble extraction and occupation.

These are some of those whom God called to do his work. He has not always confined his choice to men of this class; sometimes he has chosen men of royal descent and from what are called the higher walks of life. Because Deity has chosen his servants so frequently from those of humble extraction and occupation, it is not for me to flout the rich and learned and great. That were an arrogance as offensive to the spirit of right reason and to heaven, as that which I condemn in those who affect to despise the Prophet Joseph



because of his humble birth and circumstances. By citing the fact that God in other ages has chosen men of lowly birth and humble occupation, I only desire to show that there is no value in the objection urged against Joseph Smith on the ground of his humble station in life.

Let Joseph Smith's birth be as humble as it will, it cannot be more lowly than that of Jesus Christ. The fortunes of the mother of the Prophet were not more fallen than those of Mary, the mother of Jesus. A log house in Sharon, Vermont, was not a more humble birthplace than a stable in Bethlehem. The rude cradle of Joseph Smith, made by his father's hands, though rough hewn, was at least equal to the ruder manger of the stable at Bethlehem; and the occupation of husbandman, which the father of Joseph followed, and in which the Prophet in boyhood assisted him, is not more humble as an occupation than that of a carpenter which the supposed father of Jesus followed, and in which Jesus doubtless assisted him, before entering upon his public ministry. Indeed, I may say that neither Joseph Smith nor any other prophet has been permitted to start from a more lowly station in life than the Son of God; for it is fitting that he who is to ascend above all things—all heights, principalities and powers, should also descend below all things, that he might in all things touch all points of human experience so that whatever the experience of man might be, however lowly his station, however distressing his misfortunes; however poor, forsaken, desolate; however ridiculed, despised, hated, persecuted; however tempted—looking down from his exalted throne at the right hand of God, with his soul swelling with compassion, Jesus might say—"The Son of Man hath descended below them all."<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> These were the words of the Lord to Joseph Smith when confined a prisoner for the truth's sake in Liberty jail, Clay County, State of Missouri: "If thou art called to pass through



The objections urged against Joseph Smith on the ground of his lowly birth and humble occupation are without value. Writing to the saints at Corinth, the apostle to the Gentiles says: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things which are."<sup>b</sup> The reason God assigns for pursuing such a course in the selection of his servants is said to be, "That no flesh should glory in his presence. \* \* \* That, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."<sup>c</sup> If the wisdom of this method of procedure does not appeal to the intelligence of man, let him accept it as an evidence that God's ways are not as man's ways, nor his thoughts as man's thoughts. Of this, too, we may be assured—that as the

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tribulation: if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea; if thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee \* \* \* and if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death be passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up thy way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. cxxii.) So also Paul: "Where in all things it behooved him [Jesus] to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high oriest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted. (Heb. ii: 17, 18.)

<sup>b</sup> I Cor. i: 26, 27.

<sup>c</sup> I Cor. i: 29, 31.



heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than man's ways; and his thoughts than man's thoughts.<sup>d</sup> Moreover, as I have remarked elsewhere,<sup>e</sup> it has become proverbial that all great movements, all reformations, all revolutions must produce their own leaders; and this is true of the great work of the last days—the establishment of the Church of Christ on earth—as it is of any other great movement. Leaders in established usages and institutions, political, social or religious, are seldom or never converted to innovations. They usually consider it to their interest to oppose change, especially those changes which from their very nature, cast any shadow of doubt upon the correctness of existing customs or institutions with which they are connected. Hence it happened that the Jewish Rabbis, the priests, the scribes, the members of the great Sanhedrim did not accept the doctrine of Messiah and become the chief apostles, sevens and elders of the new church. On the contrary, this class were the stubbornest opponents of the doctrines taught by the Son of God, and his most implacable enemies. It was the common people who heard him gladly, and from their number he chose the apostles, who through the God-given powers of the priesthood conferred upon them, shook the old systems of morals and religion from their foundations.

From the very nature of things it must be necessary that men whose minds are unwarped by prevailing customs and traditions, should be selected to establish a new order of religion, of government or society. How could the Jewish priests and rabbis, bound by long custom to a slavish adherence to the outward forms and ceremonies of the Mosaic ritual, the spirit of which had long been made of no effect by the rubbish of false traditions, open their minds to re-

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<sup>d</sup> Isaiah iv: 8, 9.

<sup>e</sup> Life of John Taylor, chapter 1.

ceive the larger and nobler doctrines of the gospel of Christ unmixed with the pomp and circumstance which men of that age considered essential to religion? Can men educated to an attachment for despotic government, and whose interests are bound up with its maintenance, be expected to look with favor on democratic principles, or become the champions of a republic?

Finally, were the religious leaders of the early part of the nineteenth century, educated to the idea that revelation had ceased; that the voice of prophecy was forever silenced; that the ministration of angels was ended; that the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost were done away; that the ancient organization of the church was no longer needed—were such men, filled with pride which the learning of the world too often infuses into the hearts of those who possess it—were such men qualified to stand at the head of and become leading actors in the dispensation of the fullness of times? A dispensation opened by a new revelation, by numerous visitations of angels, and to end eventually in the full establishment of the Church of Christ, the restoration of the house of Israel and the complete redemption of the earth and all its inhabitants?

Such a work was too large, too high and too deep for minds filled with false sectarian ideas. Hence God chose for his servant to stand at the head of this great and last dispensation, a man whose mind was unwarped by false education; but one of large capacity; possessing breadth and freedom of thought, of sanguine, fearless temperament: a child of nature, with a conscience unseared by worldly guile and a stranger to motives other than those dictated by an honest purpose; and withal, full of implicit confidence in God—a confidence born of a living faith in the fact of Deity's existence, and a consciousness of the rectitude of his own intentions and life.



As ill-founded as the objection based upon his humble parentage and station in life is that objection which arises out of the fact that he was evil spoken of by the world. Let not the reader here confound reputation with character. They are quite distinct, I assure you. The latter is what one is; the former may be a fool's estimate of one; or, even worse, it may be and often is a thing created by liars and knaves—formed by misrepresentations and set on its feet by malice. When favorable it is often obtained without merit, and as often lost without deserving. But with character it is not so. That stands independent of the estimate of fools or the misrepresentation of knaves. It is formed in great part by ourselves; in part by our surroundings; in part by God. It is what we are irrespective of what the world may think or say of us.

I have said so much that the reader may be reminded that a man's character may be good, while his reputation may be villainous; or *vice versa*. There is nothing, therefore, that is so unsafe a criterion by which to estimate a man as by what the world says of him—by his reputation.

Especially is this true of the servants of God. Commissioned as they usually are to reprove the world of sin and unrighteousness, and to call mankind to repentance, they have appeared as rude disturbers of the peace and ease of mankind—iconoclasts bent on breaking the images on which men set their hearts. The world does not love them, and what it hates it maligns—and thence, with the world, springs the reputation of the servants of God. The balances in which they are weighed are false, hence the announcement of their value from that source is untrue.

Judged by his reputation with the world when he lived among men, the Lord Jesus himself would be condemned as a blaspheming malefactor; a violator of ancient customs; a



traitor to Cæsar's government ; one so base as to be in league with Lucifer by whose power he cast out devils ; by magic healed the sick and blind and halt ; who for his many crimes was crucified between two thieves ; and whose body his disciples—being of like spirit with their master—stole, and then sent out the lying report that Jesus was risen from the dead. Such was the world's account of Christ, in his day, and in the days of his apostles—such the reputation of the Son of God ! If judged by it would he not be rejected as an imposter ? How unjust would such a judgment be ! To those who reject Joseph Smith as a servant and witness for God, because he was, and is evil spoken of by the world, I put this question : “May not the judgment you pass upon him—which you base upon what the world, and generally what his enemies, say of him, be equally unjust and untrue ?”

Jesus said to the apostles :

“If the world hate you ye know it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world the world would love his own : but because ye are not of the world but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me they will also persecute you ; if they have kept my saying they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake because they know not him that sent me.”<sup>f</sup>

In the light of these sayings of the Lord Jesus, of what value is the objection urged against Joseph Smith as a Prophet and witness for God based upon the fact that he was evil spoken of by the world ? Why, since he was a servant of the Most High, sent to reprove the world of its unrighteousness, may we not reasonably expect that the world would speak evil of him ? Would there not be something

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<sup>f</sup> St. John xv: 18-21.

manifestly wrong if it did not do it? "Blessed are ye," said Jesus, "when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for behold, your reward is great in heaven: *for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.*"<sup>g</sup>

It is nothing strange, then, that the great Prophet of the new dispensation should be spoken evil against. 'Tis an old tale, this slandering of God's servants by the world, so old that one wonders that men have not become so accustomed to it that they can assign to it its true importance, or rather its want of importance. But it seems to be the doom of every age in this matter to follow in the footsteps of that which preceded it—to build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."<sup>h</sup> And yet with strange inconsistency, these builders of tombs, these garnishers of sepulchres, while they profess to honor the prophets of past ages, persecute to the death the prophets of their own days. Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, they do always resist the Holy Ghost: as their fathers did, so do they—which of the prophets have they not persecuted?<sup>i</sup>

"Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! *for so did their fathers of the false prophets!*"<sup>j</sup> Stranger grows the inconsistency of human conduct. The true rejected; the false enshrined! and so common has become the

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<sup>g</sup> Luke vi: 22, 23.

<sup>h</sup> Matt. xxiii: 29.

<sup>i</sup> Acts vii: 51, 52.

<sup>j</sup> Luke vi: 26.



practice that one great thinker<sup>b</sup> touching the theme said: "There is always something great in that man against whom the world exclaims, at whom every one throws a stone, and on whose character all attempt to fix a thousand crimes without being able to prove one."

Here I may pause again to ask: What is the value of the objection made to Joseph Smith as a Prophet and witness for God, based upon the fact that he was evil spoken of by the world? That has been the heritage of the servants of God so long that the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. Had Joseph Smith failed to have received this treatment at the hands of the world, he would have failed of one of the marks of a true Prophet. Had he been received with open arms by the world, he could with some effect have been denounced as a false prophet; for in such manner they have been received:—"Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers of the false prophets!" The fact here stated by the Son of God is a complete answer to the objections based on the calumny of the world against the prophets of God in all subsequent times; and no less an answer to the objections urged against Joseph Smith than to other prophets.

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<sup>b</sup> Zimmerman.