

Joseph Smith—History 1:27-65; Doctrine and Covenants 2

Lesson 4: Come, Follow Me, Doctrine and Covenants, 24 January 2025

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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, was 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 was 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 a 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. farm and 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.

Joseph Smith—History 1:27-65

Setting

During this period of Joseph Smith’s life, he remained aloof from all churches, as instructed in his First Vision, 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 named Moroni, appeared to the young man multiple times in two days and gave him an important task—but Joseph could only do it when he had matured spiritually and morally.

While in this ‘probation’ period with Moroni as tutor, he worked away from home, married, and moved several times. After finally obtaining 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.

Foreword: Peep Stones and Seer Stones

This lesson brings us to an area of Joseph Smith’s life that has received much needed attention in recent years, again starting with the Joseph Smith Papers project and extending to other studies—that of peep and seer stones.

It’s not that we didn’t know that Joseph Smith had seer stones until a few years ago. Quite the contrary—they were well known in the early Church and published in multiple sources in the last century, including books like Bruce McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* and B. H. Roberts’ *Comprehensive History of the Church*. They were mentioned in *Ensign* and even *Friend* articles, and in numerous publications by Church history professors and scholars.

Yet many members of the Church have been taken by surprise by this topic. I think this is mainly due to three things:

- 1) We don’t talk about them much in our normal Sunday curriculum related to the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants. For many Latter-day Saints, this is their main source of information about these scriptures, outside of their own personal study.
- 2) The standard-issue Church artwork found in building libraries around the world includes pictures of Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon that, while painted with love and faith, are simply incorrect on many levels. But teachers who use library resources will seek a picture showing the translation of the Book of Mormon, and this is their only choice in the library. Movies about Joseph Smith have also portrayed this event incorrectly.
- 3) Joseph Smith used a single name, “Urim and Thummim,” later in life to refer to *both* his seer stones and the Nephite interpreters. Early on, he called the instruments found with the golden plates “spectacles” (History, circa Summer 1832, 5, in his own handwriting), but later as he translated the Old Testament and saw the term “Urim and Thummim” for a divination instrument used by the high priest, he associated that name with all of these things. This makes it very difficult to know just what stone he might be talking about at any given time.

Since you’re reading these notes, you’re probably not among those who were surprised or confused by this research and discussion about seer stones. But let’s review a bit of what we’ve learned, so we’re all on the same page.

First, Joseph Smith appears to have had two stones in his life that he called seer stones (he may have had as many as five, according to a later quote by Brigham Young (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/seer-stone>)). The first one was brown, and photos have been published on the Joseph Smith Papers’ website and in their books, along with descriptions and other details. This stone was given to Oliver Cowdery shortly after the Book of Mormon translation was finished, and through various possession changes, ended up in the possession of the First Presidency, where it is today.

The second stone was white and has a vaguer history and transmission record. Joseph Smith seems to have kept it all of his life, showing it to people in Nauvoo and making its future use the subject of a teaching (D&C 130:10-11). Though there is no record of its possession after Joseph Smith’s death until 1888, when Wilford Woodruff consecrated it on the altar of the Manti temple. Presumably, it came to him through Brigham Young and John Taylor, but we cannot be certain. Woodruff gave it to Lorenzo Snow, his successor, who showed it to at least one person. It has not been heard of again but it likely still in possession of the First Presidency. It has never been photographed and not displayed in public for over one hundred years.

The stories of how Joseph Smith came to possess these two stones are conflicting and difficult to validate, but the indications are that he had both the brown and the white stones by 1826. One probably came while digging a well for Willard

Chase, a neighbor of the Smith's, and the other was perhaps found near Lake Erie, Joseph being directed to the spot by another person with a seer or peep stone. Critics of the Church take these stories as displaying a fondness for magic or deception on Joseph's part, while members of the Church in the earliest days were aware of his stones and saw them as gifts from God.

There was a culture of using peep or seer stones in Joseph's immediate area in New York, coming originally from Europe in the Middle Ages. Such stones were used by people gifted with the ability to see into them to find lost objects, buried treasure, and similar things. Joseph was involved in this culture in the 1820s. In his 1838 history in the Pearl of Great Price, he probably alluded to this even while distancing himself from it, writing:

I was left to all kinds of temptations, and mingling <with> all kinds of society I frequently <fell> into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the corruption of human nature which I am sorry to say led me into divers temptations to the gratification of many appetites offensive in the sight of God.¹

But in his youth, there are several accounts of Joseph Smith using his seer stones to find things. Because of his ability, he was hired in 1825 by a family friend, Josiah Stowell, and other investors,² to look for a Spanish silver mine, with the potential reward being 1/11th of the findings for the young man. It was during this time that Joseph boarded with Isaac Hale and met his future wife, which we'll cover later.

Shortly after the Spanish mine incident, which lasted only a month or so before being disbanded, Joseph Smith was brought to court by a nephew of Josiah Stowell, Peter Bridgman, and charged with being "a disorderly person and an Imposter." These charges relate to his claim to discover lost goods. While no original record of the trial has been found, people have published what they claimed to be transcripts (though conflicting with each other). Some consistent findings from these transcripts are that Josiah Stowell spoke strongly in Joseph's defense (even though his nephew supposedly brought the suit in his behalf), and that Joseph had used his seer stone(s) to find things for a few years but by 1826 "had pretty much given it up," blaming poor health.³

Joseph Smith would soon use his seer stones for things no one in that culture or society had ever seen before—reading the words of a book in an unknown language.

Documents and Publication

The original manuscript behind Joseph Smith—History, started in 1838, is not extant, but it was copied into the manuscripts that formed the "Manuscript History of the Church" known as "History, circa June 1839—circa 1841 [Draft 2]," which is the oldest copy.⁴

The history was first published in the *Times and Seasons* on 15 March 1842⁵ and in the *Deseret News* on 15 November 1851.⁶ It was published in England in the booklet *The Pearl of Great Price* in 1851 by Franklin D. Richards. On 10 October 1880, the Pearl of Great Price, including this history, was canonized by the general membership of the Church.

Outline

1. Moroni's appearances (27-47)
2. Joseph tells his father (48-50)
3. First attempt (51-54)
4. Emma Hale (55-58)
5. Obtaining the plates (59-60)
6. Martin Harris and the characters (61-65)

Moroni's Appearances (27-47)

27 I continued to pursue my common vocations in life until the twenty-first of September, one thousand eight hundred and

twenty-three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the

¹ History, circa June 1839-circa 1841 [Draft 2], [5](#); cf. JS-H 1:28.

² See a [newspaper report](#) of their agreement.

³ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:248-256.

⁴ See History, circa June 1839—circa 1841 [Draft 2], [1](#).

⁵ See "History of Joseph Smith", [726](#).

⁶ See "History of Joseph Smith", [1](#).

hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision.

28 During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three—having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me—I was left to all kinds of temptations; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God. In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature. But I was guilty of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been. But this will not seem very strange to any one who recollects my youth, and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament.

29 In consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when, on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.

30 While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.

31 He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom.

32 Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me.

33 He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.

34 He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants;

35 Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted “seers” in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.

36 After telling me these things, he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament. He first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi; and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books, he quoted it thus:

37 For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble; for they that come shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

38 And again, he quoted the fifth verse thus: Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

39 He also quoted the next verse differently: And he shall 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.

40 In addition to these, he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty-second and twenty-third verses, precisely as they stand in our New Testament. He said that that prophet was Christ; but the day had not yet come when “they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people,” but soon would come.

41 He also quoted the second chapter of Joel, from the twenty-eighth verse to the last. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be. And he further stated that the fulness of the Gentiles was soon to come in. He quoted many other passages of scripture, and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here.

42 Again, he told me, that when I got those plates of which he had spoken—for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled—I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it.

43 After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been

speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark, except just around him; when, instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance.

44 I lay musing on the singularity of the scene, and marveling greatly at what had been told to me by this extraordinary messenger; when, in the midst of my meditation, I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside.

45 He commenced, and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit, without the least variation; which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things, he again ascended as he had done before.

Commentary

Moroni's first appearance occurred on the night of 21-22 September 1823, about 3-1/2 years after the first vision. Joseph Smith was seventeen years old. The Smith family was still living in the log home while their frame home, being mainly built by Alvin, the oldest son, was under construction.

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)

As with the First Vision, there are multiple accounts of Moroni's appearance that first night. We'll draw on each of these to highlight unique information about the visits.

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 that 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 acuirements."⁷

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 at the period of his life that 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.⁸

28 *the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature.* Joseph's sins were not serious but did cause him concern, enough that he sought to know his standing before the Lord. In 1838, he said that "he was entangled again [in] the vanities

⁷ *JSP*, H1:11; History, circa Summer 1832, [1](#).

⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 93-94; see also Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, [72](#).

46 By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard. But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them.

47 After this third visit, he again ascended into heaven as before, and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced; when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me for the third time, the cock crowed, and I found that day was approaching, so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.

of the world.”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ He may have associated some of these actions with the use of his seer stones to find things for others, something he later distanced himself from (as possibly reflected in this history) but still continued to use later in life.¹¹

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.”¹² 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 September 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 under twelve-foot ceilings), Joseph probably shared a bed upstairs with his at least some of 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, perhaps separated by a wall as in the reconstructed home today, or perhaps just by a curtain or sheet. He perhaps 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 something would happen again.

30 *a light appearing in my room.* The light increased until it was “lighter than at noonday.” In the 1842 version, he describes it this way:

on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness burst into the room, indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire.¹³

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 “stood between the floors of the room” in a miraculous way that apparently opened up the house around him.¹⁴ Oliver Cowdery described “The stature of this personage was a little above the common size of men in this age.”¹⁵

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. In a letter from Oliver Cowdery to William W. Phelps, he said “his garment was perfectly white, and had the appearance of being without seam.”¹⁶

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. It might be surprising no one else woke up in the house as he had his three conversations with Moroni, lasting most of the night, but they all slept through it, which might say something about how appearances happen.

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. The 1832 account adds that after calling him by name, Moroni answered his prayer and told him, “The Lord had forgiven me my sins.”¹⁷

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.’ Joseph used that same term here.

⁹ History, 1838-1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834], [36](#).

¹⁰ Letter to Oliver Cowdery, December 1834, published in *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1834, [40](#).

¹¹ See Griffiths, *Scripture Central Commentary*, 45, and MacKay and Frederick, *Seer Stones*, 125-136. More about seer stones in upcoming lessons about the translation of the Book of Mormon.

¹² Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 106 n14; see Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844-1845, [10](#).

¹³ “Church History,” 1 March 1842, [707](#).

¹⁴ *JSP*, J1:88; Journal, 1835-1836, [24](#).

¹⁵ *JSP*, H1:58; History, 1834-1836, [63](#).

¹⁶ *JSP*, H1:58; History, 1834-1836, [63](#).

¹⁷ *JSP*, H1:14; History, circa Summer 1832, [4](#).

33 **his name was Moroni.** “Moroni” is the capital city on the island of Comoros, where it means “at the river.”¹⁸ It is also the name of an Italian noble family.¹⁹ While in Europe, I saw a wine named Moroni from Italy. 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 do wonder how Moroni pronounced his name to Joseph.

33 **God had a work for me to do.** In this appearance, Joseph first learned that he had a specific mission relating to restoring of lost truths, in the 1842 account: “I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation.”²⁰

33 **my name should be had for good and evil among all nations.** Even when this was published, this was a bold statement. Joseph Smith was certainly known regionally but not among even the entire United States, much less all nations. And certainly, when Moroni spoke it in 1823 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 been fulfilled to a large degree 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. See 3 Nephi 27:13-21 and D&C 76:40-43.

35 **two stones in silver bows . . . the Urim and Thummim.** These “interpreters,” as they are called in the Book of Mormon,²¹ may have been those passed down from the Jaredites to the Nephites and then 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 them “spectacles”²² but later began to use the name “Urim and Thummim” after the instruments by that name in the Old Testament, a name he also (somewhat confusingly for us) applied to his personal seer stones.²³

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; it is also the meaning of the name “Malachi”) 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 commentary on 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”) – This chapter is interpreted by Joseph Smith in D&C 113. 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”).

¹⁸ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moroni>. Comoros.

¹⁹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Moroni.

²⁰ JSP, H1:495; “Church History,” 1 March 1842, 707.

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

²² JSP, H1:15, History, circa Summer 1832, 5, from his 1832 account and in another short section written in Joseph’s own hand.

²³ 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.

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 wrote²⁴ that Moroni also quoted many 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.
- Psalm 100:1-2 – Make a joyful noise and serve the Lord with gladness.
- Psalm 107:1-7 – Those who wandered in the wilderness have been redeemed and delivered by the Lord.
- Psalm 144:11-12 – Deliver from evil people that our sons and daughters might flourish.
- Joel 2:28 – Everyone should prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions.
- Psalm 144:13 – That garners may be full.
- Psalm 146:10 – The Lord will reign forever.
- Isaiah 1:7, 23-24 – Wickedness is everywhere, but the Lord promises deliverance.
- Deuteronomy 32:23-24 – Judgment will come on the wicked.
- Isaiah 1:25-26 – The Lord’s people will be purged and a restoration commenced.
- Psalm 107:7 – The Lord will lead his people.
- Isaiah 2:1-4 – The Lord’s house is established, and all nations will flow to it.
- Isaiah 4:5-6 – With a cloud in the day and fire in the night, the Lord will create a place of refuge.
- Jeremiah 31:27-28 – Even as Israel and Judah were destroyed before, so shall they be planted and built again.
- Jeremiah 31:32-33 – People will be led by a new covenant, written in the inward parts.
- Jeremiah 30:18-21 – Israel will be restored with thanksgiving; they will be enlarged and their enemies punished.
- Jeremiah 31:1, 8 – God will be for all families and bring them back from their dispersion, healing them.
- Isaiah 43:6 – The Lord will bring back his sons and daughters from the ends of the earth.
- Jeremiah 50:4-5 – The children of Israel will come weeping, reading to join themselves to God by covenant.
- Jeremiah 31:9 – They will come weeping but will not stumble.
- Isaiah 2:3 – Come to the house of the God of Jacob.
- Isaiah 11:15-16 – The Lord will dry seas and prepare a highway for the return of his people.
- Jeremiah 16:16 – The Lord will send fishers and hunters to gather everyone in.
- Deuteronomy 32:43 – Rejoice the people of the Lord!

One scholar summarized Moroni’s message to Joseph Smith into at least seven major points:²⁵

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).

²⁴ History, 1834-1836, Letters [IV](#), [VI](#) and [VII](#). See Kent P. Jackson, “Moroni’s Message to Joseph Smith, *Ensign*, August 1990, [12-16](#), where he breaks down the various scriptures quoted but also notes that Cowdery was clearly not a witness to the conversation but was in a better place than most to capture these details.

²⁵ Clyde J. Williams, “Insights from Moroni’s Visits in 1823,” in Black and Skinner, *Joseph*, 52-53.

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 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 likely 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 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 "without the least variation" (v. 45), though 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."²⁶ Joseph's own account says that this instruction was in the fourth visit the next day (v. 49).

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.²⁷

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.²⁸

Joseph Tells His Father (48-50)

48 I shortly after arose from my bed, and, as usual, went to the necessary labors of the day; but, in attempting to work as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as to render me entirely unable. My father, who was laboring along with me, discovered something to be wrong with me, and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house; but, in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my

strength entirely failed me, and I fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything.

49 The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name. I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received.

²⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 106-107, n14; see also Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, [11](#).

²⁷ *JSP*, H1:495; "Church History," 1 March 1842, [707](#).

²⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 111; see the longer version in Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, [12](#).

50 I obeyed; I returned to my father in the field, and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field, and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of

Commentary

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).²⁹

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.³⁰

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:

again a thought would start across the mind on the prospects of obtaining so desirable a treasure—one in all human probability sufficient to raise him above a level with the common earthly fortunes of his fellow men, and relieve his family from want, in which, by misfortune and sickness they were placed.³¹

Cowdery further said that Joseph's 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 tho'ts and reflections like those previously mentioned—contrasting his former and present circumstances in life with those to come [and] a fixed determination to obtain and aggrandize himself, occupied his mind when he arrived at the place where the record was found.³²

First Attempt (51-54)

51 Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth.

52 Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger.

the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there.

The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them.

53 I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the messenger, and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time; but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates.

²⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 108; cf. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, [11](#).

³⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 108; see also Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, [11](#).

³¹ *JSP*, H1:75; *History*, 1834-1836, [83](#).

³² *JSP*, H1:75-76; *History*, 1834-1836, [84-85](#).

54 Accordingly, as I had been commanded, I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our

interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.

Commentary

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.”³³ 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 or other non-New York 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.³⁴

52 **the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate.** Oliver Cowdery again gave a very detailed explanation of the box and its contents. He explained how flat stones were carefully placed to create the box, each edge cemented to keep out moisture.

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 placed the record of the children of Joseph. . . . I must not forget to say that this box, containing the record was covered with another stone, the bottom surface being flat and the upper, crowning.³⁵

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 considered 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 adversary [adversary] therefore repent and call on the lord thou shalt be forgiven and in his own due time thou shalt obtain them.³⁶

Oliver Cowdery’s account gives 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?”³⁷

Moroni then appeared and told him it was because he had not kept the commandments of the Lord. 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” but also “the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates.” Moroni explained that this vision was given so that he would know “the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one”³⁸

³³ JSP, H1:76-77; History, 1834-1836, [86](#). Oliver goes on for several pages and into the next letter to make the association with the hill in New York with the hill called Cumorah in the Book of Mormon.

³⁴ Mormon 6:5 shows it was 384 years after the sign of the birth of Christ when the final Nephite-Lamanite battle began and Moroni took possession of the plates, and Moroni 10:1 is dated 420 years after the sign, making it 36 years for Moroni to wander with the plates. We do not know how much longer he wandered once he buried them.

³⁵ JSP, H1:81; History, 1834-1836, [91-92](#).

³⁶ JSP, H1:14; History, circa Summer 1832, [4](#).

³⁷ JSP, H1:82-83; History, 1834-1836, [94](#).

³⁸ JSP, H1:83; History, 1834-1836, [95](#).

53 *until four years from that time*. This is written in retrospect, as other accounts show that Joseph had no idea what year he would receive the plates at the beginning. 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. The records of what happened each year are sparse, but here's what we know.

Lucy Mack Smith recorded that in 1824, the first anniversary Joseph hoped he would get the plates. He 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 lifted out the plates, the thought that perhaps there might be something else in the box that would enrich his family entered his mind. He set the plates aside, then covered the box again to protect the other contents from anyone finding them. 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 walked home empty handed.³⁹

When he returned home, his father asked him about the plates, and Joseph told him he had not obtained them. His father asked, "did you see them?" Joseph replied, "I saw them, but could not take them." Joseph Sr. stated, "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.⁴⁰

Joseph's brother, William Smith, related an account in 1884. Though he seems to be referring to the first 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.⁴¹

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: he might as well go work for Stowell since the plates had to wait for at least another year.

John Taylor once taught that Moroni wasn't the only angelic messenger to teach and tutor the young prophet:

Joseph Smith in the first place was set apart by the Almighty according to the counsels of the gods in the eternal worlds, to introduce the principles of life among the people. . . . I know of what I speak for I was very well acquainted with him and was with him a great deal during his life, and was with him when he died. The principles which he had, placed him in communication with the Lord, and not only with the Lord, but with the ancient apostles and prophets; such men, for instance, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Jesus and the Father, and the apostles that lived on this continent as well as those who lived on the Asiatic continent. He seemed to be as familiar with these people as we are with one another. Why? Because he had to introduce a dispensation which was called the dispensation of the fulness of times, and it was known as such by the ancient servants of God.⁴²

Emma Hale (55-58)

55 As my father's worldly circumstances were very limited, we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring out

³⁹ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, book 4, [2-3](#).

⁴⁰ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, [89](#).

⁴¹ "William Smith Testimony, 1884," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:504-505.

⁴² John Taylor, "Effects of the Preaching of the Gospel," delivered at Ephraim, Utah, Sunday, 13 April 1879, *Journal of Discourses* 21:93-94.

by day's work and otherwise, as we could get opportunity. Sometimes we were at home, and sometimes abroad, and by continuous labor were enabled to get a comfortable maintenance.

56 In the year 1823 my father's family met with a great affliction by the death of my eldest brother, Alvin. In the month of October, 1825, I hired with an old gentleman by the name of Josiah Stoyal, who lived in Chenango county, State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehanna county, State of Pennsylvania; and had, previous to my hiring to him, been digging, in order, if possible, to discover the mine. After I went to live with him, he took me, with the rest of his hands, to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to

cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger.

57 During the time that I was thus employed, I was put to board with a Mr. Isaac Hale, of that place; it was there I first saw my wife (his daughter), Emma Hale. On the 18th of January, 1827, we were married, while I was yet employed in the service of Mr. Stoyal.

58 Owing to my continuing to assert that I had seen a vision, persecution still followed me, and my wife's father's family were very much opposed to our being married. I was, therefore, under the necessity of taking her elsewhere; so we went and were married at the house of Squire Tarbill, in South Bainbridge, Chenango county, New York. Immediately after my marriage, I left Mr. Stoyal's, and went to my father's, and farmed with him that season.

Commentary

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 him rent. The poverty of the Smith family in the mid-1820s was very real, helping us see why Joseph was tempted by the financial gain the plates and other objects could provide.

56 *the death of my eldest brother, Alvin.* Alvin's death in November 1823 was a huge blow to the family, coming just two months after Moroni's first visit. Lucy Smith recorded that Alvin was sick with "bilious colic" in the fall of 1823.⁴³ Joseph Knight recounted that in September 1823, Joseph was first 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."⁴⁴ But two months later, that oldest brother, Alvin, lay dying. Before he passed away on 19 November 1823, Alvin told Joseph, "I want you to be a good boy, and do everything that lays in your power to obtain the record— Be faithful in receiving instruction, and in keeping every commandment that is given you."⁴⁵ Later Alvin's situation will be part of a vision Joseph Smith has in the Kirtland temple, which we'll cover in Section 137 later.

56 *In the month of October, 1825.* Joseph jumped two years in history from Alvin's death to his employment with Josiah Stowell, skipping over the annual visits to the hill discussed above.

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 (the correct spelling of his name), 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."⁴⁶ 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 before any other woman I have ever seen."⁴⁷ 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

⁴³ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, [91](#).

⁴⁴ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:13.

⁴⁵ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, [91](#).

⁴⁶ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

⁴⁷ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, [97](#); see also Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

times to see her. Isaac Hale, Emma’s father, did not approve of Joseph because of his treasure hunting work and his claims to visions (v. 58).

Joseph returned home in September 1826 for his fourth visit to the hill with Moroni. Joseph Knight recounted that during this visit, Joseph was told that he could not have the plates but “the 22nd Day of September nex[t] he mite have the book if he Brot with him the right person.” (This is the second time he received this direction, the first being in 1823 and the right person then being Alvin.) Knight continued: “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.”⁴⁸

Lucy said Joseph 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.⁴⁹ 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, your 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹

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.⁵² Joseph Smith was twenty-one and Emma twenty-two. As shown above, 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.⁵³

Obtaining the Plates (59-60)

59 At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate. On the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, having gone as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge: that I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all

my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.

60 I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe

⁴⁸ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:13.

⁴⁹ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, [103](#).

⁵⁰ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:538.

⁵¹ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:285.

⁵² Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

⁵³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 54; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:285-286.

than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible. But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand. When, according to arrangements, the

Commentary

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.”⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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. 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.⁵⁸

Martin Harris and the Characters (61-65)

61 The excitement, however, still continued, and rumor with her thousand tongues was all the time employed in circulating falsehoods about my father’s family, and about myself. If I were to relate a thousandth part of them, it would fill up volumes. The persecution, however, became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester, and going with my wife to Susquehanna county, in the State of Pennsylvania. While preparing to start—being very poor, and the persecution so heavy upon us that there was no probability that we would ever be otherwise—in the midst of our afflictions we found a friend in a gentleman by the name of Martin Harris, who came to us and gave me fifty dollars to assist us on our journey. Mr. Harris was a resident of Palmyra township, Wayne county, in the State of New York, and a farmer of respectability.

62 By this timely aid was I enabled to reach the place of my destination in Pennsylvania; and immediately after my arrival there I commenced copying the characters off the plates. I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them, which I did between the time I

messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him; and he has them in his charge until this day, being the second day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight.

arrived at the house of my wife’s father, in the month of December, and the February following.

63 Sometime in this month of February, the aforementioned Mr. Martin Harris came to our place, got the characters which I had drawn off the plates, and started with them to the city of New York. For what took place relative to him and the characters, I refer to his own account of the circumstances, as he related them to me after his return, which was as follows:

64 “I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had

⁵⁴ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 104.

⁵⁵ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

⁵⁶ Griffiths, *Scripture Central Commentary*, 1:61.

⁵⁷ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

⁵⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 60-61; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 7-14 for even more examples.

been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him.

65 “He then said to me, ‘Let me see that certificate.’ I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and

tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, ‘I cannot read a sealed book.’ I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and the translation.”

Commentary

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.⁵⁹

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,⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ Emma’s brother, Reuben, also lived close by. 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.

Joseph Smith speaks very little of this period, but nearby, in Colesville, was Joseph Knight, who visited frequently, bringing supplies and support. Knight spoke much about this time and is one of the best sources for what went on.

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.⁶²

Joseph Knight, Sr., recounted that at this time, Joseph “with his wife drew off [f] the Characters exactly like the ancient.”⁶³ Since Emma never saw the plates, Joseph’s copying likely included making rubbings of the plates in private (rubbing charcoal over paper to capture the shapes of the characters), 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ None of the copied character documents from Emma, Reuben, or Martin exist today, though there are three others, one by John Whitmer, one by Oliver Cowdery, and one published later in Nauvoo.⁶⁶

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

⁵⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 62-63; MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 29-31.

⁶⁰ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 33-34.

⁶¹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 63.

⁶² MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 34.

⁶³ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

⁶⁴ 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.

⁶⁵ Michael Hubbard MacKay, “Git Them Translated,” in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*, 84.

⁶⁶ See [Appendix 2: Copies of Book of Mormon Characters, Introduction, Page 1](#), for details and links to the documents.

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 Marvelous.”⁶⁷

Joseph didn't seem to understand the ultimate role of the interpreters at first. Falling back on 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.⁶⁸ Lucy, Joseph's mother, agrees with this in her history, saying that he used the interpreters “at any time [to] ascertain the approach of danger, either to himself or the record and for this cause he kept these things constantly about his person.”⁶⁹ 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 four months after Joseph got the plates. In his 1832 history, Joseph said this about Martin:

because of his faith and this righteous deed [giving Joseph and Emma \$50] the Lord appeared unto him in a vision and shewed unto him his marvelous work which he was about to do [JS handwriting begins] and <h[e]> immediately came to Suquehannah and said 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.⁷⁰

In other words, Joseph had the plates for over four months and still didn't know how to fulfill the angel's command to translate them. Martin's visit coincided with Joseph's desire to have knowledgeable scholars look at them to help him know what language they were and how he might go about getting them translated.⁷¹

64 I went to the city of New York. Note that the 1838 history quotes Martin Harris about the trip to New York, hence “I” becomes Martin for a few verses instead of Joseph. The purpose of Martin's trip to the east 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 his way on all the professed linguists in order to give them an opportunity to display their talents in giving a translation of the same.”⁷² She implied that once Joseph had a basic translation of the characters, he could proceed with the work. She believed Joseph was looking for an expert who could teach Joseph the language or perhaps give him a dictionary or some other tool he could use to do the translation.

Joseph Knight also conveyed Smith's intentions about what to do next:

He now began to be anxious to get them translated he therefore with his wife drew off [f] the characters exactly like the ancient and sent Martin Harris to see if he could get them translated.⁷³

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.⁷⁴ According to his son, he stopped along the way in Geneva, Ithaca, 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.⁷⁵ 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.

⁶⁷ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

⁶⁸ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 12-16.

⁶⁹ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, book 6, [1](#).

⁷⁰ *JSP*, H1:15; *History*, circa Summer 1832, [5](#).

⁷¹ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 39.

⁷² Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, [122](#).

⁷³ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:17.

⁷⁴ MacKay, “*Git Them Translated*,” 90.

⁷⁵ MacKay, “*Git Them Translated*,” 91-94.

It's important to recognize that Joseph knew the plates were written by the ancient inhabitants of the New World, so he likely believed it was some kind of Native American language. He certainly didn't go looking for an Egyptian expert, nor could he have found one in the United States at this time. That is why Martin Harris went to see those he did—he was looking for someone with expertise in native American languages.

Harris' likely first stop was Utica, New York. The reason for the stop is unknown, but later it was in this same city that the copyright for the Book of Mormon was requested, so perhaps he was looking into that process.⁷⁶

The next stop was in Albany to meet with Luther Bradish, 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 to get suggestions about which scholars Harris might 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.⁷⁷ He likely pointed Harris to Mitchell (below).

Joseph Knight said that Harris also went to Philadelphia.⁷⁸ Philadelphia would make sense as a stop after Bradish, who knew about the American Philosophical Society which fostered research on Native Americans. Two members, Samuel Rafinesque and Caleb Atwater, were very engaged in such research, creating the start of a Mayan translation and with broad understanding of Native American languages.

While no account but Knight's puts Harris in Philadelphia, solid documentation exists for the next visit to a scholar named Samuel Latham Mitchell, vice president of Rutgers Medical College in New York City, and a former US senator who had been chair of the Indian Affairs Committee. Mitchell was a scholar of Native American languages, thus matching the goal of the trip. 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. But Mitchell wrote an introductory letter for Harris to take to a professor at Columbia College that Mitchell thought might be able to help, Charles Anthon.⁷⁹ Mitchell knew Anthon mostly through Anthon's father, a doctor who had worked side-by-side with Mitchell, as well as more directly through a mutual society where both were members. It's likely that Mitchell, with little time or patience for Harris' characters which matched nothing he knew, was anxious to be rid of him and sent him to Anthon as a favor to his former colleague's son.⁸⁰

64 Professor Charles Anthon. Charles Anthon was a young 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.⁸¹ 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. Anthon was currently in the middle of gathering stories of Native Americans for a book he was co-authoring with a British acquaintance. There was much interest in such stories in 1828, and Anthon hoped to capitalize on that interest in stories about the native inhabitants of the land but was struggling to find enough for the book. No doubt he had already reached out to Mitchell about it, and Mitchell probably thought that Harris might be able to help Anthon with his work. However, in linguistic terms, it is hard to see the value of the visit for Harris.⁸²

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

⁷⁶ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 40-41.

⁷⁷ John H. Gilbert, [Memorandum](#), 8 September 1892; MacKay, "Git Them Translated," 92-93.

⁷⁸ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:17.

⁷⁹ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 47-49.

⁸⁰ Erin Jennings, "Charles Anthon," *John Whitmer History Association Journal*, v32 n2, 173.

⁸¹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 64.

⁸² MacKay, "Git Them Translated," 98-100.

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.

The story of their visit that Harris told and the one that Anthon later told, when his name had been associated with the Latter-day Saint movement (and not in a very positive way) are quite different. Harris said that Anthon validated the characters and gave him a note indicating as much, but when he explained that they were given to Joseph by an angel and that Anthon could not see the plates themselves, Anthon tore up the document and chased Harris away. Harris' recollection of Anthon's demand to see the plates and his comment that he could not read a sealed book is well-known in the Church, as it has been noted to fulfill Isaiah 29:11-12.

Anthon's recital of the events removes the certificate completely from the story and has him (Anthon) telling Harris he was being deceived by an obvious forgery. He said that Harris asked him to provide a translation, which he refused to even attempt due to the nature of the document—being “a mere hoax.” On the one hand, Anthon said that Joseph Smith could translate the plates using the “spectacles” or Nephite interpreters, provided with the plates, but then he stated that “no translation had been furnished.” In other words, Anthon claimed Harris came to him to verify Joseph's ability to translate but only provided characters from the plates without a corresponding translation. Anthon said he told Harris it was a scheme to cheat him from his money and warned him strongly. In one account Anthon said Harris requested this conclusion in writing, but Anthon refused and sent him on his way; in another, he said he gave his conclusion in writing “without any hesitation,” and that he extracted a promise from Harris that he would have nothing to do with this book.

Anthon described the paper that Harris showed him as containing characters written in columns from various alphabets, including Greek, Hebrew, and Roman, and “half moons, stars, and other natural objects,” including “a rude representation of the Mexican zodiac,” though he left out the Mexican zodiac comment in his final letter in 1844. He also said that later Harris came back for a second visit, bringing with him a copy of the Book of Mormon to present to Anthon, who refused to even accept the gift from Harris. Anthon said that Harris told him he had never seen the plates, and Anthon urged him to go home, seize the trunk in which they were stored, and expose the fraud by which he had been duped. This is an odd statement, given that Harris' personal witness of seeing the plates was published in the very book that he was supposedly trying to give to Anthon. Additionally, Martin Harris never mentioned a trip to New York to give a book to Anthon.

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

Regardless of the true nature of their conversation, Martin Harris came back to Palmyra and soon Harmony filled with a conviction that the work was of God and was ready to fully support Joseph financially and with his own time and effort. So, Anthon's version of the encounter doesn't make sense, at least in terms of what Harris actually did. Harris' version is also a product of later interpretation; the earliest published account (an 1829 Palmyra newspaper) only mentions Mitchell. It seems that after the Book of Mormon text itself interpreted Isaiah 29 (see 2 Nephi 27:9-20), that the retelling of the Anthon visit aligned with that interpretation.

Shortly after returning from New York City, 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.⁸³

⁸³ Harper, *Making Sense*, 31.

Results

Martin Harris did become a staunch support of Joseph Smith and the work on the Book of Mormon. Joseph learned that there was no one who would give him a dictionary or otherwise help him accomplish what the angel had tasked him with. He instead learned to do something with the interpreters and his seer stones that no one had ever done before—read words that were a translation of an ancient record. With Harris’s support and his new knowledge, the work began.

Doctrine and Covenants 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

This section was an excerpt from the 1838 history that Joseph Smith started in Far West and then continued in Illinois. See the Documents and Publication section for Joseph Smith—History above. It was first published on 15 Apr 1842 in the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo as part of Joseph Smith’s history. It was added to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876 by Orson Pratt who no doubt felt like the words of an angel interpreting scripture merited a section.

Elijah Will Come (1-3)

1 Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

2 And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises

made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

3 If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.

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 (see table). Joseph also quoted it just as in the Bible in D&C 128:17, then provided a brief interpretation in verse 18. Like that verse, Moroni’s recitation, then, must have been more of a commentary than a quotation.⁸⁴ 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.

| KJV 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> |

⁸⁴ Griffiths, *Scripture Central Commentary*, 1:39.

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: 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. As Elijah said when he came to the Kirtland temple in 1836, “Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors” (D&C 110:16).

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—covenants—that triggers the change of heart, and the children who take action.

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 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. These words were deeply impactful to the young Prophet, and even more so when Elijah came to the Kirtland temple in 1836 and restored the keys that would make this prophecy possible. Eternal families can be created thanks to the keys of Elijah. As Steven Harper wrote, “In Doctrine and Covenants 2, Moroni told Joseph Smith that his job was to save the earth.”⁸⁵

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⁸⁵ Harper, *Making Sense*, 23.

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