The consequences of following the information or direction are beneficial to the individual and to others, except in cases where the vision contains a rebuke of iniquity or a prophecy of destruction.

Feelings of enlightenment, edification, and peace, rather than of anxiety or confusion, follow the receiving or awareness of the vision.

It is not induced by drugs, eroticism, violent or hyperemotional ritual, or worship of false spirits.

While it is often asserted that visions are merely the natural outcome of psychology, biology, culture, or drugs, this viewpoint has never been adequately supported. Such interpretations are helpful for a narrow range of explainable phenomena but do not reach the transcendent and inspirational realm of true visions. Theories from the time of Freudian psychoanalysis to the modern psychobiology of dreams and altered states of consciousness fall short of comprehending divinely given concepts.

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VISIONS OF JOSEPH SMITH

Ancient prophets were typically called through a revelatory process—visions and/or revelations: “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream” (Num. 12:6). The prophet Joel anticipated that visions would increase in the last days, saying, “Old men shall dream dreams, and young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28–32).

The Prophet Joseph Smith had his first vision at the age of fourteen while praying in a grove of trees in western New York (see FIRST VISION). The appearance of the Lord to him, like that to Saul of Tarsus, was attended by a shining light from heaven (Acts 9:3). The Lord spoke face-to-face with Joseph and called him to service. This was the first of a series of visions Joseph Smith received, many of which were shared with other persons. Blessed like John on the isle of Patmos and Paul who spoke of the third heaven, the Prophet Joseph Smith affirmed, “Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject” (TPJS, p. 324; cf. HC 6:50). He also declared that “the best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching” (TPJS, p. 191).

President John Taylor said that Joseph Smith had contact with prophets from every dispensation:

Because he [Joseph] stood at the head of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which comprehends all the various dispensations that have existed upon the earth, and that as the Gods in the eternal worlds and the Priesthood that officiated in time and eternity had declared that it was time for the issuing forth of all these things, they all combined together to impart to him the keys of their several missions (JD 18:326).

A new dispensation requires the conferral of priesthood and keys, in accordance with the law of witnesses: “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Cor. 13:1). During the restoration sequence when priesthood and keys were conferred by angelic ministrants, the Prophet was accompanied by one or more witnesses. Oliver Cowdery was a principal figure in the fulfillment of this law of witnesses (see WITNESSES, LAW OF); others were David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Sidney Rigdon. Distinguishing dreams from visions and associating visions and visitations, Joseph said, “An open vision will manifest that which is more important” (TPJS, p. 161). Crucial visions received by the Prophet Joseph Smith are the source of many cardinal doctrines and teachings of the Latter-day Saints.

THE FIRST VISION. Lucy Mack Smith recalled that as the Joseph Smith, Sr., family worked their Manchester, New York, farm in the period of 1820, “there was a great revival in religion, which extended to all denominations of Christians in the surrounding country.” Lucy and three of the children joined the Western Presbyterian Church in Palmyra, but Joseph remained “unchurched.” He later wrote, “It was impossible . . . to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong” (JS—H 1:8). In answer to a biblical prompting that “if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God” (James 1:5), Joseph retired to the
woods and uttered what he termed his "first vocal prayer." His prayer of faith was answered. Joseph recorded, "I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" Responding to his inquiry concerning which church he should join, the Lord instructed Joseph to join none of them, saying that he must continue as he was "until further directed" (JS—H 1:17–19, 26). When Joseph left the grove, he possessed the knowledge that God and his Son were actual personages, that the Godhead was composed of separate individuals, and that God hears and answers prayers. He also knew that he must not affiliate with the existing denominations (Backman, 1971, pp. 206–208).

This vision set in motion a train of visitations by angelic ministrants directing the young prophet in the process of restoring the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Visitation of Moroni.** The Prophet continued to pursue his common vocations until September 21, 1823, while "suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men," in part as a result of his claims concerning his first vision (JS—H 1:27). As he prayed that evening that he might know his standing before God, an angel appeared at his bedside, saying that he had been sent from the presence of God and that his name was Moroni. He explained "that God had a work for [Joseph] to do; and that [his] name should be had for good and evil among all nations" (JS—H 1:33). He instructed Joseph concerning a book that was written on gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of the continent. The fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in the record as delivered by the Savior to these people. Joseph was also shown a vision of a nearby hill and the place where the plates containing this record were deposited.

The next day, Joseph went to the hill, subsequently known by his followers as Cumorah, removed a stone covering, and viewed the contents of the box beneath, the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and a breastplate. The angel reappeared and informed him that the time for the removal of the plates had not arrived and that he was to meet him for further instruction at that same site over a succession of four years (JS—H 1:53). A further vision was opened to Joseph’s view, and he saw the “prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates.”

The heavenly messenger said, "All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one" (Messenger and Advocate 2:198).

From 1824 to 1827, Joseph returned to the hill each year as specified. On September 22, 1827, he met the angel and received final instructions regarding the record. Moroni gave the record to the Prophet to translate. Joseph said, "The same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge: that I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected" (JS—H 1:59). The messenger did not limit his instruction solely to these annual meetings, but made contact with Joseph on numerous occasions (Peterson, pp. 119–20). In all, the angel Moroni visited Joseph Smith at least twenty times (see Moroni, Visitations of). Joseph informed associates that other Book of Mormon prophets also visited him, including Nephi, son of Lehi (Cheesman, pp. 38–60). Lacy Mack Smith recalled that his son Joseph was enabled from this tutoring to describe "with much ease" the ancient inhabitants of America, "their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship" (p. 83).

**John the Baptist.** While translating the Book of Mormon at Harmony, Pennsylvania, on May 15, 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery became concerned about baptism for the remission of sins as described in 3 Nephi 11. They went into the woods to pray for enlightenment. Both record that a messenger from heaven, identifying himself as John the Baptist, laid hands on them and ordained them to the Aaronic Priesthood, saying, "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness" (JS—H 1:69; D&C 13; cf. TPJS, pp. 172–73).
Peter, James, and John. John the Baptist also informed Joseph and Oliver that "this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter." John stated "that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred on us" (JS—H 1:70, 72).

This restoration occurred during the latter part of May or early June 1829, someplace between Harmony and Colesville on the Susquehanna River (see Melchizedek Priesthood: Restoration of). Of this visitation, Joseph Smith later testified, "The Priesthood is everlasting. The Savior, Moses, & Elias—gave the Keys to Peter, James & John on the Mount when they were transfigured before him. . . . How have we come at the priesthood in the last days? It came down, down in regular succession. Peter, James & John had it given to them & they gave it up [to us]" (WJS, p. 9).

Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. By revelation Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris were selected to be witnesses of the plates and the authentic translation of the Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 11:3; 27:12; Ether 5:2–4; D&C 5:11–18; D&C 17). During the latter part of June 1829, in company with Joseph Smith, these three men went into the woods adjacent to the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, and knelt in prayer. When the promised revelation was not immediately received, Martin Harris stated that he felt he might be the cause of their failure. After Martin Harris withdrew, the others knelt in prayer again. David Whitmer described the visitation of Moroni:

The angel stood before us. He was dressed in white, and spoke and called me by name and said "Blessed is he that keepeth His commandments. . . ." A table was set before us and on it the Records of the Nephites, from which the Book of Mormon was translated, the breast plates [and also the Urim and Thummim], the Ball of Directors [Liahona], the Sword of Laban and other plates. While we were viewing them the voice of God spoke out of heaven saying that the Book was true and the translation correct (quoted in "Letter from Elder W. H. Kelley," Saints' Herald 29 [Mar. 1, 1882]:68).

Afterward, Joseph found Martin Harris, and together they experienced a similar manifestation. The Three Witnesses later endorsed a statement describing their experience that has been appended to all copies of the Book of Mormon. They swore that they had seen the angel and the plates and that "we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us" (see Book of Mormon Witnesses). Subsequently, eight others were privileged to see and handle the plates, but without the presence of the angel or having heard the voice of God.

Vision of Glories. While preparing the text of his translation of the Bible, Joseph Smith, with Sidney Rigdon, moved to the John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, on September 12, 1831. As the two men worked on the Gospel of John, it became apparent to them that many important points concerning the salvation of individuals had been lost from the Bible. Joseph wrote, "It appeared self-evident from what truths were left, that if God rewarded every one according to the deeds done in the body the term 'Heaven,' as intended for the Saints' eternal home must include more kingdoms than one" (HC 1:245). On February 16, 1832, in an upper room of the Johnson home, while he and Sidney Rigdon were examining the passage from John 5:29, they saw a multifaceted vision (D&C 76), commencing with a vision of the Father and the Son in the highest glory. This scene was followed by a series of visions, including Perdition and the sons of Perdition and then the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial kingdoms of glory. One witness, Philo Dibble, present in the room recalled that the two men sat motionless for about an hour. One would say, "What do I see," and describe it, and the other would say, "I see the same" (Juvenile Instructor 27 [May 15, 1892]:303–304).

It is apparent that the Prophet Joseph Smith did not impart all that he saw in vision, for he later said, "I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them" (TPJS, p. 305).

Kirtland Temple Visions. From January 21 to May 1, 1836, many of the Saints in Kirtland experienced an outpouring of the Spirit, a "Pentecostal season." On January 21, the Prophet assembled with others in the west schoolroom on the third story of the Kirtland Temple. Here Joseph beheld a vision of the celestial kingdom of God (D&C 137). He beheld the Father and the Son and sev-
eral ancient worthies, including Adam, Abraham, and his own mother and father (both still living), and his brother Alvin, who had died in 1823 (verse 5). As Joseph marveled over Alvin’s station in the celestial kingdom, the voice of the Lord declared, “All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God” (verse 7). He was also instructed concerning the destiny of little children. The Prophet recorded, “I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (verse 10).

During the dedication of the Kirtland Temple on March 27, 1836, many testified of the presence of angels. The Prophet specifically identified the ancient apostles Peter and John as present among them (Backman, The Heavens Resound, 1983, pp. 299–300; cf. JD 9:376).

One week later, on April 3, 1836, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had retired to the Melchizedek Priesthood pulpits on the west side of the first floor of the temple. The curtains were dropped around the pulpit area as the men prayed. “The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened” (D&C 110:1).

The Lord stood before them on the breastwork of the pulpit. “His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah” (D&C 110:3). The Savior accepted the newly completed structure and promised that his name and glory would be present and that thousands of persons would receive an outpouring of blessings because of the temple and the endowment received by his servants in that house (D&C 110:6–9).

Following the Savior’s appearance, three other messengers presented themselves. Each bestowed specific priesthood keys on the two leaders. Moses came and “committed [to them] the keys of the gathering of Israel” (verse 11). As Moses departed, Elias, possessing the keys of “the gospel of Abraham,” appeared and administered the keys of this dispensation, saying “that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed” (verse 12). Further priesthood keys were restored by Elijah, who declared, “Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent . . . to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers” (verses 14–15; see also ABRAHAMIC COVENANT; GOSPEL OF ABRAHAM).


The visions discussed herein are but a few of the myriad manifestations that gave the Prophet direction. Joseph mentions having seen others in vision, including Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, but does not detail their association (D&C 128:20–21). President John Taylor identified yet others who ministered to the Prophet, notably Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (JD 17:374; 18:325–26; 21:69, 94, 161; 23:48).

One writer has commented, “He had visions of the past as well as of the future. As a seer, he knew things about the past that are not part of our own scripture, but which he spoke of in discourse” (Madsen, p. 44). “I saw Adam in the valley of Adam-oni-Ahman” (TPJS, p. 158). To Joseph Knight, Sr., the Prophet commented on the vistas opened to him through the Urim and Thummim, which he found deposited with the gold plates. Knight explained, “He seemed to think more of the glasses or Urim and Thummim . . . says he, ‘I can see anything; they are marvelous’” (Jesse, 1976, p. 33). Accordingly, after reading Foxe’s Book of the Martyrs, Joseph remarked that he had “seen those martyrs, and they were honest, devoted followers of Christ, according to the light they possessed, and they will be saved” (Stevenson, p. 6). He saw in vision marchers in ZION’s CAMP who had perished from cholera in Clay County, Missouri. He related their condition, observing to the survivors, “Brethren, I have seen those men who died of the cholera in our camp; and the Lord knows, if I get a mansion as bright as theirs, I ask no more” (HC 2:181n). The organization of the QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES and the First Quorum of the Seventy were made known to him “by vision and by the Holy Spirit,” and he established those priesthood offices in February 1835 (HC 2:182). In an earlier vision, he “saw the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, who are now
upon the earth, who hold the keys of this last ministry, in foreign lands, standing together in a circle, much fatigued, with their clothes tattered and feet swollen, with their eyes cast downward, and Jesus standing in their midst, and they did not behold Him. The Savior looked upon them and wept” (HC 2:381). He saw a vision enabling him to designate the “central place” in Independence, Missouri (TPJS, p. 79). Of a vision of the resurrection of the dead, he explained, “So plain was the vision, that I actually saw men, before they had ascended from the tomb, as though they were getting up slowly” (TPJS, pp. 295–96). He also saw the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples in vision before their construction and gave detailed instructions to the architects, describing the windows and their illumination (JD 13:357; 14:273; HC 6:196–97). He foresaw the struggles of the Saints in crossing the plains, their establishment in the Rocky Mountains, and the future condition of the Saints (HC 5:85n–86n).

He remarked late in his life, “It is my meditation all the day & more than my meat & drink to know how I shall make the saints of God to comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge, before my mind” (WJS, p. 196).

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VISITING TEACHING

Visiting teaching is an organized means whereby the women of the Church receive regular instructional and compassionate service visits—usually by personal contact in the home—from other female members of the Church. The purpose is to promote SISTERSHOOD, present inspirational messages, and note instances of need wherein the temporal and spiritual resources of the Church might be helpful.

In practice, the ward RELIEF SOCIETY president or those assisting her assign pairs of visiting teachers to keep in contact with specific families over a period of several months or even years. More frequent contact is made with women and families exhibiting special needs, such as those new to the Church, the less active, single parents, the divorced, the widowed, the aged, and those faced with illness, death, or other difficulties.

The need for such visitors was recognized soon after the founding of the Relief Society in 1842. At the second meeting of the society on March 24, Emma SMITH, wife of the Prophet Joseph Smith, suggested appointing persons to wait upon the poor. On July 28, 1843, a Necessity Committee of sixteen was named “to search out the poor and suffering, to call upon the rich for aid, and thus as far as possible, relieve the wants of all.” The original functions of this committee were twofold, “to ascertain the condition of the families visited, and to accept contributions for charitable purposes” (General Board, 1942, pp. 43–44; 1966, p. 68).

In the early years of the Church in Nauvoo, Illinois, visiting teachers reported their visits at the regular Relief Society meeting before all mem-