

Tribute to Solomon Mack

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September 16, 2023

Keene, New Hampshire

My name is Matt Maddox, and my wife, Julie, is the descendent of Hyrum Smith. Since she's on the Joseph Smith Senior committee, I often get to help her with her responsibilities. So it's a pleasure for me to come talk to you about Solomon Mack. He was an astounding man with an interesting life.

My purpose is to talk about how and why Solomon Mack was foreordained to be the grandfather of Joseph Smith because he does not fit the mold that you might think of for an ancestor to a prophet—and not just any Prophet, but one of the greatest prophets in all of history.

He was born In 1732 and descended from a long line of preachers but he himself did not follow the occupation. In fact he was indentured out because of his family's reversals of fortune, and at about four years old, he supposes, he was indentured to a very severe farmer who taught him to work, and to work hard, and made sure that he didn't learn how to rest. That man taught him nothing about reading or writing or arithmetic and nothing about religion. In fact his whole life seemed to revolve around the god of gold.

But Solomon married well to Lydia Gates who also came from preachers. She taught her children in morality, in religious instruction, in reading, and in writing. She schooled them at home because they didn't have a lot of opportunity in a place out here in the early days as the frontier. You can see that.

But Solomon himself was really quite an exceptional man. He was a moral man, he was honest in all of his business dealings. But he also had many, many narrow escapes with his life, he had several reversals of fortune that would break almost anybody, and he was brave and courageous. So I'll talk about those three things.

First, let's talk about his life-threatening accidents and illnesses, things that brought him close to death. As a young boy he caught some sort of disease that left him with a life-threatening leg sore for which he was given all sorts of medical attention. The farmer was kind to him at that point in his life, probably because he thought he wanted to get more work out of him and not lose him as a worker. Later he caught small pox. After that he was crushed by a falling tree as he was felling trees with his son. His son took him up for dead and thought he was deceased. He brought him home where they laid him on the bed. He laid there still and immovable for two months. After that time he was still unable to get up and walk and had to be lifted by six men on a bed sheet in order to be moved at all. For months after that he hobbled around. It was during this time of his convalescence when he went to a mill nearby to tell the man how to fix the mill. In his hobbling, he fell on the water wheel that severely bruised him.

He had all sorts of experiences that could have taken his life. Once when he was walking out on the icy ground going from one place to another with his ax underneath his arm, he fell into a fit. We don't know what the fit was—it might have been a seizure of some sort. He woke up four hours later, bloodied and bruised and his ax was still underneath his arm. He didn't know where

he was, he didn't know where he was going, he didn't have any idea what the circumstances were, and so he made a guess and headed towards a home and got the help he needed.

Another time he fell off his horse and broke his shoulder. He broke his wrists one time during the Revolution. He couldn't do any labor, so what did he do? He still wanted to help the Revolution, so he learned how to make salt peter—gunpowder—from his brother-in-law and went from town to town making gunpowder. That would be exciting wouldn't it? For any male of the species that's an exciting job to have, and besides that he got paid a dollar a day for it.

So he labored in the service of his country and was able to tell his grandchildren stories of bravery and courage and patriotism. Joseph Smith Jr said, "It is a love of Liberty which inspires my soul. Civil and religious liberty were diffused into my soul by my grandfathers while they dandled me on their knee."

Solomon apparently lived on the same Farm as Joseph Smith Senior's family. Likely at this time, before they moved away, he was able to have some association with Joseph Smith jr., and so you might imagine some of the stories he told. One story he would have told was about a time during the war he was out alone walking. There was another man behind him about 20 rods and he sees in front of him, about 30 rods away, four Indians come out—and they don't look friendly because they've got, tomahawks rifles, and scalping knives. You don't go anywhere dressed up like that with the intent to have a birthday party! So he didn't know what to do because all he had was a walking stick. But he got up a strategy and he said that he started running towards the Indians waving the stick in his hand and yelled "Rush on! Rush on, brave boys, we'll have the devils. And just at that moment the other man in back of him walked out of the bushes. Well, the Indians saw him and scattered! That saved his life.

Now, you might think about how Joseph Smith was influenced by that story. Shortly after he got the plates, Lucy knew that the mob was gathering around the house and convinced him to put the plates underneath the hearthstone, which he did. No sooner had he done that than the mob was coming toward the door. Joseph ran toward the door, flung it open, said a similar thing, hollering and shouting and all the men of the house even down to little Don Carlos ran out and the mob scattered in fear!

At 23 years old, or so, Solomon was fighting in the French and Indian War. Later he fought in the Revolution and very narrowly escaped a ball that went within half an inch of his neck. Another time he was in retreat where tomahawks and bullets were flying around him like hail. He saw a large windfall that he had to climb over. He was able to get over it, but on the other side he saw a man who had been injured. He turned aside, got the man, and took him to safety even though he was being pursued by the enemies. We can see he was a brave man and that he had stories to tell.

He also had stories to tell of his reversals of fortune that happened. So many times in his life he had to start over again and again. He opened a store selling provisions to soldiers and, because he couldn't read and write, the clerk that he had took advantage of him and took off. And then, because he couldn't keep track of his accounts, he lost all of them. Later he bought 1,600 acres with the provision that he would build some cabins on the property. But he gashed his leg after he had paid in full. He was laid up all winter and couldn't do the work, so he hired a man to do the work for him building the cabins. In the end, the man left without doing the work, which ruined Solomon and he had to start all over again.

For one of his financial ventures he bought a sailing vessel and as a privateer he was engaged in skirmishes on the sea. He could have lost his life when others actually did lose their lives in the battles that he came through. After four years of privateering he came back home with nothing. His family had been abused by dishonest creditors and had kicked them out of doors.

You can see anybody else might have given up. Anybody else might have become bitter. In spite of all of this, in his old age—he was 78 years old or so—he was afflicted during the winter with rheumatism. Painful and distressing, he was confined all that winter. He had this scripture come to his mind from Matthew 11:28-30, which says, “take my yoke upon you...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” He asked his wife, “is that found in the Bible?” He had no idea. He had remembered some scripture throughout his life, in order to ridicule the people who believed in them. He himself did not believe and didn't have any religious background whatsoever.

In pain all that long winter, one night he began reading the Bible. As he studied it, he prayed. At about midnight one night he saw a great light about a foot in front of his face. That happened to him again another night not long after. In the moment he thought his life was coming to an end. A few nights later he heard a voice call his name, and each time it did, he thought the end was nigh. Reflecting on his life, he realized that he was in dire need of repentance. Though he considered himself most unworthy of the Lord's blessings, he prayed one night that the Lord would take away his pains for a night if the Lord truly was with him. It happened. He said he found Christ's promises verified that we would receive whatsoever things we ask in prayer believing ye shall receive. I wonder what kind of influence that had on a grandson who was also distressed over religious matters.

I just want to close by saying how much I appreciate Solomon Mack, who in later life, finally became converted. We see that God had called Joseph Smith from the very beginning, from the foundation of the world to effectuate and open up this new dispensation of the fullness of times. It would be Joseph Smith's mission to do more for the salvation of mankind save Jesus Christ only. His ministry was to affect every nation, every kindred, every tongue, every people; living, yet to live, and who have lived on the earth. There is no family which the work of Joseph Smith would not touch. The Lord, knowing all of that, sent ancestors to rear him up to put in his DNA what he needed: the gumption he needed to overcome, the faith he needed to go forward, and everything that he required to accomplish his mission. This is why God put Solomon Mack in Joseph Smith's line: to give him all that through his DNA. It was his inheritance.

I bear testimony of the truthfulness of the mission of Joseph Smith, who bore witness of the resurrected Savior and the Living God. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.