

Joseph Smith—History 1:27-65

D&C 2-5, 10

Lesson 2, Doctrine & Covenants, Adult Religion Class, Monday, 19 Sep 2016

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General Introduction

This lesson covers Moroni's visits to the teenage Joseph Smith as he sought to know his standing before God. While waiting to receive the plates, Joseph married Emma Hale, whom he had met earlier while working in the area. After receiving the plates, Martin Harris took a copy of some of the characters to scholars, after which he served as scribe while Joseph translated. That early translation, about 116 manuscript pages, were lost through the neglect of Martin Harris. Joseph received the promise of additional witnesses to support his story about the plates and the book.

Summary Chronology

- **Sun-Mon, 21-22 Sep 1823** (Manchester, NY) – Joseph Smith is visited by Moroni, three times during the night of 21-22 Sep and at least once again during the day on 22 Sep; D&C 2.
- **Wed, 19 Nov 1823** (Manchester, NY) – Alvin Smith (25), oldest son of Joseph and Lucy and brother to Joseph Smith, died.
- **Wed, 22 Sep 1824** (Manchester, NY) – Joseph met Moroni at the hill at the end of the first year.
- **Thu, 22 Sep 1825** (Manchester, NY) – Joseph met Moroni at the hill at the end of the second year.
- **Oct 1825** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph Smith hired by Josiah Stowell (Stoal) to look and dig for Spanish silver mine; Joseph boarded at the Isaac Hale home and met Emma Hale.
- **Thu, 17 Nov 1825** (South Bainbridge, NY) – Joseph stopped digging for Stowell but began to live and work at his farm and at the nearby Joseph Knight, Sr., carding business.
- **Nov or Dec 1825** (Manchester, NY) – The Smith family moved into the frame home that Alvin had started building in 1823.
- **Tue, 20 Dec 1825** (Manchester, NY) – The Smiths lost title to their house and land, but Lemuel Durfee took ownership and allowed them to stay on the land for at least three years.
- **Mon, 20 Mar 1826** (South Bainbridge, NY) – Joseph stood trial for being a disorderly person and was acquitted. Joseph spent most of 1826 in South Bainbridge.
- **Fri, 22 Sep 1826** (Manchester, NY) – Joseph met Moroni at the hill at the end of the third year.
- **Nov 1826** (Colesville, NY) – Joseph worked for Joseph Knight, Sr., and became acquainted with his family; he visited Emma a few times during Nov and Dec in Harmony, during which he asked for her hand but her father refused.
- **Thu, 18 Jan 1827** (South Bainbridge, NY) – Emma came to visit the Stowells and her sister in the area; Joseph came from the Knights and persuaded Emma to marry him. Immediately following the wedding, they moved to Manchester to live with Joseph's family.
- **Sat, 22 Sep 1827** (Manchester township) – Joseph obtained the plates from the hill, early in the morning before sunrise.
- **Dec 1827** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph and Emma moved to Harmony to live with her parents, using a \$50 gift from Martin Harris.
- **Dec 1827 – Feb 1828** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph copied many characters from the plates and translated some of them using the interpreters.
- **Feb 1828** (Albany and New York City, NY) – Martin Harris showed a transcript of the characters from the plates to various scholars, including Charles Anthon.
- **Feb 1828 – Apr 1828** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph began to translate the “book of Lehi” with Emma as the main scribe.
- **Sat, 12 Apr-Sat, 14 Jun 1828** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph finished translating the first portion of the plates with Martin Harris as scribe.
- **Sat, 14 June 1828** (ca.) (Palmyra, NY) – Martin Harris took the translated manuscript pages to show to family and friends; the plates and interpreters were taken away from Joseph Smith.
- **Sun, 15 Jun 1828** (Harmony, PA) – Emma gave birth to a son (Alvin) who died very shortly after birth; Emma was very ill for many days.
- **Early Jul 1828** (Manchester, NY) – Joseph traveled to his parents' home to discover what had happened to the manuscript

- **Mid to late Jul 1828** (Harmony, PA) – D&C 3 and at least portions of D&C 10 a little later that month.
- **Mon, 22 Sep 1828** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph received the plates and interpreters again, per Lucy Mack Smith; Lucy and Joseph Sr. visited Joseph and Emma shortly after this.

- **Feb 1829** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph Smith, Sr., and Samuel Smith visited Joseph with Joseph Knight’s help; D&C 4.
- **Mon, 2 Mar 1829** (ca.) (Harmony, PA) – Martin Harris visited Joseph; D&C 5.
- **Sun, 5 Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – Oliver Cowdery arrived with Samuel Smith.

Joseph Smith—History 1:27-65

Introduction

During this period of Joseph Smith’s life, he remained aloof from all churches but still did not have a personal mission. Falling into various sins, he sought forgiveness and experienced his second vision (which quickly became his third, fourth, and fifth visions). An ancient prophet, now divine messenger, appeared to the young man and gave him an important task—but Joseph could only do it when he had maturely sufficiently spiritually and morally.

While in this ‘probation’ period with Moroni as tutor, he worked away from home, married and moved several times. Having finally obtained the plates in 1827, he still did not know how to translate them and also needed support, which came in the form of Martin Harris. Harris, however, also proved to be a roadblock to the work. But the Lord knew all things in advance and had prepared everything for this critical learning experience.

Outline

1. Moroni’s appearances (27-47)
2. The hill (48-54)
3. Emma Hale (55-58)
4. Obtaining the plates (59-60)
5. Martin Harris and the characters (61-65)

Commentary

Moroni’s first appearance occurred on the night of 21-22 Sep 1823, about 3-1/2 years after the first vision. Joseph’s motivation in going to pray was to receive forgiveness of sins again, with some kind of divine manifestation of that forgiveness. He got that, but in addition he also was called to serve God and do a latter-day miraculous work. These experiences set the course of his life as a prophet of the Lord. But first he had to learn to truly obey God.

Moroni’s appearances (27-47)

27 *I continued to pursue my common vocations.* Joseph Smith’s First Vision experience apparently left him with no

hint of a greater call coming. It was marvelous and he had received forgiveness of sins and an answer to his prayer about what church to join, but none of the accounts he gave alluded to his future mission. It was only with Moroni’s appearance that he learned about his personal role. In the meantime, he continued working on the family farm, including helping clear sixty acres of forested land, and doing other unremarkable daily activities. That it was mostly work with little time for learning is reflected in Joseph’s 1832 history: “and as it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructtid in reading and writing and the ground <rules> of Arithmatic which const[it]uted my whole literary acquirements.”¹

27 *severe persecution...because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision.* Some critics suggest that Joseph’s First Vision story was fabricated later. But as he states here, he continued to talk about it, and indeed his family and those who knew him in the earliest years, such as Oliver Cowdery, agreed with his story as being both genuine and in the time Joseph proposed. The “severe persecution” the Prophet remembers was perhaps accentuated by his later life when he wrote this, but history shows that he was at least rebuked and shunned by the local Methodist minister. There was certainly gossip around town, and a growing sense of alienation. People threw dirt and stones at their home and one time someone seems to have fired a gun at Joseph for no obvious reason.²

28 *the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature.* Joseph’s sins are not serious but do cause him concern, enough that he seeks to know his standing before the Lord. In 1838, he said that “he was entangled again [in] the

¹ JSP, H1:11.

² Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 93-94.

vanities of the world.”³ The verse details “levity” and associating with “jovial company.” In a letter to Oliver Cowdery, Joseph described these weaknesses as “a light, and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation.”⁴

29 *twenty-first of September.* Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph’s mother, remembered having a family discussion that night before bed about “the diversity of churches” and “the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture.”⁵ It was a Sunday, so no doubt some of the family had attended church meetings that day, stimulating at least some of the discussion.

29 *I had retired to my bed.* The family, led by Alvin, had started building their frame house in 1822, but it was still under construction on 21 Sep 1823, so the family continued living in the log home just up the road. Unlike the common picture of him in the room alone (and 12 foot ceilings!), Joseph shared a bed upstairs with his five brothers (Alvin, Hyrum, Samuel, William, and Don Carlos), with the sisters (Sophronia, Catherine, and Lucy) sleeping in the small bedroom next to them. He probably said the prayer mentioned while in bed and had the visions surrounded by his sleeping brothers, with none of them waking up.

29 *I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.* Even though it had been more than three years, Joseph showed his faith that it would happen again.

30 *at my bedside, standing in the air.* Remarkable in that the room is very small. In his 1835 account to “Joshua the Jewish minister,” Joseph stated that Moroni was suspended “between the floors of the room” in a way that apparently opened up the house around him.⁶

31 *a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness.* Moroni’s clothing is described in great detail by the Prophet in this verse, showing that he had on a single robe (tunic) that went down to his wrists and ankles and was open in the chest. Given how many times he saw him, it’s not surprising that he had time and ability to notice such detail.

32 *his whole person was glorious.* Not only his clothing but his actual skin, hair, etc., was white “like lightning.” Moroni was the source of the light, or at least it was most concentrated and bright immediately around him.

33 *He called me by name.* In v. 32, Joseph relates that he was afraid but the fear soon dissipated. The angel calling him by name was surely part of the lessening of the fear.

33 *a messenger sent from the presence of God.* In both Hebrew and Greek, and words translated “angel” in our scriptures have the meaning of ‘messenger.’ Perhaps in deference to his own self-introduction, we should call him ‘Messenger Moroni’ instead of angel?

33 *his name was Moroni.* Moroni is the capital city on the island of Comoros, where it means “in the heart of the fire.”⁷ It is also the name of an Italian noble family.⁸ While in Europe, I saw a wine named Moroni. But Joseph Smith is very unlikely to have known any of that. Instead, the angel before him was the last prophet in the long history of the Nephite civilization. I have to wonder how Moroni pronounced his name to Joseph.

33 *my name should be had for good and evil among all nations.* Even in 1842 when this was published it was a bold statement as Joseph Smith was certainly known regionally but not among even the entire United States, much less all nations. And certainly when Moroni spoke it and Joseph first recounted it, he was unknown except to a small group of family and friends. This first prophecy of our dispensation is thus perhaps one of the greatest, as it has already been fulfilled and will continue to be so.

34 *a book deposited.* How excited Moroni must have been to deliver this message after nearly 1400 years of waiting! He had finished the record, protected and transported it for forty years, then lovingly buried it in the hill. He surely watched over it from his position in the heavens all those years, waiting for this day to come.

34 *the fulness of the everlasting Gospel.* The “gospel” is the good news about Jesus Christ, which is clearly the message of the Book of Mormon. Sometimes today we use the term “gospel” to mean the Church itself, but that is not its scriptural meaning. The Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the gospel because it gives the truth about Jesus, his atonement, his resurrection, and his forgiveness to those who repent and come unto him.

35 *two stones in silver bows...the Urim and Thummim.* These “interpreters,” as they are called in the Book of Mormon,⁹ were those passed down from the Jaredites to the Nephites and now to Joseph Smith. They were used to translate the Book of Mormon but also to help Joseph receive various revelations from heaven. At first, he called

³ History, 1838-1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834], 36 (see <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834?p=36>).

⁴ *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. I, No. 3, Nov. 6, 1834, <http://centerplace.org/history/ma/v1n03.htm>, p. 40.

⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 106 n14.

⁶ *JSP*, J1:88.

⁷ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moroni,_Comoros.

⁸ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Moroni.

⁹ See Mosiah 8:13, 19; 28:20; Alma 37:21, 24; and Ether 4:5.

them “spectacles”¹⁰ but later began to use the name “Urim and Thummin” after the instruments by that name in the Old Testament.¹¹

36-41 *he commenced quoting the prophecies*. Joseph said that Moroni quoted several scriptures, including:

36 **Malachi 3:1-6, 16-18?** (exact verses not listed in the PoGP account) – A messenger (a reference how Moroni introduced himself but as Joseph will learn, also a reference to his role) will prepare the way for the Lord who will come to his temple, purge the sons of Levi so a righteous offering can be made. Judgment will come on the wicked, while the righteous will be written in a book of remembrance and be the Lords.

36-39 **Malachi 4:1, 5-6** (see D&C 2 below) – The wicked will be burned, but those that fear the Lord shall be healed. Obey the law of Moses. Elijah will come with the priesthood and turn hearts of children and fathers to each other.

40 **Isaiah 11** (“about to be fulfilled”) – The stem/branch of Jesse will judge with righteousness, slaying the wicked and blessing the righteous. Peace shall reign after his coming. An ensign to the Gentiles will be raised up, and the remnant of the people will be gathered, helped by the miraculous hand of God.

40 **Acts 3:22-23** (“precisely as they stand in our New Testament”) – A prophet (“that prophet was Christ”) is raised up, and those who don’t hear him will be destroyed (“soon would come”).

41 **Joel 2:28-32** (“not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be”) – The Spirit is poured out, resulting in prophesy, dreams, and visions, even among slaves. There will be wonders in heaven and earth, the sun darkened, and the moon to blood. Those who call on God will be delivered in Zion and Jerusalem.

41 *quoted many other passages of scripture*. Oliver Cowdery wrote¹² that Moroni also quoted other scriptures:

- 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 – “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.”
- Isaiah 28:21 – The Lord will do “his strange work...his strange act.”

- Isaiah 29:11-14 – A sealed book is delivered to one who cannot read it because it is sealed, then to another who is not learned. People’s hearts are removed from God, but he will do a marvelous work and a wonder. (Contrary to what some have said about Joseph not having any idea about this prophecy until it was fulfilled, Moroni called it out and drew his attention to it. He still could have been surprised that the Anthon visit fulfilled it, of course.)
- John 10:16 – “Other sheep” not in Jerusalem will hear Christ’s voice.

One scholar noted that Moroni’s message to Joseph Smith has at least seven major points:¹³

1. Joseph was called of God to open the last dispensation (Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 11:1, 10; Joel 2:28-29).
2. His work fulfilled ancient prophecies (Malachi 3-4; Isaiah 2; 11, 29; Joel 2; Jeremiah 30-31).
3. The work entailed the restoration of priesthood keys, powers, and covenants (Isaiah 29:14; Malachi 4:4-5).
4. The Book of Mormon was a key part of the work (Isaiah 29:11, 14).
5. It also involved the gathering of Israel (Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:11-13; Psalm 107:1-7).
6. Without this work, the earth would be wasted (Malachi 4:5-6).
7. The work was to prepare the world for the Second Coming (Malachi 3:1-3; 4:1-3; Joel 2:30-31; Acts 3:22-23).

42 I should not show them to any person. This strict command was for Joseph’s protection as well as the plates’. His history shows that he struggled to meet this expectation, to keep them safe even and prevent anyone from seeing them. If there had been witnesses during the translation process who knew for certain of the plates’ existence, that task of keeping them safe would have been much harder, if not impossible.

42 I could see the place where the plates were deposited. Joseph surely knew the hill itself as he passed by it many times on the road south from his house, so the point of this vision was to show exactly where the plates were buried on the hill.

43 a conduit open right up into heaven. This fascinating account details how Moroni departed Joseph’s room, with

¹⁰ *JSP*, H1:15, from his 1832 account and in another section written in Joseph’s own hand.

¹¹ The transition could have been as early as 1830 but certainly by 1833 that was the common name for both the Nephite instruments and Joseph’s own seer stones; see MacKay and Frederick, *Seer Stones*, 50-52.

¹² Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:426-444.

¹³ Clyde J. Williams, “Insights from Moroni’s Visits in 1823,” in Black and Skinner, *Joseph*, 52-53. For a detailed analysis of the whole experience, see Kent P. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” in *Studies in Scripture 2: The Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Company, 1985.

the light gathering around him and then some kind of “conduit” opening up that took him right through the roof and into heaven. It will be amazing to understand just how this works one day!

44 *again at my bedside.* Moroni appeared three times that night giving the same message (v. 45), but with some additional information each time. The repetition is surely at least partly why Joseph Smith remembered it in such detail that he could quote the scriptures and note how they were different from the Biblical versions.

45 *great judgments which were coming.* In this second appearance, Moroni not only emphasized the importance of the Book of Mormon but showed how it would help prepare the world for the judgments preceding the Second Coming—“famine, sword, and pestilence.”

46 *Satan would try to tempt me.* On his third visit, Moroni again repeated the same ‘base’ information, then informed Joseph that Satan would be after him to use the plates for gain. He was strictly forbidden to consider this and told he could not get the plates unless his only goal was to build up God’s kingdom. This proved to be a great challenge to the young man from an impoverished family over the next four years. Lucy Smith added that Moroni instructed Joseph in this third appearance to tell his father about the vision, “for he will believe every word you say.”¹⁴

47 *occupied the whole of that night.* Clearly we don’t have the full record of their conversations. Each conversation could have been two hours in length, perhaps more. In his 1842 history, Joseph wrote about this night in more detail:

I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people was made known unto me.¹⁵

In her own history, Lucy added that that evening, the whole family gathered around Joseph to hear the story.

We sat up very late and listened attentively to all that he had to say to us, but his mind had been so exercised that he became very much fatigued. When Alvin saw this he said, “Now, brother, let us go to bed. We will get up early in the morning and go to work so as to finish our day’s labor by an hour before sunset, and if Mother will get our suppers early, we will then have a fine, long evening and all sit down and hear you talk”

The next day we worked with great ambition and were ready by sunset to give our whole attention to the disclosure of my son, pertaining to the obtaining of the plates, the goodness of god, his knowledge and power, our own liability to error and transgression, and the great salvation that lay before the faithful.¹⁶

The hill (48-54)

48 *my strength entirely failed me.* The lack of sleep as well as the drain from the heavenly vision left the young man exhausted. Lucy recounts that he and Alvin were in the field harvesting wheat, with Alvin noticing Joseph’s lack of strength and chiding him, saying, “We must not slacken our hands or we will not be able to complete our task.” Father Smith saw Joseph’s uncharacteristic lack of effort and pale face, and deciding he was too sick to work, sent him back to the house. But too tired to even make it that far, he laid down under an apple tree (probably next to the fence he attempted to scale in this verse).¹⁷

49 *commanded me to go to my father.* This was Moroni’s fourth visit in twenty-four hours. Lucy said that Moroni first said, “Why did you not tell your father that which I commanded you to tell him?” Joseph’s feeble reply was, “I was afraid my father would not believe me.” But Moroni again promised that Joseph Sr. would indeed believe every word.¹⁸

50 *it was of God.* Joseph Sr. not only believed his son’s story about the angel, but sent him off to immediately obey and go to the hill. Amazingly, after being so tired that he could not stand just a short time before, Joseph was suddenly reinvigorated with the strength to walk about three miles southeast to the hill and back.

50 *I left the field, and went to the place.* Oliver Cowdery recounted that even during this first trip to the hill, Joseph was already struggling with a desire to help the financial situation of his family with the plates, though that was contrary to Moroni’s command. His mind was filled with

thoughts of gain and income from such a valuable history....And to use his own words it seemed as though two invisible powers were influencing or striving to influence his mind—one with the reflection that if he obtained the object of his pursuit, it would be through the mercy and condescension of the Lord, and that every act or performance in relation to it, must be in strict accordance with the instruction of that personage, who communicated the intelligence to him first; and the other with the thoughts and reflections like those previously mentioned—contrasting his former and present circum-

¹⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 106-107, n14.

¹⁵ *JSP*, H1:495.

¹⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 111.

¹⁷ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 108.

¹⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 108.

stances in life with those to come...a fixed determination to obtain and aggrandize himself, occupied his mind when he arrive at the place where the record was found.¹⁹

51 a hill. Joseph does not call it “Cumorah” in his own histories. That name was adopted later by those who knew the Book of Mormon and has caused some small confusion among members, thinking that the hill was the place of the final battle of the Nephites and Lamanites. True enough that in his history in 1834, Oliver Cowdery pronounced the hill in New York as being “Cumorah” where the Nephites were “doomed to suffer extermination.”²⁰ But that appears to be his conclusion; he does not claim to have learned that from Joseph, but draws it out of his own reading of the final chapters of the Book of Mormon. The best evidence today points to a Mesoamerican location for the book’s Cumorah, with this hill simply being the final resting place of the plates after Moroni’s nearly four decades of wandering (Moroni 10:1 concludes 420 years after the sign of Christ’s birth, compared to Mormon 6:5, which shows it was 384 years after the sign when the final battle began).

52 the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breast-plate. Oliver Cowdery again gave a very detailed explanation of the box and its contents:

This box was sufficiently large to admit a breast-plate, such as was used by the ancients to defend the chest, &c. from the arrows and weapons of their enemy. From the bottom of the box...arose three small pillars composed of the same description of cement used on the edges, and upon these three pillars was place the record of the children of Joseph.²¹

53 was forbidden by the messenger. Joseph added more in his own 1832 account about what happened here:

I immediately went to the place and found where the plates were deposited as the angel of the Lord had commanded me and straightway made three attempts to get them and then being exceedingly frightened I supposed it had been a dream of Vision but when I considred I knew that it was not therefore I cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul why can I not obtain them behold the angel appeared unto me again and said unto me you have not kept the commandments of the Lord which I gave unto you therefore you cannot now obtain them for the time is not yet fulfilled therefore thou wast left unto temptation that thou mightiest be made acquainted of with the power of the advisory [adversary].²²

Again, Oliver Cowdery’s account gave interesting details about Joseph’s attempt to get the plates on this first visit to the hill:

On attempting to take possession of the records a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before....He therefore made the third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditation he exclaimed, “Why can I not obtain this book?”²³

Moroni then appeared and told him it was because he had not kept the commandments of God. Calling upon the Lord in prayer, the “darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul was lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy.” He saw “the glory of the Lord” and also “the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates.” Moroni explained that this vision was given so that he would know of “the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one”²⁴

53 until four years from that time. This is an anachronism written in retrospect, as other accounts show that Joseph didn’t know what year he would receive the plates. Instead, he went each year hoping that that was the one. Only when it is done can he look back and say it took four years.

54 I went at the end of each year. Not the end of our calendar year but the end of the year from the last visit. Joseph went to the hill on 22 September each year.

Emma Hale (55-58)

55 hiring out by day’s work and otherwise. The family completed the house that Alvin had worked on in 1825, though they soon lost it because they couldn’t make their final loan payment. With Alvin’s death, their income was reduced, and completing the house taxed what was left. A kind local Quaker, Lemuel Durfee, purchased the farm instead, allowing them to live on the property for a little longer by paying rent.

56 the death of my eldest brother, Alvin. Alvin was sick with “bilious colic” in the fall of 1823. Joseph Knight recounted that in September 1823, Joseph was told by Moroni that he could have the plates in 1824 if he brought “the right person” with him. When he asked Moroni who that was, the angel replied, “Your oldest brother.” But two

¹⁹ Jessee, *Papers*, 1:76-77.

²⁰ Jessee, *Papers*, 1:78-79.

²¹ Jessee, *Papers*, 1:83.

²² *JSP*, H1:14.

²³ Jessee, *Papers*, 1:86.

²⁴ Jessee, *Papers*, 1:87.

months later, that oldest brother, Alvin, lay dying. Before he died on 19 November 1823, Alvin told Joseph, “I want you to be a good boy, and do everything that lies in your power to obtain the Record. Be faithful in receiving instruction, and in keeping every commandment that is given you.”

56 *In the month of October, 1825.* Joseph jumped two years in history from Alvin’s death to his employment with Josiah Stoyal (Stowell), but each year in September, he was still going to the hill, hoping to get the plates. Each year he was disappointed. Most of the visits are passed over in the historical record, but the first one in 1824 was an adventure, as told by Lucy Mack Smith.

In 1824, hoping he would get the plates, Joseph had tried to keep God’s commandments all year, and thus “fully expected to carry them home with him.” But on 22 September 1824, as he lifted the lid and reached into the box, the thought that perhaps there might be something else in the box that would enrich his family entered his mind. He lifted out the plates and set them aside, then covered the box again to protect the other contents. When he turned around, the plates were gone.

He prayed to ask what had happened, and Moroni again appeared, explaining that he had not kept the Lord’s commandments again, both in his thoughts about gain and in laying the plates down, for he had been commanded not to let them out of his hands. He opened the box again and saw the plates back in their place. When he reached toward them, he was thrown to the ground, and Moroni left, leaving Joseph to walk home weeping.

When he returned home, his father asked him about the plates, and Joseph told him he had not obtained them. His father replied, “I would have taken them if I had been in your place.” But Joseph humbly answered, “You do not know what you say. I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me.” Thereafter, the family renewed their prayers for Joseph to be successful.²⁵

Joseph’s brother, William Smith, related an account in 1884. Though he seems to be referring to the 1823 visit in his retelling, the details align more with the 1824 visit. He stated that when Joseph went to get the plates,

He found them as he was told he should. He took them from the stone box in which they were found, and placed them on the ground behind him, when the thought came into his mind that there might be a treasure hidden with them. While stooping forward to see, he was overpowered, so that he could not look farther. Turning to get the plates, he found they had gone; and

on looking around found that they were in the box again; but he could not get them, and he cried out, “Why can’t I get the plates as Moroni told me I could?” The angel then appeared to him, and told him it was because he had not done as directed. That the plates could not be had for the purpose of making money.²⁶

The details of the 1825 visit, which happened just a few days before Joseph left for Josiah Stowell’s employment, are not documented, but the result was the same as 1823 and 1824—no plates. Perhaps the timing of Joseph’s employment was linked to the disappointment of another year without the plates.

56 *I hired with an old gentleman by the name of Josiah Stoyal.* The family did raise some extra money by working for Josiah Stowell, located in southern New York and Harmony, Pennsylvania, hunting for lost Spanish treasure in late 1825, which is how Joseph Smith said he got the reputation of a money digger. Being taken to court later on charges of being a disorderly person and a money digger, Josiah Stowell and others of the area testified in Joseph’s behalf, citing his good character and work ethic. Stowell stated, “he was not a Profain man although I did onc[e] in a while hear him swair but never gambled to my knowledge...I never new him to git drunk.”²⁷ Joseph was acquitted.

The money digging was not financially profitable, but after that stopped, Joseph continued to work for the Stowells on their farm. The stay of several months in the South Bainbridge and Harmony area was beneficial because of two families that Joseph Smith met while there. The first was the Joseph Knight family in Colesville, who also hired Joseph to work in their carding mill and who were later very instrumental in supporting Joseph in his translation efforts and were early and strong converts to the Church. The second was the Hale family, who had a daughter of great interest to Joseph Smith.

57 *I first saw my wife...Emma Hale.* Joseph told his mother that Emma was his “choice in preference to any other woman I have ever seen.”²⁸ He met her while working for Stowell, as he and his father boarded at the Hale home. Joseph continued to court Emma during most of 1826, covering the twenty-five-mile distance from South Bainbridge to Harmony several times to see her. Isaac Hale, Emma’s father, did not approve of Joseph because his treasure hunting work and his claims to visions (v. 58).

Joseph returned home in September 1826 for another visit to the hill with Moroni. Joseph Knight recounted that during this visit, Joseph was told that he could not have the

²⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 122-124.

²⁶ “William Smith Testimony, 1884,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:504-505.

²⁷ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

²⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

plates but “the 22nd Day of September nex[t] he mite have the book if he Brot with him the right person Joseph says who is the right Person the answer was you will know then he looked in his glass [seer stone] and found it was Emma Hale.”²⁹

Lucy said he stayed in Manchester until the end of the year, though he and his father were having business dealings with Stowell and Joseph Knight, Sr., so made the trip more than once that fall and early winter.³⁰ Sometime that winter, Joseph returned to work briefly for the Knights.

When Emma came to visit the Stowells in January 1827, she saw Joseph again. Though it was not her intention, the visit became the opportunity for them to elope. She told her son later:

I was visiting <at> Mr Stowell’s who lived in Bainbridge and saw your father there. I had no intention of marrying ~~then~~ when I left home; but during my visit at Mr Stowell’s, our Father visited me there. My folks were bitterly opposed to him; and as being importuned by your father, aided by Mr Stowell, and preferring to marry him than any one I Knew, I consented.³¹

Emma’s father, Isaac Hale, was very much against the marriage, and left this account:

young Smith made several visits at my house, and at length asked my consent to his marrying my daughter Emma. This I refused, and gave him my reasons for so doing; some of which were, that he was a stranger, and followed a business that I could not approve [treasure seeking and looking in a stone]; he then left the place. Not long after this, he returned, and while I was absent from home, carried off my daughter, into the state of New York, where they were married without my approbation or consent.³²

58 *married at the house of Squire Tarbill.* Zechariah Tarble lived across the river from the Hale home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, just north of Colesville and the Joseph Knight, Sr., home.³³ Joseph Smith was twenty-one and Emma twenty-two. Later, Isaac Hale charged Joseph with ‘stealing’ Emma, but she was of age to make her own decision, and by her own account, did so willingly.

58 *I left Mr. Stool’s, and went to my father’s.* With the bad feelings in Harmony, Joseph and Emma went to live with his family in Manchester for a time. They would soon return to Harmony where the major work on the Book of Mormon translation took place. This was set up by a letter from Emma in the summer of 1827, a few months after

their marriage, asking about her belongings she had left behind in the impromptu decision to marry. Her father agreed to give them all to her, so Joseph hired Peter Ingersoll to take them to Harmony and retrieve Emma’s possessions. When they arrived in Harmony, Isaac Hale expressed his discontent with their marriage but Joseph assured Isaac that his treasure seeking days were behind him. Before they left, Isaac offered to give them a place to live and work for Joseph.³⁴

Obtaining the plates (59-60)

59 *the time arrived.* Early in 1827, Lucy wrote that Joseph came home late one night from town. Worried, when he came in the door, his parents asked what had happened. Joseph replied, “I have taken the severest chastisement that I have ever had in my life.” Thinking it was from a human source, Joseph, Sr., grew angry. But the son explained, “As I passed by the hill of Cumorah, where the plates are, the angel met me and said that I had not been engaged enough in the work of the Lord; that the time had come for the record to be brought forth; and that I must be up and doing and set myself about the things which God had commanded me to do.”³⁵ Other accounts say that Moroni had given Joseph an ultimatum: either be prepared to receive the plates that September, or he would never get them.³⁶

59 *delivered them up to me.* It had been four years since Moroni’s first appearance. The annual trek had become a tradition. But this year would be different. Just after midnight, Joseph and Emma took Joseph Knight’s wagon to the hill (Knight and Josiah Stowell were up visiting just to be there on this day). They were gone all night, not returning until after breakfast. With excitement, he told his family and friends in the house that he had the plates and the Seers. Joseph Knight records the event with a sense of humor displayed on Joseph Smith’s part, first making Knight think he did not get the plates again:

after Brackfirst [breakfast] Joseph Cald me into the other Room and he set his foot on the Bed and leaned his head on his hand and says well I am Dissopinted [disappointed]. Well say I I am sorrey Well says he I am grateley Dissopinted, it is ten times Better than I expected.³⁷

59 *use all my endeavors to preserve them.* Many tried to get the plates from Joseph. The first night, he hid them in a log. When people went out hunting for them, he retrieved them, but was soon accosted and forced to fight and flee. Next they were buried under the hearth in the living room.

²⁹ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:13.

³⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 133-134.

³¹ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:538.

³² Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:285.

³³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

³⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 54; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:285-286.

³⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 134-135.

³⁶ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

³⁷ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

When someone suspected that location, Joseph hid them in the attic of his father's cooper's shop in the yard. When people unsuccessfully tore up that building trying to find them, he determined it would be best to get out of town.³⁸

Martin Harris and the characters (61-65)

61 *Martin Harris...gave me fifty dollars.* Martin Harris received an early witness of Joseph's calling, even before Joseph Smith had started translating. He hired members of the Smith family starting in 1824 to do work on his large farm just north of Palmyra. He asked them many questions about Joseph's experience in an attempt to uncover any potential lie. Skeptical at first, he asked for proof of Joseph's work, and was able to hold the box to feel the weight of the plates inside. He went home and prayed and received a witness of the Holy Ghost of Joseph's calling. After that, he was a steady supporter and played key roles in the early days of the work. Giving Joseph and Emma \$50 would be like giving them several thousand dollars today; it paid off their debts so they could leave the area, and helped sustain them for some time. Emma's brother, Alva, also helped by bringing a team and wagon to make the move.³⁹

62 *my destination in Pennsylvania.* Joseph and Emma's public reason for leaving was that Emma was several months pregnant and in poor health, so they wanted to be near her family, having reconciled somewhat the previous August. When they left, they packed the plates in the bottom of a barrel of beans. When leaving town, they were stopped by several men who searched the wagon, wanting to get the plates, but didn't find them in the beans.

At first Joseph and Emma lived with her parents, and even there attracted more attention than they wanted with neighbors coming to try and see the plates. But after Emma's father told them they could not stay in his house if he couldn't see the plates,⁴⁰ they were able to arrange to purchase a small two-room log cabin and 13 acres for \$200 (paid off in 1830) on the same property that belonged to Emma's brother, Jesse, and about 150 yards from Isaac Hale's house.⁴¹ In this house they lived for the next 2-1/2 years, and in this house the bulk of the Book of Mormon was translated.

62 *I commenced copying the characters.* Once they were settled in Harmony in December 1827, Joseph started to copy characters from the plates onto paper. Some of this was likely to help convince Isaac Hale, who had hefted the

plates but remained skeptical, thinking this was just an example of Joseph being a treasure seeker.⁴²

Joseph's copying likely including making rubbings of the plates (rubbing charcoal over paper to capture the shapes of the characters) and then having Emma do her best to copy the characters from the rubbings to a clean sheet of paper. Emma's brother, Reuben, and later Martin Harris, also may have helped with this effort.⁴³ He may have attempted to create a list of the characters or even an alphabet, as he later did with the Egyptian papyri in Kirtland.⁴⁴

62 *by means of the Urim and Thummim.* The two Nephite interpreters he had received were in many ways more exciting to Joseph than the plates. The first day he brought them home, Joseph Knight commented to that effect: "he seemed to think more of the glasses or the urim and thummim than he did of the Plates for says he I can see any thing they are Marvelus."⁴⁵

Joseph didn't understand the ultimate role of the interpreters at first. Falling back onto his seer stone experience, he first used them to keep track of the plates and know they were safe. On several occasions, he looked in the interpreters to assure himself of the plates' safety or to be warned of a coming danger.⁴⁶ He does not appear to consider using them to translate until after Martin left for New York.

62 *translated some of them.* During this time, Joseph worked to earn money and worked on the plates when he could. However, the "translation" efforts of this period appear to be more copying characters and trying to figure them out. He was apparently not dictating or writing any kind of story as we have in the Book of Mormon today until after Feb 1828. All the evidence points to an attempt by Joseph Smith to find a normal, scholarly way to get the plates translated. In other words, he recognized that it was his responsibility to get them into English but did not yet understand it was to be by his own efforts, and hoped to find someone to help him.

63 *February, the aforementioned Mr. Martin Harris came.* Martin came in February 1828, about 4-1/2 months after Joseph got the plates, telling Joseph Smith that he had seen a vision telling him to take some of the characters to New York. This coincided with Joseph's desire to have knowledgeable scholars look at them to help him know

³⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 60-61; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 7-14 for even more examples.

³⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 62-63; MacKey and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 29-31.

⁴⁰ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 33-34.

⁴¹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 63.

⁴² MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 34.

⁴³ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 34-35, Michael Hubbard MacKay, "Git Them Translated," in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*, 86, the most in-depth study to date on Harris' visit to the scholars.

⁴⁴ Michael Hubbard MacKay, "Git Them Translated," in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*, 84.

⁴⁵ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

⁴⁶ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 12-16.

what language they were and how he might go about getting them translated.⁴⁷

64 *I went to the city of New York.* The 1838 history quoted Martin Harris about the trip to New York, hence “I” became Martin for a few verses instead of Joseph. Martin came down to Harmony in February 1828 from Palmyra. Joseph’s 1832 history says that because of Martin’s faith and generous gift to Joseph, “the Lord had shown him that he must go to new York City <with> some of the characters so we proceeded to copy some of them.”⁴⁸ The purpose of the trip is brought out in Lucy Mack Smith’s and Joseph Knight’s recollections. Lucy Smith’s account says the purpose of Martin’s visit to New York was to “call on all who were professed linguists to give them an opportunity of showing their talents in giving a translation of the characters.”⁴⁹ She implied that once Joseph had a basic translation of the characters, he could proceed with the work. Joseph Knight also conveyed Smith’s intentions about what to do next:

He now Began to be anxious to git them Translated he therefore with his wife Drew of[f] the Caricters exactly like the ancient and sent Martin Harris to see if he Could git them Translated.⁵⁰

64 *presented the characters.* Martin took “a considerable number” of characters copied onto paper and something of Joseph Smith’s first attempts at translation, whatever that may have been, and in February 1828 left for New York City.⁵¹ According to his son, he stopped along the way in Geneva, Ithica, and Albany, while W. W. Phelps said that he stopped in Utica and Albany, and Joseph Knight reported that Martin also made a stop in Philadelphia.⁵² We don’t know everyone he saw, but the record shows that he saw at least two others besides Anthon and that potential visits may have pointed him to the two New York scholars we know he consulted with.

The first known visit was Luther Bradish in Albany, someone knowledgeable about the Middle East and a state politician of note. Bradish had lived in Palmyra for a time and he and Harris had mutual friends. The goal of the visit appeared to be get suggestions about which scholars Harris should see. Bradish was not a scholar but was enthusiastic about antiquities and had traveled in Turkey, and according to one source, thought the characters Harris had looked similar to writing from that country.⁵³ He likely pointed Harris to Mitchell.

The other visit was to a scholar named Samuel Latham Mitchell, vice president of Rutgers Medical College in

New York City. One account says Mitchell referred Harris to Anthon, but Joseph’s record says Mitchell confirmed Anthon’s conclusion, so the order is not certain. However, both Mitchell and Anthon stated that Harris saw Mitchell first, so that seems the most likely. Though an administrator at a medical college, Mitchell’s recent passion was the study of Native Americans in New York, and he had learned the Mohawk language well and other languages to lesser degrees. He taught that the historical record showed one race of Native Americans wiped out another (or two) in New York, which aligned with what Joseph had possibly learned from Moroni. Mitchell looked at Harris’ characters and compared them to some of the languages he knew but apparently confessed that he could not understand them.

64 *Professor Charles Anthon.* Charles Anthon was a professor of classical studies at Columbia College in New York, teaching Greek and Roman history and Greek and Latin languages. Anthon was familiar with Jean-François Champollion’s 1824 work on reading Egyptian hieroglyphics from the Rosetta Stone, so perhaps that is why Mitchell sent Harris to him.⁵⁴ But Anthon was a fairly low level adjunct professor at this time and had no knowledge of Native American languages (though he had a professed interest in their stories, related to a book project he was working on at the time). At least in linguistic terms, it is hard to see the value of the visit for Harris.⁵⁵

64 *they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic.* The surviving fragments of the papers Martin took to Anthon indeed contain Egyptian characters (and also others that resemble Chaldean, Assyrian, and Arabic). No one today can ‘translate’ them in terms of making sense of them because they’re not formed into cohesive sentences, so Anthon’s declaration is either an Anthon bluff or a poor recollection on Martin’s part. Anthon wrote his own version of the encounter and denied that he had said the translation was correct, and in fact warned Harris that he was being cheated out of his money. Martin, of course, came away feeling confirmed that the characters were genuine, and his subsequent actions of being involved in the translation, investing in the publication, and his commitment to Joseph Smith support his version of the story more than Anthon’s, who very much disliked his name being associated with the Book of Mormon in any way. Whatever the ultimate conversation, it left Harris ready to fully support Joseph.

65 *I cannot read a sealed book.* The clear reference is to Isaiah 29:11-12. No one could truly translate the characters

⁴⁷ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 39.

⁴⁸ *JSP*, H1:15.

⁴⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 154.

⁵⁰ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:17.

⁵¹ MacKay, “*Git Them Translated*,” 90.

⁵² MacKay, “*Git Them Translated*,” 91-94.

⁵³ MacKay, “*Git Them Translated*,” 92-93.

⁵⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 64.

⁵⁵ MacKay, “*Git Them Translated*,” 98-100.

using human knowledge (indeed, no one can today). Instead, the unlearned man, Joseph, recognized that he had to rely on faith in the Lord and the Urim and Thummin. Oliver Cowdery's account of Moroni's visit says that Isaiah 29 was quoted to the Prophet, but Joseph didn't recognize its fulfillment until it was pointed out to him upon Harris' return. Recognizing his experience in Isaiah was worth far more to the young prophet in his early days than anything Anthon said or didn't say about his abilities.

Shortly after returning from New York, Martin Harris said that he went to his bedroom and

prayed to God to show me concerning these things, and I covenanted that if it was his work and he would show me so, I would put forth my best ability to bring it before the world. He then showed me that it was his work, and that it was designed to bring in the fullness of his gospel to the gentiles to fulfill his word. . . . He showed me this by the still small voice spoken in the soul. Then I was satisfied that it was the Lord's work, and I was under a covenant to bring it forth.⁵⁶

Starting to translate

In the Pearl of Great Price, the account jumps from Harris' New York visit straight to the coming of Oliver Cowdery, but there were many events during those months as related in Joseph Smith's history and other accounts of the period.

Sometime during Martin's New York trip, Joseph began to truly translate, creating the first two-thirds of the manuscript today referred to as the book of Lehi. The details are uncertain, because he appeared to be waiting for word from Martin about finding a translator, but at the same time, Martin and Emma both testified that during this time, Emma wrote about two-thirds of the manuscript, which was fully completed by mid-April.⁵⁷

Emma's time acting as Joseph's scribe was something she spoke of with great fondness and emotion later in life. She said:

I frequently wrote for day after day, often he sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it and dictating hour after hour, with nothing between us. He had neither mss [manuscript] nor book to read from. If he had anything of the Kind he could not have concealed it from me. The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen <table> cloth, which

I have given him to fold them in. I have felt of the plates, as they lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like ~~st~~ thick paper, and would rustle <with a metallic sound> when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.⁵⁸

After returning from New York, Martin Harris came to Harmony and assisted Joseph in the translation from about 12 April to 14 June 1828, over the objection of Martin's wife, Lucy, who thought Joseph was only after Harris' money. This was good timing for Emma who was getting toward the end of her pregnancy.

For Joseph's part, the information Martin had learned from his trip posed a challenge: no scholar was going to come to Joseph's rescue to "git them translated." He realized that he was on his own and needed to learn how to use the Nephite interpreters for that purpose. Though we have no details about this learning experience, he clearly figured it out sometime between February and April 1828, as he and Emma had translated most of the manuscript by Martin's arrival in April. With Martin there, the two men went to work, finishing the book of Lehi by mid-June.⁵⁹

The lost manuscript

After they had translated "116 pages,"⁶⁰ Martin asked for something that would quiet his wife's concerns. Joseph would not let them see the plates, so Martin asked to take the translated manuscript. Joseph's 1832 account tells it this way:

after we had translated 116 pages that he desired to carry them to read to his friends that peradventur he might convince them of the truth therefore I inquired of the Lord and the Lord said unto me that he must not take them and I spake unto him (Martin) the word of the Lord and he said inquire again and I inquired again and also the third time and the Lord said unto me let him go with them only he shall covenant with me that he will not shew them to only but four persons and he covenanted with the Lord that he would do according to the word of the Lord therefore he took them and took his journey unto his friends to Palmire Wayne County & State of N York.⁶¹

The time period for the three inquires was the entire two months Martin was in Harmony, not just something in quick succession.

point where Joseph restarted in. In other words, what he translated from the small plates to replace the book of Lehi record ended up being 116 pages in the printer's manuscript, so Joseph referred to it as the 'lost 116 pages,' even though the number of pages lost may have been quite different; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 102-103 n58.

⁶¹ *JSP*, H1:15-16.

⁵⁶ Harper, *Making Sense*, 31.

⁵⁷ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 90-91.

⁵⁸ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:539.

⁵⁹ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 89-92.

⁶⁰ The number of pages is probably an estimate, based on the fact that the later printer's manuscript had exactly 116 pages up to the

Joseph said that after Martin took the manuscript, Moroni came and reclaimed the plates and the interpreters. The day after Martin left, on 15 June 1828, Emma gave birth to a little boy who they named Alvin, but he died within the hour, and Emma nearly died herself. Joseph cared for her night and day. After two weeks Emma began to get better but there was no word from Martin, so with her urging, he left his wife in the care of her mother and took a stage-coach north to his parents' home, fasting and agonizing as he went. Being dropped twenty miles from his home, he walked all night. Exhausted but anxious to hear from Martin, Joseph called for him at breakfast time, and he reluctantly came after noon, delivering the news that the manuscript was gone. Martin had indeed showed it to several friends, and it had disappeared from his house when he was away one day.⁶² The manuscript has never been found; some claimed that Lucy Harris, Martin's wife, burned it. Joseph related the story simply in his 1832 history:

and he brake the covenant which he made before the Lord and the Lord suffered the writings to fall into the hands of wicked men and Martin was Chastened for his transgression and I also was chastened ~~also~~ for my transgression for asking the Lord the third time wherefore the Plates was taken from me by the power of God and I was not able to obtain them for a season.⁶³

Lucy Smith, who was there, said that when Martin told him the manuscript was lost (exclaiming twice, "I have lost my soul!"), Joseph cried out, "Oh, my God, my God! All is lost, is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned. It is I who tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which I had no right to ask, as I was differently instructed by the angel."⁶⁴ Joseph Smith was 22 years old when this happened.

Immediately after returning to Harmony, Joseph walked out into a private area near his home and Moroni appeared to him again, handing him the interpreters. Using them, D&C 3 was received, the first written revelation of Joseph Smith's young prophetic experience. It was Joseph finding "his prophetic voice."⁶⁵ Then Moroni took the interpreters back and left Joseph alone to ponder his situation.

The return of the plates

Lucy Smith recorded that Joseph repented all summer and on 22 Sep 1828, Moroni returned the plates and the interpreters to him.⁶⁶ But there is no indication that translation

resumed for several months, most likely because of the strong opposition of Emma's family and Joseph's complete lack of resources. He was just scaping by and had no money for paper, ink, and other supplies needed to do the work.⁶⁷

Two events changed his course. The first was a visit from his father and brother, Samuel, who were accompanied by Joseph Knight, in February 1829. Joseph Sr. asked his son what his duty might be in this work, and Joseph used his seer stone to receive what is now D&C 4. This was a call to serve, a mission beyond getting the plates translated, and is the first real hint of something bigger coming.⁶⁸ Joseph Knight was strapped for cash himself but gave Joseph and Emma "a little money to Buoy [buy] paper to translate."⁶⁹

Joseph Sr. returned home but young Samuel stayed behind, and the record indicates that he and Emma served as scribe while Joseph made some effort at translation. But resources were scarce and not much progress appears to have been made.⁷⁰

In March 1829, Martin Harris came to Harmony, seeking a "greater witness" of the work. This was the first time he and Joseph had seen each other since the loss of the manuscript. Martin came because his wife, Lucy, had threatened a lawsuit against Joseph to stop Martin from supporting him.⁷¹ Martin hoped that he could persuade Joseph to at least let him see the plates in the hopes of quieting his wife. Joseph sought the guidance of the Lord and the result was D&C 5, counseling Martin to be patient and he would indeed see the plates as one of three witnesses. Harris acted as scribe for Joseph for a few pages and as part of his effort to gain evidence to convince his wife, traded Joseph's seer stone out for another during one of their breaks. When Joseph could tell something was wrong, Martin confessed his attempt, saying he had done it "to stop the mouths of fools."⁷²

It is not known what happened to this few pages recorded between February and April 1829. No surviving manuscript in Emma's, Samuel's, or Martin's hand.⁷³ There are several theories about what happened but two seem most likely. First, we do not have all of the original manuscript, much of it being destroyed by water when it was put in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. But the missing sections don't correspond well to the timing of this early work, and Oliver Cowdery's hand appears in each section

⁶² MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 93-96.

⁶³ *JSP*, H1:16.

⁶⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 165-166.

⁶⁵ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 69.

⁶⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 176; MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 97.

⁶⁷ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 70.

⁶⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 70.

⁶⁹ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:19.

⁷⁰ *JSP*, H1:16.

⁷¹ She threatened the suit in March and actually filed it in August 1829; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 107.

⁷² MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 111.

⁷³ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 115 n7.

that is preserved. The other theory is one I've not found documented elsewhere but which fits the circumstances. Perhaps Joseph restarted the translation back with the book of Lehi and began to redictate the same material as before. The work did not progress far (as explained above) but soon perhaps as late as 5-6 April 1829, Joseph received D&C 10 which told him not to retranslate the book of Lehi but that the Lord had prepared another solution for that part of the history—the small plates of Nephi that contained Nephi's personal account and those who followed after

him. Thus when Oliver arrived, the translation picked up in Mosiah where it had left off a year earlier and continued on through Moroni's final words, then they finished by translating the small plates to the Words of Mormon. This would mean that the few pages Emma, Samuel, and Martin had recorded in February – April 1829 were set aside and never used.⁷⁴

D&C 2

Setting

See Joseph Smith-History 1:27-43 (above). On 21-22 Sep 1823, Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith four times in and near his house in Manchester, New York, giving him a similar message each time. Part of that message was to quote prophecies from the Bible, including chapters 3 and 4 of Malachi. Joseph Smith noted that Moroni offered the last two verses of Malachi differently than in the King James Bible, and noted those differences in his history.

Documents and Publication

First published on 15 Apr 1842 in the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo as part of Joseph Smith's history. Added to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876 by Orson Pratt who no doubt felt like the words of an angel merited a D&C section.

Commentary

Moroni's quotation in these three verses comes from two verses in Malachi 4:5-6. The message in Moroni's version is that the priesthood will be revealed by Elijah before the Second Coming, planting promises made to the fathers in childrens' hearts and causing their hearts to turn to their fathers. Without this, the earth would be wasted.

It is useful to note that the Savior did not change these verses when he gave the same scripture to the Nephites, nor did the Prophet change it as part of his translation of the Bible. Moroni's recitation, then, must have been more of a commentary than a quotation. Malachi's message is general and open to interpretation as it stands. Moroni made sure the young Prophet knew just how this scripture applied to him and his future mission.

Malachi 4:5-6	3 Nephi	D&C 2:1-3/JS-H 1:38-39
Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:	Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord;	Behold, I will <i>reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of</i> Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.
And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.	And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.	And he shall <i>plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.</i>

1 reveal unto you the Priesthood. Moroni explained the reason Elijah would be sent—to reveal the priesthood. This event (see D&C 110) is more than just giving the priesthood to Joseph Smith because by 1836 he had received that already from John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John.

Elijah brought the keys of the sealing power, which not only binds families together but has the power to seal the heavens and more. In this sense, Elijah revealed what the priesthood power could be to our dispensation.

⁷⁴ Of course, problems exist. No such pages have ever been found, but following D&C 10's instructions, Joseph could have

destroyed them. So the reconstruction is speculative but does have the merit of fitting all the known dates and circumstances.

2 plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers. The KJV portrays the results of Elijah’s coming as turning fathers’ and children’s hearts toward each other. Moroni’s version instead plants ancient promises and covenants already made to the fathers in the hearts of their children, which then causes the children to turn their hearts to the fathers. It is the promises of God that triggers the change of heart.

2 the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming. More than being cursed, without Elijah’s mission, the earth would be “wasted.” Without the sealing power, the future

celestial kingdom would indeed be wasted—empty and void and without purpose.

Results

Moroni’s words taught Joseph Smith specific things about the future coming of Elijah in 1836 and about the priesthood and eternal family ties. It also is a fascinating first exposure to the idea of divine Biblical interpretation. This concept was later the foundation of his work on the Bible from 1830-1833.

D&C 3

Setting

See “The lost manuscript” above for more details. In December 1827, Joseph and Emma had located to Harmony (today Oakland), Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, next to Emma’s father’s home, purchasing a small, two-room house and some property from Emma’s brother. Martin Harris came and assisted in the first translation effort that produced over a hundred pages of translated manuscript. After imploring the Lord three times, Joseph allowed Martin to take the manuscript back to Palmyra to show to his wife and a limited number of friends in June 1828. Breaking his covenant, he showed the writing to others, and one day they disappeared from his house.

In the meantime, Emma gave birth to a son who died within the first hour, and she was near to death herself. Joseph cared for her for nearly three weeks. Then in early July 1828, Joseph left Emma in the care of her mother and traveled from Harmony to Manchester to learn what happened. Discovering that Martin had lost the papers, he was devastated and returned to Harmony. Shortly after his arrival, Joseph prayed for forgiveness in the woods near his home. Moroni appeared to him to temporarily return the Nephite interpreters, which had been taken when Martin left with the manuscripts. This allowed Joseph to receive D&C 3 in mid- to late July 1828, after which the interpreters were again taken by the angel, leaving Joseph to ponder and repent.

Documents and Publication

The oldest record is in Revelation Book 1, in which it is the first thing written. It was first published as chapter 2 in the 1833 Book of Commandments, then as Section 30 in the 1835 and the 1844 Doctrine & Covenants.

Outline

1. One eternal round (1-4)
2. Repent or lose the gift (5-15)
3. Help the Lamanites believe (16-20)

Commentary

This is the first revelation of Joseph Smith which has a surviving text. The rebuke from the Lord is strong and not softened by any editing on Joseph’s part. Joseph Smith is chastised for fearing man more than God, counseled to repent to receive the Lord’s mercy, and taught that the Book of Mormon will come forth to fulfill the promises of the Lord. This section was clearly a turning point in the young Prophet’s life, helping solidify behaviors and commitments to obey God that served him all of his life. Starting with Sections 3 and 10, Joseph shifted from being a servant struggling with his own desires to one dedicated to doing things the Lord’s way.

One eternal round (1-4)

The heading for this in Revelation Book 1 is: “Given to Joseph the Seer after he had lost certain writings which he had Translated by the gift & Power of God.”⁷⁵

1 the purposes of God cannot be frustrated. It might have appeared to Joseph that the loss of the manuscript set the work back. But the Lord was not surprised by Joseph’s and Martin’s choices, and had anticipated them hundreds of years earlier by having Nephi prepare a second set of plates (1 Nephi 9:2-6; 19:1-6) and Mormon include them in the record (Words of Mormon 1:3-7). For the ancient prophets, this duplicate history was in the record for an unknown but “wise purpose” (Words of Mormon 1:7), but it allowed Joseph Smith to have a full account of the Lehite people even

⁷⁵ JSP, MRB:9.

after the book of Lehi on the first part of the translation was lost.

4 *although a man may have many revelations.* This is not the Lord speaking in generalities, but to Joseph, who is “a man” receiving “many revelations.” God is telling the young Prophet that he has boasted in his own strength, set at naught God’s counsels, and followed his own will and carnal desires. Thus he has fallen and incurred just vengeance. This is a harsh condemnation. How fascinating that Joseph would record such a personal chastisement as his first revelation. He did not try to hide his mistakes from the Church or the world, but openly shared them in the hopes that we might learn the same lessons in a less painful way.

4 *text note:*

RB1 he must fall ~~to the Earth~~ & incur the vengeance of a Just God upon him
1833 he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him

The original manuscript for this section first had “he must fall to the Earth,” but then a later unidentified hand crossed the phrase “to the Earth” out. It is not printed in the 1833 version or any version afterwards. This phrase is used somewhat in the Bible to represent either bowing down in humility before God or another person (e.g., Joshua 7:1), or death (e.g., 2 Chronicles 20:24). In some cases, the cause of the fall is the power of God (e.g., Acts 9:4). The phrase is used even more times in the Book of Mormon, and it does sometimes mean humility (e.g., 3 Nephi 4:8) or death (e.g., Alma 47:24; 56:56; Helaman 9:3), but the most common and dominant meaning is to be overcome by the power of God (e.g., Jacob 7:15; Mosiah 4:1; 27:12; Alma 18:42; 19:16; 27:17; Helaman 9:4). All three are potential meanings of the phrase in this verse, meaning that the man who follows his own will and carnal desires will either be humbled, die, or overcome by God’s power and judgment, though the last seems to match the context best. See also the second reference to falling in v. 9.

Repent or lose the gift (5-15)

5 *how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises.* In his four year experience with Moroni, Joseph had been told and reminded many times exactly how he was to treat the plates and the translation. Specifically in this case, the Lord had clearly told him ‘no’ when asked about Martin taking the plates. The rewards of faithfulness were also clearly taught and explained.

7 *you should not have feared many more than God.* Considering Joseph Smith’s position, it is in some ways understandable that he persisted in asking the Lord about letting Martin Harris take the manuscripts. Not only was Joseph young and still learning his prophetic role, but Martin was Joseph’s only real supporter at this time. Martin was older; he helped fund the work; Martin wrote for Joseph; and Martin believed him, which helped Joseph’s credibility because of Martin’s prominent position in the community. If he lost Martin’s support, Joseph believed, the work would

come to a halt (which it subsequently did after the manuscripts were lost). On the third request, the Lord said yes, but almost with a resigned sigh, ‘If you feel you must do it, then give him the pages, but it will not turn out well, as I have warned you.’

8 *fiery darts of the adversary.* The phrase “fiery darts” is found exclusively in the Bible in Ephesians 6:16, though there the darts come from “the wicked” (compare D&C 27:17). But Joseph may have encountered this exact phrase in his translation efforts already in the lost 116 pages, because it will show up later in his translation of the small plates as Nephi records his words to his brothers after his own tree of life vision (1 Nephi 15:24). (Footnote 8b notes these references, which are the only ones in scripture with this phrase.)

9 *thou art Joseph.* In the early sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord uses this phrase with a person’s name four times, with Joseph Smith (this verse), Oliver Cowdery (6:20), Hyrum Smith (11:23), and David Whitmer (14:11). In each case, the Lord seems to be calling out a personal knowledge of the person by declaring their name. With the other three, he also declares “I am God,” perhaps affirming that relationship or establishing clearly who is speaking, since the voice the person heard was Joseph’s. In this revelation, Joseph knew that, so the declaration was not needed.

10 *God is merciful.* Verse 10 is the turning point in the revelation. With the declaration of God’s mercy, the message shifts from condemnation and judgment to hope and promise.

10 *text note:*

RB1 repent of that which thou hast done & he will only cause thee to be afflicted for a season
1833 repent of that which thou hast done, and he will only cause thee to be afflicted for a season
1835 repent of that which thou hast done, which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you

RB1 & thou art still chosen & will again be called to the work
1833 and thou art still chosen, and wilt again be called to the work
1835 and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work

The 1833 Book of Commandments reads identically to Revelation Book 1. The change to the version we now use was made in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, and it has remained that way since. The original promise, that God would only “afflict” Joseph for a season (cf. v. 14), then he would be again called to the work of translation must have given him great hope when he received it, but the 1835 change makes it more clear that repentance was required for the specific things mentioned in the revelation. The change from future to present tense at the end also emphasizes the continuing call of the Prophet, rather than leaving the impression that he needed to be called once again.

11 *come as other men*. To be called by God is to be required to separate yourself from the world and to be different than others without such a calling. The blessing of faithful service is to remain different from the world—in terms of having the Spirit, hearing the voice of God, and receiving his blessings in our lives. Transgression causes us to lose those blessings and return to a ‘mortal’ state of affairs, bereft of the daily support, direction, and peace of God.

12 *text note*:

RB1 that Which God had given thee right to Translate
1833 that which God had given thee sight and power to translate

Sidney Rigdon changed the Revelation Book 1 version to “sight and power” which is how it reads in the 1833 publication and every one subsequently. Both versions are accurate: Joseph was given the “right” to translate by the Lord, but also given the “sight” to translate through the Urim and Thummim.

12-13 *a wicked man*. We would not generally say that Martin Harris was a wicked man. He was supporting Joseph, scribing for him, and generally a kind and generous person. So why would the Lord use such strong language about him? Verse 13 gives four reasons, which is a good

explanation of what the Lord intends with the word “wicked”:

1. He “set at naught the counsels of God.”
2. He had “broken the most sacred promises which were made before God.”
3. He “depended upon his own judgment.”
4. He “boasted in his own wisdom.”

15 *the counsel of thy director*. The original manuscript first read “directors,” but the “s” was deleted by an unknown hand, making it singular, and it has always been published this way. This may have caused some to see this as a reference to the Urim and Thummim. But in other scriptures, it is the Liahona that is called the director or directors (Mosiah 1:16; Alma 37:38, 45; D&C 17:1), and Joseph Smith does not mention having Lehi’s ball in any of his histories. Most likely this phrase refers to Joseph’s mentor during the last nearly five years, Moroni, who consistently taught him to guard and protect the plates and (by extension) the translation, and whose direction Joseph struggled to obey for so many years.

16-18 *text note*: These verses have several differences from the original manuscript (differences indicated in italics):

Current edition	Revelation Book 1
Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for <i>inasmuch</i> as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, <i>through the testimony of the Jews</i> , even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—	Nevertheless my work shall go forth & accomplish its <i><my> purposes</i> for as the knowledge of a Saveiour hath has come into the world, even so shall the knowledge of my People
<i>And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—</i>	the Nephites & the Jacobites & the Josephites & the Zorumites Lamanites & the Lemuelites
<i>And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, whom the Lord has suffered to destroy their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and their abominations.</i>	come to the Lamanites knowledge of the Lamanites, & the Lemuelites & the Ishmaelites which dwindled in unbelief because of the <i>iniquities</i> of their Fathers who hath <i>have been</i> suffered to destroy their Brethren because of their iniquities & their Abominations

The 1833 Book of Commandments reads like Revelation Book 1, meaning that the purpose of the book is to bring the knowledge of the Lord’s fallen people (the Nephites and associated groups) to the knowledge of those still remaining (the Lamanites and their associated groups). As with verse 10, the changes we see in our current edition were made in 1835, and clarify that the knowledge of the Savior came to the world through the Bible (“the testimony of the Jews”) and that the purpose of the Book of Mormon is likewise to bring a knowledge of the Savior (compare the Book of Mormon title page, which was the last thing Joseph Smith translated) to “my people,” implying the latter-day church, in addition to the Nephites and Lamanites and other associated groups (implying, interestingly, that Nephites are still on the earth today). It also makes explicit what is implied in the original version, that the Lord allowed the destruction of the Nephites, something that Joseph Smith would not have known in July 1828

when he first received this revelation, because he hadn’t translated the story beyond the days of King Benjamin.

Help the Lamanites believe (16-20)

19-20 *for this very purpose are these plates preserved*. These verses catalogue the reasons for the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which Joseph will later read summarized so nicely in Moroni’s title page.

- “That the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people”
- “That the Lamanites might”:
 - “Come to a knowledge of their fathers”
 - “know the promises of the Lord”
 - “may believe the gospel”
 - “rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ”

- “be glorified through faith in his name”
- “through their repentance...be saved”

Joseph Smith spent the summer of 1828 repenting and working on his farm to support himself and Emma. Martin Harris did not come back to Harmony. Though Joseph had the promise of getting the plates back and resuming the translation from Section 3, he did not know when that would happen. On 22 September 22 1828, Moroni returned the plates and translators. Either at that time or shortly thereafter, he received another revelation, now called Section 10.

Results

Though chastised, he was also promised to be able to continue his mission, if he had patience, faith, and repented. This Joseph did, and the plates and interpreters were returned to him on 22 September 1828. This is the young prophet’s first recorded revelation, yet it is a mature piece of writing, the voice of the Lord. Through the early translation efforts and his own increased understanding, Joseph is becoming a young prophet. He learned from the loss of the manuscript and D&C 3 to be obedient to the Lord.

D&C 4

Setting

Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Smith had not seen their son since September 1828. In February 1829, Joseph Smith, Sr., with his son, Samuel, took a trip to Harmony to see him, accompanied by Joseph Knight, Sr. This was the first opportunity for the Smiths to meet the Hales. While there, Joseph Sr. (age 57 at this time) asked his son to inquire of the Lord what his duty might be, resulting in D&C 4. This section is widely used today as the qualifications for missionary work, and appropriately so. But it was intensely personal for Father Smith, who had struggled all his life with religion. He avoided organized churches but always felt unfulfilled in his life, like he was close to truth but could not find it. He had anxious dreams where he could almost find answers but they would just elude him. He felt something critical was missing in his life. D&C 4 told him that his dream of being involved in something marvelous was coming true, and invited him to do specific things that need not elude him, giving him that sense of completeness he lacked for so long.⁷⁶

Documents and Publication

Recorded in Revelation Book 1 as the second revelation, and also from an Edward Partridge copy made between December 1830 and early 1831,⁷⁷ this was first published as Chapter 3 in the 1833 Book of Commandments, then as Section 31 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Commentary

Qualifications to labor in the service of God are outlined. Though cited by missionaries today, the principles in this section apply to anyone who wishes to serve the Lord. John Whitmer wrote as introduction: “A Revelation to Joseph

the Father of the Seer he desired to know what the Lord had for him to do & this is what he Received as follows.”⁷⁸

1 ***a marvelous work***. The phrase comes from Isaiah 29:14, and the reference is to the Book of Mormon which was about to be translated and published (see D&C 10:61). By extension, the “marvelous work” would also include subsequent events—the restoration of the priesthood, the organization of the Church, etc.

2 ***heart, might, mind and strength***. Each of these represent a unique aspect of our dedication to God. The “heart” is emotions, while “might” is our abilities and talents. “Mind” refers to all of our thoughts, while “strength” is our physical capacity. Only if we engage all of these are we able to “stand blameless before God at the last day.”

3 ***if ye have desires to serve God ye are called***. There was no church and no priesthood in February 1829, so this does not refer to callings that come through proper priesthood channels. The concept here is that a call to engage in God’s work comes merely from a willing heart. Every believer can do good to their neighbor, share the love of God in their life, and be a witness for Christ. It is almost as if the Lord were saying, ‘Do you want to help? Great, that’s all we need to get started.’

4 ***the field is white***. John 4:35 also includes this phrase, the only place in the Bible where it occurs. Some have noted that the word “white” represents wheat at its final stages, as it moves from green to a dry state ready for the harvest. Other scholars have concluded that in John the concept was a metaphor, referring to the white-clothed Samaritans coming out of the city to see Jesus. Whatever the case, this metaphor, used eight times in the Doctrine and Covenants (4:4; 6:3; 11:3; 12:3; 14:3; 31:4; 33:3, 7) was understood by Joseph Smith, Sr., and others of their day to mean that the field was fully ripe and it was time to reap the harvest,

⁷⁶ Harper, *Making Sense*, 29; *JSP*, D1:10-12.

⁷⁷ *JSP*, D1:9-10.

⁷⁸ *JSP*, MRB:11.

something Father Smith was deeply familiar with, given his farming background.

layeth up in store that he perisheth not. The Bible contains the phrase ‘laid up in store’ or ‘laying up in store’ several times (e.g., Deuteronomy 32:34; 2 Kings 20:17; Isaiah 39:6; 1 Timothy 6:19), but never in this context. This entire phrase is unique to Section 4.

salvation to his soul. Not only does reaping the harvest bring the message of salvation to others, but it saves our own souls as well. Like anyone who serves diligently in a calling or gives service to a neighbor in need, both parties are blessed by the experience.

5 faith, hope, charity and love. “Charity” and “love” are typically interchangeable in the New Testament, translated from the same Greek word generally. But in the 1820s, the two words in English had related but different meanings. Charity was “that disposition of heart which inclines men to think favorably of their fellow men, and to do them good” while love is “an affection of the mind excited by beauty and worth of any kind, or by the qualities of an object which communicate pleasure, sensual or intellectual.” Thus the Lord is calling upon us to engage both kinds of emotions.

An eye single to the glory of God. The phrase “eye single” occurs twice times in the New Testament (Matthew 6:22; Luke 11:34), where “single” means ‘being motivated by singleness of purpose.’ But the New Testament doesn’t explicitly call out the purpose. Here in Section 4, we are invited to focus on bringing glory to God.

qualify him for the work. If a desire to serve constitutes a call (verse 3), then faith, hope, charity, and love, with a focus on God’s glory qualify us to engage in the actual work.

Working under any other terms could lead us to self-gratification, a quest for recognition, or other results that are not part of the Lord’s plan to move his work forward.

6 faith, virtue...humility, diligence. This is similar but not identical to a list in 2 Peter 1:5-7, 10. Peter wrote about them in an additive way—one trait builds on or leads to the next.

6 text note:

1833 Remember temperance, patience,

1835 Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity,

1833 humility, diligence, &c.

1835 humility, diligence

The original manuscript for the last part of this section (after verse 3a) is not extant. The Edward Partridge copy⁷⁹ and the 1833 edition has a shorter list of attributes, which was lengthened in the 1835 printing.

7 Ask, and ye shall receive. Similar phrases are found in Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:9. It is a marvelous promise that represents the great blessings God has promised to those who engage their whole beings in his service.

Results

Joseph Smith, Sr. understood the message of this revelation and embraced the invitations. Upon returning home, he shared the message with a school teacher boarding with their family, by the name of Oliver Cowdery. In 1830, he shared the gospel with some others in Palmyra, resulting in some baptisms. That same year, he took the Book of Mormon and the message of the Restoration to his extended family and converted many of them. All of this brought peace to his troubled soul. Since his day, tens of thousands of missionaries have used D&C 4 as their call to labor, resulting in a Church that now numbers in the millions.

D&C 5

Setting

Not long after the visit from his parents that resulted in D&C 4, Martin Harris returned to Harmony in March 1829 to see Joseph Smith for the first time since the loss of the first manuscript. Like Joseph’s parents, Martin also wanted to know if the plates had been returned to Joseph. He was humble and contrite and desired some kind of communication from the Lord, still wanting to know if it would be his privilege to see the plates. He was also somewhat wavering in his testimony, telling Emma’s father, Isaac Hale, that he

“must have a *greater* witness, and said that he had talked with Joseph about it.⁸⁰ The next day, Isaac heard Joseph reading part of this revelation, where the Lord told Martin that “no greater witness can be given him.” But the promise was there that if Martin was humble and repented, he could be a witness of the plates.

Martin’s visit was motivated by threats his wife was making about a lawsuit against Joseph Smith. She wanted her husband to quit supporting him. The lawsuit she did indeed file in August 1829 got (false) witnesses who stated that Joseph Smith had told them he was a fraud and that the box

⁷⁹ JSP, D1:13.

⁸⁰ Harper, *Making Sense*, 31.

holding the plates actually contained sand, lead, or was just empty. Martin wanted to get something to take back to his wife that would calm her fears and avoid this outcome. He hoped to see the plates for himself or have some other tangible proof as a “greater witness” that would do this.⁸¹

Documents and Publication

Not extant in Revelation Book 1, the oldest source comes from a copy later in the possession of Newel K. Whitney but written by Oliver Cowdery, probably about 6 April 1829 (the day after he met Joseph Smith, making that copy the oldest known recorded Joseph Smith revelation).⁸² First published as Chapter 4 in the 1833 Book of Commandments, this was also Section 32 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants, with fairly extensive editing in the 1835 version, the most noticeable of which is to change the address from third person to second person (addressing Joseph Smith as “you” to distinguish him from Martin, “him”).

Outline

1. The word through Joseph Smith (1-10)
2. Three other witnesses (11-20)
3. Martin Harris as a witness (21-29)
4. Directions concerning the translation (30-35)

Commentary

Though directed to Martin Harris, unlike other revelations (D&C 4 already received, and others that will be received in the coming days), this one was spoken to Joseph to give to Martin, not directly to Martin, almost as if Martin’s faith was not yet prepared to receive direct communication. The 1833 Book of Commandments had a head for this section: Martin desired of the Lord to know whether Joseph had, in his possession, the record of the Nephites.”⁸³ This could mean ‘again’ (asking if Joseph had received them again after the loss of the first manuscript) or ‘at all,’ referring to the “greater witness” that Isaac Hale said Martin was after.

The word through Joseph Smith (1-10)

1 has desired a witness at my hand. Martin Harris had enjoyed several witnesses, including the experience in New York with the scholars, a personal witness of the work from the Spirit, and translating much of the first manuscript at Joseph’s dictation the previous year. Now he wanted another witness that Joseph had the plates back—not just Joseph’s word that it had happened; Martin wanted to see the plates for himself.

2 you should stand as a witness. The first witness of the Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith. Others will be called, as this revelation teaches, but Martin needs to accept Joseph as a witness.

2 text note:

1833 this shall you say unto him :

–I the Lord am God

1835 this shall you say unto him, He who spake unto you said unto you, I the Lord am God

The Lord affirms that he has already spoken to Martin in the past and is still speaking to him now.

3 you have no power over them. The Lord reminded Joseph that he was ultimately in control of the plates, and that Joseph had promised not to show them to anyone except the Lord commanded it.

4 a gift to translate. Joseph had, at this point, just received one gift from God—the ability to use the Urim and Thummim to translate the plates. Until the translation was complete, he would receive “no other gift.”

4 text note:

1833 he has a gift to translate the book

1835 you have a gift to translate the plates, and this is the first gift that I bestowed upon you

The book is the result of translating the plates, so the 1835 change is more accurate. The clarification that translation was the “first gift” and not the only gift, as the 1833 might imply, is also significant (see the next note).

4 text note:

1833 I will grant him no other gift

1835 I will grant unto you no other gift until it is finished

Translation wasn’t Joseph’s only gift but it was the only one he was given until the work of translation was completed.

6 hereafter you shall be ordained. The promise is made that priesthood authority and power are coming soon, but not yet. With that ordination will come the charge to teach and preach “my words unto the children of men”—in other words, the message of the Book of Mormon. Note that verse 6 was not in the 1833 version of the revelation but was added in 1835.

7 they would not believe...if it were possible that you should show them all these things. Faith and belief do not come by seeing things—miracles or artifacts. The witness of the Spirit is the true converter and the only lasting impact.

7 text note:

1833 if it were possible that he could show them all things

1835 if it were possible that you should show them all these things which I have committed unto you

⁸¹ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 107-110.

⁸² *JSP*, D1:13-14.

⁸³ *JSP*, D1:15.

The things that Joseph had in his possession were “committed” to him with serious covenants of protection and limitations on how he could use them.

9 *it shall be made known unto future generations.* Referring to the Book of Mormon plates (the thing “reserved” and “entrusted” unto Joseph), the promise is given that future generations will have them and see them.

10 *shall have my word through you.* But during this time, the published book is the Lord’s gift.

10 *text note:*

1833 But this generation shall have my words
 1835 But this generation shall have my word through you
 The word of the Lord comes to our dispensation specifically through Joseph Smith first.

Three other witnesses (11-20)

11 *the testimony of three of my servants.* This is the promise of the three witnesses. Joseph was the first witness (verse 2) but he would shortly have other witnesses that would raise their own voices in testimony. This was, of course, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, but not for three more months—Joseph hadn’t even met Oliver or David at this time.

11 *text note:*

1833 yea and the testimony of three of my servants
 1835 And in addition to your testimony the testimony of three of my servants

1833
 1835 whom I shall call and ordain, unto whom I will show these things

1833 shall go forth with my words
 1835 and they shall go forth with my words that are given through you

The Three Witnesses were also ordained, serving as chief elders of the early Church and later selecting and ordaining the Twelve Apostles. The role of Joseph Smith in again bringing forth God’s word is also highlighted.

12 *they shall know of a surety.* There would be a powerful manifestation to go with their witness—not just a handling of the plates, but a declaration from heaven by the voice of God himself.

12 *text note:*

1833 three shall know of a surety that these things are true
 1835 they shall know of a surety that these things are true:
 for from heaven will I declare it unto them
 The source of the experience of the Three Witnesses is clarified.

14 *to none else will I grant this power.* Though others would see and handle the plates, only the three witnesses would have the declaration from heaven, “this same testimony.”

14 *text note:* All of verse 14 starting with “in this the beginning...” is an 1835 addition. Two scriptures are referred to in this addition. The first is Revelation 12:6-8, where, according to the JST, the woman (“the church of God”) fled into the wilderness “to be delivered of her pains,” which resulted in the coming forth of “the king of our God and his Christ.” The second reference is Songs of Solomon 6:10, the source for the rest of the verse. This is especially interesting because in 1833, Joseph Smith learned that the Song of Solomon was not inspired and did not belong in the Bible. It is removed from the JST but this one verse is quoted (with a slight variation), perhaps implying a more ancient source for the metaphor. It is also quoted in D&C 105:31 and 109:73, the first structured like this first usage, the second in the same order as Song of Solomon 6:10.

16 *text note:*

1833 they shall be born of me
 1835 they shall be born of me, even of water and of the Spirit
 “Born of me” is greatly clarified with this 1835 addition.

17 *ye are not yet ordained.* The promise of being born by “water and of the Spirit” was given (verse 16), but the Lord was clear that the fulfillment of that promise required authority, which ordination was yet in the future. Note that verse 17 was not in the 1833 version of the revelation but was added in 1835.

18-19 *text note:* These two verses were substantially edited and shortened in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants from the 1833 Book of Commandments, which substantially matches the oldest copy by Oliver Cowdery.⁸⁴

1833	1835
and their testimony shall also go forth. And thus, if the people of this generation harden not their hearts, I will work a reformation among them, and I will put down all lyings, and deceiving, and priestcrafts, and envying, and strifes, and idolatries, and sorceries, and all manner of iniquities, and I will establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples in the days of old	And their testimony shall also go forth unto the condemnation of this generation if they harden their hearts against them: For a desolating scourge shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out, from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away, and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming.

⁸⁴ JSP, D1:17.

And now if this generation do harden their hearts against my word, behold I will deliver them up unto satan, for he reigneth and hath much power at this time, for he hath got great hold upon the hearts of the people of this generation : and not far from the iniquities of Sodom and Gomorrah, do they come at this time : and behold the sword of justice hangeth over their heads, and if they persist in the hardness of their hearts, the time cometh that it must fall upon them.

19 **consumed away and utterly destroyed.** The consequence of not obeying the Lord’s message is destruction at the Second Coming, as sure as was the destruction of Jerusalem prophesied in the New Testament (verse 20).

Martin Harris as a witness (21-29)

21 **yield to the persuasions of men no more.** Though directed at Joseph as a call to repent, this warning is equally directed at Martin Harris, because of the lost 116 pages where Martin was the “persuasions of men.”

22 **eternal life, even if you should be slain.** Joseph is only 23 years old when this revelation is given, but the Lord alludes to that future day in Carthage Jail when he will give his life for his testimony.

23 **concerning the man.** The Lord refers to Martin in the third person, speaking to Joseph and using him as an intermediary. Martin is not yet humbled and repentant enough to be addressed directly.

24 **a view of the things which he desires to see.** Martin greatly desired to see the plates, and the Lord offers him that experience on the condition of sincere humility and repentance.

24 text note:

1833 a view of the things which he desireth to know

1835 a view of the things which he desires to see

Martin didn’t just desire a knowledge but specifically wanted to see the plates.

25 **I know of a surety.** This verse is very similar to the language drafted by the witnesses after their experience, as printed in each copy of the Book of Mormon since the beginning.

25 text note:

1833 I have seen the things

1835 I have seen the things which the Lord hath shown unto Joseph Smith, jr.

Which “things” Martin will see is clarified.

27 **if he deny this...he is condemned.** Martin Harris and the other witnesses never did deny their experience or their testimony, even when they were estranged from Joseph and the Church.

28 **except he humble himself...he shall have no such views.** The promised witness was condition on Martin being humble, repenting, keeping the commandments, and exercising faith—just as we are promised blessings today based on similar obedience.

Directions concerning the translation (30-35)

30 **stop for a season.** Joseph Smith didn’t yet know it, but his slow efforts were about to be greatly multiplied with the arrival of Oliver Cowdery in April. He had translated a little in the months previous, using Emma and her brother Reuben as scribes. Anticipating the burst of effort that would be with Oliver’s arrival in four weeks or less, the Lord commanded him to take a break from the translation “for a season.” This was also an indirect statement that Martin was not to resume his work as scribe, which might have been a consideration with his return to Harmony.

32 **he will fall into transgression.** Just as the Lord foreshadowed Joseph’s death in Carthage, he predicted that Martin would not remain faithful in all things. Happily, though Martin left the Church for many years, in the end he returned and died in full fellowship.

34 **I will provide means.** “Means” in Joseph’s past had been both financial support and a helper in Martin Harris. Soon it would be Oliver Cowdery, who will play a significant role in not only the translation effort, but in the entire restoration of the gospel and the establishment of the Church.

35 **thou shalt be lifted up at the last day.** When Jesus comes in glory, every knee shall bow and many will fall to the earth. Joseph’s promise is that at that day, he will be personally lifted up by the Lord and brought to stand with him, so that all would acknowledge the greatness of the latter-day Prophet of the Restoration.

Results

As Harper put it, Martin came to Harmony saying, “Show me, and I’ll believe” but the Lord told him, “Believe, and I’ll show you.”⁸⁵ Martin left Harmony very excited about the Book of Mormon. He rode a stage home and excitedly told his fellow passengers about Joseph Smith’s “gold bible

⁸⁵ Harper, *Making Sense*, 33.

& stone in which he look'd & was thereby enabled to translated the very ancient chara[c]ters.”⁸⁶ Martin continued to be a committed and strong follower of Joseph

Smith, was one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and ultimately funded the publication of the book later in 1829.

D&C 10

Setting

There is some debate about the date and setting of this revelation. All editions of the Doctrine and Covenants before 1921 printed the date of this section as May 1829, and placed it in its present order because of that date. The original manuscript is not extant (Revelation Book 1 is missing 8 pages, which include the beginning of this section that would have the date), so the earliest copy is the Book of Commandments. In 1921, B. H. Roberts changed it to “summer of 1828” based on his reading of Joseph Smith’s history, and that was the date in our scriptures until 2013. However, from the context of the revelation, it had to have been given after the plates were returned to Joseph Smith, which Lucy Smith says happened on 22 September 1828, so summer is too early. Historians, including Steven Harper and Robert Woodford of the Joseph Smith Papers project, promote April 1829 as the correct date, believing that the text was either written then or is a composite of two or more revelations, most of which was received then. Indeed, the language of the text, especially the first part, suggests a date right after the return of the plates, but later portions could have been about the time Oliver Cowdery arrived. It seems correct from all the evidence that this revelation was given to Joseph Smith in Harmony in at least two parts, the first few verses on or shortly after 22 September 1828, and the rest in April 1829.

Documents and Publication

The 1830 Book of Mormon included a preface where Joseph Smith explained the lost pages, quoting many verses from this revelation. It was first fully published as Chapter 9 in the 1833 Book of Commandments. It was also Section 37 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants. The version in 1835 was substantially edited from 1833, with many changes that clarify the meaning. This editing was done by a committee but overseen by Joseph Smith. The version we use today essentially matches the 1835 version.

Outline

1. Translation restored but Satan against it (1-9)
2. Satan’s plan to destroy the work (10-33)
3. The Lord’s plan to combat Satan (34-52)

4. The gospel puts down contention (53-70)

Commentary

Continuing the themes of Section 3, this revelation explains the power of Satan over men’s hearts in the last days, how the gospel will go forth to the Lamanites and all nations, how the Church will be established and the faithful gathered.

Translation restored but Satan against it (1-9)

1 by the means of the Urim and Thummim. This phrase was added in 1835, clarifying the mechanism the Prophet used in the translation. Joseph may not have even been familiar with the name while translating the Book of Mormon (the name is not found in the Book of Mormon, but is a Hebrew name meaning ‘lights and perfections’), but learned about it while translating the Old Testament (1830-1833). Realizing what he used was the same, he began calling it that in 1833 or so.

a wicked man. See D&C 3:12-13. The use of this term also argues for an 1828 setting for the revelation, because Section 5, dated to March 1829 in Joseph’s history, has a much softer tone relative to Martin Harris.

2 text note:

1833 at the same time

1835 at the same time, and your mind became darkened

Joseph’s suffering was not only the loss of his privilege and ability to translate, but darkness replaced the light he had been experiencing during the translation process.

3 continue on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work of translation. Evidence from the manuscripts suggests that the 116 pages ended just before what is today Mosiah 1, which was called “Mosiah 3” in the Book of Mormon manuscripts, suggesting that Mosiah chapters 1-2 were on the lost pages. Here the Lord instructs Joseph Smith to continue translating from the place he and Martin had concluded until the end. See also verses 38-41.

4 Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided. Though the Lord is clear that the translation must continue, he also lets Joseph know that it is important to take care of other things in his life right now. With no scribe and little funding, supporting himself and Emma was a priority, and he devoted himself to that

⁸⁶ JSP, D1:15.

effort during the months of October 1828 to early April 1829. Interestingly, a similar phrase is only found in one other place in scripture—Mosiah 4:27, which would likely have been something Joseph Smith translated shortly during this period of time.

5 text note:

1833 that you may come off conquerer
1835 pray always, that you may come off conquerer
In 1828, it is diligence that allows Joseph to “come off conquerer.” But in 1835, it is prayer that enables his success. This reflects a humility and reliance on the Lord that he was just learning after the loss of the manuscript.

5 text note:

1833 and those
that do uphold his work
1835 and that you may escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work
This not only clarifies the meaning “those that do uphold his [Satan’s] work,” but enhances the idea of what it means to conquer Satan.

6 text note:

1833 even the man in whom you have trusted
1835 even the man in whom you have trusted, has sought to destroy you
The way this read in 1833, it could be interpreted that “the man in whom you have trusted” (Martin Harris) was also the target of “the servants of Satan.” But this addition turns that around, making Martin one of Satan’s servants in his actions regarding the manuscript.

7 he has also sought to destroy your gift. Martin Harris certainly did not intentionally seek to destroy Joseph’s gift of translation. But his persistent request for the manuscripts even after the Lord had said no did just that. In fact, Joseph gave the plates and the Urim and Thummim back to Moroni when Martin left for Harmony with the 116 pages, not after they were left. So in essence, Joseph’s gift was “destroyed” immediately after hearkening to Martin’s appeal.

8 text note:

1833 behold they have taken them from you
1835 behold wicked men have taken them from you
This change clarifies who were the people who took the manuscripts. Though they took them from Martin, ultimately they took them from Joseph Smith who gave them up against the Lord’s counsel.

Satan’s plan to destroy the work (10-33)

10 alter the words which you have caused to be written. The Lord revealed the plan of the “wicked men.” They would take the manuscript, written in Martin Harris’ hand, and carefully change it so the words were different. It would not require a major rewrite, just small changes for their plan to work. As the subsequent verses explain, if Joseph translated the text again identically as he had done before, they could offer the altered manuscript as demonstration of his ‘fraud’ (v. 11, 17-18).

14 I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design. Satan’s downfall is that God knows everything and can counteract it. Indeed, in this case, he knew Satan’s plan hundreds of years before it was hatched, and laid the groundwork to counter the plan long before it was needed.

15 text note:

1833 for behold he has put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God;
1835 For behold he has put it into their hearts to get thee to tempt the Lord thy God, in asking to translate it over again.
The 1835 version is longer and clearer, being explicit about what Joseph was being tempted to do. To “tempt the Lord” is to test him. See also verse 29 text note.

16 text note:

1833 for behold they say in their hearts
1835 and then behold they say and think in their hearts
Expanding on the Lord’s ability to see into men’s thoughts, in the 1835 expansion, he shares with Joseph not only what they say, but what they think.

19 that we may not be ashamed...get glory of the world. The people who took the manuscripts and altered them did it from two reason, the Lord explained. First, that they would “not be ashamed,” perhaps meaning looking bad in comparison to Joseph Smith. The second is more obvious, to “get glory of the world.” Avoiding embarrassment and getting the praise of the world are common and powerful motivations.

21 they love darkness rather than light. See the text note for v. 2. Darkness is a place to hide evil deeds.

21 text note:

All of verse 21 and the first part of 22 (“Satan stirreth them up”) is an 1835 addition, not in the 1833 text.

23 their shame and condemnation. The exact opposite of what they wanted (verse 19).

23 text note:

Most of verse 23 is an 1835 addition: “but I will require this at their hands, and it shall turn to their shame and condemnation in the day of judgment.”

26-27 catch themselves in their own snare. Satan does not support those who follow him. He is only using them to help destroy others, because he knows in the end they are also destroying themselves. Once they are no longer useful to him, he lets them be caught in their own snare, as it were, and abandons them, going “to and fro in the earth,” looking for his next victims, because his entire existence is just to “destroy the souls of men.”

28 lieth to deceive because he supposeth that another lieth. Today we call this ‘the ends justify the means,’ meaning that lying to catch another person in their lying is okay. But the Lord is clear that that is Satan’s strategy, and “he flattereth them away to do iniquity” (verse 29).

29 *text note*:

1833 to tempt the Lord thy God

1835 to get thee to tempt the Lord thy God

Like v. 15, this verse makes it clear that the actions of the evil men do not tempt the Lord, but that Joseph's request to retranslate the same material would be tempting the Lord, i.e., testing him by asking him to do something that would not be right.

30 *you shall not translate again those words*. Now that the Lord had laid out the plans of the enemies, he gives Joseph his plan. It starts by not starting over—Joseph is not to retranslate the record of Lehi, but is to pick up where they left off (see verse 3 above).

31 *text note*:

1833 they shall not lie any
more against those words

1835 they shall not accomplish their evil designs in lying
against those words

They are not just lying against the words that Joseph already translated, but are doing so with evil designs in mind—to destroy Joseph Smith and the work to which he is called.

33 *text note*:

1833 thus satan would overpower this
generation

1835 Thus Satan thinketh to overpower your testimony in this
generation

Satan's specific goal in this work is to mute Joseph's witness of the reality of God, and of his concern for his children in the last days in sending a prophet again to the Earth. It's the testimony that makes all the difference.

The Lord's plan to combat Satan (34-52)

34 *show it not unto the world*. As the Lord is revealing the thoughts and plans of the enemies of the work, it is best to proceed with the translation but not explain the change of plans until the book is published, thus nullifying their efforts. Much of the contents of this section were published in an introduction in the 1830 Book of Mormon (not printed in subsequent editions), exposing the attempts of the enemies after there was any chance of them being able to act on them.

37 *you cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous*.

A true general statement, but specifically applies to Martin Harris in this instance. By all accounts, Joseph judged him as a righteous person, but (by the Lord's definition—see D&C 3:12-13 above) he was in reality a wicked man, who by his choices harmed Joseph Smith and the work of God.

41 *till you come to the reign of King Benjamin*. Because Joseph and Martin had already completed up to what we today call Mosiah 1, they knew about Benjamin's reign, but not yet about the great sermon he gave at the end of his reign, as recorded in Mosiah 2-6.

44 *an abridgment of the account of Nephi*. The lost 116 pages contained what Joseph Smith called "the book of Lehi," but that was taken from the record of Nephi and

abridged by Mormon on what we commonly refer to as 'the large plates.'

45 *the plates of Nephi*. This refers to the so-called 'small plates,' which were written by Nephi and handed down through his line. We have the translated record of these plates today in 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni, which is what the Lord is commanding Joseph to translate.

46 *the remainder of this work*. Meaning Mormon's abridgement of the large plates of Nephi—Mosiah through 4 Nephi—plus the writings of Mormon and Moroni.

46-49 *my disciples, desired in their prayers*. Book of Mormon prophets asked the Lord that the things they wrote would survive and bless many in the last days (Enos 1:13; 3 Nephi 5:14; Mormon 8:24). The Lord declares that it is his will to answer those prayers.

52 *I do not bring it to destroy that which they have received*. The restoration of the gospel does not destroy truths that exist in the world, any more than the Book of Mormon destroys the Bible. President Gordon B. Hinckley said in an interview, "you bring all the good that you have, wherever you have acquired it, and see if we may add to it" (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20051225/ai_n15961712/). This language of building up and not destroying continues in verses 54-55, where it "is meant to ease the fears of all Christians concerning the restored Church. The only ones who need fear are those who build their own churches, those who are Christian in name but whose hearts are far from Christ. He restored the gospel to save his church, meaning all who will believe in him. He is not destroying the true church; he is building it" (Harper, *Making Sense*, 48-49).

The gospel puts down contention (53-70)

53 *I will establish my church among them*. This is the first mention (chronologically) of the word "church" in relation to Joseph's mission. It is mentioned several others times in this section (verses 54, 55, 67-69).

57 *I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. Lest we be confused about who is speaking—Joseph Smith, Moroni, etc.—the speaker is clearly identified as the Savior himself.

58 *the light which shineth in darkness*. Getting back to the theme of other verses (2 and 21), the Lord makes clear that he is the light that expels darkness, even if the darkness does not understand him.

59 *Other sheep have I*. Another first-time reference. The Prophet will not come across this teaching until he translates 3 Nephi, so here the Lord is anticipating and prefiguring that pronouncement to the Nephites he made during his resurrected ministry among them (3 Nephi 15:16-21).

61 *bring to light their marvelous works*. The stories of the righteous Saints in the Book of Mormon are indeed “marvelous works”—a phrase that will figure prominently in revelations received over the next year or so.

63 *that there may not be so much contention*. Joseph Smith had learned first-hand about religious contention and disagreement. The “gospel,” meaning the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, is restored in our day so that contention will decrease.

63 *they do wrest the scriptures*. To “wrest” means to ‘twist, turn, pull, or jerk violently’ and to ‘take away by force.’ The scriptures (meaning the Bible when this revelation was received) had certainly been twisted and pulled in many different directions and had been taken away from people by force. Until not long before Joseph’s day, Bibles were not read by very many, and then only in a language most did not understand. Only trained clergy were trusted to read and interpret God’s word to the unwashed masses. But then Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and many others brought the Bible to people in a language they could understand and printed in books that many could afford. While that certainly drove an increase in understanding about God, it also generated the controversies and debates that were raging in the Prophets day. They had the scriptures but they still “do not understand them.”

67 *whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church*. Joseph Smith was learning the lesson of repentance during this time, so the Lord emphasized that, with the promise that if he (and by extension, all of us) could learn that lesson well, we can become part of the church of God.

Results

The Restoration was meant to save the best of Christianity and fix what was broken or missing, which is good news for all believers in Christ. It pictures a God who knows all but still allows for human agency, planning ahead according to his knowledge but not restricting their actions in any way. This was a new view of God for Joseph’s day. The example is clear: the Lord promised the Book of Mormon authors that their record would be preserved, but knew Martin would lose a large portion of it in ours. He kept the promise by having them provide an extra copy of the lost section. It maintained Joseph and Martin’s agency while still fulfilling God’s promises. The plan of salvation does not depend on our actions nor will it be frustrated by our sins and mistakes. We can trust in the Lord’s promises.⁸⁷

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