

## Comments on Joseph Smith-History

### Theological Context

This text presents a sharp dichotomy between the behavior of the sectarian religionists Smith observed and the revelation which he personally received. The dichotomy is enhanced by both the figurative and literal inclusion of spiritual and physical light and darkness. The dichotomies, presented as a table:

Contention	Peace
Disputation	Revelation
Division	Unity
Hypocrisy	Veracity
Confusion	Wisdom
Darkness	Light
Satan	Father & Son

Smith's description of the sectarian preachers is unfavorable, yet undoubtedly accurate. Anyone who has ventured into polemical forums of religious dispute such as the ones Smith described knows firsthand the scenes described are real and repeated all too frequently.

The history serves to trace Smith's experience at traversing the sectarian arena of disputation. The same experience can be had today by anyone choosing to wade into the morass of religious debate. This can repulse people and drive them from religion altogether (cf. Rom. 2:24). However, in Smith's case the experience caused him to completely abandon the wisdom of man and appeal directly to God.

The fact that Smith at age 14 could not comprehend the nature of the arguments being employed illustrates the reliance of the polemicists upon worldly learning and sophistry. The unlearned were excluded from these debates by those participating not by any overt means, but by using words and arguments the uninitiated did not know. Rather than appealing to the basics of the gospel and encouraging a godly walk, concepts any typical fourteen year old could understand, they did public battle over esoteric doctrines in an effort to promote their private cause while discrediting others. It is quite like a boxing match without physical violence, but the combat is just as real.

This type of contention and division based on creeds and esoteric doctrines is wholesale rejected and condemned by the Lord in v. 19. Aside from Smith's generally unfavorable

description of the contentions that divided the various sects, there are numerous scriptures dealing with the same issue (cf. 2 Ne. 28:4, Mosiah 2:32, Mosiah 18:21, Alma 2:5, Alma 4:9, Hel. 16:22, 3 Ne. 1:24-25, 3 Ne. 11:29-30, 4 Ne. 1:2, 4 Ne. 1:13-18, D&C 10:63, D&C 95:10-12, D&C 101:6, D&C 136:23). The Lord's people are those who do His will and live His teachings (cf. John 15:1-15), not those who espouse any particular esoteric doctrine or creedal statement.

The question is then, "Which doctrines are essential and which are esoteric?" The essential doctrines are "the will of God concerning them" (the rejection of which is sin, cf. 3 Ne. 6:18), which is defined plainly in 3 Ne. 11:31-41. What it really boils down to is humility and repentance, which these professors of religion have no use for. Their goal is to win the argument, not get people to follow the example of Christ.

### **Literary Context**

From the first sentence, it is clear Smith's intent is to provide an account that counteracts the hostility of his detractors. The result is a first-person account that is defensive and reactionary. If you compare this account with [that of Orson Pratt](#), it is clear Pratt's third-party account is more detached and meant to be informative to the reader. Smith's first-person account presents religious preachers as contentious and adversarial with the Lord rejecting them and their doctrine. The Lord calls their creeds an abomination, which is pretty strident. Smith's characterization clearly presents the Lord as hostile to Smith's enemies.

Smith is in good company, as both the Bible and Book of Mormon present the end-times Gentiles as pretty awful. But, as a reader, it is important to recognize the author's point of view and intent when reading a text. Had Smith been warmly received into a heterogeneous religious community that openly discussed different points of view, or apathetically ignored by a secularized population, his account of the First Vision would likely be significantly different.

The text presents the Lord and the Adversary as fighting a proxy war on the earth, and the sectarian Christian churches are part of the Adversary's kingdom. We tend to see this in very sharp contrasts, as if saying, "If you aren't with us, then you are against us". We have to remember that virtually all of the original converts to the Church were members of other churches first. Smith's own family joined the Presbyterian church before

joining the Church.

Smith's presentation is meant to defend himself from his detractors and place himself firmly on the Lord's side, with his detractors in the Adversary's camp. After that, we need to be careful about saying which other churches are bad, or wrong, or part of the Adversary's kingdom, as there are clearly good people involved with these other churches at various levels. In our history as a Church we have at times drawn lines that are counterproductive (e.g., [Which Church is Right?](#), First Edition [Mormon Doctrine](#) entry on Roman Catholic Church). Where Smith is engaging in an apologetic defense against those who are actively attacking him, we should not use this as a starting point to then counterattack. Smith's defense should not be an excuse for us to pick at motes in other's eyes.

1 OWING to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons, in relation to the rise and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world--I have been induced to write this history, to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church, so far as I have such facts in my possession. 2 In this history I shall present the various events in relation to this Church, in truth and righteousness, as they have transpired, or as they at present exist, being now [1838] the eighth year since the organization of the said Church.

v1-2 As Smith was the subject of considerable slander in the public arena, he is motivated to give an honest account of the events from his point of view (v. 1). The matters he will address are those pertinent to the Church (v. 2).

3 I was born in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five, on the twenty-third day of December, in the town of Sharon, Windsor county, State of Vermont...My father, Joseph Smith, Sen., left the State of Vermont, and moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) county, in the State of New York, when I was in my tenth year, or thereabouts. In about four years after my father's arrival in Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester in the same county of Ontario-- 4 His family consisting of eleven souls, namely, my father, Joseph Smith; my mother, Lucy Smith (whose name, previous to her marriage, was Mack, daughter of Solomon Mack); my brothers, Alvin (who died November 19th, 1823, in the 26th year of his age), Hyrum, myself, Samuel Harrison, William, Don Carlos; and my sisters,

## Sophronia, Catherine, and Lucy.

v3-4 Smith gives chronological, geographical, and genealogical information to establish context and setting. Lucy Mack Smith gives considerably more detail of the early life of the family in chapters 13-16, and vivid details of Alvin's demise (cp. v. 56) in chapter 19 of her book History of Joseph Smith, by His Mother.

5 Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, "Lo, here!" and others, "Lo, there!" Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist. 6 For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to the different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued--priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.

v5-6 Shortly after moving to New York the area they now living is swept up in revivalism (v. 5), which manifests itself in considerable contention between the various religious parties as they compete for congregants (v. 6).

v5 "'Lo, here!' and others 'Lo, There!'", a paraphrase drawing on the substance of Matt. 24:23 and Mark 13:21 which implies they are false prophets.

Note in the list of participants in the disputations (v. 9) and those who become Smith's opponents (v. 20-26) no Roman Catholics are mentioned. This is because they were largely absent in the U.S. until Italian and Irish Catholics emigrated

to the United States well afterwards. This fact is hostile to the notion the Roman Catholic Church is the same as Nephi's "Church of the Devil", as Smith labels these various Protestant sects "his [i.e., the adversary's] kingdom" (v. 20). Supporting this is text which defines the "great and abominable church" as any self-promoting secret combination, cf. 1 Ne. 13:32, 1 Ne. 22:13, Hela. 7:25, Rev. 17:1.

v6 "the seemingly good feelings...were more pretended than real", the false front of brotherly love is quickly discarded when they fail to persuade the masses to their particular views. They know they are supposed to love their neighbors as themselves, but when push comes to shove the gloves come off.

"a strife of words and a contest about opinions", to paraphrase Pres. Benson, "Pride is concerned about who is right, not what is right". These professors of religion do not live as a disciple of Christ, they only argue theology.

7 I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My father's family was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that church, namely, my mother, Lucy; my brothers Hyrum and Samuel Harrison; and my sister Sophronia. 8 During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. 9 My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others. 10 In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: what is to be done? who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?

v7-10 Smith, being young and unsophisticated with respect to matters of debate and the things of the world, is overwhelmed by

the volume of debate and the contentious tone. He is unable to cut through the arguments and identify any clear winner, because they are all acting alike.

v9 "used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error", the participants are characterized as using any means whatsoever to persuade people. Whether the doctrine they teach is good or not becomes irrelevant, it comes down to simply winning the argument using whatever means possible.

v10 Smith is unable to determine the appropriate means of discerning the truth among this war of words. Clearly, some of them are wrong, because they contradict one another, but which ones and what is the acid test?

11 while I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 12 Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. 13 At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to "ask of God," concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.

v11-13 In an effort to figure out what to do regarding all the different churches, Smith is reading the Bible. He comes across a passage in the letter of James which tells him to ask God for direction when you lack wisdom (v. 11). He realizes that left to himself it would be impossible for him to discern the truth by studying on his own (v. 12), so he decides he needs to act on James' admonition to ask God for guidance (v. 13).

v12 "understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal

to the Bible", the words are twisted about to suit their own needs, thus causing confusion in anyone paying attention. It is not that the words have no meaning, it is that they are used as proof-texts to support the philosophies of men, so they are distorted and combined with popular ideas. Once the meaning of the canon has been distorted by divisive self-promoting sectarians, the only sure and safe source is revelation.

Smith's personal revelation and the subsequent revelation of the Book of Mormon served to divide the sheep from the goats based on whether or not they would accept it as what it claimed, not because of any novel doctrines that answered ancient philosophical imponderables. All of the commandments dealing with personal behavior that appear in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine & Covenants appear in the Bible. If those commandments were rejected in the Bible, they will be rejected in the Book of Mormon as well.

Can the same thing happen with the LDS canon? When the LDS canon becomes the target of divisive self-promoters who discount the necessity of a godly walk in favor of their particular esoterica, you get individual apostasy, factions within the church, and splinter groups without. This is why Jesus prohibits contention over doctrinal points and emphasizes unity through a godly walk, cf. 3 Ne. 11:28-30.

14 So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally. 15 After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. 16 But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction--not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being--just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. 17 It no sooner appeared than I found

myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other--This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him! 18 My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)--and which I should join. 19 I was answered that I must join none of them, 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: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." 20 He again forbade me to join with any of them; and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home. And as I leaned up to the fireplace, mother inquired what the matter was. I replied, "Never mind, all is well--I am well enough off." I then said to my mother, "I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true."

v14-20 Smith's resolve leads him to pray for guidance in the seclusion of neighboring woods (v. 14), but upon attempting to do so the adversary seeks to thwart him (v. 15). Calling upon God to deliver him, heavenly light disperses the darkness (v. 16). With the darkness dispersed, Smith sees the Father and the Son, and the Father instructs Smith to listen to what the Son will say (v. 17). Smith gathers his wits about himself and asks Them which church he should join (v. 18), and the Son responds that he should join none of them because they are all full of hypocrisy (v. 19). After the overwhelming appearance, Smith recovers and returns home and obliquely informs his mother concerning what he has learned (v. 20).

v15 "thick darkness gathered around me", cross reference with Gen. 15:12 (KJV: an horror of great darkness fall upon him, JPS: a great dark dread descended upon him) reveals Jacob had a similar experience. The typical non-LDS interpretation of Gen. 15:12 is the incident means Jacob was in fear of the Lord, but that interpretation fails to address the issue of darkness which is never equated positively with the presence of the Lord (it is



used in some Judgement themes, but Jacob is being blessed by the Lord not punished or judged, so it does not fit).

v19 In the theophany, this is the only verse where the resurrected Lord's statements are quoted, and His quote is a rejection of contemporary Christianity. The Lord rejects all who profess doctrines that are not of Him. They are characterized as hypocrites, their hearts are far from the Lord, cf. Matt. 7:21-23.

The characters being referred to here are obviously those same sectarians described earlier by Smith. This serves to draw an equation where those who were instigating the contention and disputes are self-promoters, hypocrites, and deliberate liars. Thus, this type of contentious behavior as a good indicator of self-promoters and hypocrites.

"their creeds were an abomination in his sight", the various early [Christian Creedal statements](#) were [born out of contention](#) and were designed to divide the ecclesia and promote certain groups to power and exclude others from it. While Jesus taught his disciples were to be united in him (cf. John 15), the early church divided itself for political power. The fundamental issue is whether people are doing Christ's will by having a godly walk, or their own will by having a godly talk. The various Creeds are designed to promote people's ideas over the behavior Christ taught his followers should have. Creeds versus deeds.

The earliest widely-accepted extrabiblical writing is the [Didache](#) (pronounced did-uh-kay), likely written late in the first century AD, which focuses on behavior, and we would agree with most of it. If you were to go through the New Testament and pull out all of the statements about a disciple's behavior and condense it, you would come up with something similar to this text. It was meant to keep early Christians behavior-based, and probably intended to counter false prophets and apostles in the church (Paul sarcastically calls them "super apostles" in 2 Cor. 11:5).

By the time of [Apostle's Creed](#), likely second century AD, it is a statement of beliefs, not behaviors, that track closely with clear Biblical statements, most of which we would have no real problems with. By the third century, the creedal statements stray far from clear Biblical teachings and well into philosophical statements that have nothing to do with Christ's teachings concerning the behavior of his disciples.

These creeds are offensive to Christ because they promote the notion that being smart or saying the right things is at the core of Christianity. Jesus' teachings were the opposite of this. He taught his disciples were to be humble, teachable and eager to do good works. Creeds promote the same kind of intellectual self-righteousness that afflicted the Pharisees, whom Jesus clearly rejected during his mortal ministry.

"having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof", paraphrase of 2 Tim. 3:5 where the subject of walk versus talk is dealt with in an eschatological context. The KJV translates the Greek "eusebio" as "godliness", another translation would be "devoutness". To paraphrase, "they have a false form of devoutness, but reject the power/ability of devoutness". They look pious, but are spiritually weak.

It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy? 21 Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement; and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them. 22 I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects--all united to persecute me.

v20-22 The adversary continues his attack on Smith through his minions (v. 20). Smith relates the vision to a Methodist preacher, who immediately turns on him and tells him it was false (v. 21). Word quickly spreads of Smith's vision, and all of the leaders of the various churches unite in persecuting this

obscure teenage farm boy (v. 22).

v20 "his kingdom", the adversary is the king of the world, but Smith is more specifically referring to the various sectarian religions which combine to persecute him, per v. 22.

v21 Smith learns the hard way what polemicists are all about. It is interesting to note the verse ends with the preacher insisting "all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them". What about the two prophets spoken of by John in Revelation? There the Bible indicates there will be two latter-day prophets on par with Elijah, yet this preacher insists that it simply isn't the case at all.

Also, recall Moroni ended the Book of Mormon with a series of admonitions to the future Lehite remnant that they believe in revelations and miracles (cf. Moroni 10:8-19), contrary to what Moroni knows the contemporary Gentile Churches preaches.

23 It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself. 24 However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. 25 So it was with me. I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God,

or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation.

v23-25 Smith often reflected on why such an obscure lowly farm boy should be subjected to such intense persecutions (v. 23). But, regardless, Smith refused to bow to pressure even as did the ancient Paul (v. 24). Smith had seen it and all of the persecutions could not change that truth (v. 25).

v23 Smith builds the logical argument to support his assertion that he has seen the Father and the Son, the evidence being the intense opposition by the adversary through his sectarian preachers. Smith's implicit argument is that had he only been some deluded farm boy, then the sectarian preachers would have laughed him off and every one else would have ignored him. But, they did not.

v24 See Acts 26 for Paul's testimony to Agrippa.

v25 "Why persecute me for telling the truth?", those who tell the truth are harassed by the unrepentant which are exposed to be liars, cf. Isa. 50:6, Isa. 66:5.

26 I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned--that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but to continue as I was until further directed. I had found the testimony of James to be true--that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided. 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 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 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.

v26-28 Smith is determined to maintain his course (v. 26) despite the persecutions (v. 27) and abuse (v. 28), and naturally encounters the foibles and follies of youth (v. 29).

v26 Smith sums up the account of his relations with the sectarians by indicating he had found out for himself the Bible and James were correct and asking God was the solution. This cleverly contrasts the Bible against the sectarians as their means were disputation and not revelation as the Bible forwards.

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.

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.

v29-47 As a result of guilt over his youthful follies, Smith decides to pray for forgiveness (v. 29). While praying, an angel appears to him in brilliant glory (v. 30-32). The angel tells him he is to do a great work, and tells him about a sacred record on plates and means to interpret these records (v. 33-35). The angel then quotes and explains a series of Biblical scriptures concerning the redemption of Israel and the times of the Gentiles (v. 36-41). The angel warns him about the

artifacts, and then shows him where they are located (v. 42). The angel then departs by miraculous means (v. 43). The angel returns shortly thereafter (v. 44), repeats everything previously said, and adds warning about the Day of the Lord, then departs (v. 45). The angel then returns a third time, repeats everything again, and then additionally cautions him against any attempts to obtain worldly wealth from the plates (v. 46). After the end of the third visit, Smith discovers the entire night has passed as the sun is dawning (v. 47).

v30-33 Moroni's appearance was typical to other angelic appearances recorded in the scriptures, with the exception that he reveals his name. In most instances the angel does not reveal their name, cp. Gen 32:29, Judges 13:18. Moroni probably reveals his name because of his direct connection with the plates.

v36-45 These verses necessarily place eschatological interpretations on a considerable amount of scriptural text. It is popular today among non-LDS Bible scholars and commentators, both Jew and Gentile alike, to push for historical interpretations so as to dismiss the latter-day applications. This debate is particularly keen among NT scholars over Matthew 24 and its potential eschatological interpretations. It is generally popular because it allows you to dismiss a considerable amount of text that carries a rather harsh message. Christian commentators generally consider most, if not all, of the OT Prophets to be historical with little or no eschatological application. Jewish commentators on the OT Prophets generally favor historical interpretations, but recognize some passages as blatantly eschatological (significantly fewer than an LDS commentator would though). Thus, these verses validate eschatological interpretations on a broad range of subjects.

v40 The two biblical references here are largely passed over in the reader's mind, probably owing to the greater emphasis given to Malachi in v. 36-39. The reference to Isa. 11 is only glancing, with Acts 3:22-23. If we were to watch a movie that literally acted out all what the text said, then the amount of time Moroni spends quoting these Scriptures would be the opposite of Smith's presentation, as Isa. 11 is a significantly larger body of text.

The subject of Isa. 11 is the Messiah's gathering of



scattered Israel, and the Gentiles who will follow Him. The Branch of David will establish the kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 10:1-9) will be an ensign, or rallying flag, to Gentiles (cf. Isa. 11:10) and remnant of Israel will be gathered again be restored as a powerful kingdom (cf. Isa. 11:11-16). The key passage would be Isa. 11:10, as the Lord is starting the work of establishing the end-times Church with the Gentiles so they can gather Israel.

v41 "fullness of the Gentiles", D&C 45:28-29 explains the fullness of the Gentiles is the disbursement of the fullness of the gospel to the Gentiles. Also cf. Luke 21:24, JST Luke 21:32, Romans 11:25, 1 Ne. 15:16-18, 3 Ne. 16:4.

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. 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.

v48-50 Smith attempts to attend to the labors of the day, but is entirely exhausted. His father sends him home, but he collapses along the way (v. 48). The angel returns to wake him and repeats everything from the previous night, and then instructs Smith to tell his father concerning what has happened (v. 49). Smith does so, and his father instructs him to go and do what the angel has commanded (v. 50).

v50 The natural deference Smith shows the father in attending to the farm work is typical for the historical time period. Subsistence agriculture is grueling work demanding all able hands. Failure to support the work was not trivial. Hence the messenger sending Smith to his father to explain the need for

him to be released from work to go and see the plates.

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

v50-54 Smith travels to the place shown him in vision the previous night and recognizes it instantly (v. 50). He describes the general location, and the appearance of the site (v. 51). Smith opens the repository and sees the previously described items (v. 52), but is not permitted to take them yet. He is told to return every year to the spot (v. 53). Smith does so and returns every year, and is educated by the angel (v. 54).

v53 "neither would it, until four years from that time", this is a parenthetical comment by Smith, not a quotation or paraphrase of the angel. It is plain Smith was unsure as to when he would ultimately obtain the plates and suffered a number of humbling disappointments, see the ends of chapters 18 and 21 of History

of Joseph Smith, by His Mother for details of two such events.

v54 Additional details regarding what Moroni taught him is given in Lucy Mack Smith's comments, see the Historical Material below.

55 As my father's worldly circumstances were very limited, we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring out 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 Staal, 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. Staal. 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. Staal's, and went to my father's, and farmed with him that season.

v55-58 Owing to their indigent circumstances, all of the men of the family are required to obtain manual labor whenever possible (v. 55). One of the jobs Joseph took resulted in scurrilous accusations (v. 56). However, one benefit of that job is he met the woman whom would be his wife (v. 57). His wife's family were put off by the persecution that followed him, and so they left and Smith obtaining work elsewhere (v. 58).

v56 The accusation of being a "money-digger" still sticks to this day. Nobody faults Josiah Staal for funding the enterprise, they only fault Smith for participating.

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 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 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.

v59-60 Four years after the original interview, Smith returns to the site and receives the plates. He is warned against losing them, and assured that if he uses every means available to him to protect them they would be safe (v. 59). Subsequent experience shows him why he received such a stern warning, as the persecution intensifies and there are numerous unsuccessful attempts to steal the plates (v. 60).

Details of the breastplate, plates, and various attempts to steal them from Joseph are detailed in Lucy Mack Smith's History of Joseph Smith, by His Mother, chapters 22-23.

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 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, Chaldaid, 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 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."

v61-65 The persecution becomes so intense Smith must leave. Their financial circumstances are difficult, but they make acquaintance with Martin Harris, who becomes their benefactor (v. 61). As a result of his assistance, Smith starts the work of translation (v. 62). Harris then takes some of the characters and Smith's translation of those characters to an academic for verification (v. 63). The academic verifies the characters and translation, but then questions Harris concerning

their origin (v. 64). Upon learning their origin the academic retracts his verification and requests Harris bring the plates to him for translation, which Harris states is not possible. Harris then approaches another academic, who also indicates both the characters and translation are accurate (v. 65).

v63 People generally assume Harris' intent was to build his own confidence in Smith's claims. However, Smith's might have had an ulterior motive as well, to have the quality of his translation verified.

v64-65 Anthon's interview and subsequent denials are discussed at length in B. H. Robert's Comprehensive History of the Church, volume 1, chapter 9. Regardless of Anthon's denials, whatever transpired between them and Dr. Mitchell left Harris with enough confidence in Smith to continue to support him despite considerable opposition from his wife and neighbors.

v65 This interview between Harris and Anthon is taken to be the literal fulfillment of the prediction of Isa. 29 as more specifically reinterpreted in 2 Ne. 27. See the comments on Isa. 29 for a lengthy discussion of the matter.

66 On the 5th day of April, 1829, Oliver Cowdery came to my house, until which time I had never seen him. He stated to me that having been teaching school in the neighborhood where my father resided, and my father being one of those who sent to the school, he went to board for a season at his house, and while there the family related to him the circumstances of my having received the plates, and accordingly he had come to make inquiries of me. 67 Two days after the arrival of Mr. Cowdery (being the 7th of April) I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon, and he began to write for me. 68 We still continued the work of translation, when, in the ensuing month (May, 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found mentioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying: 69 Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness. 70 He said this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but

that this should be conferred on us hereafter; and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and that afterwards he should baptize me. 71 Accordingly we went and were baptized. I baptized him first, and afterwards he baptized me--after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same Priesthood--for so we were commanded. 72 The messenger who visited us on this occasion and conferred this Priesthood upon us, said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred on us, and that I should be called the first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second. It was on the fifteenth day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger, and baptized. 73 Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation. 74 Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of.

v66-74 Smith meets Oliver Cowdery (v. 66), who acts as scribe while Smith translates (v. 67). While translating, a question arises concerning baptism and the two pray for guidance concerning the matter (v. 68). An angelic John Baptist appears to them and grants them the Aaronic Priesthood (v. 69-70), and they proceed to baptize one another, whereupon the Holy Spirit is received (v. 71-73), greatly enlightening them (v. 74).

In the meantime we were forced to keep secret the circumstances of having received the Priesthood and our having been baptized, owing to a spirit of persecution which had already manifested itself in the neighborhood. 75 We had been threatened with being mobbed, from time to time, and this, too, by professors of religion. And their intentions of mobbing us were only counteracted by the influence of my wife's father's family (under Divine providence), who had become very friendly to me,

and who were opposed to mobs, and were willing that I should be allowed to continue the work of translation without interruption; and therefore offered and promised us protection from all unlawful proceedings, as far as in them lay.

v74-75 As a result of threats, they keep various things from being made public (v. 74). Fortunately, providence has manifested itself by his wife's family, who were formerly not favorably disposed towards Smith (cf. V. 58), sheltering them. This allows the work of translation to continue (v. 75).



## Historical Material Pertaining to Joseph Smith-History

The first print version of the events of the First Vision was Orson Pratt's [An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions](#), pages 3-5, which was published in Scotland in 1840. The first mass printing in the US would be in [Times & Seasons](#) in 1842. Other documentary accounts are [here](#), including Smith's personal journal entries from 1832.

The first excerpt is from a Church publication and presents a concatenation of quotes, excerpted from [Journal of Discourses](#), by Orson Pratt where the subject is the First Vision. Orson Pratt interviewed Smith extensively on the subject and published a tract on the subject, which Smith apparently used himself in some of his writings on the same subject. Pratt's comments on the subject add considerable details to the events of the First Vision and are considered reliable.

The second excerpt is from Lucy Mack Smith's history and addresses the subject of Joseph's initial interview with Moroni.

### Excerpt from [Regional Studies in LDS History:New York](#)

For more than forty years Orson Pratt was not only an avid defender of the First Vision by writing more on this subject than any other contemporary but, he spoke more on that vision than any other early leader. His comments, created from a compilation of seven sermons delivered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle between 1859 and 1880, provide interesting insights into various phases of that theopany from its setting to Joseph's possible perceptions of truths unfolded in 1820. (Amplifications not found in the writings of Joseph Smith are placed in italics.) Elder Pratt declared,

The Lord revealed himself to...[Joseph Smith] not in his manhood, but in his youth. What were the circumstances that enabled him to have manifestations from Heaven at that early period in his life? He was very anxious...to be saved. He felt the necessity of repenting of his sins and serving God. He was a farmer's boy; he was not brought up and educated in high schools, academies, or college.... Having been reared in a *secluded part of the country* and laboring hard on the farm with his father, [he] *had not fallen into the pernicious habits practiced by many boys.*"

When he was about fourteen years old there was what is called a religious revival or reformation in the neighborhood in which he lived. It was not confined to any one particular sect. The Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and the

various denominations in that district or country were all engaged, more or less, in this revival. *Several of the relatives of this youth had taken part in the revival, and had united themselves with the Presbyterian church. This young man was also requested to unite himself with this church.* He heard a great many different doctrines advocated by ministers respecting the different denominations, which *caused him* to read the Bible....

He had not been trained...*in any of the creeds of the existing denominations*, and therefore he was confiding enough to believe what was...written, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth liberally to all men and upbraideth not." He thought to himself that he did lack wisdom, for he did desire to know which was the true church. He went into the grove with a determination to claim this promise.

In the spring of the year 1820, he went into a...grove *near his father's house*...and knelt down in all the simplicity of a child and prayed to the Father *in the name of Jesus* that he would show him which, among all the churches, was the true one. Said he, "Show me, Father, who are in possession of the truth, let me know, O Lord, the right way, *and I will walk therein.*"

*He had now come to a Person who was able to teach him.* All his inquiries previously had been futile and vain, *but he now applied to the right source.* Did the Lord hear him? Yes. *But he had to exercise faith. This young man, while thus praying, was not discouraged because he was tempted;* but he continued praying until he overcame the powers of darkness which tried to prevent him from calling upon God.

The heavens...were opened to him, or, in other words, a glorious pillar of light like the brightness of the sun appeared in the heavens above him, and approached the spot where he was praying.... He saw the light gradually approaching him until it rested *upon the tops of the trees. He beheld the leaves of the trees were not consumed by it, although its brightness, apparently, was sufficient, as he at first thought, to consume everything before it. But the trees were not consumed by it,* and it continued to descend until it rested upon him and enveloped him in its glorious rays.... He saw, in the midst of this glorious pillar of...light or...fire, two glorious personages, whose countenances shone with an exceeding great lustre. One of them spoke to him, saying, while pointing to the other, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him."

*Here were personages capable of instructing him, and of telling him which was the true religion. How different this from going to an uninspired man professing to be a minister! One minute's instruction from personages clothed with the glory of God coming down from the eternal worlds is worth more than all the volumes that ever was written by uninspired men.*

When these persons interrogated him to know what he desired, he answered and said, "Lord show me which is the true church." He was then informed by one of these personages that there was no true church upon the face of the whole earth; *that the whole Christian world, for many generations, had been in apostacy; [that they] had framed doctrines, and dogmas, and creeds by*

human wisdom;...*that the authority to administer in the holy ordinances of the Gospel was not among men upon the earth.* They [also] had denied the power of Godliness, the gifts, miracles, the spirit of revelation and prophecy [and] visions, that all these things had been done away with by the unbelief of the children of men, and that there were no prophets or inspired men on the earth, as there always had been when there was a true Church upon the earth. He was strictly commanded to go not after any of them.

He was also informed that at some future time the fullness of the Gospel should be made manifest to him, *and he should be an instrument in the hands of God of laying the foundation of the kingdom of God.*

*[They] did not see proper upon that occasion to give him a full knowledge of the Gospel and what was necessary to constitute a true church. Now we can see the wisdom of God in not revealing everything to him on that occasion. He revealed as much as Joseph was capacitated to receive. The Lord dealt with this young man as you, parents, do when you wish to instruct your children on any subject. You do not pour out volumes of instruction on them all at once, but impart to them according to their capacity. Just so the Lord acted towards the youth. He imparted enough to let him know that the whole Christian world was without authority.*

(Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman, Jr., and Susan Easton Black, Regional Studies in LDS History:New York, pages 42-44, from an essay entitled "Defender of the First Vision" by Milton V. Backman, Jr.)

**Excerpt from History of Joseph Smith, by His Mother**

The next day, my husband, Alvin, and Joseph, were reaping together in the field, and as they were reaping,

Joseph stopped quite suddenly, and seemed to be in a very deep study. Alvin, observing it, hurried him, saying, "We must not slacken our hands or we will not be able to complete our task." Upon this Joseph went to work again, and after laboring a short time, he stopped just as he had done before. This being quite unusual and strange, it attracted the attention of his father, upon which he discovered that Joseph was very pale. My husband, supposing that he was sick, told him to go to the house, and have his mother doctor him. He accordingly ceased his work, and started, but on coming to a beautiful green, under an apple tree, he stopped and lay down, for he was so weak he could proceed no further. He was here but a short time, when the messenger whom he saw the previous night, visited him again, and the first thing he said was, "Why did you not tell your father

that which I commanded you to tell him?" Joseph replied, "I was afraid my father would not believe me." The angel rejoined, "He will believe every word you say to him."

Joseph then promised the angel that he would do as he had been commanded. Upon this, the messenger departed, and Joseph returned to the field, where he had left my husband and Alvin; but when he got there, his father had just gone to the house, as he was somewhat unwell. Joseph then desired Alvin to go straightway and see his father, and inform him that he had something of great importance to communicate to him, and that he wanted him to come out into the field where they were at work. Alvin did as he was requested, and when my husband got there Joseph related to him all that had passed between him and the angel the previous night and that morning. Having heard this account, his father charged him not to fail in attending strictly to the instruction which he had received from this heavenly messenger.

Soon after Joseph had this conversation with his father, he repaired to the place where the plates were deposited, which place he describes as follows:

[text of JS-H 1:51-52 quoted]

While Joseph remained here, the angel showed him, by contrast, the difference between good and evil, and likewise the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God, in such a striking manner, that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the very end of his days; and in giving a relation of this circumstance, not long prior to his death, he remarked, that ever afterwards he was willing to keep the commandments of God.

Furthermore, the angel told him, at the interview mentioned last, that the time had not yet come for the plates to be brought forth to the world; that he could not take them from the place wherein they were deposited until he had learned to keep the commandments of God--not only till he was willing but able to do it. The angel bade Joseph come to this place every year, at the same time of the year, and he would meet him there and give him further instructions.

The ensuing evening, when the family were altogether, Joseph made known to them all that he had communicated to his father in the field, and also of his finding the record, as well as what passed between him and the angel while he was at the place where the plates were deposited.

Sitting up late that evening, in order to converse upon these things, together with over-exertion of mind, had much

fatigued Joseph; and when Alvin observed it, he said, "Now, brother, let us go to bed, and rise early in the morning, in order to finish our day's work at an hour before sunset, then, if mother will get our suppers early, we will have a fine long evening, and we will all sit down for the purpose of listening to you while you tell us the great things which God has revealed to you.

Accordingly, by sunset the next day, we were all seated, and Joseph commenced telling us the great and glorious things which God had manifested to him; but, before proceeding, he charged us not to mention out of the family that which he was about to say to us, as the world was so wicked that when they came to a knowledge of these flyings they would try to take our lives; and that when we should obtain the plates, our names would be east out as evil by all people. Hence the necessity of suppressing these things as much as possible, until the time should come for them to go forth to the world.

After giving us this charge, he proceeded to relate further particulars concerning the work which he was appointed to do, and we received them joyfully, never mentioning them except among ourselves, agreeable to the instructions which we had received from him.

From this time forth, Joseph continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented an aspect as singular as any that ever lived upon the face of the earth--all seated in a circle, father, mother, sons and daughters, and giving the most profound attention to a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life: he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study.

We were now confirmed in the opinion that God was about to bring to light something upon which we could stay our minds, or that would give us a more perfect knowledge of the plan of salvation and the redemption of the human family. This caused us greatly to rejoice, the sweetest union and happiness pervaded our house, and tranquility reigned in our midst.

During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every

particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them.

On the twenty-second of September, 1824, Joseph again visited the place where he found the plates the year previous; and supposing at this time that the only thing required, in order to possess them until the time for their translation, was to be able to keep the commandments of God--and he firmly believed he could keep every commandment which had been given him--he fully expected to carry them home with him. Therefore, having arrived at the place, and uncovering the plates, he put forth his hand and took them up, but, as he was taking them hence, the unhappy thought darted through his mind that probably there was something else in the box besides the plates, which would be of some pecuniary advantage to him. So, in the moment of excitement, he laid them down very carefully, for the purpose of covering the box, lest some one might happen to pass that way and get whatever there might be remaining in it. After covering it, he turned round to take the Record again, but behold it was gone, and where, he knew not, neither did he know the means by which it had been taken from him.

At this, as a natural consequence, he was much alarmed. He kneeled down and asked the Lord why the Record had been taken from him; upon which the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and told him that he had not done as he had been commanded, for in a former revelation he had been commanded not to lay the plates down, or put them for a moment out of his hands, until he got into the house and deposited them in a chest or trunk, having a good lock and key, and, contrary to this, he had laid them down with the view of securing some fancied or imaginary treasure that remained.

In the moment of excitement, Joseph was overcome by the powers of darkness, and forgot the injunction that was laid upon him.

Having some further conversation with the angel, on this occasion, Joseph was permitted to raise the stone again, when he beheld the plates as he had done before. He immediately reached forth his hand to take them, but instead of getting them, as he anticipated, he was hurled back upon the ground with great violence. When he recovered, the angel was gone, and he arose and returned to the house, weeping for grief and disappointment.

As he was aware that we would expect him to bring the plates home with him, he was greatly troubled, fearing that we might doubt his having seen them. As soon as he entered the

house, my husband asked if he had obtained the plates. The answer was, "No, father, I could not get them."

His father then said, "Did you see them?"

"Yes," replied Joseph, "I saw them, but could not take them."

"I would have taken them," rejoined his father, with much earnestness, "if I had been in your place."

"Why," returned Joseph, in quite a subdued tone, "you do not know what you say. I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me."

Joseph then related the circumstance in full, which gave us much uneasiness, as we were afraid that he might utterly fail of obtaining the Record through some neglect on his part. We, therefore, doubled our diligence in prayer and supplication to God, in order that he might be more fully instructed in his duty, and be preserved from all the wiles and machinations of him "who lieth in wait to deceive." (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith, by His Mother, pages 79-85)

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