



Welcome to the Modern Dispensation series. In our Old and New Testament classes, we traced patterns of sacred temples, the Divine presence of God, covenantal ascent, women's sacred roles, wisdom, prophecy, the image of God, and the movement of revelation through history. In this new section, we will study how those same patterns are restored through Joseph Smith as a dispensational prophet, beginning in the Sacred Grove and unfolding through Zion, Kirtland, Nauvoo, and the modern temple.

In our first lesson, **The Sacred Grove as the First Temple**, we are going to dive deep and ask better questions with the background we gained in the Old and New Testament courses helping us to see Joseph's First Vision as something much more telling than the superficial information in the accounts he gives. Joseph enters a grove, seeks wisdom, kneels in prayer, passes through darkness, receives light, and comes into the presence of the Godhead. As you read this homework, watch for the ancient temple patterns returning in the modern dispensation, especially sacred trees, divine light, women's covenantal roles, continuing revelation, and the path back into God's presence.

Reading Assignment

Read Doctrine and Covenants 93:1 and 93:36.

[Doctrine and Covenants 93:1](#)

[Doctrine and Covenants 93:36](#)

Read Joseph Smith History 1:8 through 20.

[Joseph Smith History 1:8 through 20](#)

Read President Russell M. Nelson, "Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints," October 2018 General Conference. In this talk, President Nelson teaches that temple ordinances and

covenants bring ongoing spiritual strengthening and tutoring available in the house of the Lord, and he affirms that revelation continues in the Church.

[Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints](#)

*President Nelson's Revelation:
A Modern Doorway into
Ancient Temple Memory*



Eve Elevated

Women Covenant Directly with Elohim

Continuing Revelation in the Temple

President Nelson's 2018 temple revelation gives us the interpretive key for this whole series. It helps us see the Restoration as something still unfolding. By elevating Eve, clarifying women's direct covenantal relationship with Elohim, and emphasizing continuing revelation in the temple, it reopens ancient patterns of sacred space, covenantal ascent, and spiritual fullness for women and men. As you read this week, watch for how older temple themes return in the modern dispensation.

President Nelson's temple revelation gives us the opening key for this entire series. It helps us see the Restoration as something still unfolding, with the temple at the center of that movement. In 2018, President Nelson directed a renewed examination of temple worship with special attention to Eve, women's covenantal standing, and the spiritual fullness offered to every individual. These changes to the temple alone point us back to older temple patterns that had become harder to see over time.

So as we begin this lesson, watch how President Nelson's revelation and changes to the temple gathers together many of the themes we studied in the Old and New Testament courses. Eve is elevated. Women covenant directly with Elohim. Continuing revelation becomes the way God restores forgotten truths and corrects inherited assumptions. This is why we begin with President Nelson before returning to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove. The modern temple helps us recognize what the First Vision began: a Restoration of divine presence, sacred knowledge, covenantal ascent, and spiritual power for women and men. This is the pattern of diachronic study. Seeing where it began and how it is evolving and mapping that trajectory.

Reading Assignment

Reading Assignment

Read Genesis 2:18 through 25.

[Genesis 2:18 through 25](#)

Read Genesis 3:1 through 24.

[Genesis 3:1 through 24](#)

Read 2 Nephi 2:22 through 25.

[2 Nephi 2:22 through 25](#)

Read Moses 5:10 through 12.

[Moses 5:10 through 12](#)

Read the selected President Nelson material from the class workbook on the 2018 temple revelation and women's covenantal standing.

WHAT IS A DISPENSATIONAL PROPHET?

A dispensational prophet is one through whom God opens, restores, or reorganizes an entire covenant order.

REGULAR PROPHET	DISPENSATIONAL PROPHET
Speaks for God within an existing covenant order.	Receives keys, restores or opens a covenant order, and administers divine stewardship.

LANGUAGE MARKERS

REGULAR PROPHET	DISPENSATIONAL PROPHET
Thus saith the Lord • Repent • Return • Hear the word of the Lord • Remember the covenant	Keys • Dispensation • Fullness • Restore • Gather • Covenant • Priesthood • Ordinance • Sealing • Zion • Temple

EXAMPLES OF DISPENSATIONAL PROPHETS



ADAM ENOCH NOAH ABRAHAM MOSES CHRIST JOSEPH SMITH

Joseph Smith is a dispensational prophet because he restores scripture, priesthood, ordinances, temple knowledge, sealing authority, Zion, and the covenant path back to God.

A dispensational prophet is different from a regular prophet as a dispensational prophet does more than speak for God inside an existing covenant order. This initial prophet is one through

whom God opens, restores, or reorganizes an entire covenant order. This is why figures like Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, and Joseph Smith stand at major turning points in religious history. Each one receives revelation that reshapes how God's people understand covenant, priesthood, sacred temples, divine law, and the path back into God's presence. The linguistic clue is found in the word **dispensation**. In the New Testament, this idea comes from the Greek word **oikonomi** or economy, meaning stewardship, household management, or in this case sacred administration. A regular prophet may call people to repent, return, and remember the covenant. A dispensational prophet receives keys, restores ordinances, gathers covenant people, reveals priesthood order, and administers a larger sacred economic structure of God for the people of their time. what the people do with that information is completely up to them. This is why Joseph Smith belongs in the same pattern as Moses and Abraham. Joseph does not only receive revelation. He restores scripture, priesthood, temple knowledge, sealing authority, Zion, and the covenant path back to God. As we move through this course, we will watch how those restored pieces unfold line upon line through the Sacred Grove, Zion, Kirtland, Nauvoo, and the modern temple, while seeing how the economy of God has always been rooted in our own free agency to receive what has been there from the beginning, or to remain unwilling to accept it.

Reading Assignment

Read Ephesians 1:9 through 10 and look for the phrase "dispensation of the fulness of times."

[Ephesians 1:9 through 10](#)

Read the Bible Dictionary entry "Dispensations," focusing on how dispensations are connected to priesthood authority, gospel restoration, and authorized servants of God.

[Bible Dictionary: Dispensations](#)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 110 and watch for the return of keys through Moses, Elias, and Elijah.

[Doctrine and Covenants 110](#)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 27:5 through 14 and notice how earlier prophetic dispensations gather into the Restoration.

[Doctrine and Covenants 27:5 through 14](#)

Read Moses 1:39 and ask how the work of each dispensational prophet participates in God's larger purpose.

[Moses 1:39](#)



So let's look at the road map for the Modern Dispensation series we are starting today. We will begin in the Sacred Grove as the first temple and then follow the Restoration as it unfolds through Zion in Jackson County, Kirtland, Nauvoo, women and priesthood, Joseph Smith's endowment, Prophetesses in our modern times, martyrdom, modifications, Brigham Young, the temple film, the modern temple, Abraham's covenant, line upon line revelation, and the women weavers. Each class will help us see how Joseph Smith's prophetic work restored the gospel of Jesus Christ and then traces our reactions to it. He restored a sacred pattern of covenant, priesthood, temple ascent, divine presence, sacred order, and direct relationship with God. As we move through this course, keep watching for the same patterns we traced in the Old and New Testament classes. The image of God returns. The Godhead is clarified. Women's sacred roles come back into view. The balance of masculine and feminine is at the center of temple theology. Chaos and order are covenantal principles restored. Personal accountability replaces shallow prosperity religion. The call of Shema returns as a modern invitation to hear, obey, and respond to God with the whole soul before revelation can be complete.

Reading Assignment

Read Doctrine and Covenants 109 and look for temple language connected to holiness, glory, learning, order, power, and the presence of God.

[Doctrine and Covenants 109](#)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 110 and watch how Moses, Elias, and Elijah return with keys that gather older dispensations into the Restoration.

[Doctrine and Covenants 110](#)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 25 and notice how Emma's calling introduces women's sacred labor, voice, selection, instruction, and covenant participation into the Restoration.

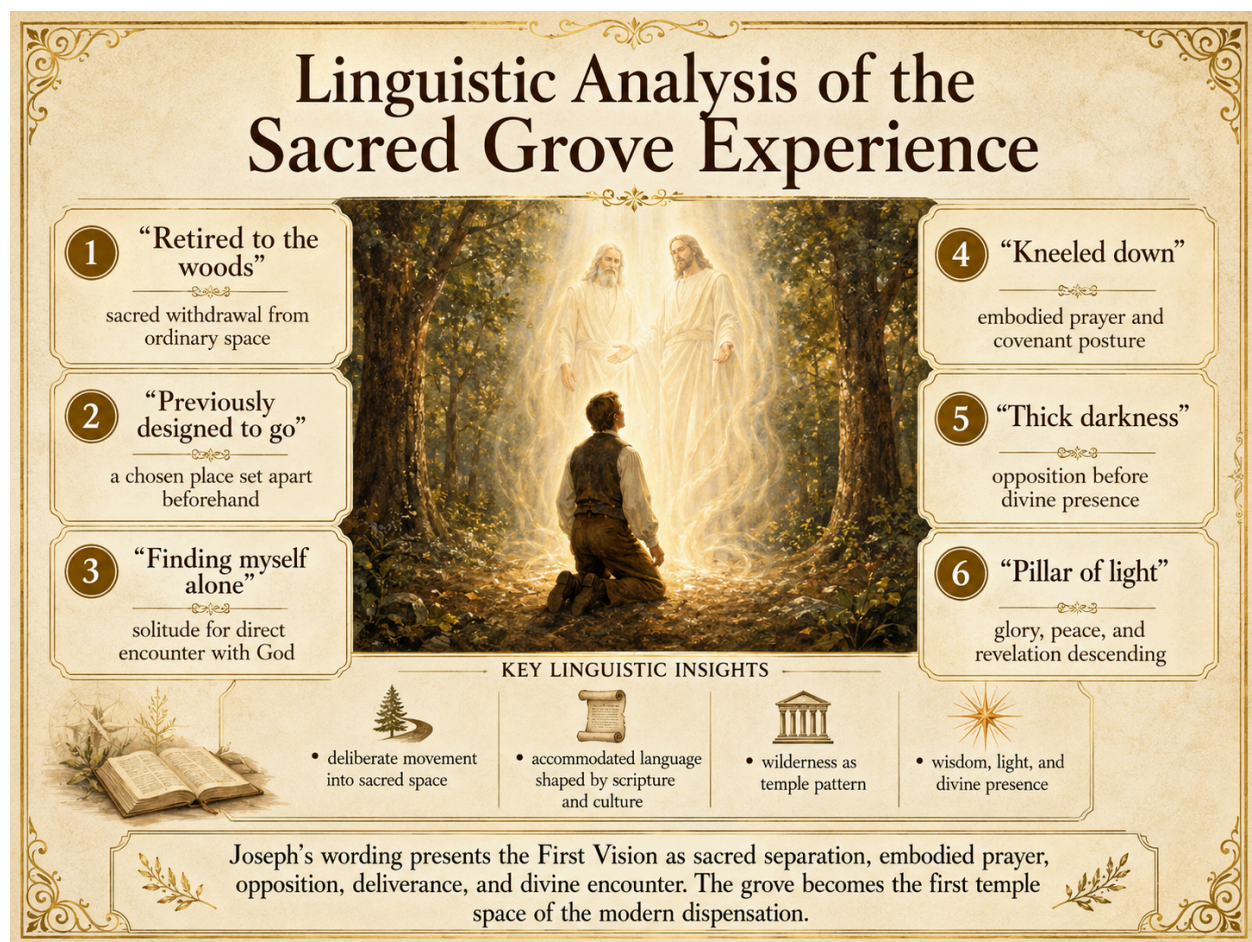
[Doctrine and Covenants 25](#)

Read President Russell M. Nelson, "The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation," and look for how temple covenants become the foundation for spiritual stability in the modern world.

[The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation](#)

Read President Russell M. Nelson, "Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints," and look for how temple worship sits at the center of the ongoing Restoration.

[Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints](#)



The Sacred Grove experience is filled with linguistic clues that help us read Joseph Smith's First Vision as the first temple encounter in our modern dispensation. Joseph says he "retired to the woods," and went to this place he had "previously designed to go," in order to find himself alone, kneel down, and begin to offer the desires of his heart to God. These words show the deliberate withdrawal and understanding of the requirement of sacred separation, embodied prayer, and sacred movement from ordinary space into a place set apart for divine encounter. Lucy Mack

Smith later preserves a family memory of “a little grove” where she had taught the family to go to offer their secret prayers to God. The grove whether intuited or understood by Joseph's mother is that same Old Testament wilderness temple that is found for those needing outside the ordered life of house, farm, church, and community, where Joseph could ask God directly. As you read the different First Vision accounts, pay close attention to Joseph's wording. In the earliest account, Joseph emphasizes his soul, sin, mercy, and forgiveness. In the later account, he emphasizes confusion, competing churches, vocal prayer, opposition, thick darkness, deliverance, the fluid pillar of light that brings peace, and the embodied and ordered Father revealing the Son. These differences help us see how revelation is communicated through accommodated language. Joseph is describing a divine experience through the scriptural and cultural language available to him and his understanding at the time. The grove, wisdom seeking, darkness, light, divine voice, and sacred presence all belong to the same ancient temple pattern we have studied over and over again. Joseph leaves ordinary space, seeks wisdom, passes through opposition, receives light, and comes into the presence of the Godhead. That is why the Sacred Grove should be read as the first temple moment of the modern dispensation.

Reading Assignment

Read Joseph Smith History 1:8 through 20 and look for Joseph's movement from confusion, to the grove, to prayer, to darkness, to light, and finally to divine presence.

[Joseph Smith History 1:8 through 20](#)

Read the Joseph Smith Papers overview of the primary First Vision accounts and notice how each account emphasizes a different part of Joseph's experience.

[Primary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision](#)

Read Joseph Smith's 1832 account and look for the language of personal sin, mercy, forgiveness, and Joseph's desire to know God for himself.

[Joseph Smith's 1832 First Vision Account](#)

Read Joseph Smith's 1835 account and look for the additional visionary details, including opposition, angelic presence, and Joseph's effort to describe what he experienced.

[Joseph Smith's 1835 First Vision Account](#)

Read the 1838 account and mark the phrases “retired to the woods,” “previously designed to go,” “finding myself alone,” “kneeled down,” “thick darkness,” and “pillar of light.”

[Joseph Smith's 1838 Account](#)

Read Lucy Mack Smith's history and look for the family memory of a little grove where secret prayers were offered. Notice how this supports the idea of a grove as a family sacred space, while still reading it carefully as a later memory connected to the witnesses.

[Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844 to 1845, Book 9](#)

Read the Church History Topics entry on the Sacred Grove and Smith Family Farm and notice how the wooded area offered Joseph a secluded place to pray.

[Sacred Grove and Smith Family Farm](#)



THE PEACEFUL PRESENCE IN THE FIRST VISION

MOTHER • WISDOM • SPIRIT • DIVINE LIGHT

THE LINGUISTIC AND SCRIPTURAL PATTERN OF THE HEAVENLY MEDIATOR

Joseph enters a grove in the chaotic wilderness, seeks Wisdom, passes through thick bitter darkness, and then a pillar of light descends with power, peace, and revelation. That light ushers away the darkness and becomes the medium through which the Father reveals the Son. In this reading, the light is identified as Divine presence, the Comforter, Wisdom, Spirit, and the Heavenly Mediator.



"... a pillar of light exactly over my head above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me, I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air."
— Joseph Smith—History 1:14–17

OLDER SCRIPTURAL PATTERNS

EXODUS 13:21–22 A PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE

The LORD went before them in a pillar of a cloud by day, to lead them the way; and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light.

EXODUS 13:21–22

The presence, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–38)

PROVERBS 8 – WISDOM (HOKMAH)

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old ... I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in the inhabitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men. (Proverbs 8:22, 30–31)

Wisdom is the power through which Adam ("the Lord") forms the world.

NEW TESTAMENT – THE PARACLETE

"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter (Parakletos), that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth ... he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." — John 14:16, 26–27

EARLY CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

GOSPEL OF THE HEBREWS (CLEMENTINE TRADITION)

Jesus said, "My Mother, the Holy Spirit."
— Pseudo by Origen (3rd century)

SYRIAC WITNESSES TO JOHN 14:26

"The Spirit, feminine in the feminine pronoun 'she,' for the Paraclete (Holy Spirit), 'She shall teach you all things,' — Syriac (Old Syriac and later)

These images do not prove that Joseph understood the Mother in the grove at the moment of the First Vision, but they show us the road to vision through a literary, temple grammar where light, wisdom, spirit, comfort, and divine mediation are all connected through the sacred temple and covenant language of God.

SYMBOLS OF THE FEMININE DIVINE PRESENCE IN SCRIPTURE

D&C 88:45–47

The Earth as a Mother



"The earth rolls upon her wings, in the midst of the power of God." (feminine imagery)

1 NEPHI 11:22–25

The Tree and the Mother



The love of God, the Mother, and the Son are united in the tree of the vision.

JST REVELATION 12

The Woman Clothed with the Sun



A symbol of covenant people, heavenly birth, and sacred struggle.

LUKE 3:21–22

The Spirit Descends



"The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape ... and a voice from heaven."

ALL CONNECTED THROUGH TEMPLE AND COVENANT



Light • Wisdom • Spirit
Comfort • Mediation
Divine Presence

VISIONARY TRADITION OF ZEBEDEE COLTRIN

ABRAHAM H. CANNON'S RETELLING (1890)



Joseph lay upon the ground with his arms outspread. After repeated prayer, a brilliant light appeared. They saw the Father, the Mother, and finally the Savior added to the vision. Identified as the Godhead.

OTHER COLTRIN ACCOUNTS (Contextual Comparison)



Other accounts identify the enthroned man and woman as Adam and Eve, in the same pattern as the Elohim as a Father and Mother.

These visions show Joseph's revelatory world returning to temple and covenant teachings, embodied prayer, opened heavens, and Divine percentage—expanding the temple pattern of Father, Mother, Son, Spirit, creation, covenant, male and female imagery, and the Elohim relationship that makes us as the Gods.

LATER RESTORATION TEACHINGS – OPENING THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVENLY PARENTS

JOSEPH SMITH – 1841 DISCOURSE THE THREE DIVINE PERSONAGES

"An everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and it is due to the dispensation of things to men on the earth. These personages according to Adam the second, according to Adam the first, the feminine creation." — William Clayton Report (16 March 1841)

ELIZA R. SNOW – "MY FATHER IN HEAVEN" (1845)

"I presume all here believe in our Father who is in heaven. Do you believe in our Mother who is in heaven?" Until the key of knowledge was restored, the world could not comprehend the character of Deity in its fullness." — Eliza R. Snow Oct. 1845

MOTHER IN HEAVEN – CHURCH HISTORY TOPICS

Early Latter-day Saints saw their redeemed daughters participating in Relief Society, as "Mother in Heaven" revealed in Relief Society ritual and Savior's testimony.



PATTERN, PURPOSE, AND TEMPLE GRAMMAR



The diagram shows a sequence of stages: GRIEV / WILDERNESS (Chaos, retreat, separation, working, wisdom, Joseph enters sacred space) → WISDOM SEEKING (Asking the Lord for wisdom, who? (Wisdom, Holy Spirit, Divine encounter)) → DARKNESS / OPPOSITION (Thick, bitter darkness (temptation, bound)) → PILLAR OF LIGHT (Power, peace, presence descends (Divine Mediation)) → FATHER REVEALS SON (The Father reveals the Son through the Light/Spirit / Wisdom) → HEAVENLY PARENTS (Creation, teaching, blessing, A Mother, the Spirit)

KEY SCRIPTURAL SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANING

SYMBOL	SCRIPTURE	MEANING
Pillar of Cloud & Fire	Exodus 13:21–22, 40:34–38	Divine guidance and presence; glory fills sacred space
Wisdom (Hokmah)	Proverbs 8:22–31	Co-creation, delight, ordering, power within God
Spirit / Paraclete	John 14:16–27; Luke 3:21–22	Comforter, Teacher, Witness, Peace, Divine Presence
Earth as Mother	D&C 88:45–47	Feminine imagery of creation in God's power
Tree / Mother Love	1 Nephi 11:22–25	Love of God (female) as Mother and Son
Woman Clothed w/ Sun	JST Revelation 12	Covenant people, heavenly birth, sacred struggle

REFLECTION QUESTION

How does the First Vision change when we read the pillar of light as Divine presence, Wisdom, Comforter, Spirit, and the Heavenly Mediator rather than simply as a physical brightness? (When the historical context which reading is more likely?)

KEY CONCLUSION

The First Vision fits an ancient pattern: Wisdom (Mother) brings light; the Spirit reveals the Son; the Father speaks; and God's presence brings peace and testimony.

SUMMARY

- Joseph's experience aligns with scriptural patterns of light, Wisdom, Spirit, and mediation.
- The feminine imagery of Mother, Wisdom, and Spirit is consistent across Scripture, temple, and early restored teachings.
- Restoration leaders affirmed the reality of Heavenly Parents and the temple order of heaven.

SOURCES (READING & STUDY)

Joseph Smith History 1:14–17; D&C 88:45–47; Proverbs 8; 1 Nephi 11:22–25; Luke 3:21–22; John 14:16–27; JST Revelation 12; William Clayton Report, 16 Mar. 1841; Eliza R. Snow, Oct. 1845; Abraham H. Cannon, "Joseph Smith—Coltrin Account," 1890; RSC, Gospel of the Hebrews fragments; Early Christian & Syriac witnesses.

In the final layer of our linguistic analysis, we should look at the scriptural symbols and their meanings. The peaceful presence in the First Vision belongs to an older scriptural pattern of Mother, Wisdom, Spirit, and Divine light. The First Vision account may not directly name Heavenly Mother, but Joseph's language gives us a symbolic field that ancient temple texts already trained us to recognize. Joseph enters a grove in the chaotic wilderness, seeks Wisdom, passes through thick bitter (MRR) darkness, and then a pillar of light descends with power, peace, and revelation. That light pushes away the darkness and becomes the medium through which the Father reveals the Son. In this reading, the light is identified as Divine presence, the Comforter, Wisdom, Spirit, and the Heavenly Mediator.

The Old and New Testament patterns help us understand why this is so significant. In Exodus, the Lord leads Israel through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and fire, and the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle. In Proverbs 8, Wisdom is present with God, Adonai before and during creation, rejoicing before Him and is the power through which He forms the world. In the New Testament, the Spirit descends, comforts, teaches, remembers, and bears witness of Christ as the Paraclete. Early Christian sources preserve traces of this same older pattern, including traditions where Jesus speaks of "my Mother, the Holy Spirit," and Syriac witnesses where the Spirit is described with feminine grammar. These images do not prove that Joseph understood

the Mother in the grove at the moment of the First Vision, but they allow us to read the vision through a larger temple grammar where light, wisdom, spirit, comfort, and divine mediation are all connected through the sacred temple and covenant language of God.

Later Restoration sources show that Joseph's teachings opened the way for a fuller doctrine of heavenly parents. Joseph taught in 1841 that an everlasting covenant was made between three divine personages before the organization of the earth, identifying them as God the first, the Creator, God the second, the Redeemer, and God the third, the Witness or Testator. Eliza R. Snow's "My Father in Heaven" later speaks of a restored "key of knowledge" that reveals a Mother there. The Church's history topic on Mother in Heaven also notes that early Latter-day Saint women remembered Joseph personally teaching the doctrine of a Mother in Heaven. The Sacred Grove should be read as the beginning temple experience of this dispensation, a pattern that Joseph and the Saints would only understand more fully over time.

One later visionary tradition connected to Zebedee Coltrin helps us see how Joseph's first vision of the Godhead kept returning to temple and covenant teachings, embodied prayer, opened heavens, and Divine parentage. In one later retelling recorded by Abraham H. Cannon, Joseph goes with brethren to a secluded place in the woods, lies on his back with his arms extended, and after repeated prayer the group sees a brilliant light, then the Father, the Mother, and finally the Savior added to the vision. This is identified as the Godhead. Other Coltrin related accounts identify a vision of an enthroned man and woman as Adam and Eve, sitting in the same pattern as the Elohim as the Father and Mother. the temple pattern started in vision of the roles of Father, Mother, Son, Spirit, creation, covenant, male and female imagery, and the Elohim as the relationship that makes us as the Gods.

Reading Assignment

Read Joseph Smith History 1:14 through 17 and mark the movement from the grove, to vocal prayer, to thick darkness, to deliverance, to the pillar of light, and finally to the Father revealing the Son.

[Joseph Smith History 1:14 through 17](#)

Read Exodus 13:21 through 22 and Exodus 40:34 through 38. Watch how the pillar of cloud and fire guides Israel and how the glory of the Lord fills sacred space.

[Exodus 13:21 through 22](#)

[Exodus 40:34 through 38](#)

Read Doctrine and Covenants 88:45 through 47 and notice the feminine imagery of the earth rolling upon her wings in the midst of the power of God.

[Doctrine and Covenants 88:45 through 47](#)

Read Proverbs 8:22 through 31 and notice how Wisdom is present with God in creation, ordering, delight, and divine work.

[Proverbs 8:22 through 31](#)

Read John 14:16 through 18 and John 14:26 through 27. Watch how the Comforter teaches, remembers, and brings peace through the name of Christ.

[John 14:16 through 18](#)

[John 14:26 through 27](#)

Read Luke 3:21 through 22 and notice how the Spirit descends as the Father bears witness of the Son.

[Luke 3:21 through 22](#)

Read 1 Nephi 11:8 through 25 and notice how the tree, the love of God, the Mother, and the Son are linked in visionary symbolism.

[1 Nephi 11:8 through 25](#)

Read JST Revelation 12 and notice how the woman clothed with the sun becomes a symbol of covenant people, heavenly birth, and sacred struggle.

[JST Revelation 12](#)

Read Joseph Smith's May 1841 discourse on the three divine personages and notice the language of Creator, Redeemer, and Witness or Testator.

[Joseph Smith Papers, Discourse circa May 1841, William Clayton Report](#)

Read the early Christian witness from the Gospel of the Hebrews preserved by Origen, where Jesus refers to "my Mother, the Holy Spirit."

[Origen and the Gospel of the Hebrews](#)

Read the scholarly article on feminine Holy Spirit traditions and notice the Syriac witness to John 14:26, where the Spirit is described with feminine pronouns.

[The Holy Spirit as Feminine, Early Christian Testimonies](#)

Read the Church History Topics entry on Mother in Heaven and notice how early Latter-day Saint women remembered Joseph Smith teaching the doctrine of a Mother in Heaven.

[Mother in Heaven](#)

Read Eliza R. Snow's "My Father in Heaven" and look especially for the phrase "until the key of knowledge was restored."

[Eliza R. Snow, "My Father in Heaven," October 1845](#)

Read Abraham H. Cannon's retelling of the Zebedee Coltrin vision, then read the contextual comparison of other Coltrin accounts that identify the enthroned man and woman as Adam and Eve.

[Abraham H. Cannon Retelling of the Coltrin Vision](#)

[Contextual Comparison of the Coltrin Accounts](#)

Reflection Question

How does the First Vision change when we read the pillar of light as Divine presence, Wisdom, Comforter, Spirit, and the Heavenly Mediator rather than simply as physical brightness? Given the historical context which reading is more likely?