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Sixth Principle: The Lord Has Already Planned for His Children's Success

Author(s): LeGrand L. Baker

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SIXTH PRINCIPLE:
**THE LORD HAS ALREADY
PLANNED FOR HIS CHILDREN'S
SUCCESS**

**JOSEPH IS TOLD TO TRANSLATE THE SMALL
PLATES OF NEPHI**

In “the beginning,” there was a plan established whereby each child of our Father in Heaven would receive just the right challenges and experiences to be able to define one’s Self and one’s happiness in terms of the Savior and His atonement. Accommodations were made in that plan to thwart all the maneuvering of Satan and still leave each person free to choose. The Father had known in advance what Satan would do to try to destroy Joseph and His work and had made all necessary preparations to protect Joseph and still give him the chance to choose.

Thus, after Nephi had arrived in America, the Lord instructed him to make a set of small plates and to “engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people.” Nephi obeyed. He spent the next ten years¹¹⁰ composing and polishing a perfectly structured epic poem that not only told a story, but also described the “goodness and the mysteries of God.” (1 Nephi 1:1).

Nephi added to that poem (First Nephi) additional inspired writings (Second Nephi) then gave these small plates to Jacob to be added to and preserved.

A thousand years after that, the Lord instructed Mormon to insert Nephi's small plates, intact without abridging them, into the history he was compiling.

Now, almost 2,500 years after Nephi had written it, the Lord explained to the Prophet Joseph the fruition of his plan:

38. ...an account of those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands, is engraven upon the plates of Nephi....

41. Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained.

(Excerpts from D&C 10:38, 41).

The Lord then explained that Joseph was not alone in his task. His assignment was the culmination of the work of many other prophets, and his ultimate success would be, in part at least, because of their great faith and love and their desire that the people of the last days receive the blessings of the gospel.

46. And, behold, all the remainder of this work does contain all those parts of my gospel which my holy prophets, yea, and also my disciples, desired in their prayers should come forth unto this people.

47. And I said unto them, that it should be granted unto them according to their faith in their prayers;

48. Yea, and this was their faith—that my gospel, which I gave unto them that they might preach in their days, might come unto their brethren the Lamanites, and also all that had become Lamanites because of their dissensions.

49. Now, this is not all—their faith in their prayers was that this gospel should be made known also, if it were possible that other nations should possess this land;

50. And thus they did leave a blessing upon this land in their prayers, that whosoever should believe in this gospel in this land might have eternal life;

51. Yea, that it might be free unto all of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue, or people they may be.

52. And now, behold, according to their faith in their prayers will I bring this part of my gospel to the knowledge of my people. Behold, I do not bring it to destroy that which they have received, but to build it up. (D&C 10:46-52).

The loss of the first 116 pages of the translation of Mormon's abridgment had served two purposes. First, there is possibly more wisdom than we know in the fact that Joseph's first, perhaps stumbling, attempts to translate were not preserved and were not intended to be preserved. Second, it gave Joseph an opportunity to be challenged and thereby demonstrate his integrity, to learn about obedience and sacrifice, and, after he had met the challenge, to find fulfillment and security in God's love for him and in his love for God. The Lord had foreseen Joseph's need to be taught

and had arranged that Mormon's abridgement would be used to school the young prophet. With that accomplished, the abridgement could be replaced by Nephi's testimony.¹¹¹

The loss of the 116 pages had been a hurtful experience for Joseph. The Lord withdrew His Spirit, and Joseph tasted the bitterness of hell.¹¹² Joseph received a revelation calling Martin a "wicked man" and telling him that Martin could no longer participate in the translation. If Martin had believed that Joseph had contrived his story in order to get rich or that Joseph's revelations were a hoax, this would have been the perfect time for him to respond by exposing Joseph to the world. But he did not; instead, since Martin knew the revelations were true, he acknowledged his sins and repented.

The Lord had also foreseen Martin Harris's weaknesses, and gave Joseph assurance that he could be forgiven. In time Martin became one of the Three Witnesses, and for the rest of his life, he testified that the Book of Mormon was truly the word of God.¹¹³

When Moroni returned the plates and the Urim and Thummim to Joseph, he told him that he could begin translating the Book of Mormon whenever he wished. But Martin Harris, who had "sought to destroy" him, could never again act as his scribe.¹¹⁴ One cannot honestly assist a prophet unless one's purpose is to serve the Lord.

Since Martin could no longer write for Joseph, Emma took up the task, but housework and other things got in the way. At length the Savior instructed the Prophet to wait, promising to send someone else in due time.¹¹⁵

OLIVER COWDERY COMES TO HELP JOSEPH

Oliver Cowdery, who was almost the same age as Joseph Smith, was the new school teacher in Palmyra. He taught all the grades in the one-room schoolhouse and was paid by the parents of the children who attended. But Joseph's parents, who did not have enough money to pay, gave Oliver board and room in lieu of tuition.¹¹⁶ After the family learned to trust him, they frankly answered Oliver's questions about Joseph and his "golden book." When spring came and school was out, Oliver decided to go to Pennsylvania to meet Joseph for himself.¹¹⁷

Almost ten months had passed since Martin Harris had lost the manuscript. Joseph did not record how he spent that time, but it is not hard to guess. When Joseph began to translate again, his speed and ability were so much improved that after Oliver arrived, Joseph was able to translate the entire Book of Mormon, as we have it, in less than twice the time it had taken him to complete the small part Martin had lost. During those months, Joseph had obviously been doing his homework.

Three days before Oliver arrived at Joseph's home, the Prophet, who now felt confident enough to begin the translation work in earnest, prayed to ask the Lord to send him a scribe. The Lord responded that one would come soon. When Oliver Cowdery got there on April 5, 1829, Joseph knew more about why he had come than Oliver did. They talked late into the night and again the next day. Then,

on the third morning, they began working together on the translation of the Book of Mormon.

For Oliver and Joseph, translating was a learning experience and they were discovering ideas they (or at least Oliver) had never encountered before.

THE RESTORATION OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

New ideas give rise to new questions. Many of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants were given in response to Joseph's questions while he was translating or otherwise reading the scriptures. One of the earliest examples of this resulted in the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood.

Joseph and Oliver had been working together for about a month when they came to a place in the record that discussed the importance of baptism.¹¹⁸ Neither of them had been baptized, so they went into the woods to pray and ask about baptism. After walking together for a short distance out among the trees, they stopped at the banks of the ambling Susquehanna River. As they prayed they saw an angel descend in "a cloud of light."¹¹⁹ The angel introduced himself as John the Baptist. He taught them how to baptize, and he ordained them to the Aaronic Priesthood.

Then, as he instructed, Joseph and Oliver baptized each other. This was apparently the first time Oliver had ever seen an angel. Of that experience he left an account that virtually blossoms with nineteenth-century flourishes of

language.¹²⁰ It is delightful to read, but its contrast with the simplicity of the way Joseph told the story leaves one to muse, “How grateful one is that Oliver was Joseph’s scribe instead of the other way around.”

The Prophet’s version of this experience is, as is his account of the First Vision, expressed in “plain, matter-of-fact, truthful...well-mannered prose.”¹²¹

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.¹²²

After they were baptized and the Holy Ghost came upon them, the work of their translation took on an entirely new dimension.

Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the Scriptures laid open to our understanding, 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.¹²³

That statement by the Prophet should be carefully considered. It tells one a great deal about the translation process and about the value of the Holy Ghost. Notwithstanding all he had seen and heard from the angels and from the Savior, Joseph did not clearly understand what the Book of Mormon prophets had written about the mysteries of the gospel until after he was baptized. He reported, “We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation.”¹²⁴ His understanding of the fullness of the gospel came in the appropriate sequence, after obedience and sacrifice.

THE WHITMERS PREPARE TO RECEIVE THEIR GUESTS

About a week after the visit of John the Baptist, again while translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph received a warning through the Urim and Thummim. There was a plot brewing to kill him. He and Oliver were to get away from there as quickly as possible. They would be safe, the message continued, if they went to the home of David Whitmer, a friend of Oliver’s whom Joseph had never met. Oliver was instructed to write David immediately and invite himself and Joseph to live with the Whitmers while they finished translating the Book of Mormon.¹²⁵ Oliver wrote the letter, asking David to bring a wagon to Harmony as soon as he could and to take Joseph and Oliver home with him.

When David received the letter, he asked his parents if Joseph and Oliver could come. His parents did not object, but they were not prepared to receive these unexpected guests. David's father reminded him that there was still much work to be done in the fields, and until it was finished they could spare neither the wagon and horses nor the time to go fetch the visitors. David could go, but not until he had taken care of things at home. The Whitmers did not feel the same sense of urgency the Lord had conveyed to the Prophet—but they would.

The first task was to plow a twenty-acre field. The morning after he had received Oliver's letter, David went out early to get started plowing, but he found someone had taken the plow from the place in the yard where the Whitmer's always kept it. David was amazed when he located it in the field he had planned to plow. During the night someone had used it to plow almost a third of that field, and he hadn't the foggiest notion who might have done it. The plow was left standing in the furrow, as he would have left it. All David had to do that morning was hitch the horses to the plow and finish the job.¹²⁶

The Whitmer's had been sowing wheat just before Oliver's letter arrived. If the seeds were left on the top of the ground they would sprout and die because they could not take root. The wheat had to be harrowed into the earth and that had to be done before David left. There was about as much wheat sown as David could harrow in two days' hard work. There were also several piles of plaster of paris that were to be spread on another field. Plaster of paris was used

as a kind of fertilizer and, in its powder form, was sown on a field in much the same way wheat was sown. That job also had to be done immediately, because if the piles of powdered plaster were rained on, they would set up like concrete.

When David went out to harrow the wheat, he had the strong impression that rather than dividing the field into small sections and doing them one at a time, as he usually did, he should drive his team around the entire field. When he stopped for lunch, he looked around and discovered, to his surprise, that he had harrowed in half the wheat. After lunch he went on as before, and by evening he had finished the entire field. He had done two days work in a single day.

His father was beginning to feel there was something rather pressing about getting Joseph and Oliver. The speed with which the obstacles to David's going were being removed confirmed his feelings. Observing to the family that there must be an "over ruling hand" in this, his father urged David to go get their guests as soon as the plaster was sown.¹²⁷ David planned to begin that task the next morning.

As day broke he took a wooden scoop under his arm and went out to sow the plaster of paris. He had last seen it in piles near his sister's home, but when he got to where it was supposed to be, it was gone. He ran to the house and asked his sister if she knew what had happened to it.

She did, and she could not understand why he was upset. The day before, she had watched three men. They had spread plaster faster than anyone she had ever seen before. Even her children had been fascinated by the quickness with

which the men moved. They were strangers to her—they certainly did not live nearby—but she supposed David must have hired them.¹²⁸

David and his family were now convinced that something very important was going on and that God intended they should be a part of it. He wanted them to get Joseph and Oliver—and He wanted them to do it now. David hitched up the wagon and started off.

He traveled the 135 miles in a surprisingly short time. As would any good horseman, he kept alert to the needs of his animals. He was in a hurry but knew better than to push them too fast. In the long haul, fatigued horses move more slowly than rested ones. To his amazement, in spite of the distance and their speed, his horses did not tire.¹²⁹

Joseph knew David was coming. He told Oliver when David started from home, where he stopped the first night, how he read the sign at the public house, and where he stopped the second night. When David was only a few miles from Joseph's home, the Prophet knew that too, so he and Oliver walked down the road to meet him.¹³⁰

David was surprised to receive this reception and even more surprised to learn that Joseph had known just when he would arrive. But when Oliver told him how Joseph had described his journey, David became quite convinced that Joseph was a prophet and became more eager than ever to help.

They left for the Whitmer farm almost immediately. Emma stayed behind to look after things, but she would join them a short time later.¹³¹

MORONI CARRIES THE PLATES FOR JOSEPH

Joseph did not take the Book of Mormon plates with him to the Whitmers' home because he feared that if he were stopped this time, the plates would be stolen. Instead he gave them to Moroni to carry. The angel would return them to him after the travelers arrived at their destination.

During the trip back to David's home, when David and Oliver were riding on the old-fashioned spring seat in the front of the wagon and Joseph was behind them in the wagon box, a rather extraordinary thing happened. Years later, David recalled that they were driving through "a clear open place" when "a very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared" beside the wagon.

"Good morning, it is very warm," the man said as he wiped his forehead with his hand. Oliver and David looked at Joseph, he nodded, and they asked the old fellow to ride with them. He replied, "No, I am going to Cumorah." That name caught their attention. They gazed at him and then for a moment at each other. As they "looked around inquiringly of Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared." David remembered him as being "about five feet eight or nine inches tall and heavy set...; his hair and beard were white... he had on his back a sort of knapsack with something in, shaped like a book." David understood (or was told by Joseph; he does not say which) that this man "was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony."¹³²

After the travelers reached their destination and were settled at the Whitmer farm, Joseph went alone out into the garden. There, according to prior arrangements, the Prophet met the angel, who returned the plates to him.¹³³ The next day, Joseph and Oliver began translating again. In the security of the Whitmer home, they would be able to continue their work without much interference until the translation was completed.