

# The First Vision

STAKE EDUCATION CLASS, 13 SEP 2018

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**Summary:** This class covers the earliest years of Joseph Smith's teenage experiences, including the First Vision. The Joseph Smith Papers have helped us see the First Vision in new ways, understanding the various accounts of the Vision and what influences were impacting young Joseph going into the grove.

## Pre-First Vision Experiences

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### The Source Documents

The best sources for this earliest period of Joseph Smith's life are his journals and histories, with four documents in particular. We typically first turn to one of them, Joseph Smith—History in the *Pearl of Great Price*, which is a great place to start. It's helpful to understand the origin of this history and put it in the context of other documents.

On **27 April 1838**, shortly after arriving to live in Far West, Missouri (mid-March), Joseph Smith's journal notes:

This day was chiefly spent in writing a history of this Church from the earliest perion [period] of its existance up to this date, By Presidents, Joseph Smith Jr & Sidney Rigdon, myself also ~~was~~ engaged in keeping this record.

The handwriting is that of **George W. Robinson**, called to be one of the Prophet's clerks (he is the "myself" in the last part).

The reason they were starting this new record of early Church history was that **John Whitmer**, who had been Church historian starting in early 1831, had been **excommunicated** in early 1838, and refused to give the history he had been keeping up to Church leaders. So Joseph Smith decided to start over. This 1838 journal did not last long because of the troubles in Missouri that year that led to the imprisonment of the Prophet and other Church leaders. This first work is referred to as "**Draft 1**." After arriving in Illinois in 1839, Joseph resumed work on the history with his scribes, adding a bit to Draft 1, then copying it into **Draft 2**, with a large number of edits and expansions. Draft 2 was the main source for *History of the Church* and the excerpts used to create *Joseph Smith—History*.

However, this 1838 history was not the first time Joseph Smith had written or talked about the First Vision. Other records were recorded earlier, which are invaluable to understanding these earliest days in the Prophet's religious experience.

The first was written in **1832**, in Joseph's own handwriting for much of the first pages. He called it "A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr. an account of his marvilous experience." **Frederick G. Williams**, who was Joseph's main scribe in 1832, working on the Bible translation with the Prophet, started writing, but **Joseph picked up writing** partway down the first page and continued through the end of the account of the First Vision.

The other important early account comes from a relatively short journal entry written in **1835** by **Warren Parrish**, another scribe, after Joseph received a visitor going by the name of **Joshua** the Jewish minister or **Matthias** the Prophet, but whose real name was **Robert Matthews**. Joseph told him the early history of the Church and Parrish recorded a summary of it in Joseph's journal. It is interesting that he characterized the story of the First Vision as the beginning of "the coming forth of the book of Mormon."

Finally, is the **Wentworth Letter**, written in **1842** to a man named John Wentworth for a friend of his, George Barstow, who was writing a history of New Hampshire. Though Barstow nor Wentworth ever published it, the Church did in Nauvoo that same year, so this is another account in which the Prophet made an official record of his early experiences.

(There are technically **two other accounts** but they don't add anything to the story. One from **1844** is basically a **copy of the Wentworth Letter** that was published in a book (there were edits to the overall letter but none to the First Vision section). The second is more a mention in Joseph's history in **1835** of him talking about it with someone, just a few days after the Robert Matthew's encounter, but which offers no significant details.)

Each of these primary sources tell us details about the First Vision itself and the pre-vision experiences. There are also other secondary sources—people who heard Joseph Smith tell the story and who wrote it down—that we'll refer to along the way, as they have some unique and interesting details. These are:

- **Orson Pratt, 1840:** The first publication of the First Vision was by Pratt, not Joseph Smith, as a **missionary tract in Scotland**.
- **Orson Hyde, 1842:** On the way back from the dedication of Palestine for the return of the Jews, Hyde published an account of JOSEPH SMITH's story in Germany, in **German**, which he had just worked to learn.
- **Levi Richards, 1843:** Richards heard Joseph Smith tell the story in a **talk** given on 11 Jun 1843 and wrote about it in his journal. It's the **shortest** account we have (74 words).
- **David Nye White, 1843:** A newspaper editor from Pittsburgh, **White interviewed Joseph Smith** and recorded his notes in the voice of Joseph Smith (first person, "I").
- **Alexander Neibaur, 1844:** A **friend** of Joseph Smith, Neibaur, a German convert, heard Joseph Smith tell the story in his home and wrote about it in his own journal.

In the rest of the discussion, we'll look at all these accounts and the story they tell about young Joseph Smith and his quest for religious truth. We'll reference them by year (1832, 1835, 1838, 1842) for the accounts from the Prophet or his scribes, and by name (Pratt, Hyde, Richards, White, Neibaur) for the secondary accounts.

## The religious commotion in the area ("burned over district")

Let's begin with what was happening to Joseph Smith just prior to his first vision. In the canonized account, he calls what was happening in his area "an unusual excitement on the subject of religion" (JS-H 1:5). This flurry of excitement on religion had a dramatic impact on young Joseph, and for at least two to three years. It wasn't just a social curiosity or reaction to surrounding events or a desire to close the debate in the area. According to his earliest accounts, he was "looking at the different systems taught" (1835) because he was worried about "the welfare of [his] immortal Soul" (1832).

Joseph mentioned **Presbyterians** and **Methodists** particularly in his accounts, saying that most of his family had joined with the Presbyterians (JS-H 1:7) but he was inclined to the Methodist faith (JS-H 1:8). In the meantime, his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., followed his own father's faith (Joseph Smith' grandfather) and was a Universalist, which was not so much a religion as a belief that God would save everyone in the end. In other words, dinner conversations in this pluralistic household must have been very interesting!

Why all the fuss with the different churches? Weren't they all just leading people to Christ? Here's some history that helps this make sense. **Most** people in New York at this time **were Presbyterians**, having come from parts of the country where that was the dominant faith. But **Methodism was on the rise**, with traveling ministers, revivals and camp meetings, and a message that resonated with a lot of frontier people. **Baptists, Quakers, and Universalists** also had a presence. Presbyterians were **Calvinists**, teaching that God elected certain people to salvation and condemned the rest to damnation; the individual had no influence on God's decision and hence their own eternal state. But Methodists followed the teachings of John Wesley, who rejected that notion. Instead, he taught that people could choose to follow Christ and be saved by his grace.

This was the major theological conflict that troubled Joseph Smith, Jr.: “looking ~~upon~~ <at> the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and considering it of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involved eternal consequ[e]nces” (1835).

In other words, we see from Joseph’s accounts in the Papers that he was “convicted of [his] sins” (1832) and wanted to make sure he **knew the path to forgiveness** and salvation. Was it just that God **randomly** picked people to save, as the Presbyterians taught, or that you had to **follow** Christ’s teachings, as the Methodists taught, or did God just save **everyone**, as the Universalists believed? And if you had to follow Christ, as Joseph was inclined to believe, **what did you have to do?** These churches disagreed about baptism, agency, revelation, the role of the Bible, the nature of God, taking the Lord’s supper, Sabbath-breaking, and much more.

Neibaur’s account states that Joseph Smith “**wanted to get Religion too** wanted to feel & shout like the Rest but could feel nothing.”

You can hear a great example of **farmer’s poetry** in Joseph’s very first writing of this experience, with all the wonderful references to the world around him:

for I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their magesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in magesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intilgence in governing the things which are so exceding great and marvilous even in the likenys of him who created ~~him~~ <them> and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said the <it is a> fool <that> saith in his heart there is no God (1832).

Joseph Smith did **struggle with his writing** early on, which is why he came to rely on scribes so much. Later in life, his speaking and writing skills were much more developed, but in the early 1830s, he did not have much ability or confidence, so something like the above is quite remarkable.

More illustrative is his first **journal**, that he began on **27 November 1832**, just a few weeks after writing his 1832 history. In that journal, he wrote with his own hand:

Joseph Smith Jrs Record Book Baught for to note all the minute circumstances that comes under my observation

Then he immediately seems to have reconsidered that because he crossed it all out. Perhaps he sensed the **inadequacy** of those **words**, or Emma or someone gently **corrected him** on the grammar, we don’t know. But right under it, he started over:

Joseph Smith Jrs Book for Record Baught on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1832 for the purpose to keep a minute acount of all things that come under my observation &c — —

oh may God grant that I may be directed in all my thoughts O bless thy Servant Amen

## The role of Reverend George Lane

Returning to the turmoil Joseph was dealing with, according to his brother, **William**, Joseph attended a sermon in the summer of 1819 by a well-known Methodist preacher, **George Lane**, who asked the question, “What church should I join?” and used as his text **James 1:5**. Oliver Cowdery likewise indicated that Lane had been an influence on the young Joseph. Research shows that Lane’s itinerary indeed took him through the area in the **summer of 1819** but not later, so he could not have been the Methodist minister that so strongly rejected Joseph’s vision in 1820 (JS-H 1:21), as some have speculated.

The timing of Lane’s sermon demonstrates that Joseph did **ponder** on this scripture “again and again” and “at length” (JS-H 1:12-13), considering it for several months before taking action in the spring of 1820.

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:1-13; *JSP*, H1:10-16, 115-117, 187-221, 492-495; *JSP*, J1:87-95; Steve Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision>; <https://www.lds.org/topics/first-vision-accounts>.

## The First Vision

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Before we get into the details of the First Vision account, a word about memory. About a dozen years ago, I made a decision to **donate a kidney** to a friend of mine in need. At first I didn't talk about the experience, not wanting to make a big deal about it. But my bishop convinced me that discussing it might help others decide to do the same thing, and so I began to speak out. Soon I hooked up with a couple of non-profits promoting kidney donations, and got on a speaking 'circuit' where I was talking regularly about my experience, often several times each month. Over the course of a few years, I must have told the story of my donating a kidney to my friend, Bill, a couple hundred times. I had the story down pat.

Then one day Bill joined me and we decided to tell the story together. Without conferring ahead of time, I started and he was going to jump in and add color when he wanted to. What happened instead was fascinating. He did add color but he also corrected me several times; his memory of the event was quite different from my own. Though we experienced it together, and it was a pretty impactful event, we did not remember it the same. Over time, we had both interpreted the experience differently, and now our memories were different, including conversations we had, things we had done together, and the timing and order of various events.

**Steven Harper** has written about this extensively in his book on the First Vision, which I highly recommend. Memories are interpretive, not recordings like something we did with a video camera and it's forever preserved just the way it happened. As we move through life and experience other things, our memories of past events change, being impacted by our additional experiences and outlooks. For example, it's clear from Joseph Smith's **1838** account, the one we quote most often, his interpretation of the memory of the First Vision is impacted by the **persecutions** in Missouri, especially his time in the **Richmond and Liberty Jails**. His language is **harsher** and more condemnatory, even when it comes from the mouth of the Lord. In **1842**, when life is **peaceful** in Nauvoo, that language **softens**. In **1832**, in his first written account, it's almost **not there**, because he has not yet experienced life-threatening trials.

Joseph Smith's critics love to emphasize these differences in the various accounts, but do not acknowledge or understand the science of interpretive memory. They also like to make mountains of molehills and over-emphasize small differences to make them sound more significant than they are. We'll address many of these as we examine the accounts in detail next.

What's truly significant about Joseph's First Vision accounts is their remarkable similarities, in spite of being told at different times and places and to different audiences and with different purposes. Each time he tells it, the fundamental points are consistent. Some of the less important details might differ, but he is telling the same story each time, unlike my kidney donation story which morphed over many tellings to be different enough from Bill's memories that he wondered if we had both actually experienced it together!

Putting together all the accounts of the First Vision, including Joseph Smith's primary accounts and those recorded second-hand by those who heard him tell it, gives us a **rich and fuller account** than what we get from the 1838 Pearl of Great Price account alone. We get a taste of this in the **new First Vision video** the Church released earlier this year (and which is now in Gospel Library), but they were trying to tell the story in just a few minutes. With the time we have, we can take a deeper look and explore it even more. Here's how it comes together. (*Images from the Church's new First Vision video on history.lds.org.*)

## Time and Place

**1838:** He retired to the woods on a "beautiful clear day early in the spring" of **1820**. Beyond that, we don't know the date. Much has been made by critics about an entry in the **1832** account that appears to confuse the year of the First Vision. In this line, Joseph Smith originally wrote, "the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in <the> attitude of calling upon the

Lord, a pillar of fire light . . .” There is **no date**. Later, at an unknown time and for an unknown reason, **Frederick G. Williams** inserted above the line, “<in the 16th year of my age>”. That age does indeed conflict with the other First Vision accounts which consistently place the event in 1820, when Joseph was in his fifteenth year, but there is no real conflict, because Joseph didn’t write it, and we don’t know the source for Williams’ edit. The most likely explanation is that he wrote it in error.

**White:** “I immediately went out into the woods where my father had a clearing, and went to the stump where I had stuck my axe when I had quit work.” This fascinating detail is nicely reflected in the new First Vision movie.

## Reason for Prayer

**1832:** “I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and to obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness.” It’s important to understand that Joseph’s **motivation** in going into the grove was to obtain **forgiveness** of his sins, because his own salvation was at stake. As we have discussed, he wanted to know which church to join because he didn’t know how to be saved. It was God’s mercy upon his soul that he truly sought as he knelt down that day and prayed out loud for the first time.

## Encounter with Satan

When Joseph started to pray, the Joseph Smith-History account talks about an encounter with a dark force. **1835:** Adds additional details about this encounter with Satan:

I made a fruitless attempt to pray, my tounge seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, <I> strove again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet, ~~and~~ and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking, I kneeled again my mouth was opened and my tounge liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer

**Pratt:** While praying, “At first, he was severely tempted by the powers of darkness, which endeavoured to overcome him.” The nature of the temptation was not explained, but . . .

**Hyde:** wrote that “the adversary then made several strenuous efforts to cool his ardent soul. He filled his mind with doubts and brought to mind all manner of inappropriate images” to keep him from faithful prayer. Again, the nature of these images is not explained, but they were likely images of **failure** or **darkness** or **despair**, and perhaps not the kinds of things we might label “inappropriate” today.

**1835, Pratt, Hyde, and Neibaur** all mention the battle with darkness as then giving way and leading to another or additional prayer. The emphasis is that it was not a short prayer, but something that required effort, patience, and some amount of time.

## Fire or Light?

Several accounts try to describe what he saw descending as either **fire** or **light** or **flame**; in **1832**, Joseph wrote “fire” then immediately crossed it out and wrote “light,” while in **1842** he called it “a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day.” Struggling for the right mortal words in all accounts, he said in **1838** that the “brightness and glory defy all description” (JS-H 1:17).

**Pratt’s** account adds some fascinating details about the way the flame/light descended on him and how he perceived it:

A very bright and glorious light . . . which, at first, seemed to be at a considerable distance. He [Joseph] continued praying, while the light appeared to be gradually descending towards him; and, as it drew nearer, it increased in brightness, and magnitude, so that, by the time that it reached the tops of the trees, the whole wilderness, for some distance around, was illuminated in a most glorious and brilliant manner. He expected to have seen the leaves and boughs of the trees consumed, as soon as the light came in contact with them; . . .

but, perceiving that it did not produce that effect, he was encouraged with the hopes of being able to endure its presence. It continued descending, slowly, until it rested upon the earth, and he was enveloped in the midst of it. When it first came upon him, it produced a peculiar sensation throughout his whole system; and, immediately, his mind was caught away, from the natural objects with which he was surrounded; and he was enwrapped in a heavenly vision.

## Who and What He Saw

The **1838** Pearl of Great Price account says that he “saw two Personages,” but other accounts offer more details about that simple observation. **1832 doesn’t specifically mention two people**, and some have used that as ‘evidence’ that Joseph Smith developed his story over time and changed it to make it more glorious. But it’s clear from all accounts that the Son did all the talking except for the Father’s introduction, a pattern followed in other scriptures (e.g., Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 3 Nephi 11:7). It’s also possible to read 1832 as being two people, both with the title “Lord,” an entirely appropriate way to refer to both the Father and the Son: “the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me.”

In the **1835** account, the Father appeared first, followed shortly by the Son (perhaps as the Father was introducing him?): “a personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame which was spread all around, and yet nothing consumed, another personage soon appeared like unto the first.”

This is also how the **White** account records it: “I saw a light, then a glorious personage, and then another personage,” while **Neibaur** recorded that Joseph said he “saw a personage” and then “after a w[h]ile a other person came to the side of the first.”

In the **1842** account, Joseph mentions something unique about their appearance: “I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness.” Similar language is repeated in both the **Pratt** and **Hyde** accounts, describing the two as “resembling each other exactly” (**Hyde**).

Finally, **Neibaur** noted that the first personage—presumably the Father—had a “light complexion blue eyes a piece of white cloth drawn over his shoulders, his right arm bare.”

**1835:** Adds that he also “saw many angels in this vision” (written above the line as an edit). No other account mentions that so we have no other details, but other visions of God in the scriptures often include angels (e.g., Jacob’s ladder; Lehi’s ‘first vision’).

## Conversation

The conversation between Christ and Joseph Smith is captured differently in many versions—not in any contradictory way but recounting different parts of what was probably a longer conversation than even combining all accounts would lead us to believe.

**1832:** In the earliest written account, the **first thing** the Lord said was, “Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments.”

This idea of forgiveness of sins being the first message is also mentioned in **Pratt’s** account, “his sins were forgiven.” The same emphasis was reflected in the first revelation to refer to the First Vision, **D&C 20:5**: “After it was truly manifested unto this first elder [Joseph Smith] that he had received a remission of his sins...”

**1832:** Next, Joseph was taught that “the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me.” Though he used different words in other accounts, the concept is the same.

**1838:** In answer to his question about **churches**: “I was answered that I must join none of them [churches], for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors



were all corrupt.” That is strong language and can be offensive to some, but he appears to be referring to the early Christian **creeds** that were developed from the fourth century onward, including the Apostles’ Creed, the Creed of Nicaea, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. They were an abomination because they incorrectly defined the very nature of God and his relationship to mankind, making it **impossible for the truth about God to be known** without **new revelation**—like the First Vision. The harshness of the language is also best understood in the context of Joseph’s recent experiences: when he dictated this account in 1838, he had just been freed from several months in Liberty Jail, where he was held captive by at least some people who professed (the “professors” of the account) to belong to other Christian faiths. The earlier and later accounts use somewhat different and softer words.

**1842:** For example, the Wentworth letter version was written four years later when things were going well for the Saints in Nauvoo. In that writing, the language was **softened**, though the concept is the same: “all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of god as his church and kingdom.”

**1842:** This is the only original account that mentions receiving a **promise** from the Lord, “that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.” **Hyde’s** account also records he was “to wait patiently until some future time, when the true doctrine and Christ and the complete truth of the gospel would be revealed to him.”

**1838:** At the **end** of the conversation, Joseph summarized, saying, “and many other thing[s] did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time.” While no other record of the First Vision tells us the full content of those other things, one of them seems to have been a direct reference to the Second Coming, seen in . . .

**1832:** “mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them according to their ungodliness and to bring to pass that which <hath> been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[o]stles behold and lo I come quickly as it [is] written of me in the cloud <clothed> in the glory of my Father.”

## After the Vision

**1838:** records that after the vision was ended, he was lying on his back, “looking up into Heaven.” **White** captures this detail as well, along with a great feeling of fatigue: “The vision then vanished, and when I come to myself, I was sprawling on my back; and it was sometime before my strength returned.” Neibaur has unique language, perhaps because English was not his native tongue: “Indeavoured to arise but felt uncomen feeble.”

**1832** is the only **primary** account to record Joseph’s emotional reaction, saying, “my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me.” In the secondary accounts, **Pratt** also mentions this: “the vision withdrew, leaving his mind in a state of calmness and peace, indescribable,” and **Hyde** says, “The vision closed and peace and calm filled his mind.”

In terms of any reaction from others, most are familiar with the **1838** Pearl of Great Price account where Joseph Smith shared his experience with a **trusted Methodist minister** (remember, he was inclined to join the Methodist church before this vision) and was treated “with great contempt,” calling it “all of the Devil,” and instructing Joseph Smith that “there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days.”

**Neibaur** has the same story but shorter: “told the Methodist priest, said this was not a[n] age for God to Reveal himself in Vision Revelation has ceased with the New Testament.”

**1832** summarizes the encounter without any details: “[I] could find none that would believe the hevnlly vision.”

**White** also summarizes, focusing on the reaction of others: “When I went home and told the people that I had a revelation, and that all the churches were corrupt, they persecuted me, and they have persecuted me ever since.”

## One story

If we were to attempt to **combine all of these stories** into a single account, we might have a story like this:

A twelve-year-old boy was troubled by his own sins and wanted to be sure that he could achieve forgiveness from God. He investigated the churches in his area but they gave him conflicting information which he didn't know how to resolve. When he was thirteen, he heard a Methodist preacher teach from James 1:5 that anyone lacking wisdom could ask of God. Pondering this for several months, he finally went into a grove of trees behind the small home where his family lived, determining to pray near where he had been chopping a tree the day before. At first, he thought he heard a noise behind him, and leaped to his feet. Seeing nothing he continued to pray, but was overcome by darkness, tempted with inappropriate mental images and thoughts, and nearly succumbed to an unseen power. Exerting all his faith, his mouth was freed, his heart was calmed, and he was able to pray again.

Shortly he saw a light, at first far away but coming down slowly upon him. He continued to pray as the light drew closer. It resembled a pillar of fire or flame, but as it touched the trees above him, he saw that the leaves did not burn, so he began to have confidence that he would not either. The world around him fell out of his conscious view and his whole attention was focused on the light, which was brighter than the sun. As the light came upon him and fell all around him, he was filled with great joy and peace.

He saw one personage appear in the light, who had light blue eyes and a white cloth drawn over his shoulders, exposing a bare right arm. This personage was bright and glorious beyond all description. Soon another personage appeared, identical in glory and appearance to the first. The first spoke, saying, 'Joseph, this is my beloved Son, hearken to him.' The second spoke, saying he was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and told Joseph his sins were forgiven. He was told that the world was lying in sin, drawing near to God with their lips but being far from him in their hearts, and that he should walk in the Lord's statutes and to keep the commandments. During the vision, other angels appeared as well.

Joseph asked which church he should join, in order to know who taught the truth about personal salvation. Perhaps, he wondered, it was the Methodist church, which he liked. But to his surprise, he was told to join none of them, for none were recognized by God. All were teaching incorrect and corrupt doctrines and the creeds they believed were wholly wrong. None of them were acknowledged by God as his church and kingdom. Joseph was commanded not to go after them but to wait patiently until, at a future day, the true doctrine of Christ would be revealed to him. The conversation went on a bit longer, and Joseph learned other things, including some things about the Second Coming of Christ.

Soon the vision closed and the light left him lying on his back on the ground. He felt very weak but eventually rose and went home, full of peace and calm, which lasted for many days.

I have a testimony that Joseph Smith experienced what he said he did in the grove that day. He sought forgiveness of sins and an understanding of how to get to heaven, and came out with answers to those questions—and so much more. As he looked back on this experience over the course of his eventful life, he began to see it as the beginning of his prophetic call and ministry, and so should we. It all started with the First Vision, and the Joseph Smith Papers help us appreciate even better than ever before what that fourteen year old saw, heard, and felt.

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:14-20; *JSP*, H1:10-16, 115-117, 187-221, 492-495; *JSP*, J1:87-95; Steve Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision>; <https://www.lds.org/topics/first-vision-accounts>.