

The End Times According to Latter Day Saint Joseph Smith Senior

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Background

Joseph Smith Senior was ordained to the office of Patriarch in the early Latter Day Saint (Mormon) movement. Smith is the father of Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith Junior. In Smith Senior's calling he pronounced blessings on church members. He made predictions including how long a person may live, if they would be living at the winding up scene at the second coming of Jesus Christ, the return of the ten lost tribes, and the possibility of being among the 144,000 faithful. This article is based upon the recorded patriarchal blessings for the time period of 1834-1840.

Joseph Smith Senior was born on July 12, 1771 and became a farmer, cooper, school teacher, and treasure-seeker who with his oldest son Alvin contracted for land in what would become Manchester, Ontario County, New York. Joseph Sr. was also known as a visionary. He married Lucy Mack in 1796. Joseph Smith Sr. was one of the eight witnesses to see the Book of Mormon gold plates and add his name to the religious testimony of its authenticity. He was 58 years old when he was baptized into the Church of Christ on April 6, 1830, the day of organization, in Manchester, New York.¹

In early May 1834, at Kirtland, Ohio, the name of the church was changed from Church of Christ to Church of the Latter Day Saints.² It is believed that Joseph Sr. was ordained church patriarch on December 6, 1834.

His son Joseph Jr. said on February 14, 1835 to those who traveled to Missouri to redeem Zion (in Zion's Camp) that they "should be ordained to the ministry and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, or the coming of the Lord, which was nigh, even fifty six years, should wind up the scene."³ This statement may have influenced his father in giving his patriarchal blessings. If taken literally the winding up scene or second coming would occur about the year 1891.⁴

In May 1836 Patriarch Smith administered blessings outside of Kirtland Township:

¹ Manuscript History, Book A-1:38, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. The manuscript history mentions the baptisms of Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith and includes the words "about the same time Martin Harris and a [blank space] Rockwell." Martin Harris was baptized on April 6, 1830. The location in this history should be corrected to Manchester, New York where the baptisms occurred.

² "Communicated," *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2, no. 20 (May 1834): 160, Kirtland, Ohio.

³ Kirtland Council Minute Book, 147, LDS Church History Library; Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H Parkin and Alexander L. Baugh, eds., *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834-September 1835* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), 225.

⁴ See for example, Dan Erickson, "Joseph Smith's 1891 Millennial Prophecy: The Quest for Apocalyptic Deliverance," *Journal of Mormon History* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 1-34 and Dan Erickson, *"As a Thief in the Night": The Mormon Quest for Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

The venerable Patriarch of our church Joseph Smith, sen. and Elder John Smith set out on a mission from this place, May 10th, to visit some of the branches of the church south of this, to regulate them and set in order the things that were wanting; they returned again on the 18th, being absent but eight days, during which time they either baptized, or witnesses the baptism of 16, and 95 received their patriarchal blessing.⁵

Topics in Joseph Smith Senior's Patriarchal Blessings

Some of the topics in patriarchal blessings were phrases that are found in the book of Revelation in the New Testament. These include being numbered with the 144,000 and having one's name written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 7:4; 14:1, 3; 21:27). Many blessings included lineage of one of the tribes of Israel. Other themes were more current like being sealed up to eternal life. Church members receiving patriarchal blessings felt that the patriarch was inspired in pronouncing the wording of the blessing. Many looked to their blessing as insight to their life and future prospects. These blessings help preserve part of the ministry of Joseph Smith Sr. Belief in other worlds being inhabited, being able to translate (remove) a person from one place to another, the nearness of the coming of Christ were part of the mix in blessings given.

Since these were the last days prior to the imminent second advent of Christ, the last time to preach the gospel before the end, blessings were given to members to reflect the belief that by keeping the commandments they would live to see the appearing of Jesus Christ. All of the following quotations come from Joseph Sr.'s patriarchal blessings.⁶

Coming of the Lord

For thus says the voice of the Spirit unto thee: "I am the Lord thy God, and I have spoken unto thee." And thou shalt stand upon the earth till the heavens shall be revealed and the Son of Man descends in flaming fire. (Jared Carter, February 24, 1835)

And if thou desirest thou shalt live on the earth, till the coming of the Son of Man in his glory (Charles B. Thompson, circa March 1835)

thou shalt stand upon the earth, in the flesh, when the Savior comes (Burr Riggs, June 7, 1835)

⁵ "From Our Elders Abroad," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, 2, no.9 (June 1836): 331, Kirtland, Ohio; see also John Smith Journal, LDS Church History Library.

⁶ Blessings of Joseph Smith Sr. can be found in H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007), 11-195 and on Mormon PDF Web Site at <https://user.xmission.com/~research/mormonpdf/index.htm>

Thou shalt stand upon the earth at the coming of thy Redeemer, and be caught up to meet him in the cloud and ever be with the Lord. (Don Carlos Smith, September 15, 1835) He died in 1841.

Thou shalt stand to see thy Redeemer come in his glory. (Agnes Smith, September 15, 1835)

Thou shalt be mighty before God and stand upon the earth at the coming of the Lord in his glory, and see him face to face (Heman Hyde, September 20, 1835)

And thou shalt stand in Zion and have an inheritance there & when the Savior comes thou shalt rise and meet him. (Sally Gray, June 25, 1836)

thou shalt stand on the earth when the Savior comes (Joanna Gray, June 25, 1836)

If thou art faithful thou shalt stand upon the earth to see the coming of the son of man. (Zarah S. Cole, probably 1836)

Thou shalt live until the Saviour shall come (Eunice Wilbur, probably 1836)

Thou shalt stand in the flesh and see Jesus come in the clouds of heaven (Jesse Turpin, April 15, 1837)

See the winding up Scene of this Generation

thou shalt live to see the Son of Man come in the clouds of heaven, and the winding up scene of this generation (Isaac Morley, May 4, 1835) He died in 1865.

Yea thou shalt stand on the earth and behold thy Savior and meet him in the cloud when he comes with power and great glory . . . Thou shalt stand to witness the winding up scene of this generation. (Orson Hyde, December 29, 1835) He died in 1878.

Thou shalt stand upon the earth 'till the Redeemer comes. See the end of this generation (Jonathan Crosby, February 21, 1836)

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. Thy strength shall be greater than when thou art twenty five. (Seth Church, May 23, 1836)

Thou shalt live and see the winding up scene of this generation (Polly Angel, probably May 1836)

Thou shalt stand to see almost the winding up scene of this generation (Mary Milliken, probably May 1836)

thou shalt live to behold the winding up scene of this generation when wickedness shall be swept off the face of the earth and thou shalt stand when Jesus Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven (Lucia Louisa Leavitt, June 30, 1836)

thou shalt live to see the Savior come in the clouds of heaven and behold the winding up scene of this generation, when wickedness is destroyed (Mary A. Baldwin, November 2, 1836)

thou shalt live to behold thy Savior in the flesh if thou shalt desire it: and thou shalt desire it and shall behold him. Thou shalt behold the winding up scene (Susan Mills Rogers, December 3, 1836)

thou shalt live to see the winding up scene of this generation (Abel Butterfield, December 8, 1836)

thou shalt live to behold the winding up scene of this generation (Simeon Carter, probably 1836)

Thou shalt stand to see the winding up scene of this generation. (Eliza Ann Cheney, probably 1836)

Thou shalt see the winding up scene of this wicked and adulterous generation (Mary Ann McBride, probably 1836)

Thou shalt stand on the earth to the end and see the winding up scene of this generation (George Robinson, probably 1836) He died in 1878.

Thou Shalt live to se[e] the winding up S[c]ene of this generation, to See Jesus Christ come in the clouds of heaven with power & Great Glory, thou Shalt Stand in the flesh with one hundred forty & four thousands and sing their song. (William Mc Clerry, October 2, 1837)

Thou shalt live to see the winding up scene (Mark Anthony Coombs, April 28, 1840)

One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand

Thou shalt stand among the 100 & 44000 even as thou hast desired (Harlow Redfield, December 26, 1835)

thou shalt stand on the earth to the end. Thou art one of the hundred and forty and four thousand. (William Oglesby Clark, April 25, 1836)

Thou shalt stand on mount Zion with the one hundred and forty four thousand (Abner Scovel, May 24, 1836)

thou shalt stand among the one hundred & forty four thousand on Mount Zion (Sampson Avard, probably May 1836) He died in 1869.

Thou shalt stand among the one hundred and forty four thousand on Mount Zion in robes of pure white (George Washington Dunham, probably May 1836)

Thou shalt stand to behold the winding up scene, and shall stand on the earth at the coming of Christ if faithful. Thou shalt stand on Mount Zion with the hundred and forty four thousand (Isaac Rogers, December 3, 1836)

thou shalt stand among the hundred and forty four thousand who shall stand with the Lamb on mount Zion (John Allen, probably 1836)

Thou shalt stand among the 144 thousand that John saw standing on Mt. Zion (Reuben Mc Bride, probably 1836) He died in 1891.

Thou shalt stand among the 144. thousand whom John saw standing upon Mount Zion in the presence of the Lamb. (Russel Potter, probably 1836)

Thou shalt stand in the flesh and see the winding up scene of this generation. Thou shalt remain on the earth to behold the Savior come in the clouds of heaven. Thou shalt be numbered with the 100 & 44.000 that shall stand upon Mount Zion and sing a song that no man can learn or sing but thy company. (Wilford Woodruff, April 13, 1837) He died in 1898.

Live to a certain Age

Thou shalt live to see thy three score years and ten and be satisfied with life (Loren Babbitt, July 31, 1835)

Thy life shall be prolonged threescore & fifteen years yea longer, if thy faith hold out. (Almera Foote, probably May 1836) Almera was born in 1807. She was twenty-nine years old when blessed. If she would have lived seventy-five years longer it would be to 1911. She died in 1867.

Thy days shall be many, but thou canst not live till the Saviour comes in the clouds of heaven, because of the infirmity of thy body." (Harriet Thornton, probably May 1836) Harriet received her blessing when forty-four years old. She lived another thirty-five years and died in 1870. Since Jesus did not come this part of her blessing came to pass.

thou shalt live till thou art 95 years old (Israel Knapp, June 25, 1836)

If thou art faithful and desirest it, thy days shall be one hundred and twenty years (Israel Calkins, July 7, 1836) Israel was born in 1766. If he lived to be one hundred twenty years old it would be to 1886. He died about 1848.

thou shalt live to a good old age and see the winding up scene among this generation (William Huntington, September 8, 1836) He died at the age of 62 years in 1846.

Thou hast the promise of long life, even eighty seven years." (Huntington Johnson, November 10, 1836) That is until 1883. He died in 1863 at the age of 67.

Thou shalt have long life thou shalt live to the age of Moses yet not be old (Lorenzo Snow, December 15, 1836) He died at the age of 87 years in 1901.

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 (Fally St. John, probably 1836) Fally was born on September 7, 1808. If she lived eighty-two years longer she would live at least to September 7, 1890.

Thou art forty and one years old and thou shalt live forty and four years more, if faithful (John Lyons, January 6, 1837) John would have lived to 1881. He died in 1864.

See Jesus Christ come in the clouds of heaven

thou shalt live to see thy Redeemer come in the clouds of heaven (Hyrum Smith, December 9, 1834) He died in 1844.

live to see the end of this generation . . . until the earth shall reel to and fro . . . at the coming of the glorious Messiah, for thou shalt live to see him come in the clouds of heaven, while thou art yet in the flesh (Ethan Barrows, March 23, 1836)

Thou shalt live to see the savior who shall come in the clouds of heaven (Phebe K. Pratt, May 15, 1836)

thou shalt see the Savior come in the clouds and rise and meet him (Sarah Byngton, June 25, 1836)

Thou shalt stand on the earth till the Redeemer comes in the clouds of heaven, rise to meet him in the air (Simon Dyke, probably 1836)

thou shalt stand on the earth when Jesus Christ comes in the clouds of heaven (Samuel Mc Bride, probably 1836)

Stand in the Flesh

Something whispers me that thou shalt stand in the flesh and see Jesus. (Esther Loraine Brown, December 8, 1836)

Thou shalt stand in the flesh when the Savior comes and shall not die (Nathan Lewis, probably 1836)

See the Tribes from the North

Thou shalt stand upon the earth when it shall reel to and fro as a drunken man . . . thou shalt stand on mount Zion when the tribes of Jacob come shouting from the north, and with thy brethren, the Sons of Ephraim, crown them in the name of Jesus Christ: Thou shalt see thy Redeemer Come in the clouds of heaven" (Joseph Smith Jr., December 9, 1834) He died in 1844.

Thou shalt live to see the ten tribes come from the land of the North the heavens rend and the son of man come in the clouds of heaven with all the glory of his father, and thou shalt rise and meet him and reign with him a thousand years (Lydia Knight, April 3, 1836) She died in 1884.

Thou shalt live to see the tribes come in from the North (Oliver Snow, June 20, 1836)

if faithful thou shalt see the sons of God come from the North Country, & thou shalt be crowned with them, and shall meet them in their armies as the Lord leads them by his Prophet, and when the highway is cast up . . . Thou shalt see the Revelator John, and stand upon the earth when he shall lead in his armies from the North (Arnold Stephens, July 6, 1840)

To Be Given Notice before the Coming of the Savior

Thou shalt be worthy to stand among the 144 thousand dressed in white upon Mt. Zion. . . . The Lord will give thee 48 days notice of his coming in the clouds of heaven. (Nathan Cheney, probably 1836)

thou shalt stand on the earth when Jesus comes in the Clouds of heaven. If thou livest up to thy privileges. Thou shalt have forty days notice of the coming of the Saviour. (Mariah Crandall, probably 1836) She died in 1842.

Summary

The majority of the promised events leading to the end times did not occur as pronounced by Joseph Smith Senior. To Latter Day Saints it does not matter if prophecy fails. In other ways the Saints would live out their lives in anticipation of that elusive end time. This is where the work of historians ends and where sociologists and theologians begin.⁷

⁷ A study that includes the use of the blessings of Joseph Smith Sr. is Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, *Binding Earth and Heaven: Patriarchal Blessings in the Prophetic Development of Early Mormonism* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).