



SAMUEL MORSE 1791-1872

FAXes, e-mail, the Internet, the information superhighway are a revolution of communication that continued to change our world and affect relationships around the globe. This revolution has its beginnings with Samuel Morse and his invention of the telegraph in the 1830's. Born in 1791, the first son of Congregationalist minister Jedidiah Morse, he set out to be an artist by profession and went to England to study under Benjamin West. He produced several works that were exhibited and well received at the Royal Academy.

Back in America, however, there was little demand and he led a struggling existence as a portrait painter. After the deaths of his young wife and his father and mother in close succession, Samuel again returned to Europe to study and paint. On his return voyage in 1831, he was captivated by discussions at dinner about new experiments in electromagnetism. He thought, "If the presence of electricity can be made visible in any part of the circuit, I see no reason why intelligence may not be transmitted by electricity." He worked on the plan for the rest of the voyage.

In 1837 he applied for a patent on the American Electromagnetic Telegraph. He also created the Morse Code with letters represented by dots and dashes to convey the telegraph message. Although he had a patent, Morse was still poor and needed funds to implement his ideas. Unsuccessful in the U.S., Morse spent four fruitless months in Europe seeking backers. Faced with constant failure, Morse wrote: "The only gleam of hope, and I cannot underrate it, is from confidence in God. When I look upward it calms any apprehension for the future, and I seem to hear a voice saying: 'If I clothe the lilies of the field, shall I not also clothe you?' This is my strong confidence, and I will wait patiently for the direction of Providence."

In 1843 Morse again approached Congress, but many continued to call his ideas ridiculous. On the last night of the Congressional session, Morse went to bed tired and disgusted. In the morning, however, he was told that a few minutes before midnight Congress had awarded him \$30,000 to construct a telegraphic line between Baltimore and Washington. Within a year the line was established, and Morse sent the first telegraph message from Numbers 23:23 in the Bible, "WHAT GOD HATH WROUGHT!" Morse later wrote that "no words could have been selected more expressive of the disposition of my own mind at that time to ascribe all the honor to Him it truly belongs."

Soon governments, railway lines, newspapers, businesses, and missions agencies began to rely on the telegraph for communications. He had revolutionized and changed forever the realm of communication. After years of struggle and poverty, Samuel Morse enjoyed wealth and success. He died of pneumonia in New York on April 2, 1872. Late in his life, he shared his considerable wealth through grants to colleges such as Yale and Vassar, in addition to charities and artists.

As a reminder to you, information about all the people we've presented in our study of church history have so much more information about them available on the internet. It's truly remarkable that we have this resource at our fingertips.