



Joseph Fielding McConkie, 1941–2013.

## Bruce R. McConkie: A Special Witness

*Joseph Fielding McConkie*

*The following address was given by Joseph Fielding McConkie on April 12, 2013, in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, as part of the “Men and Women of Faith” series sponsored by the Church History Library. In his remarks, he pays tribute to his father, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who served as a member of the First Council of Seventy (1946–1972) and the Quorum of the Twelve (1972–1985). The narrative is reflective and provides insights and glimpses into Elder McConkie’s personal life, character, and doctrinal teachings.*

*Joseph Fielding McConkie was a professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University from 1977–2006. He died on October 10, 2013, following a lengthy battle with cancer. This was his final public address.*

*We acknowledge the McConkie family for permission to publish the address and the accompanying photographs, and also the assistance of Matthew B. Christensen in preparing the remarks for publication.<sup>1</sup>*

Sometime before Bruce McConkie was old enough to hold the priesthood, the town bully in Monticello, Utah, where the McConkies lived, approached Oscar W. McConkie, Bruce’s father, and told him that he had a boy who could whip his boy any time, any place. Oscar responded, “Well that may be so, but that is not the purpose for which I am raising my son.”

In a father’s blessing, given to him as he was about to leave as a missionary, Bruce was given the following promise:

The day will come, while you are yet tabernacle in the flesh, that all men who know you will look to you for counsel and for the witness of the truth, for through your faithfulness you shall become a chosen vessel, exalted among your brethren in the holy order of the priesthood of our God.

The Lord will bless you and your heart will be filled with understanding. Your wisdom shall be great, extending beyond the bounds of the earth, and you shall

comprehend the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and many revelations will be given unto you, and many things will be understood and taught you which are and shall ever be mysterious unto those who are not willing to pay the full price of obedience to God's exalted law, but which great treasures shall be pearls beyond price to you, for they shall light up your soul with everlasting joy.<sup>2</sup>

Bruce Redd McConkie was a man of faith, raised in a home of faith, to do a work of faith. At his funeral, Elder Boyd K. Packer said, "If ever there was a man who was raised up unto a very purpose, if ever a man was prepared against a certain need—it was Bruce R. McConkie."<sup>3</sup>

In the morning session of the April 6, 1985, general conference, Bruce McConkie sealed his life's work and ministry with a powerful testimony of Christ; the spirit felt by those who heard this testimony will never be lost. Rarely does a week or more go by that I do not meet someone who heard that talk and reminds me of it. I invite you to reflect with me on a lifetime of preparation that enabled Elder McConkie to speak with such power and effect. All that will be said rests upon these verities:

- You cannot teach what you do not know.
- If you have not taught anything, you cannot testify to anything.
- Competence as a witness is predicated upon knowledge—empirical personal knowledge which you have experienced. Teaching this principle the Savior said, "If any man will do his will, he will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).
- A valid and binding testimony of Christ grows out of a sound understanding of the Restoration. You cannot get to Gethsemane without going through the Sacred Grove.<sup>4</sup>

To that end, let me review with you some of the preparatory experiences that preceded that powerful testimony. Let us begin our story with Bruce McConkie, the young missionary.



Oscar W. McConkie, Sr., father of Bruce R. McConkie, date unknown.

### As a Missionary

One could not suppose that his mission call as a young man was a matter of chance. The young Elder McConkie was called to serve in the Eastern States Mission. For all intents and purposes he was called to serve in the combined Sacred Grove and Hill Cumorah Missions. He spent many an hour in these sacred places—reading, pondering, and praying. Here it was that he became intimately acquainted with the message of the restored gospel and the Spirit which attends it.

Bruce McConkie was born to teach and to be a preacher of righteousness. He lived to do so. He never saw a pulpit he did not want to occupy. He never obtained a truth from heaven that he did not want to share. Whether the word had been



Bruce R. McConkie just prior to serving as an LDS missionary in the Eastern States Mission, 1934.



Oscar W. McConkie Sr., Joseph Fielding Smith, Amelia S. Smith, Ethel R. Smith, and Bruce R. McConkie following graduation exercises at the University of Utah, June 1937. Bruce and Amelia were married three months later on October 13, 1937.



The First Council of Seventy at the time of Bruce R. McConkie's call to the council, 1946. Front, l-r: Antoine R. Ivins, Levi Edgar Young, Richard L. Evans. Back, l-r: S. Dilworth Young, Oscar A. Kirkham, Milton R. Hunter, Bruce R. McConkie.

canonized as scripture or was prompted by the Holy Ghost, it mattered not; he wanted to declare it to all who would hear.

### **His Mentors**

As to mentors, we all have many to whom we are indebted. Standing above the many, two men in particular played key roles in laying the foundation of my father's faith in the restored gospel. The first was Elder McConkie's own father, Oscar W. McConkie. He was a man with the faith of Enoch and Elijah; wholly obedient to gospel principles, his life was one of faith in action. The second was his father-in-law, Joseph Fielding Smith. President Smith carried with him the spirit of his fathers and a love for the Prophet Joseph Smith in greater measure than any other man I have ever met.

### **The Family**

According to the divine plan, the family is the primary classroom in which the gospel is to be taught; so it was with the family in which Bruce McConkie was reared, and so it was in the family that he and Mother



Bruce R. and Amelia S. McConkie family, circa 1958. Front, l-r: Stephen, Bruce, Amelia, Sara, Mark, and Rebecca. Back, l-r: Joseph, Vivian, Mary, Stanford.

raised. Back in the day of two-and-a-half minute talks, all of Bruce and Amelia McConkie's children spoke on the same subject—Joseph Smith. If help was needed in preparing the talk, Father would guide us back to the First Vision.

My sister Vivian recalled the following experience: “After an impressive lesson in a Sunday school class I attended as a child, I asked dad if any prophet could be greater than Elijah. He talked to me about the work of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who had ‘done more save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it’” (D&C 135:3).<sup>5</sup> She spoke with tenderness about another occasion when she and father were alone in our home on Lambourne Avenue in Salt Lake City. She was about eleven years of age. He had been upstairs studying and writing. Deeply moved by the things he was learning, his soul filled to the brim, he had to share it so came downstairs looking for that opportunity. Vivian being the only one at home at the time, he sat her down and with all the fervency of his soul he told her the Book of Mormon was true and that no man could have written it. To understand the man is to understand that such feelings could not be constrained.



The McConkie family home on Lambourne Avenue in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The day after I received my mission call, my father came to my room, woke me up, and said, “I want you to read the Book of Mormon and report.” I read the Book of Mormon and reported, to which he said, “Now I want you to read the Book of Mormon and report.” By this time I was in the mission field. I read the book a second time and reported. His response was, “Now, what I want you to do is to read the Book of Mormon and report.” I read it the third time and reported. Father wrote back and said, “Now you have laid the foundation upon which we can build,” and then came the letters filled with great doctrinal instruction.

My missionary companions received letters telling them of current events. I received epistles as if written by the Apostle Paul. As to current events, if there were such things in our neighborhood, Dad seemed to have no awareness of them.

My younger brother, Mark, has memories of going on walks with Father in the mornings when they lived in Australia, where he served as a mission president. “Dad would teach me the gospel as we walked,” Mark said. “On one occasion he stopped and asked, ‘Do you have any questions?’” Mark said, “No,” to which Father responded, “Well, junior, you should always have questions.”

My brother Stanford remembers his questions to Father being met with the question “What do you think?” He would always measure our understanding

before he gave answers, and the answers we got were commensurate with the preparation we had made. He did not mind a vigorous discussion. It was very important to him that we learn to think straight and that we learn how to get answers for ourselves.

Father told Vivian that when he was nineteen he had done a verse-by-verse study of the Book of Mormon, and had taken a sizeable stack of notes. She asked, “Where are those notes?” He replied, “I threw them away.” “I want to have them,” she mourned. “The notes,” he said, “were not important, the discipline was.”

Early in their marriage Mother and Father read the King James Bible and what we now call the Joseph Smith Translation together, comparing the two verse by verse. That they did this while he was a law student at University of Utah, with all its attendant pressures, captures his love of the Prophet Joseph Smith and everything he could learn from him.

As his children grew older, his personal library grew smaller. He would complain that his books, particularly his copy of *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, were frequently missing. Something about the way he complained gave us the feeling that he was quite content to live in a home where such books were freely borrowed.

When we entered adulthood and he found something he particularly wanted us to read, he would buy eight copies and give one to each of his children. He gave us all a copy of *The Analytical Bible*, which contained both a dictionary and a concordance. It takes no stretch of the imagination to see how this work may have influenced the creation of what we called the new edition of the scriptures published in 1979. *The Analytical Bible* contains a 1973 copyright.

He also gave each of us a copy of Robert J. Matthews’ book titled “*A Plainer Translation*”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible*, a history and commentary on the Joseph Smith Translation published in 1975.<sup>6</sup> He described it as a marvelous commentary on how Joseph Smith received revelation.

### Introducing the Church to the JST

Our current generation has the advantage of being raised with a Bible that has six hundred JST footnotes and a section in the back where extracts too



Bruce R. McConkie at the time he was serving as the president of the Australia South Mission, circa 1961–1964.



lengthy for inclusion as footnotes is found. Before the publication of our 1979 edition of the Bible, the feeling in the Church was often one of uncertainty about the reliability of this text. What was known then as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now the Community of Christ) held the copyright. We did not trust them and they did not trust us. Our suspicion was that they had tampered with the text. It took the painstaking effort of a quiet and unobtrusive spiritual giant by the name of Robert J. Matthews to slay this dragon of distrust. For years with great patience, he visited the RLDS historian's office seeking the opportunity to see the original manuscripts. In time trust developed, and he was able to compare it with the published version verse by verse and verify that the manuscript had rendered the text accurately. When Brother Matthews was called to join the scripture committee he brought that knowledge with him.

My father shared Bob Matthews' confidence in the accuracy of the text as the RLDS had rendered it. His assurance that the *Inspired Version*, as we then called it, was accurate rested on the witness of the Spirit. At a family night in the fall of 1971, he told me he had been "called on the carpet" for a talk I had given. Speaking at a fireside the previous Sunday, I had taken JST Genesis 50 as a text. This is where Joseph of Egypt prophesies relative to the latter-day seer who would bear his name and commence the great work of the gathering. I asked if what I had done was wrong. He said, "No." When I asked if I should quit teaching it, he said, "You continue to do just as you are doing."

### **His Writings**

When he wrote *Mormon Doctrine* he drew freely upon the *Inspired Version*, quoting from it about three hundred times. These were announced as errors by those who were critics of his book.

When the first volume of *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* was published in 1965, Father included the text of the King James Bible side by side with the *Inspired Version*. Again, he was sharply criticized for so doing. The two volumes that followed in 1970 and 1972 continued with the same format.

After his call as an Apostle, he wrote a six-volume work to testify of Christ. It begins with the *Promised Messiah* and concludes with the *Millennial Messiah*. Between these two books are four other volumes of commentary on the ministry of Christ, both in the Old World and in the New. In the writing of these books he drew heavily on what we learn in the JST.

Relative to Elder James E. Talmage's work *Jesus the Christ*, Father wrote: "His work is profound and sound and should be studied by every member of the true Church. But I think I hear his [Talmage's] voice . . . saying, 'Now is

the time to build on the foundations I laid some seventy years ago, using the added knowledge that has since come by research and revelation, and to pen a companion volume to the one I was privileged to write.”<sup>77</sup>

Elder Talmage’s work was first published in 1915. I note three things in particular that place us in a position to enhance what he wrote: first, President Joseph F. Smith’s vision of the redemption of the dead, received in 1918; second, President Joseph Fielding Smith’s *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, first published in 1938; and third, our conversion to the Joseph Smith Translation, which did not take place until its introduction to the Church in our new edition of the Bible published in 1979. These three sources bring with them a great deal of light not enjoyed by a writer in 1915. As to his own work, Elder McConkie said, “It too is but an opening door. Others who follow will find the errors and deficiencies that always and ever attend every mortal work, will correct them, and, building upon whatever foundations then exist, will write greater and better works on the same subject.”<sup>78</sup>

His final work, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, was also intended to stand on the shoulders of Elder Talmage’s work *The Articles of Faith*. The great difference in the two books is that Elder Talmage teaches or defends the basic beliefs of the Latter-day Saints from biblical texts. Elder McConkie declares the same doctrines from the revelations of the Restoration, drawing heavily on the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, the Joseph Smith Translation, Lectures on Faith, and *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*.

### **Expanding the Standard Works**

In 1973, Father was assigned to the Church’s scripture publication committee. Today, I do not think it is much of a secret that it was Bruce McConkie who made the recommendation to the committee that Joseph Smith’s vision of the celestial kingdom and Joseph F. Smith’s vision of the redemption of the dead be added to our canon of scripture. We now know them as D&C 137 and 138. The older generation will remember that these sections were first placed in the Pearl of Great Price in 1976; and then in 1979, they were moved to their present home in the Doctrine and Covenants.

When Father made the recommendation that D&C 137 and 138 be added to our scriptures, he placed them in verse form, along with number of other revelations he hoped to have canonized. This included two additional “articles” that he composed. President Monson has teased Dad a little about this suggestion, saying, “We all know that there are only thirteen Articles of Faith, not fifteen.” The Articles of Faith are drawn from the Wentworth letter which Joseph Smith penned in 1842, before the temple endowment and the

doctrine of eternal marriage were revealed. Though his suggestions were not added to the Articles of Faith, Elder McConkie included them in his book *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. They read as follows:

We believe that God has restored in these last days the fulness of his everlasting gospel to prepare a people for the coming of the Son of Man, and that this gospel shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all people, and then shall the end come.

We believe in a premortal life, in eternal marriage, in salvation for the dead, in the resurrection of the just and of the unjust, in eternal judgment, and in kingdoms of glory in the eternal worlds.<sup>9</sup>

### **Other Suggestions**

The Book of Mormon tells us that “many parts which are plain and most precious,” along with “many covenants of the Lord,” were taken from the biblical record by the “great and abominable church” before the Bible went forth to the nations of the earth (1 Nephi 13:26). Some of these records were revealed to and restored by Joseph Smith in the JST. Elder McConkie sought their inclusion in the Pearl of Great Price. This included:

- A covenant made by God to Enoch and Noah relative to the last days (JST Genesis 9:15–25).
- A revelation given about the ministry of Melchizedek, setting forth the power and glory of the Holy Priesthood (JST Genesis 14:26–40).
- An inspired account of the Abrahamic covenant (JST Genesis 17:1–14).
- The covenant of the Lord with Jacob relative to his seed and their bowing to the tribe of Joseph (JST Genesis 48:3–11).
- The prophecy of Joseph son of Jacob relative to the latter-day seer who would bear his name ( JST Genesis 50:24–38).

He also included in his suggestion the inclusion of extracts from:

- Psalms 11, 12, 14, and 24.
- A number of extracts from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John.

Though it was decided not to include these extracts in the Pearl of Great Price, they, along with others, can now be found in the lengthy extracts from the JST in the back of our present edition of the Bible.

Elder McConkie also sought inclusion in our standard works the entire Wentworth letter, which he had also put in verse form. To this he had added the Lectures on Faith, which had found inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants from 1835 to 1921.

Each of these suggested inclusions constituted an affirmation of his love for and loyalty to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

### **Blacks and the Priesthood**

It was during this same period of time that President Kimball was laboring to prepare himself to importune the Lord relative to the blacks and the priesthood. In doing so he invited the members of the Quorum of the Twelve to give in writing any expressions they wanted. Father responded to that invitation with simplicity and power, arguing that every passage of scripture that promised that the gospel would go to those of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people had to include those of every race and had to include the fulness of all gospel blessings, including those received in the temple. For him, the scriptural answer was simple and obvious, and the time had come for us to see the scriptures in a new light.

After the receipt of this revelation he spoke to the teachers in the Church Education System: “Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Being a part of the receipt of this revelation was one of the greatest experiences of his life. Immediately after the public announcement had been made he called his family together so he could share the experience with them.

### **Standing in the Light**

Nothing was as important to dad as standing in the light. If he discovered that he was wrong on something, he was thrilled with the additional light and pleased to be able to correct or improve his views.

It never ceases to amaze me that this causes problems for some people. I have answered a number of calls in which someone asked, “How can we trust what your father has written if he later changed his mind?” My response is: “How could you trust anyone whose life was devoted to the pursuit of truth that did not and could not learn something new and improve their views?”

CHRISTMAS 1964

To: Joseph F. McConkie —

The most important single thing that any Latter-day Saint ever does in this world is to marry the right person, in the right place, by the right authority —

Dad & Mother

Note written to Joseph Fielding McConkie, December 1964.



Bruce, Amelia, and Joseph Fielding McConkie, Saigon, South Vietnam, 1968.

## About the Man

There were things that Father simply could not understand. They included jealousy, pettiness, and above all doubt where gospel principles were concerned. "I was born with a testimony," he said, "and from my earliest days have known with absolute certainty of the truth and divinity of his great latter-day work. Doubt and uncertainty have been as foreign to me as the gibberish of alien tongues."<sup>11</sup>

Vanity was another of those things he just did not get. He was perfectly happy with haircuts given by mother and could not understand why his sons were not perfectly happy with the haircuts he gave them. When he got the clippers out there was just cause to consider running away from home.

The things Father enjoyed most were a good gospel discussion and going for a walk in the evening with Mother. The assignment he enjoyed the most in all his church service was being a mission president. He loved to climb mountains and thought his sons ought to be with him when he did. He liked to go birding with Mother and claimed that no picture or painting of a bird could match seeing it in its natural habitat. He was both a rock hound and a lapidary. He loved to cut, polish, and set stones. In the latter part of his life he became a jogger and had a secret desire to run a marathon, but could not find the time to train properly for such an event. He told my brother Stephen that he was going to run one hundred miles for every man who had served in the Quorum of the Twelve because they couldn't do it for themselves.

He never pretended to be what he was not. He assumed no knowledge or experience that was not his, yet he was wholly confident in what he knew and never pretended to know that which he did not know. He was very respectful of the competence of others. When he was a mission president, for instance, he put a nineteen-year-old missionary in charge of the mission fleet of cars and never questioned his recommendations.

Elder McConkie was called to serve as a member of the First Quorum of Seventy when he was thirty-two. He was a seventy, not a high priest, which was the practice in that day. This meant that he had not served in a bishopric, or on a high counsel, or in a stake presidency. Yet it was now his responsibility to train those holding such positions. Given that he would not pretend to knowledge or experience that was not his in leadership meetings, he taught bishops and stake presidents the doctrine, but not how to be bishops and stake presidents.

What he knew was the restored gospel and the scriptures, and so he taught the gospel and the scriptures, and he listened as the Spirit taught through him. In the coming years he could say, "I learned the gospel by listening to what I said as I taught the gospel." To some that will sound arrogant; to those who



Elder Bruce R. McConkie during the October 1972 General Conference when he was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.



Amelia and Bruce R. McConkie, July 11, 1980.

are familiar with the operations of the Spirit it becomes a perfect description of how one listens and learns as the Spirit of the Lord unfolds understanding through you.

His favorite subject for a doctrinal discourse was eternal marriage, and few who heard him preach will forget hearing him say, “The most important single thing that any member of this Church does in this life is to marry the right person in the right place by the right authority,”<sup>12</sup> or that “salvation is a family affair.”<sup>13</sup>

When Elder McConkie was called on to speak you knew that you were going to be taught. He spoke with plainness and power. He was not a story teller. Some of his colleagues, intending to be helpful, sought to coach him, telling him that he needed to be warmer, tell stories, and be more personal. This was counsel that he did not accept. He told me that in fifty years these men would be forgotten, but the words of the doctrinal teachers would still be quoted. It has taken far less time to prove him right. I recall the words President Packer spoke at Elder McConkie’s funeral:

His manner of delivery was unique, with something of an Old Testament scriptural quality about them. It was not granted to Brother McConkie to judge beforehand how his discourses would be received and then to alter them accordingly. He could not measure what ought to be said and how it ought to be said by, “What will people think?” Would his sermons leave any uncomfortable? Would his bold declarations irritate some in the Church? Would they inspire the critics to rush to their anvils and hammer out more ‘fiery darts’ as the scriptures call them? Would his manner of delivery offend? Would his forthright declarations, in content or in manner of presentation, drive some learned investigators away? Would he be described as insensitive or overbearing? Would his warnings and condemnations of evil undo the careful work of others whose main intent was to have the world “think well of the Church?” Perhaps it was given to other men to so measure their words in that way, but it was not given to him. We have talked about this. And when he was tempted to change, the Spirit would withdraw a distance and there would come that deep loneliness known only to those who have enjoyed close association with the Spirit, only to find on occasion that it moves away. He could stand what the critics might say and what enemies might do, but he could not stand that. He would be driven to his knees to beg forgiveness and plead for the renewal of that companionship with the Spirit which the scriptures promise can be constant. Then he would learn once again that what was true of Holy Men of God who spake in ancient times applied to him as well. He was to speak as he was moved upon by the Holy Spirit. What matter if it sounded like Bruce R. McConkie, so long as the Lord approved. I knew him well enough to know all of that.<sup>14</sup>

Because of his straight forward, no-nonsense preaching style, there were many who felt that his view of the gospel was so strict that few if any would be saved. This was not the case.



The April 1977 *Ensign* published an article written by him titled “The Salvation of Little Children.”<sup>15</sup> In that article he reviewed the scriptural promises of exaltation granted to those who die before they arrived at the age of accountability. He received more hate mail for this article than anything else he ever wrote.

In a talk given at the LDS Institute of Religion in Salt Lake he outlined the plan of salvation in this language:

We don’t need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved. You don’t. There’s only been one perfect person, and that’s the Lord Jesus, but in order to be saved in the Kingdom of God and in order to pass the test of mortality, what you have to do is get on the straight and narrow path—thus charting a course leading to eternal life—and then, being on that path, pass out of this life in full fellowship. I’m not saying you don’t have to keep the commandments. I’m saying you don’t have to be perfect to be saved. If you did, no one would be saved. The way it operates is this: you get on the path that’s named the “straight and narrow.” You do it by entering the gate of repentance and baptism. The straight and narrow path leads from the gate of repentance and baptism, a very great distance, to a reward that’s called eternal life. If you’re on that path and pressing forward, and you die, you’ll never get off the path. There is no such thing as falling off the straight and narrow path in the life to come, and the reason is that this life is the time that is given to men to prepare for eternity. Now is the time and the day of your salvation, so if you’re working zealously in this life—though you haven’t fully overcome the world and you haven’t done all you hoped you might do—you’re still going to be saved. You don’t have to do what Jacob said, ‘Go beyond the mark.’ You don’t have to live a life that’s truer than true. You don’t have to have an excessive zeal that becomes fanatical and becomes unbalancing. What you have to do is stay in the mainstream of the Church and live as upright and decent people live in the Church—keeping the commandments, paying your tithing, serving in the organizations of the Church, loving the Lord, staying on the straight and narrow path. If you’re on that path when death comes—because this is the time and the day appointed, this is the probationary state—you’ll never fall off from it, and, for all practical purposes, your calling and election is made sure.<sup>16</sup>

Elder McConkie had the unique ability to capture the panoramic view of the plan of salvation and teach it with power and plainness. A classic illustration of this was his BYU devotional talk on “Three Pillars of Eternity.” In that talk he declared that “the three events, preeminent and transcendent above all others, are the creation, the fall, and the atonement. These three are the foundations upon which all things rest. Without any one of them, all things would lose their purpose and meaning, and the plans and designs of Deity would come to naught.” Continuing, he said: “Now, we are speaking of the three pillars of heaven, of the three greatest events ever to occur in all eternity, of the three doctrines that are woven inseparably together to form the plan of salvation. We are speaking of the creation, the fall, and the atonement. And these things are one. And, be it noted, all things were created; all things fell; and all things are subject to the redeeming power of the Son of God.”<sup>17</sup>



The McConkie family in Jerusalem, May 1985.

### **Family Trip**

As I conclude, I return to those special experiences we shared as a family. My father and mother never had the opportunity to do more than make a brief visit to the Holy Land. It was his desire to tour that land with his family. A trip was planned for May 1985. Because my wife and I had led tours there, Father placed us in charge of making the arrangements for the trip.

To that end we instituted family study classes some months before we were to go. In one of our first meetings Father had the assignment to review the Book of Genesis. He came to our family night with a twenty-eight page outline. I explained to him that that was just too much, so he reduced his outline to three words—"family, family, and family." That is perhaps the best summary of the Book of Genesis ever given. Its message centers in the covenant God made with Abraham, which embraces family past, family present, and family future.

Father died a few weeks before we were to leave on that trip. In the family prayer following the blessing to release him from mortality, we extended the invitation to him to join us at those sacred places of which he had written and preached so much. We have reason to believe that he did so.

In the Holy Land we spent some sacred moments together on the Mount of Beatitudes. At the Garden Tomb outside the walls of the Old City in Jerusalem, we found a quiet place and sat in a circle to listen to a recording of his final General Conference talk. As we listened, a dove flew down into the center of our group, where it remained until Father's final amen.

### **Conclusion**

My father was born with a testimony and had no memory of a time when he did not know the restored gospel to be true. He never prayed to know if he should marry my mother. He was born to marry my mother just as he was born to teach and testify of the restored gospel. He did not need to ask about such things, he just knew them.

He was raised in a house of faith. He raised his children in the same kind of home. As a young missionary he caught the Spirit of the Sacred Grove and Cumorah.

Elder McConkie was the keynote speaker at a symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants held at BYU in 1979. The theme of the symposium came from Doctrine and Covenants section 5, wherein the Lord addressed Joseph Smith, saying, "This generation shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10). In



Elder Bruce R. McConkie delivering his last General Conference address, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," April, 6, 1985.

his masterful discourse Elder McConkie said, “The test of discipleship is how totally and completely and fully we believe the word was revealed through Joseph Smith, and how effectively we echo or proclaim that word to the world.”<sup>18</sup>

When I reminded my father’s brother Oscar about this talk he responded: “That was vintage Oscar W. McConkie. It was a case of the voice of the father becoming the voice of the son.”<sup>19</sup> It was the doctrine upon which Father was raised, and it was the doctrine upon which he raised his own children.

He became one with the scriptures. As he unfolded the story of the events that preceded Gethsemane and the cross, he was able to say in his last conference address: “In speaking of these wondrous things I shall use my own words, though you may think they are the words of scripture, words spoken by other apostles and prophets. True it is they were first proclaimed by others, but they are now mine, for the Holy Spirit of God has borne witness to me that they are true, and it is now as though the Lord had revealed them to me in the first instance. I have thereby heard his voice and know his word.”<sup>20</sup> As he concluded his remarks he said:

As pertaining to this perfect atonement, wrought by the shedding of the blood of God, I testify that it took place in Gethsemane and at Golgotha; and as pertaining to Jesus Christ, I testify that he is the son of the Living God and was crucified for the sins of the world. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. This I know of myself, independent of any other person. I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears. But I shall not know any better than I know now that he is God’s Almighty Son, that he is our Savior and Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through his atoning blood and in no other way.<sup>21</sup>

It is not enough for us as Latter-day Saints to bear testimony of Christ. Indeed, such a testimony may fail to distinguish us from the myriad of testimonies borne in the world of our Lord and Master by men and women not of our faith. Our testimony must rest in the revealed conviction that Joseph Smith is the great revelator of Christ for our day, and that there is a Spirit and power that comes from that knowledge that can be had in no other way and is lost to those of our own number that are fearful about voicing the name Joseph Smith. Bruce McConkie’s final and unforgettable testimony, with which he sealed his mortal ministry, drew on this foundation. There is a Spirit and power we can all share in when we are true to these principles.

I now make my voice one with that of my father’s that Jesus is our Lord and Master and that Joseph Smith is his great revelator for our day.

## Notes

1. A video of the address can be accessed at the LDS Church History website. See <http://history.lds.org/article/a-special-witness-bruce-r-mcconkie?lang=eng>.

2. Oscar W. McConkie, blessing given to Bruce R. McConkie, October 17, 1934, in possession of the author.

3. Boyd K. Packer, funeral remarks for Elder Bruce R. McConkie, April 23, 1985, in David F. Boone, comp., *"A Man Raised Up": Teachings, Sermons, and Commentary of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, 1947–1985*, 4 vols. (n.p.: By the compiler, n.d.), 3:30 (Part 4, "Funeral Addresses"). Although the volumes contain Bruce R. McConkie's addresses, Boone also included the remarks given by the speakers in Elder McConkie's funeral services.

4. I borrow this expression from my friend Matthew B. Christensen.

5. Extracted from Vivian Adams, "They Bid Us to the Feast," unpublished manuscript in possession of the author.

6. Robert J. Matthews, *"A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975).

7. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–1981), 1:xviii.

8. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:xviii.

9. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness to the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 16.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike Unto God," in *The Second Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators Symposium: The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: LDS Church Education System, 1978), 3–4.

11. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), xvii.

12. For instance see "Why the Latter-day Saints Build Temples," *Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1955), 12–13 (hereafter cited as *Conference Report*); "Celestial Marriage," *BYU Devotional*, November 15, 1955, *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1955), 1–6; "The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage," *BYU Devotional*, April 20, 1960, in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1966), 1–7; "Choose an Eternal Companion," *BYU Devotional*, May 3, 1966, *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1966), 1–6; "Marriage for Eternity Leads to Exaltation," *Church News*, July 16, 1966, 16; "Agency or Inspiration?" *BYU Devotional*, February 27, 1973, in *New Era* 5, no. 1 (January 1975): 38–43; "Celestial Marriage," *New Zealand Area Conference*, February 21, 1976, in Boone, *"A Man Raised Up,"* 1:33–34 (Part 2, "Area Conference"), "The Promises Made to the Fathers," *Address to Provo Temple workers*, July 19, 1981, in Boone, *"A Man Raised Up,"* 3:93–104 (Part 3, "Addresses").

13. For instance see "Salvation, A Family Affair," *Conference Report*, April 1959, 117–18; "Salvation is a Family Affair," *Conference Report*, April 1970, 26–28; "Households of Faith," *BYU Devotional*, December 1, 1970, in *Ensign* 1, no. 4 (April 1971): 4–8; "Only An Elder," *Regional Representative Training Seminar*, October 3, 1974, in *Ensign* 5, no. 6 (June 1975): 66–69; "Seven Steps to More and Better Converts," *New Mission President Seminar*, June 21, 1975, in Boone, *"A Man Raised Up,"* 3:35–46 (Part 3, "Seminars"); "The Promises Made to the Fathers," *Genealogical Seminar*, July 30, 1975,

in Boone, “*A Man Raised Up*,” 3:47–55 (Part 3, “Seminars”); “Mothers in Israel and Daughters of Zion,” Samoa Area Conference, February 17, 1976, and Tonga Area Conference, February 25, 1976, in *New Era* 8, no. 5 (May 1978): 35–37.

14. Packer, funeral remarks for Elder Bruce R. McConkie, April 23, 1985, in Boone, “*A Man Raised Up*,” 3:31–32 (Part 4, “Funeral Addresses”).

15. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Salvation of Little Children,” *Ensign* 7, no. 4 (April 1977): 3–7.

16. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Probationary Test of Mortality,” University of Utah Institute of Religion Devotional, January 10, 1982, in Boone, “*A Man Raised Up*,” 3:105–23 (Part 1: “Addresses”).

17. Bruce R. McConkie, “Three Pillars of Eternity,” *BYU Devotional*, February 17, 1981, *Devotional Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), 27–32.

18. Bruce R. McConkie, “This Generation Shall Have My Word Through You,” in *Hearken, O Ye People: Discourses on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Sandy, UT: Randal Book, 1984), 7.

19. Oscar McConkie, interview by Joseph F. McConkie, September 3, 2012, Salt Lake City, Utah.

20. Oscar McConkie, interview by Joseph F. McConkie, September 3, 2012.

21. Bruce R. McConkie, *Conference Report*, April 1985, 12.