

Emunah:

Smith Family Reunion Closing Thoughts at the Gravesite of Mary Duty Smith

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After Moses had led the children of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea on dry ground, and had allowed the pursuing, persecuting Egyptians to be swallowed up by the sea, the scripture records that “Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: ...and the people had “emunah” (אמונה) for the LORD and his servant Moses.¹

As Joseph Smith the Prophet and other members of the priesthood would have learned in the upper room of the Kirtland Temple, the Hebrew word “emunah” in the Old Testament is usually translated as “faith.”

Much like those Israelite believers of old, the unwavering faith that the early Saints in Kirtland had in the Lord and His prophet Joseph Smith—perhaps especially the faith of our Smith family ancestors—was built through trials on a scale typically unexperienced by us their descendants today. Consider, for example, the hardship that befell the Smiths to have Hyrum’s beloved wife Jerusha, “whom everybody loved who was acquainted with her, for she was in every way worthy,”² and whose grave site bids us honor her here today, took sick and passed away here in Kirtland while Hyrum himself was absent on a mission to Missouri for the Gospel’s sake.

However, the concept of “emunah” is greater than mere belief: it is faith that is so complete it expresses itself through action and is grounded in experience. Perhaps a better translation of “emunah” is “steadfast trust in the Lord.” Indeed, the great faith of the Smith family was not built from the trials alone through which the early Saints here were called to pass, but through their *actions*, which demonstrated their devotion and precipitated a previously unknown period of prolific spiritual outpourings, indelible heavenly manifestations, and voluminous revelations that came to the believers in Kirtland.

Answering the Lord’s call, the Smith family “emunah” was responsible for gathering to Kirtland; for building the temple; for strengthening the growing church; for fulfilling leadership positions; for sustaining the prophet; for testifying boldly of the Joseph’s vision of the Father and the Son and the Book of Mormon; for fulfilling missions at inconvenient times and supporting at home so that others could go. As an example of these last two points, in 1828 Joseph Smith Sr. and his younger brother John Smith left as missionaries to preach to Father Joseph’s parents and other brothers and sisters in St. Lawrence County, New York. Although Joseph Smith Sr.’s oldest brother refused to hear the message of the restored gospel, most of the rest of his family, including his father Asael Smith and his mother Mary Duty Smith, were very receptive. John Smith recorded in his journal, “After the usual salutations, inquiries, and explanations, the

¹ Exodus 14:31.

² Lucy Mack Smith, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, chapter 45.

subject of the Book of Mormon was introduced. Father received with gladness that which Joseph communicated;”³ and remarked, that “It has been borne in upon my soul that one of my descendants will promulgate a work to revolutionize the world of religious faith.” In October 1830, six months after the organization of the Church, “Father Asael Smith . . . on his deathbed declared his full and firm belief in the everlasting gospel and also regretted that he was not baptized when Joseph his son was there.”⁴

Mary Duty Smith, too, was very devout in her religious faith but perhaps not as vocal in her beliefs as her husband. She did, however, join with her husband in some of his unconventional religious notions. She desired baptism when her son Joseph Sr. brought the news of the restored gospel. Many of Joseph Smith Sr.’s siblings emigrated with their families to join the rest of the Saints in Kirtland. In 1836, Mother Mary Duty Smith herself—then a 93-year-old widow—undertook the journey from New York to see her posterity in the Ohio and to be baptized. Joseph Smith, Jr., recorded:

“I went in company with my brother Hyrum, in a carriage to Fairport, and brought home my grandmother, Mary Smith, aged ninety-three years. She had not been baptized, on account of the opposition of Jesse Smith, her eldest son, who has always been an enemy to the work. She had come five hundred miles to see her children and knew all of us she had ever seen. She was much pleased at being introduced to her great grand-children and expressed much pleasure and gratification on seeing me... On May 27, after a few days’ visit with her children, which she enjoyed extremely well, my grandmother fell asleep without sickness, pain or regret. She breathed her last about sunset and was buried in the burial ground near the temple, after a funeral address had been delivered by Sidney Rigdon.

“She had buried one daughter, Sarah; two Sons, Stephen and Samuel; and her husband, who died October 30, 1830, and left five sons and three daughters still living. At the death of [Joseph Smith Jr.’s] grandfather, who had kept a record, there were one hundred and ten children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.”⁵

She, too, was a woman of “emunah,” or “faith in action.” In fact, it seems particularly fitting that Mary’s maiden name was “Duty,” given that “emunah” has a sense of duty to accompany belief, and we honor her at her gravesite today.

As a family who has embodied “emunah,” we Smiths might say that even this family reunion has been in fulfillment of the council that Father Joseph (Sr.) received from his father Asael Smith: “Wherefore, my dear children, I pray, beseech, and adjure you by all the relations and dearness that hath ever been betwixt us and by the heartrending pangs of a dying father whose soul hath been ever bound in the bundle of life with yours, *that you know one another*. Visit as you may

³ Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith* by Lucy Mack Smith, pp. 172–176.

⁴ Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s New England Heritage*, pp. 215–217.

⁵ *History of the Church*, Vol. 2, pp. 442–443.

each one another; and, while your mother lives, meet her, if possible, once every year. When she is dead pitch on some other place.”⁶ Even our family reunions can serve to build our faith.

Finally, let us recall the blessing Joseph Smith the prophet pronounced upon the head of his father Joseph Smith Sr. in 1833: “And now, O God, let the residue of my father’s house ever come up in remembrance before Thee, that Thou mayest save them from the hand of the oppressor, and establish their feet upon the Rock of Ages, that they may have place in Thy house, and be saved in Thy kingdom; and let all things be even as I have said, for Christ’s sake. Amen.”⁷

It is fitting that we should end these remarks with “amen,” for the word “amen” derives from the same Hebrew word as “emunah.” May we be reminded of the blessings we enjoy as members of the Smith family, as well as the sacred duty to be a family of steadfast faith in Christ, every time we say “amen.”

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

⁶ Smith, Asahel and Mary Duty by Luella Downard, 12 p.; retrieved from <https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/memories/9X2W-BPT>

⁷ *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 466.