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Seventy-six Accounts of Joseph Smith's Visionary Experiences

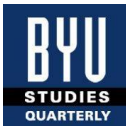
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Desk in the room of the restored John Johnson home, Hiram, Ohio, in which “The Vision,” now known as Doctrine and Covenants 76, was received concurrently by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Courtesy John W. Welch.

Seventy-six Accounts of Joseph Smith's Visionary Experiences

Alexander L. Baugh

Joseph Smith the seer ushered in the dispensation of the fullness of times. His role was known and prophesied of anciently. The Lord promised Joseph of Egypt that in the last days a “choice seer” would come through his lineage and would bring his seed to a knowledge of the covenants made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2 Ne. 3:7; JST Gen. 50:27–28). “That seer will the Lord bless,” Joseph prophesied, specifically indicating that “his name shall be called after me” (2 Ne. 3:14–15; see also JST Gen. 50:33). Significantly, in the revelation received during the organizational meeting of the Church on April 6, 1830, the first title given to the first elder was that of seer: “Behold, there shall be a record kept . . . and in it thou [Joseph Smith] shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (D&C 21:1).

In the Book of Mormon, Ammon defined a seer as one who possessed “a gift from God” to translate ancient records (Mosiah 8:13; see also 28:11–16). However, the seeric gift is not limited to translation, hence Ammon’s additional statement that “a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have” (Mosiah 8:16). In actuality, a seer is a see-er.¹ Among other gifts and powers,

1. The Hebrew *chāzāh* comes from “the usual word for ‘see’ in the various dialects of Aramaic, . . . referring both to the natural vision of the eyes and to supernatural visions of various kinds.” G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.:

he sees visions that are seen with spiritual eyes.² This study attempts to compile and analyze all of the known visions, visitations, or visual revelations experienced by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Visions can take various forms. Personal visitations or appearances of deity, angels, or even Satan and his emissaries certainly come under the heading of visions. Visions can also include seeing vivid images where the veil is lifted from an individual's mind in order to see and comprehend the things of God. Certain dreams could be considered visions, particularly when heavenly or spiritual messages are conveyed. Finally, certain revelations received through the Urim and Thummim mediums such as the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone may also be classified, in the ancient sense, as visions.

While the visions received by Joseph Smith were also revelatory experiences, revelations were not always visionary. Hence, in researching Joseph Smith's visions, I attempted to distinguish between visions and other kinds of inspiration or revelation. More often than not, when a vision was involved, the wording of the source material indicated that a vision—not a more general “revelation”—had been received. However, in some instances, the visual nature of the experience was not quite clear, so I made some judgment calls as to whether a particular revelation involved a vision based on the graphic detail in the account and the perceptual circumstances of the manifestation.

This difficulty in determining what actually constitutes a vision is illustrated by the following example. In January 1841, Joseph Smith

Eerdmans, 1980), 4:281–82. The manner in which revelation was received by the Old Testament seers is not entirely clear, but it predominantly involved hearing the word of the Lord at night, although the eyes were also “somehow involved” (4:285). The obscure Hebrew term *chāzāh* is translated in the Greek Septuagint as *blepōn*, literally “looker,” and then translated into English as “seer.”

2. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 258. Orson F. Whitney stated: “A seer is one who sees. But it is not the ordinary sight that is meant. The seeric gift is a supernatural endowment.” Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts: A Series of Dissertations on Spiritual, Historical and Philosophic Themes* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1921), 39. See also Steven C. Walker, “Seer,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1292–93, available on “Encyclopedia of Mormonism,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/EoM/id/4183>.

gave a detailed description of the Apostle Paul's physical appearance and mannerisms:

He is about five foot high; very dark hair; dark complexion; dark skin; large Roman nose; sharp face; small black eyes, penetrating as eternity; round shoulders; a whining voice, except when elevated and then it almost resembles the roaring of a Lion. He was a good orator, but Doctor [John C.] Bennett is a superior orator, and like Paul is active and diligent, always, employing himself in doing good to his fellow men.³

A cursory reading of the Prophet's statement might lead to the conclusion that his knowledge of Paul's physical characteristics could have been learned only by means of a vision. However, the Prophet's description resembles depictions of Paul found in familiar apocryphal writings.⁴ Thus, while Joseph may have received an actual vision of Paul, he possibly gained his understanding of the ancient Apostle's appearance from the traditional Christian literature of the day and accepted it as accurate. Due to this ambiguity and in the interest of cautious scholarship, I have not included the Prophet's statement on Paul among the visions listed in the documents below.

Three major points became apparent as I researched Joseph Smith's visions. First, and perhaps most remarkable, is the sheer number of visions the Prophet received. The majority of these visions are not found in the standard works but pervade the Prophet's own history and the records kept by contemporaries who were present when a vision was received or when Joseph Smith spoke about his sacred communications. The major purpose of this study is simply to catalogue those visions, many of which are not generally known. As I began collecting the accounts of the visions, I realized that any attempt to number the visions would risk miscounting, since evidence

3. "Account of Meeting and Discourse, 5 January 1841, as Reported by William Clayton," 4, L. John Nuttall Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/account-of-meeting-and-discourse-5-january-1841-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1>.

4. See J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 364.

of visions relies upon documentation, and some visions may have been purposely unrecorded. Of one vision Joseph remarked, “I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have, of the glories of the Kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive it.”⁵

Second, the Prophet was privileged to receive so many visions that they might seem almost commonplace experiences for him, but they were not. Each was supernal. In 1843 he said, “It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I shall make the Saints of God comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind.”⁶ Because his visionary experiences were so frequent, it is understandable if he left out several details or failed to record certain events altogether.

Finally, in a number of instances, others witnessed Joseph Smith’s visionary experiences. Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris, Sidney Rigdon, Heber C. Kimball, Frederick G. Williams, John Murdock, Zebedee Coltrin, and others were present when the Prophet had visions, often seeing the manifestation with him. The recorded statements of these witnesses and co-participants give additional testimony and credibility to the reality of the Prophet’s seeric experiences.⁷

5. “History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” 1556, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843?p=199>; Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 5:402 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

6. “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2, 10 March 1843–14 July 1843,” 144, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-2-10-march-1843-14-july-1843/152>; Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, vol. 2 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 360; *History of the Church*, 5:362.

7. For a general discussion and overview of Joseph Smith’s visionary experiences, see Larry C. Porter, “Visions of Joseph Smith,” in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of*

For clarity and organization, the Prophet's visions will be discussed in a historical context using two periods: 1820 to 1830 and 1831 to 1844.

Joseph Smith's Visions, 1820–1830

Joseph Smith's visions between 1820 and 1830 fall into three of the broad categories mentioned earlier: personal visitations of deity, angels, and Satan; visions received via the seer stone and the Urim and Thummim; and visions opened to the mind. One vision in particular seems to be in a category of its own.

Visitations

In the Book of Mormon, Ammon said that through a seer “secret things [shall] be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light” (Mosiah 8:16). Joseph Smith brought to light many truths he learned from heavenly beings, and he learned to distinguish those truths from their opposites through his encounters with Satan.

The First Vision. The most magnificent and certainly the most historically and doctrinally significant theophany occurred in the Sacred Grove in spring 1820, when the Father and the Son—and “many angels,” according to Joseph's 1835 account—ushered in the opening of the Restoration. This initial spiritual manifestation has appropriately come to be known among Latter-day Saints as the “First Vision,” a title that recognizes that more visions soon followed. Although Joseph Smith was privileged to have additional visions of the Father and the Son later, the First Vision is the only known instance during this ten-year period that the young prophet was privileged to have a vision of either of these two members of the Godhead. Historical evidence demonstrates that the Restoration was brought to pass primarily through the ministration of angels and other forms of revelation rather than by direct appearances of either of these two supreme deities.

Visions of Heavenly Messengers. Of the heavenly messengers who personally appeared to the youthful prophet in the years 1820

Mormonism, 4:1512–16. For an examination of Joseph Smith's visionary contemporaries, see Richard L. Bushman, “The Visionary World of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–98): 183–204.



The Angel Moroni Delivering the Plates of the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith Jun. Print, c. 1886, C. C. A. Christensen. Library of Congress.

Nephite artifacts by placing them in a barrel of beans. Shortly after departing, he and his wife were accosted by a group of men intent on taking the plates. After a thorough search, the men left empty-handed, and the couple and the plates eventually arrived safely in Harmony. A year and a half later, because of increased persecution, Joseph and Oliver were forced to leave Harmony, departing for Fayette, New York,

to 1830, Moroni was the most regular visitor. Best known are the three visits that occurred during the night of September 21–22, 1823; the appearance while Joseph returned from work in his father's field the next day; the meeting with Moroni at the Hill Cumorah; and the four annual visits that subsequently took place each September until 1827. In total over twenty appearances by the last Nephite have been documented notably by H. Donl Peterson.⁸

One of Moroni's visits, in particular, is worth recounting. During Joseph and Emma's move from Palmyra, New York, to Harmony, Pennsylvania, in December 1827, Joseph protected the plates and the other

8. See H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Tutor," *Ensign* 22 (January 1992): 22–29; H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Tutor," in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman Jr., and Susan Easton Black (Provo, Utah: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 49–70; and Robert J. Woodford, "Book of Mormon Personalities Known by Joseph Smith," *Ensign* 8 (August 1978): 12–15. See also H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1983).

around June 1. David Whitmer came from Fayette to transport them to his father's home. However, on this move, the plates were not in their possession. Prior to the trio's departure, Joseph had returned the plates and sacred relics to Moroni, who had informed him they would be returned upon arrival at the Whitmer homestead. Soon after the party's departure by wagon, Moroni paid them an interesting visit. David Whitmer told the following incident on numerous occasions over the years. One account reads:

When I was returning to Fayette with Joseph and Oliver, all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old fashioned wooden spring seat and Joseph behind us, we were suddenly approached by a very pleasant, nice looking old man in a clear open place, who saluted us with "Good morning, it is very warm," at the same instant wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation and by a sign from Joseph I invited him to ride if he was going our way, but he said very pleasantly, "No, I am going to Cumorah." This was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant, and as I looked enquiringly at Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared so that I did not see him again.

. . . He was, I should think, about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches and heavy set. . . . He was dressed in a suit of brown, woolen clothes; his hair and beard were white. . . . I also remember that he had a sort of knapsack on his back, and something was in it which was shaped like a book. It was the messenger who had the plates.⁹

In this fascinating account, Whitmer gives some idea of Moroni's physical stature and demonstrates that angels are occasionally given to informal pleasantries when executing their missions among mortals. This incident further illustrates that celestial, glorified messengers can appear in an earthly form and condition.

Moroni was not Joseph's only seeric tutor. Statements and testimonies by some of the Prophet's contemporaries reveal that the young seer was visited and taught by numerous ancient prophets and apostles. In the Wentworth Letter, published in March 1842, Joseph Smith

9. Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 27. Whitmer told the story on a number of occasions, leaving at least five additional versions of the incident. See Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 13, 41–42, 49–50, 181–82, 213–16.

stated, “After having received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of the 22nd of September, a.d. 1827, the angel of the Lord delivered the records into my hands.”¹⁰

Three major points stand out in this statement. First, Joseph Smith received “many visits from the angels of God.” Second, these angels visited him to unfold events that would soon transpire. And third, these visits occurred before he obtained the plates in September 1827 and thus took place concurrently with his years of instruction by Moroni at Cumorah. Orson Pratt stated that during the years 1823 to 1827, Joseph “was often ministered to by the angels of God, and received instruction concerning the work that was to be performed in the latter days.”¹¹ George Q. Cannon taught that during these preparatory years Joseph “was visited constantly by angels. . . . He had vision after vision in order that his mind might be fully saturated with a knowledge of the things of God, and that he might comprehend the great and holy calling that God has bestowed upon him.”¹²

Joseph never mentioned publicly, as far as we know, who these angelic ministrants were, but his close associates spoke of these appearances. John Taylor gave some indication of their identity in these two typical statements:

10. Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 707, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/1>; Karen Lynn Davidson and others, eds., *Histories: Volume 1, Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 495.

11. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 15:185 (September 22, 1872), available on “Journal of Discourses,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/5726>. On another occasion, Orson Pratt stated, “After having received from time to time, visits from . . . glorious personages, and talking with them, . . . he was permitted to go and take [the] plates from the place of their deposit.” Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:66 (December 19, 1869).

12. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 23:362 (October 29, 1882).

And when Joseph Smith was raised up as a Prophet of God, Mormon, Moroni, Nephi and others of the ancient Prophets who formerly lived on this Continent, and Peter and John and others who lived on the Asiatic Continent, came to him and communicated to him certain principles pertaining to the Gospel of the Son of God.¹³

The principles which he had, placed him in communication with the Lord, and not only with the Lord, but with the ancient apostles and prophets; such men, for instance, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Adam, Seth, Enoch, and . . . the apostles that lived on this continent as well as those who lived on the Asiatic continent. He seemed to be as familiar with these people as we are with one another. Why? Because he had to introduce a dispensation which was called the dispensation of the fulness of times.¹⁴

Lucy Mack Smith had fond memories of Joseph's maturing years and recalled some of the things her son learned from these interviews, particularly from the ancient American prophets. "During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined," Lucy said, continuing:

He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent; their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, and their buildings, with every particular; he would describe their <mode of> warfare, as also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.¹⁵

The Prophet left specific record that on May 15, 1829, John the Baptist appeared and conferred Aaronic Priesthood keys and authority upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Besides Joseph's brief account describing this visitation, Oliver Cowdery also left his written testimony of that event. Significantly, by the time John the Baptist

13. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:374 (April 8, 1875).

14. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:94 (April 13, 1879). For additional statements concerning the heavenly beings who appeared to Joseph Smith, see *Journal of Discourses*, 13:47; 18:326; 20:174–75; 21:65; 21:161, 163; and 23:48–49.

15. "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845," 87, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/94>. See also Woodford, "Book of Mormon Personalities," 12.

appeared, Joseph had received numerous heavenly visitors, but this was one of Cowdery's first visions. When Cowdery wrote about the incident five years later, his words still expressed exhilaration and spiritual elation. "The veil was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message," he wrote.

What joy! what wonder! what amazement! . . . our eyes beheld—our ears heard. . . . Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, "I am thy fellow servant," dispelled every fear. We listened—we gazed—we admired! 'Twas the voice of the angel from glory—'twas a message from the Most High! and as we heard we rejoiced, while his love enkindled upon our souls, and we were rapt in the vision of the Almighty! . . .

. . . The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel . . . is to me, past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Savior's goodness with wonder and thanksgiving.¹⁶

The appearance of Peter, James, and John and their bestowal of the Melchizedek Priesthood upon Joseph and Oliver followed. While Joseph and Oliver left no record of the exact date of this event, the traditional view is that the higher priesthood was conferred during the visitation of these ancient Apostles in late May or early June 1829, approximately two weeks following the bestowal of the Aaronic Priesthood.¹⁷

16. O. Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834 [Letter 1], printed in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 15–16, available on "Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries," *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/7012>; "History, 1834–1836," 49, 50, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/51>; Davidson and others, *Histories, Volume 1*, 42–43. It is significant to note that in his narrative Cowdery twice mentions that the voice of the Lord was heard. The Prophet's history does not mention this fact.

17. Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Priesthood," *Religious Studies Center Newsletter* 9 (May 3, 1995): 3–7; Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign* 26 (December 1996): 30–47; Larry C. Porter, "The Whitmer Log Home: Cradle of Mormonism," *Religious Educator* 12, no. 3 (2011): 177–20. For additional information on the restoration

Another heavenly visitor whom Joseph Smith saw during the 1820–30 period was an angel who is not identified in surviving records. This messenger appeared during the first week of August 1830 to instruct Joseph concerning the emblems of the sacrament. Newel Knight and his wife, Sally, had traveled from Colesville, New York, to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to visit Joseph and Emma. Both women had been baptized, but neither had been confirmed nor had yet partaken of the sacrament. Joseph authorized both ordinances and “set out to procure some wine for the occasion,” wrote Newel Knight. “He had gone only a short distance, when he was met by a heavenly messenger and received the first four verses of the revelation” (that is, D&C 27:1–4). The Prophet returned to the small group, which also included John Whitmer, prepared some wine in accordance with the instructions from the angel, partook of the sacrament, confirmed the two sisters, and “spent the evening in a glorious manner.”¹⁸

Visions of Satan. Joseph had at least two personal encounters with Lucifer during the 1820s. The best-known confrontation occurred prior to his theophany in the Sacred Grove, when Satan sought to physically destroy him as discussed in the two articles about the First Vision in this volume. The other confrontation with Satan is mentioned only briefly, in Doctrine and Covenants 128. In verse 20, the Prophet wrote of hearing “the voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light.” Clearly, he heard Adam’s (Michael’s) voice and also saw the devil. Satan’s appearance also seems to be associated with the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood since Joseph refers to Peter, James, and John’s appearance on the Susquehanna in the very next sentence. Simply interpreted, Satan appeared as an angel of light, hoping to deceive Joseph and Oliver in

of the priesthood, see Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies staff, “The Earliest Accounts of the Restoration of the Priesthood,” herein.

18. Newel Knight, “Newel Knight’s Journal,” in *Scraps of Biography*, Faith-Promoting Series, no. 10, published in *Classic Experiences and Adventures* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 62–63. See also “History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” 51, 52, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/57>; and Davidson and others, *Histories, Volume 1*, 428, 432.

some manner and thereby thwart the restoration of authority. Satan's presence, however, was detected by Michael, who informed Joseph and Oliver of the deception, concluding the incident.

Visions through the Urim and Thummim or Seer Stone

During this early period, the youthful prophet received many visions through the medium of “Urim and Thummim”—sometimes a seer stone and, more particularly, the Nephite interpreters. Both of these instruments apparently operated in much the same spiritual manner, and through them Joseph received an undetermined number of visions in addition to the translation of the Book of Mormon. The young prophet obtained a seer stone, described as dark brown in color, while digging a well for Willard Chase around 1822.¹⁹ This discovery occurred only two years after the First Vision and one year before Moroni's first visits. Joseph made use of the seer stone for five years before obtaining the Nephite interpreters from Moroni in 1827. Latter-day Saints should not be surprised to learn that prior to being engaged specifically in the work of the Lord—that is, prior to beginning the work of the translation of the plates—the youthful Joseph apparently recognized that God had given him visionary powers enabling him to see supernatural visions in a wide variety of areas. Between 1822 and 1827, he successfully obtained an unspecified number of visions by means of the seer stone. He even gained a reputation for such activities, which may explain why men such as Josiah Stowell, who lived more than one hundred miles away, near South Bainbridge,

19. Willard Chase, in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled [sic]: or, a Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, Ohio: By the author, 1834), 241–42, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/mormonismunvaile00howe#page/240/mode/2up>. See also Nicholas J. Frederick and Michael Hubbard Mackay, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016). For eyewitness descriptions of the seer stone, see Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing,’” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Summer 1982): 59; and for images of a seer stone, see Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), xx–xxi.

New York, sought out Joseph Smith and employed him to locate buried treasure in fall 1825.²⁰

Several examples of Joseph's ability to receive visions by means of a seer stone illustrate the power associated with the Prophet and this instrument. Martin Harris steadfastly believed Joseph possessed an uncanny ability of seership. This was perhaps due in part to the following incident:

I was at the house of his father in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra village, and was picking my teeth with a pin while sitting on the bars. The pin caught in my teeth, and dropped from my fingers into shavings and straw. I jumped from the bars and looked for it. . . . I then took Joseph on surprise, and said to him—I said, "Take your stone." I had never seen it, and did not know that he had it with him. He had it in his pocket. He took it and placed it in his hat—the old white hat—and placed his face in his hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look [to] one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me.²¹

Joseph's use of the stone may have also encouraged him to propose marriage to Emma Hale. At Joseph's annual visit to the Hill Cumorah in September 1826, Moroni told him that he could have the plates the following year if, in Joseph Knight's words, "he Brot with him the right person." Knight recounted this conversation further:

Joseph says "who is the right Person?" The answer was you will know. Then he looked in his glass and found it was Emma Hale, Daughter of old Mr Hail of Pensylvany, a girl that he had seen Before, for he had Bin Down there Before with me. . . . He came to me perhaps in November and worked for me until about the time that he was Married . . . and I furnished him with a horse and Cutter to go and see his girl Down to Mr. Hails. And soon after this he was Married and Mr Stowel moved him and his wife to his fathers in Palmyra Ontario County.²²

20. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 69–70, 97, 103.

21. Martin Harris, in [Joel Tiffany], "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859): 164.

22. Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (1976): 31–32.

David Whitmer learned during his very first meeting with Joseph that, by means of the seer stone, Joseph was able to see in detail actions many miles away. In late May 1828, at the request of Oliver Cowdery and Joseph, David traveled from Fayette, New York, over one hundred miles to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to take the two men back to his father's farmhouse so they could complete the translation. As he neared Harmony, he was surprised to meet Joseph and Oliver, who "were coming toward me, and met me some little distance from the house." David reported further:

Oliver told me that Joseph had told him when I started from home, where I had stopped the first night, how I read the sign at the tavern, where I stopped the next night and that I would be there that day before dinner, and this was why they had come out to meet me, all of which was exactly as Joseph had told Oliver, at which I was greatly astonished.²³

Moroni gave Joseph possession of the plates, breastplate, and interpreters on September 22, 1827. When Joseph Smith first put on the spectacles, "his entire past history [was] revealed to him," David Whitmer recounted. This experience, David believed, helped Joseph recognize the greater supernatural power God had now given him.²⁴ Joseph Knight Sr., who was at the Smith home in Palmyra when Joseph returned from the Hill Cumorah, remembered conversing with Joseph about the sacred relics the morning after he gained possession of them. "It is ten times Better than I expected," he remembered Joseph saying. He recalled further the Prophet's particular fascination with the spectacles. "He seemed to think more of the glasses or the urim and thummim than [than] he did of the Plates," wrote Knight, "for, says he, 'I can see any thing; they are Marvelous.'"²⁵ Indeed they were, for as the Prophet's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recalled, by means of the instrument "the angel showed him those things which he saw in vision."²⁶ These tools were not used for trivial or spectacular

23. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 27. For slightly different accounts, see Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 41, 48–49, 114–15, 123, 191, 213, 215.

24. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 150.

25. Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection," 33.

26. "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845," 113.

sensations. One major purpose of the spectacles (and perhaps also the seer stone) was to help protect the plates and Joseph's life. Lucy said her son "always kept the Urim and Thummim about his person" so "he could also ascertain, at any time, the approach of danger, either to himself or the Record."²⁷ Lucy Mack Smith and Martin Harris mention three incidents where the plates were kept safe because of information received by means of the Urim and Thummim.²⁸

Soon after acquiring the ancient relics, Joseph wondered how he could proceed without some personal assistance, particularly financial aid, so that he could devote himself entirely to the work of translation. The answer came in a vision through the holy interpreters. During one of his interviews with the angel Moroni, probably in September 1827, Joseph asked who could assist him. He was told "to go and look in the spectacles, and he would show him the man that would assist him." The man he saw was Martin Harris. A short while later, the Prophet told Harris what had been made known to him. The Palmyra farmer later recalled how the message "struck me with surprise. I told him I wished him to be careful about these things. 'Well,' said [Joseph], 'I saw you standing before me as plainly as I do now.'"²⁹ Martin subsequently received a testimony of Joseph Smith's divine calling to translate the Book of Mormon and later gave liberally of his wealth to the work.

Joseph Smith never detailed the method or procedure of translation.³⁰ However, Martin Harris, who assisted with the translation of

27. "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845," book 6, p. 1, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/69>.

28. "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845," book 5, p. 8, through book 6, p. 2. The three incidents were: (1) taking the plates from the old birch log where he had initially deposited them, (2) concealing the plates beneath the hearth, and (3) hiding the plates in some flax in the loft of the cooper's shop. Harris's recollections parallel that of Mother Smith. See [Tiffany], "Mormonism," 166–67.

29. [Tiffany], "Mormonism," 169.

30. For discussions of translation, see Neal A. Maxwell, "By the Gift and Power of God," *Ensign* 27 (January 1997): 36–41; Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds

the first 116 pages in 1828, and David Whitmer, a firsthand observer who lent assistance beginning in June 1829, gave some particulars. Harris gave the following testimony to Edward Stevenson:

Sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, “Written,” and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.³¹

David Whitmer stated a similar procedure for the translation:

Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.³²

Clearly, the main purpose of the interpreters was to assist the seer in the translation of the Book of Mormon. The testimonies of Emma

(Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 61–93; John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 130–44; Stephen D. Ricks, “Joseph Smith’s Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon” (Provo, Utah: FARMS paper, 1986); and, most recently, Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 2015); and John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” herein.

31. Edward Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses: Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris,” *Millennial Star* 44 (February 6, 1882): 86–87, available on “Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/MStar/id/5128>.

32. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: n.p., 1887), 12, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/address-to-all-beli00whit#page/12/mode/2up>.

Smith and David Whitmer agree that the Prophet used the Nephite interpreters to translate the first 116 pages, after which this instrument was returned to the angel in consequence of the incidents surrounding the lost manuscript. Thereafter, the seer stone was used, both instruments being essentially a “urim and thummim.”³³ In such cases, when Joseph translated he was seeing some kind of vision. Furthermore, in the Doctrine and Covenants at least nine revelations were received by means of the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone—sections 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, and 17.³⁴ Since it is likely the information was conveyed to the Prophet in much the same manner as the translation of the Book of Mormon (that is, the words would appear in some fashion within the instruments), perhaps these revelations could be better described as “visions” received through the Nephite interpreters or the seer stone. Soon after the translation of the Book of Mormon was complete, visions using the seer stone as a medium seemed to cease. David Whitmer remembered Joseph saying that “we would all have to depend on the Holy Ghost hereafter to be guided into truth and obtain the will of the Lord.”³⁵

33. “Now the first that my <husband> translated, [the book of Lehi] was translated by the use of the Urim, and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he [Joseph] used a small stone [to translate the plates].” Emma Smith Bidamon to Emma Pilgrim, March 27, 1870, in John T. Clark, “Translation of Nephite Records,” *The Return* 4 (July 15, 1895): 2. Written from Nauvoo, the original letter is located in the Emma Smith Papers, Library-Archives, Community of Christ, Independence, Mo. David Whitmer stated: “This unpardonable carelessness [of giving Martin Harris the manuscript] evoked the stormiest kind of chastisement from the Lord, who took from the prophet the urim and thummum and otherwise expressed his condemnation. By fervent prayer and by otherwise humbling himself, the prophet, however, again found favor, and was presented with a . . . stone . . . which, it was promised, should serve the same purpose as the missing urim and thummim. . . . With this stone all of the present Book of Mormon was translated.” Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 200; see also 72, 156–57, 175, 230.

34. Although not indicated in the historical record, it is likely that section 10 was received through the Urim and Thummim. Sections 3 and 10 were probably received through the Nephite interpreters since these revelations were given in conjunction with the loss of the 116 pages.

35. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, 32. The seer stone passed through a series of owners. Soon after the translation of the Book of Mormon was

Visions Opened to the Mind

Documentation exists for three visions received in the mind of the youthful prophet during the ten-year period of 1820 to 1830, each associated with his initial interviews with Moroni. The first two occurred in conjunction with Moroni's inaugural appearance on the evening of September 21–22, 1823, in the Joseph Smith Sr. log house. In the Prophet's 1839 history, he related that as the heavenly messenger was telling him about the gold 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" (Joseph Smith—History 1:42). In the 1842 Wentworth Letter, he added that during this initial interview he was informed about the ancient American inhabitants and "shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people."³⁶ A similar experience occurred the following day at the hill. After determining where the stone box was located, and after removing the large stone that covered it, Joseph made several attempts to obtain the record. As Joseph began to pray, Moroni appeared. He then told the young seer to

complete, Joseph Smith gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery, who possessed the stone until his death in 1848. That same year Phineas Young visited Oliver's widow, Lucy Cowdery, and persuaded her to give it to him. He returned to Salt Lake City and presented it to his brother, Brigham Young. The stone has remained in the possession of the Church since that time. See Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, 32; Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 200; and Zina Young Card to F. D. Richards, July 31, 1896, F. D. Richards Letter Collection, Church History Library, as cited in Van Wagoner and Walker, "Gift of Seeing," 66n53. Edward Stevenson remembered Joseph Smith using a seer stone at least four years after the Book of Mormon was translated. See Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: By the author, 1893), 6, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/reminiscencesofj00stev#page/n9/mode/2up>.

36. "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," 1281, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/455>; *History of the Church*, 4:537.

“Look!” and as he thus spake he beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. All this passed before him, and the heavenly messenger said, “All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one.”³⁷

In a very real sense, what Joseph experienced on these three occasions was a “vision within a vision” since he received visual instruction at the same time he was in the presence of a celestial personage.

A Unique Visionary Experience

A well-known vision of this period warrants a brief examination, but it is difficult to classify and explain. After the completion of the translation, Joseph returned the plates to Moroni, who appeared a very short time later at a location near the Whitmer farm to show the plates to the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. The plates were then loaned back to the Prophet, who showed them to the Eight Witnesses, who were in the vicinity of Manchester. The Prophet and Oliver Cowdery then went to Cumorah to return the record for the last time. While at the hill, an unusual phenomenon took place. Brigham Young explained:

I believe I will take the liberty to tell you of another circumstance that will be as marvelous as anything can be. This is an incident in the life of Oliver Cowdery, but he did not take the liberty of telling such things in meeting as I take. . . . Oliver Cowdery went with the Prophet Joseph when he deposited [returned] these plates. . . . When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. He says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile

37. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 198; “History, 1834–1836,” 95; Davidson and others, *Histories, Volume 1*, 83. Although this was a vision of Satan and his associates, it was given to Joseph Smith by Moroni and the powers of heaven.

of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: "This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ." I tell you this as coming not only from Oliver Cowdery, but others who were familiar with it.³⁸

The incident is substantiated by two other statements made by Brigham Young and recorded by William H. Dame and Wilford Woodruff.³⁹ Others of the Prophet's contemporaries giving similar reports included Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, and David Whitmer.⁴⁰

38. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38 (June 17, 1877).

39. The two additional statements by Brigham Young concerning the cave and the plates are given here. William H. Dame was present when Brigham Young "related a story told to him by Hyrum Smith which was as follows: Joseph, Hyrum, Cowdery, and Whitmere went to the hill Cormorah. As they were walking up the hill, a door opened and they walked into a room about 16 ft square. In that room was an angel and a trunk. On the trunk lay a book of Mormon & gold plates, Laban's sword, Aaron's brestplate." William H. Dame, Diary, manuscript, January 14, 1855, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. On December 11, 1869, Wilford Woodruff heard Brigham Young relate to the Salt Lake School of the Prophets, "President Young said in relation to Joseph Smith returning the Plates of the Book of Mormon that He did not return them to the Box from wh[ence?] He had Received But He went [in?] a Cave in the Hill Comoro with Oliver Cowdry & deposited those plates upon a table or shelf. In that room were deposited a large amount of gold plates Containing sacred records & when they first visited that Room the sword of Laban was Hanging upon the wall & when they last visited it the sword was drawn from the scabbard & [laid?] upon a table & a Messenger who was the keeper of the room informed them that that sword would never be returned to its scabbard untill the Kingdom of God was Esestablished upon the Earth & untill it reigned triumphant over Evry Enemy. Joseph Smith said that Cave Contained tons of Choice Treasures & records." Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983-85), 6:508-9.

40. In 1856, Heber C. Kimball made brief mention of the Nephite depository in the Hill Cumorah. "How does it [the crossing of the plains] compare with the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry? There were books piled

Summary of the 1820–1830 Period

This decade was distinguished by the following: First, the most significant experience of Joseph Smith during this period was the personal visitation of the Father and the Son, who opened the Latter-day dispensation with a personal appearance. This vision is also the only recorded appearance of the two supreme beings during the decade of the 1820s. Second, the period is characterized by a series of visitations from heavenly messengers, including ancient prophets from both hemispheres who appeared to indoctrinate and teach the young seer. Third, Joseph had at least two spiritual encounters with Satan, the first being a vision involving a destructive force immediately before the appearance of the Father and the Son, and the second, a more subtle appearance where Satan was disguised as an angel of light. Fourth, around 1822, Joseph Smith began to receive visions by means of a seer stone. Later, in 1827, he received the Nephite spectacles. Both of these instruments acted as a Urim and Thummim, and by them Joseph Smith received divine light and knowledge. Evidence further suggests that the entire translation process of the Book of Mormon and the receipt of several early revelations through the Urim and Thummim were in essence visionary experiences. Fifth, the Prophet had visions opened to his mind, albeit rarely, during this time period. Sixth, the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery experienced a singular visionary phenomenon when they returned the plates to the Hill Cumorah.

up on tables, book upon book.” *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105 (September 28, 1856). Several years later, Kimball spoke to a missionary meeting at the Church Historians’ Office and “related about Father Smith, Oliver Cowdery and others walking into the Hill Cumorah and seeing records upon records piled upon tables, they walked from cell to cell and saw the records that were piled up.” Brigham Young Manuscript History, May 5, 1867, microfilm of holograph, Church History Library. Orson Pratt made at least four statements attesting to his belief in the Cumorah library. See *Journal of Discourses*, 14:331 (February 11, 1872); 15:183 (September 22, 1872); 17:30 (April 6, 1874); and 17:281–82 (September 20, 1874). David Whitmer believed the cave existed but felt it was in a location other than the Hill Cumorah. See Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 22; A. Karl Larson and Katharine Miles Larson, eds., *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2 vols. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1980), 2:525–26; and Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph*, 14–15.

Joseph Smith's Visions, 1831–1844

From 1831 to 1844, Joseph received personal visitations from the Father and the Son together, the Son alone, other heavenly beings, and Satan. The Prophet also received visions where the method of receiving the vision is not clearly recorded. Examples of those visions will be discussed according to subject or event.

Visions of Beings

Joseph the seer continued to have visions of heavenly and satanic personages. These experiences gave him increasing knowledge of the unseen world.

Visions of the Father and the Son. During the first five years of the 1831–44 period, Joseph Smith was privileged to see both the Father and the Son in vision on at least four occasions. On June 4, 1831, during a four-day conference held in Kirtland, Joseph had a vision of these two beings. Levi Hancock was present and stated that the vision occurred in a schoolhouse on the hill above the Isaac Morley farmhouse, about one mile northeast of the Newel K. Whitney store. Hancock reported that the elders were meeting together when Joseph “stepped out on the floor and said, ‘I now see God, and Jesus Christ at his right hand, let them kill me, I should not feel death as I am now.’”⁴¹ Hancock’s wording suggests a vision similar to that experienced by Stephen, who saw the Father and the Son prior to being stoned before Jewish accusers (Acts 7).

Joseph Smith and his spokesman, Sidney Rigdon, saw the Father and the Son in 1832 in the vision now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 76. Classroom discussions of this vision often focus on the degrees of glory, perdition, and the attendant requirements for each. However, the highlight of the section is a vision of the Father and the Son, the premortal life, and Lucifer’s fall. The vision of the two supreme members of the Godhead was rich and glorious. The manifestation led them to write, “The glory of the Lord shone round about. And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; And saw the holy angels, and them who

41. Levi W. Hancock, “The Life of Levi Ward Hancock,” typescript, 33, Perry Special Collections, quoted in Karl Ricks Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 107–8.

are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever” (D&C 76:19–21). So powerful was the vision of what they both saw and heard, they chose to bear testimony of the Savior, a testimony declaring “that he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father” (D&C 76:22–23).

On March 18, 1833, God the Father and the Son also made a brief personal appearance to members of the School of the Prophets. Two eyewitnesses left a dramatic record of their experience. The first comes years later from Zebedee Coltrin:

At one of these meetings after the organization of the school, . . . when we were all together, Joseph having given instructions, and while engaged in silent prayer, kneeling, with our hands uplifted each one praying in silence, no one whispered above his breath, a personage walked through the room from East to west, and Joseph asked if we saw him. I saw him and suppose the others did, and Joseph answered that is Jesus, the Son of God, our elder brother. Afterward Joseph told us to resume our former position in prayer, which we did. Another person came through; He was surrounded as with a flame of fire.⁴²

In the presence of this personage, Coltrin “experienced a sensation that it might destroy the tabernacle as it was of consuming fire of great brightness.” Joseph Smith identified this personage as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and Coltrin gave the following description:

I saw His hands, His legs, his feet, his eyes, nose, mouth, head and body in the shape and form of a perfect man. . . . This appearance was so grand and overwhelming that it seemed I should melt down in His presence, and the sensation was so powerful that it thrilled through my whole system and I felt it in the marrow of my bones.⁴³

On another occasion, Coltrin stated that as the Father passed through the room, the “glory and brightness was so great . . . that had it continued much longer, I believe it would have consumed us.”⁴⁴ The second testimony of this vision comes from John Murdock:

42. “Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 1883,” October 3, 1883, typescript, 56–57, Church History Library, copy in Perry Special Collections.

43. “Salt Lake City School of Prophets Minute Book, 1883,” October 3, 1883, 57.

44. Zebedee Coltrin, in Utah Stake Minutes, Spanish Fork High Priests, February 5, 1870, Church History Library.

During the winter that I boarded with Brother Joseph . . . we had a number of prayer meetings, in the Prophet's chamber. . . . In one of those meetings the Prophet told us, "If we could humble ourselves before God, and exercise strong faith, we should see the face of the Lord." And about midday the visions of my mind were opened, and the eyes of my understanding were enlightened, and I saw the form of a man, most lovely, the visage of his face was sound and fair as the sun. His hair a bright silver grey, curled in most majestic form; His eyes a keen penetrating blue, and the skin of his neck a most beautiful white and he was covered from the neck to the feet with a loose garment, pure white: Whiter than any garment I have ever before seen. His countenance was most penetrating, and yet most lovely. And while I was endeavoring to comprehend the whole personage from head to feet it slipped from me, and the vision was closed up. But it left on my mind the impression of love, for months, that I had never felt before to that degree.⁴⁵

On January 21, 1836, Joseph Smith was more in heaven than on earth. That day he received at least two, and possibly three, visions of different events. In one of these visions, he saw "the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son" and those who became heirs of the celestial kingdom. It is this portion of the vision that has been canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 137. However, in addition, Joseph observed William E. McLellin proselyting in the South, Brigham Young working in the Southwest, and others bringing about the redemption of Zion. He also saw the Twelve standing together in a foreign land (probably Great Britain). The Prophet indicated they were "much fatiegued, with their clothes tattered and feet swollen, with their eyes cast downward, and Jesus <standing> in their

45. John Murdock, Journal, typescript, 13, Perry Special Collections; also quoted in Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 267. Joseph Smith made brief reference to the appearance of the Savior on this occasion. See "Minute Book 1," 17, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-1/21>; Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), 42; *History of the Church*, 1:334–35.

midst, and they did not behold him, he the Saviour looked upon them and wept.”⁴⁶ Subsequently, he observed that the Twelve had successfully accomplished their work on earth and had entered the celestial city, where the Savior embraced and kissed each one and then crowned them in the presence of God the Father. This vision left such a powerful impression on the Prophet, wrote Heber C. Kimball, “that he never could refrain from weeping while rehearsing it.”⁴⁷

Visions of the Son. In addition to the four appearances of the Father and Son during this five-year span (1831–36), historical sources reveal that Joseph Smith saw Jesus Christ separately on five occasions. Thirteen-year-old Mary Elizabeth Rollins was present when one of these visitations transpired. She remembered the event occurring in 1831, at a meeting of Saints held at the Isaac Morley farm, where the Prophet was the main speaker. She recalled Joseph speaking very solemnly during the meeting. “All at once his countenance changed and he stood mute,” Rollins recounted. “Those who looked at him . . . said there was a search light within him, over every part of his body. I never saw anything like it on the earth. I could not take my eyes off of him. He got so white that anyone who saw him would have thought he was transparent. I . . . thought I could almost see the bones through the flesh.” The Prophet stood silent for several minutes before he asked those present if they knew who had been in their midst. Martin Harris told them it was the Savior, to which the Prophet responded that God had revealed that truth to Martin. He then said, “Brothers and Sisters, . . . the Savior has been here this night and I want to tell you to remember it. There is a veil over your eyes for you could not endure to look upon Him.”⁴⁸

46. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 137, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/138>; Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 168.

47. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: An Apostle, the Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 93–94, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofheberckimb00whitrich/page/92/mode/2up>.

48. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, in Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland*, 112–13.

During an intimate meeting in Kirtland on December 18, 1833, the Prophet experienced a singular vision of the premortal Jehovah ministering to Father Adam in mortality. Scribe Oliver Cowdery noted that while Joseph Smith was setting apart his father, Joseph Smith Sr., as Patriarch to the Church, “the visions of the Almighty were open to his view,” and he beheld a great ancient council meeting at Adam-ondi-Ahman held three years previous to Adam’s death. “The Lord appeared unto them,” Cowdery recorded, and “administered comfort unto Adam.”⁴⁹ In July 1839 during a meeting with the Twelve and the Seventy, Joseph Smith briefly recounted the vision. “I saw Adam in the valley of Ah-dam ondi-ahman,” he said. “The Lord appeared in their midst. & he (Adam) blessed them all.”⁵⁰

Joseph Smith had three additional visions of the Savior during the week of the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. On the day of the dedication, March 27, 1836, Joseph Smith’s journal records that he gave the dedicatory prayer, “Hosannah to God and the Lamb” was sung, and Joseph then

bore testimony of the administering of angels. Presdt Williams also arose and testified that while Presdt Rigdon was making his first

49. See Patriarchal Blessing Book 1 (1835), 9, Church History Library, available as “Blessing to Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, between circa 15 and 28 September 1835,” on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/blessing-to-joseph-smith-sr-and-lucy-mack-smith-between-circa-15-and-28-september-1835/1>; and Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith, Sixth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 34–35. A careful reading of Doctrine and Covenants 107:53–57 indicates that these verses are given almost verbatim with those of the Joseph Smith Sr. December 1833 blessing, thus revealing the initial source.

50. “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Willard Richards,” from Willard Richards Pocket Companion, 65–66, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/>. See also “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Unknown Scribe,” 3, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-unknown-scribe/2>; *History of the Church*, 3:388.

prayer an angel entered the window and <took his> seated himself between father Smith, and himself, and remained their during his prayer Presdt David Whitmer also saw angels in the house.⁵¹

Heber C. Kimball could see the personage from where he sat, describing him as “very tall . . . [with] black eyes, white hair, and stoop shouldered; his garment was whole, extending to near his ankles; on his feet he had sandals. He was sent as a messenger to accept of the dedication.”⁵² The angel that Frederick G. Williams saw on March 27 was evidently the Savior.⁵³ Edward Partridge recorded in his diary, “Sunday the 27 [March 1836] met and dedicated the house of the Lord. Prest. Rigdon preached in the forenoon. Prest. J. Smith Jun made many remarks and delivered the dedication prayer. meet at 8 morn & dismissed ¼ past 4 afternoon Met again in the evening[,] that is the authorities of the church. many spoke in tongues some saw visions &c. Doct. F. G. Williams saw an angel <or rather the Savior> during the fore-noon service.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Newel Knight recorded in his journal, dated March 27, 1836, “When he [Williams] had described the dress and personal appearance of the holy visitor brother Joseph said it was Christ himself. This was to me a satisfaction to know that the Lord did come into the house we had labored so diligently to build to his name, and that he had accepted it of his servants.”⁵⁵

51. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 184–85; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 210–11; *History of the Church*, 2:427. Reminiscing about the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Orson Pratt later declared: “God was there, his angels were there, the Holy Ghost was in the midst of the people, the visions of the Almighty were opened to the minds of the servants of the living God; the vail was taken off from the minds of many; they saw the heavens opened; they beheld the angels of God; they heard the voice of the Lord; and they were filled from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet with the power and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.” *Journal of Discourses*, 18:132 (October 9, 1875).

52. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 91.

53. On this question, see Frederick G. Williams, “An Angelic Personage at the Kirtland Temple Dedication: The Vision of Frederick G. Williams,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2017): forthcoming.

54. Edward Partridge, *Diaries, 1818 and 1835–36*, 40–41, Church History Library.

55. Newel Knight, *Journals and Autobiography*, Allen version, in a private collection, quoted in William G. Hartley, *Stand by My Servant Joseph: The Story*

George A. Smith⁵⁶ and Lydia Knight⁵⁷ also later remembered that the angel was the Savior. A prominent alternate understanding of the identity of this angel is given in Truman Angell's later journal, which says that "the Personage who had appeared in the morning was the Angel Peter [who] had come to accept the dedication."⁵⁸

The Prophet's history for March 30, 1836, three days after the formal dedication, states that "the Saviour made his appearance, . . . while angels ministered unto others."⁵⁹ Although Joseph did not give any additional information concerning this manifestation, Harrison Burgess, a member of the Seventy, was present and provided the following recollection:

I was in a meeting for instruction in the upper part of the [Kirtland] Temple, with about a hundred of the High Priests, Seventies and Elders . . . and I beheld the room lighted up with a peculiar light such as I had never seen before. It was soft and clear and the room looked to me as though it had neither roof nor floor to the building and I beheld the Prophet Joseph and Hyrum Smith and Roger Orton enveloped in the light: Joseph exclaimed aloud, "I behold the Savior, the Son of God." Hyrum said, "I behold the angels of heaven." Brother Orton exclaimed, "I behold the chariots of Israel." All who were in the room felt the power of God to that degree that many

of the Joseph Knight Family and the Restoration (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 241.

56. George A. Smith stated the following concerning the personage in a conference address in 1864: "On the first day of the dedication President Frederick G. Williams, one of the Council of the prophet, and who occupied the upper pulpit, bore testimony that the Savior, dressed in his vesture without seam, came into the stand and accepted of the dedication of the house, that he saw him, and gave a description of his clothing and all things pertaining to it." George Albert Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:10 (November 15, 1864).

57. "Homespun" [Susa Young Gates], *Lydia Knight's History*, vol. 1 of Noble Women's Lives Series (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 33, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/lydiaknightshist00gate/page/32/mode/2up>.

58. Truman O. Angell Sr., "His Journal," in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, comp. Kate B. Carter, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958-77), 10:198.

59. "Journal, 1835-1836," 189; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 215-16; *History of the Church*, 2:432-33.

prophesied, and the power of God was made manifest, the remembrance of which will remain with me while I live upon the earth.⁶⁰

On Sunday, April 3, 1836, Joseph and Oliver, perhaps feeling that a manifestation was about to take place, retired to the veiled Melchizedek Priesthood pulpits in the Kirtland Temple, where a glorious vision of the Lord was opened to them. As stated in Doctrine and Covenants 110, the first and second elder saw Jesus Christ “standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit. . . . His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun” (110:2–3). This occasion is the last documented vision of Joseph Smith seeing the Lord Jesus Christ. Including the First Vision, there is documentation for five visions of the Father and the Son together, and five visions of the Savior individually, totaling ten.

Visions of Other Heavenly Beings. During his years as Church President, Joseph Smith also had visions of, manifestations about, and visitations from ancient prophets and apostles and other heavenly messengers. Father Adam was among the prophets most frequently seen. As stated above, Joseph heard Adam detect Satan when Satan appeared as an angel of light during the 1820–30 period. In addition, on at least three instances Joseph Smith saw Adam in vision during the 1830s. The two most familiar accounts are included in scripture. Joseph saw in vision the great council at Adam-ondi-Ahman, where Adam and other patriarchs—including Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah—as well as all of Adam’s righteous posterity, assembled three years prior to Adam’s death (D&C 107:53–57).⁶¹

Joseph later saw Adam in his vision of the celestial kingdom, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 137. Concerning this vision, Heber C. Kimball stated that Joseph also “saw Adam open the gate of

60. Harrison Burgess, “Sketch of a Well-Spent Life,” in *Labors in the Vineyard: Twelfth Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), 67, available on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/laborsinvineyard12salt#page/66/mode/2up>. On the dating of this vision, see 344n50 herein.

61. See notes 49 and 50 above.

the Celestial City and admit the people one by one.”⁶² The most personal account of Adam in vision is not recorded in scripture. In April 1834, the Prophet held a conference of the Church at Norton, Ohio. There Joseph asked Oliver Cowdery and Zebedee Coltrin to walk with him “to a place where there was some beautiful grass, and grapevines,” Coltrin later recounted. The Prophet then requested they each pray in turn. After praying, Joseph said, “Now breth[r]en . . . we will see some visions.” Joseph lay on the ground, and Oliver and Zebedee rested their heads on his outstretched arms. “The heavens gradually opened,” Coltrin recalled, and the brethren “saw a golden throne, on a circular foundation, something like a light house, and on the throne were two aged personages, having white hair, and clothed in white garments.” These personages were “the two most beautiful and perfect specimens of mankind” Coltrin had ever seen. Joseph called them “our first parents, Adam and Eve.” Coltrin remembered Adam as a “large broad-shouldered man, and Eve as a woman . . . large in proportion.”⁶³ That the Prophet knew Adam’s visage is also evident from a brief statement he made in January 1843, while reminiscing about his deceased brother, Alvin, where Joseph called his oldest brother “a very handsome man, surpassed by none but Adam and Seth.”⁶⁴

The Prophet also saw other angelic ministrants and prophets during this period. As the Kirtland Temple neared completion in early 1836, an outpouring of spiritual appearances by heavenly beings began. On January 21, at a meeting held in the not-yet-dedicated temple,

62. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:41 (March 17, 1861). See also Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 93–94.

63. “Salt Lake City School of the Prophets Minute Book, 1883,” October 11, 1883, 67. The Kirtland High Council Minutes is the source for the date of the conference that took place April 21, 1834. See “Minute Book 1,” 43; Matthew C. Godfrey and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835*, vol. 4 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 14.

64. “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843,” 123, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-1-21-december-1842-10-march-1843/131>; Hedges, Smith, and Anderson, *Journals, Volume 2*, 242; *History of the Church*, 5:247.

angels ministered unto those present, the Prophet reported, “as well as my self. . . . For we all communed with the h[e]avenly host’s.”⁶⁵ Bishop Edward Partridge stated that “a number saw visions & others were blessed with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.”⁶⁶ Oliver Cowdery called the scene “too great to be described, . . . therefore, I only say, that the heavens were opened to many, and great and marvelous things were shown.”⁶⁷ Recorded in the Prophet’s journal for the next day, January 22, is a comparable occurrence: “The heavens were opened, and angels ministered unto us. . . . [They] mingled ~~themselves~~ their voices with ours, while their presence was in our midst.”⁶⁸ On January 28, Joseph saw another glorious vision, which he did not describe.⁶⁹

On the evening of the dedication, March 27, 1836, the priesthood quorums again met in the temple. It was during this meeting that a pentecostal outpouring transpired. The Prophet’s history states:

A voice was heard like the sound of a rushing mighty wind which filled the Temple and all the congregation simultaneously arose being moved upon by an invisible power many began to speak in Tongues and prophecy others saw glorious visions and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels which fact I declared to the <to the congregation> The people of the neighborhood came running together (hearing an unusual sound within and seeing a bright light like a pillar of Fire resting upon— the Temple) and where [were] astonished at what was transpiring.⁷⁰

65. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 139; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 170;

66. Edward Partridge, Journal, January 21, 1836, typescript, Church History Library.

67. Oliver Cowdery, Diary, January–March 1836, MS 3429, Church History Library, available on *Church History Library*, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE4802683, image 11, published in Leonard J. Arrington, “Oliver Cowdery’s Kirtland, Ohio, ‘Sketch Book,’” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (1972): 419.

68. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 140, 141; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 172.

69. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 144; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 175.

70. Addenda note J, “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838],” 3–4 [addenda], Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>

Two or three days later, the leading brethren and quorums met to perform anointings. On this occasion, noted Heber C. Kimball, another heavenly personage appeared—“the beloved disciple John was seen in our midst by the Prophet Joseph, Oliver Cowdery, and others.”⁷¹

The most significant manifestation during this spiritual season in Kirtland occurred a week after the dedication, when the Lord appeared and accepted the temple and the sacrifice of the Saints. Then, following that theophany, the great lawgiver, Moses, appeared and bestowed the keys of gathering. His appearance was followed by a personage, whom the Prophet simply called Elias, who restored the keys associated with the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham. Finally, Elijah, an ancient Israelite prophet, bestowed the keys of the sealing power upon the first and second elders, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 110:11–16). So ended the week in which heaven and earth were brought close together. According to Orson Pratt, “In that Temple, set apart by the servants of God, and dedicated by a prayer that was written by inspiration, the people were blessed as they never had been blessed for generations and generations that were passed and gone.”⁷²

Several of Joseph Smith’s close associates left record of an angel, whose identity was not recorded, visiting him on several occasions. The purpose of these appearances was to encourage the Prophet to move ahead with the principle of celestial marriage. According to one of the Prophet’s celestial wives, this angel appeared three times between 1834 and 1842.⁷³ Another plural wife, Eliza R. Snow, described an angel

paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/306; *History of the Church*, 2:428.

71. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 92. Kimball did not state on what day the anointings took place. However, the events of March 29–30 seem to indicate the appearance must have occurred on one of those two dates. See *History of the Church*, 2:428–33.

72. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:132 (October 9, 1875).

73. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner [1905], as cited in Danel W. Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith” (master’s thesis, Purdue University, 1975), 74. For additional statements about the angel, see Brian C. Hales, “Encouraging Joseph Smith to Practice Plural Marriage: The Accounts of the Angel with a Drawn Sword,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 11 (Fall 2010): 69–70; Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, [1869], as quoted in Bachman, “Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage,” 74; and Benjamin F.

that “stood by him with a drawn sword, [who] told him that, unless he moved forward and established plural marriage, his Priesthood would be taken from him.”⁷⁴

Documents currently available do not record Joseph Smith receiving visitations from heavenly beings after 1842.

Visions of Satan. The Prophet encountered the adversary face-to-face during the 1830s and 40s. In 1831, while returning to Ohio from his first excursion to Missouri, the Prophet received a revelation at McIlwaine's Bend on the Missouri River. This revelation came, according to the Prophet's history, after W. W. Phelps saw Satan, in broad daylight, moving in power upon the surface of the water. Although the record does not indicate how much of this manifestation the Prophet also saw, he knew distinctly who was involved and what had taken place in the vision.

A more direct encounter took place shortly after the Prophet moved into his home in Far West in 1838. Heber C. Kimball related the incident:

One of his children was taken very sick; he laid his hands upon the child, [but] when it got better; as soon as he went out of doors, the child was taken sick again; he again laid his hands upon it, so that it again recovered. This occurred several times, when Joseph inquired of the Lord what it all meant; . . . he had an open vision, and saw the devil in person, who contended with Joseph, face to face, for some time. He said it was his house, it belonged to him, and Joseph had no right there. Then Joseph rebuked Satan in the name of the Lord, and he departed and touched the child no more.⁷⁵

As early as June 1839, Joseph Smith instructed the Twelve, prior to their departure to England, how to differentiate messengers of God from messengers of Satan. At the time the Prophet gave these instructions, Parley P. Pratt was imprisoned in the Columbia, Missouri, jail and did not receive these instructions until returning from Great Britain in

Johnson to George S. Gibbs, April–October 1903, in E. Dale LeBaron, *Benjamin F. Johnson: Friend to the Prophets* (Provo, Utah: Grandin, 1997), 227.

74. Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, One of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1884), 69–70.

75. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 258–59.

1843, when the Prophet taught these principles to him personally. On that occasion, William Clayton recorded Joseph's words, which now comprise section 129, outlining the three grand keys for discerning spirits. This revelation shows that the Prophet evidently had firsthand experience in such matters. When Heber C. Kimball returned from his first mission to Great Britain, he and Joseph took a walk down by the Mississippi River. Heber told the Prophet how he, Orson Hyde, and Willard Richards had been buffeted by Satan when they first arrived in Preston, England. The Prophet then told Brother Kimball about his own contests with the prince of darkness, in which Joseph saw Satan "face to face" and was "handled and afflicted" by him.⁷⁶

Visions of Zion

Although Kirtland was the hub of Mormonism between 1831 and 1838, Joseph focused on the establishment of Zion in Missouri during these years. Through revelations and visionary experiences, the Lord revealed many truths to this modern-day seer about the land where the New Jerusalem would be established. In June 1831, just four months after moving to Ohio from New York, Joseph received a revelation in which the Lord instructed Joseph, Sidney Rigdon, and thirteen pairs of elders to travel to Missouri, where "the land of their inheritance" would "be made known unto them" (D&C 52:5). Joseph later stated that the commandment to travel "to the western boundaries of the State of Missouri" was received "by a heavenly vision" and that the main purpose of the expedition was to "designate the very spot which was to be the central spot, for the commencement of the gathering together of those who embrace the fullness of the everlasting gospel."⁷⁷ Soon after the elders' arrival in Missouri in mid-July, the Prophet alluded to another vision, giving the precise location of Zion: "He manifested himself unto me, and designated to me and others, the very spot upon which he designed to commence the work of the gathering, and the upbuilding of an holy city, which should be called Zion."⁷⁸

76. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:229–30 (March 2, 1856).

77. Joseph Smith Jr. to John Whitmer, printed in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (September 1835): 179.

78. Joseph Smith Jr. to John Whitmer, printed in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (September 1835): 179.

Visions Received during Zion's Camp

The Prophet received two unusual visions in 1834. Following the expulsion of some 1,200 Latter-day Saints from Jackson County in 1833, the Prophet called for a contingent of Saints to travel to Missouri and there assist the exiled Saints in reclaiming their lands. The expedition, known as Zion's Camp, was led by Joseph Smith. After traveling for over a month, on June 3, 1834, near the Illinois River, the expedition came across some peculiar mounds. While surveying one of these formations, the Prophet received a remarkable vision. Seven members of the camp wrote about this event, now known simply as the Zelph story.⁷⁹ Regardless of the many differences in these accounts, Joseph received some divine understanding concerning Zelph, apparently through visionary means, as noted in the following published report:

We encamped on the bank of the river until Tuesday the 3rd during our travels we visited several of the mounds which had been thrown up by the ancient inhabitants of this county, Nephites, Lamanites, &c., and this morning I went up on a high mound, near the river, accompanied by the brethren. . . .

On the top of the mound were stones which presented the appearance of three alters, . . . and human bones were strewn over the surface of the ground. The brethren procured a shovel and hoe, and removing the earth to the depth of about one foot discovered [the] skeleton of a man, almost entire, and between his ribs was a Lamanitish arrow, which evidently produced his death. Elder Brigham Young retained the arrow and the brethren carried some pieces of the skeleton to Clay county. The contemplation of the scenery before us produced peculiar sensations in our bosoms; and the visions of the past being opened to my understanding by the spirit of the Almighty I discovered that the person whose skeleton was before us, was a white Lamanite, a large thick set man, and a man of God. He was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Omandagus, who was known from the hill Cumorah, or Eastern sea, to the Rocky Mountains. His name was Zelph. The curse was taken from him, or at least, in part; one of his thigh bones was broken, by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle years before his death. He was killed in battle, by the

79. Kenneth W. Godfrey has made a thorough examination of each of the accounts, noting their similarities and differences. See Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," *BYU Studies* 29, no. 2 (1989): 31–56.

arrow found among his ribs, during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites.⁸⁰

Joseph received at least one other vision while leading Zion's Camp. It illustrates how the Prophet could receive a vision at almost any time and on almost any matter. Nathan Tanner stated that while traveling with the camp

I had the pleasure of seeing him [Joseph] in a vision when he saw the country over which we had traveled in a high state of cultivation. This was while he was riding, and when he camped, he had a wagon run out in the middle of the corral of wagons, and got up into it, and told the camp what he had seen while in the Spirit. It was glorious and grand to hear.⁸¹

Visions of Church Organization

The Prophet received visionary instruction concerning Church structure and organization. During the first part of February 1835, Joseph Smith called for a meeting of the men who had participated in Zion's Camp. Brigham and Joseph Young met with the Prophet a week prior to the meeting. At that time, President Smith told the two brothers, "I have seen those men who died of the cholera in our camp; and the Lord knows, if I get a mansion as bright as theirs, I ask no more." As Joseph Young remembered this meeting, the Prophet "wept, and for some time could not speak." This vision apparently included information about the organization of the Council of the Twelve and the Quorums of Seventy. After Joseph Smith told the Young brothers about his vision, he informed Brigham that he would be called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, not yet organized, and "proceeded to enlarge upon the duties of [the Twelve's] calling." Turning next to Joseph Young, the Prophet said, "Brother Joseph, the Lord has made you President of the Seventies."⁸² These councils were organized

80. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 6 (January 1, 1846): 1076; "History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1," 483; *History of the Church*, 2:79–80. These accounts are written as if Joseph Smith were telling the story.

81. Nathan Tanner, "Reminiscences," in George S. Tanner, *John Tanner and His Family* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1974), 382–83.

82. *History of the Church*, 2:181n.

later in the month—the Quorum of the Twelve on February 14, 1835, and the Seventy on February 28. The following month, the Prophet dictated section 107, which connects these councils to a visionary experience. “And it is according to the vision showing the order of the Seventy, that they should have seven presidents to preside over them, chosen out of the number of the seventy” (D&C 107:93). Perhaps it was in part this vision of Church councils to which Joseph Smith referred when, according to Parley P. Pratt, he explained to the Twelve shortly before his death, “I have now finished the work which was laid upon me, by committing to you all things for the building up of the kingdom according to the heavenly vision, and the pattern shown me from heaven.”⁸³

Visions of the Future

Joseph Smith saw events in the near and distant future. The year 1831 opened with Joseph Smith and several other leading elders receiving a unique vision of the Church in the future. Among these elders was Sidney Rigdon, who was converted to Mormonism in Kirtland in November 1830 by four missionaries en route to Indian Territory on the western borders of Missouri (see D&C 32). Soon after his conversion, Rigdon journeyed to New York to meet the Prophet. He took with him

83. Parley P. Pratt, “Proclamation,” *Millennial Star* 5 (March 1845): 151. See also Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 258–60. It is likely Joseph Smith received a vision of the purpose and function of other types of Church councils, particularly the high council, at least a year prior to receiving his understanding concerning the Twelve and the Seventy. At a meeting of high priests in February 1834, he explained in explicit detail the decorum that existed in ancient councils. See “Minute Book 1,” 27–28; Dirkmaat and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 3*, 429–30. One week later he proceeded to organize the Kirtland High Council (see D&C 102). Then in July of that same year, while in Clay County with Zion’s Camp, he organized the high council in Missouri. See “Minute Book 2,” 43, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/45>; *History of the Church*, 2:122–24. At one time the Mormon leader declared that all Church councils were to be conducted according to an ancient pattern that had been shown him by “vision.” “Minute Book 1,” 29–30; Joseph Smith, February 17, 1834, in Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier’s, 1996), 24.

Edward Partridge, who was not yet baptized. The two men arrived at Joseph Sr. and Lucy's home on the Seneca River on December 10, 1830. They stayed for several weeks and were present at the conference held in Fayette during the first week of January. Fourteen years later, while addressing the Saints in Nauvoo, Rigdon reflected on this conference and recalled how small the Church had been in 1831. He remarked, "I met the whole church of christ in a little old log house about 20 feet square"—referring to the Whitmer farmhouse. Then continuing, he added, "we knew fourteen years ago that the church would become as large as it is to-day," for, "we saw by vision, the church of God, a thousand times larger."⁸⁴

The Prophet received another interesting vision either prior to his departure to Ohio in January 1831 or while en route. Like Rigdon, Newel K. Whitney encountered Mormonism through the preaching of the missionaries on their way to teach the Lamanites. After joining the Church, Whitney was unable to travel with Rigdon and Partridge to New York to meet Joseph Smith and instead remained behind, apparently petitioning the Lord to bring Joseph to Ohio. According to Whitney family tradition, Joseph had a vision of Whitney praying for the Prophet to come to Kirtland. When the Prophet and his company pulled up in front of Whitney's store on February 1, Joseph

alighted, and springing up the steps, walked into the store. Upon seeing Whitney the Prophet said, "Newel K. Whitney! Thou art the man!" meaning that he was the person whom he had seen in his vision. The storekeeper "could not call [Joseph] by name" so he enquired as to who he was. With obvious reference to his vision the Mormon leader responded, "I am Joseph, the Prophet. . . . You've prayed me here; now what do you want of me?"⁸⁵

The experience no doubt helped confirm in Whitney's mind the power that attended the youthful prophet.

84. "History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]," 1951–52, Church History Library, available on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/323>; *History of the Church*, 6:289.

85. Orson F. Whitney, "Newel K. Whitney," *Contributor* 6 (January 1885): 125; *History of the Church*, 1:146n.

Joseph's visions of the future included views of kingdoms and eternal worlds. Doctrine and Covenants 76 and 137 are the best examples. He also saw the tragic events of the last days as well as the glories of the Resurrection.

On July 2, 1839, the Prophet addressed several members of the Twelve prior to their departure to Great Britain. During his remarks, he referred to some of the things the Lord had revealed to him concerning the wickedness of men, future wars, and the destruction that awaits the disobedient. "I saw men hunting the lives of their own sons," Joseph explained, "brother murdering brother, women killing their own daughters & daughters seeking the lives of their mothers. I saw armies arrayed against armies. I saw blood, desolation, & fires &c. . . . These things are at our doors."⁸⁶

Tragic visions such as these were offset by more hopeful visionary experiences. While speaking at the funeral of Lorenzo D. Barnes in 1843, Joseph Smith reflected on the death of some of his own family members, particularly his father. He discussed the sanctity of the body and the need for a proper and honorable burial, and then he stated his desire to be buried beside his father and mother and other family members and friends. "Would you think it strange if I relate what I have seen in vision in relation to this interesting theme?" he asked.

I actually saw men, before they had ascend[e]d from the tomb, as though they were getti[n]g up slowly, they tooke each othe[r] by the hand & it was my father & my Son. my mother & my daughter. <my brother & my sister> & when the voice calls, suppose I am laid by the side of my fathe[r].— what would be the first Joy of my heart? where is my fathr. my mother. my sister. they are by my side <I embrace them. & they me.>⁸⁷

86. "Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Willard Richards," 71; *History of the Church*, 3:391.

87. "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2," 144; Hedges, Smith, and Anderson, *Journals, Volume 2*, 360; *History of the Church*, 5:361–62. Wilford Woodruff recorded portions of this sermon in his journal. He quoted the Prophet as saying: "In speaking of the resurrection I would say that God hath shown unto me a vision of the resurrection of the dead & I saw the graves open & the saints as they arose took each other by the hand even before they got up or while getting up & great Joy & glory rested upon them." Woodruff, *Journal*, 2:227 (April 16, 1843).

Visions of Temple Patterns

Like Moses, David, and Solomon, who obtained divine knowledge pertaining to the construction of Israel's tabernacle in the wilderness and temple in Jerusalem, Joseph Smith received visionary understanding on the basic architectural design, construction, and function of four temples—Kirtland, Independence, Far West, and Nauvoo. Joseph received a divine commission to erect a temple in Kirtland in late 1832, several months before the pattern was revealed to him (see D&C 88:119–20). The Lord instructed the Saints to build “after the manner which I shall show unto three of you” (D&C 95:14). Those three, according to Truman O. Angell, the temple's primary craftsman, comprised the First Presidency of the Church. Frederick G. Williams, the Prophet's Second Counselor, told Angell, “Joseph received the word of the Lord for him to take his two counselors . . . and come before the Lord and He would show them the plan or model of the House to be built.” Williams continued:

We went upon our knees, called on the Lord, and the Building appeared within viewing distance. I being the first to discover it. Then all of us viewed it together. After we had taken a good look at the exterior, the Building seemed to come right over us, and the Makeup of this Hall [the lower auditorium] seemed to coincide with what I there saw to a minutia.⁸⁸

Scriptural evidence indicates that patterns for the Independence, Far West, and Nauvoo Temples were also given in vision. Concerning

88. Angell, “His Journal,” 10:198. Lyndon W. Cook has given substantial historical evidence that indicates section 95 was actually received in early June 1833, while section 94 was received in August, some two months after section 95. As further evidence of this, Cook states that “verses 1–2 of section 94 indicate that the pattern for constructing the Kirtland Temple had already been given.” Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 195. In D&C 94:3–12, Joseph Smith was instructed to build a house for the Presidency and a house for printing, the patterns of which were also to be revealed. Whether the patterns for these two buildings were ever given is not known. For more on the pattern of the Kirtland Temple, see Elwin C. Robison, *The First Mormon Temple: Design, Construction, and Historic Context of the Kirtland Temple* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 7–26.

the temple in Jackson County, the Lord stated on August 2, 1833, “Verily I say unto you, that it is my will that a house should be built unto me in the land of Zion, like unto the pattern which I have given you” (D&C 97:10). On June 25, 1833, over a month before receiving section 97, Joseph Smith had sent Church leaders in Jackson County detailed instructions concerning the size, features, and function of the temple complex in Independence plus an explanation of the layout and arrangement of the city of Zion. From this information, one might infer that Joseph Smith received the pattern of the city of Zion together with the vision shown to him for the temples of that early era.⁸⁹

Concerning the temple at Far West, Joseph Smith received the following set of instructions:

But let a house be built unto my name according to the pattern which I will show unto them. And if my people build it not according to the pattern which I shall show unto their presidency, I will not accept it at their hands. But if my people do build it according to the pattern which I shall show unto their presidency, even my servant Joseph and his counselors, then I will accept it at the hands of my people. (D&C 115:14–16; see also vv. 10–13)

This particular revelation specifically states the pattern would be given to the First Presidency. Any such revelation was not documented but must have been received before summer 1838, when the cornerstones were laid and construction began.⁹⁰

89. See “History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1,” 305–9; *History of the Church*, 1:357–62.

90. The Far West Temple revelation was received on April 26, 1838. “Journal, March–September 1838,” 32–34, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-march-september-1838/18>; Jesse, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 258. Four days later, Thomas B. Marsh wrote a letter wherein he indicated the “plan is yet to be shown to the First presidency.” See Thomas B. Marsh to Wilford Woodruff, April 30, 1838, Wilford Woodruff Papers, Church History Library, published in *Elders’ Journal* 1 (July 1838): 38, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/6>. The cornerstones of the temple were subsequently laid on July 4, 1838. “Celebration of the 4th of July,” *Elders’ Journal* 1 (August 1838): 60. During summer and fall 1838, work on the temple proceeded slowly due to the Missouri persecutions. According to Missourian William A. Wood, the walls were built

The Nauvoo Temple stood as a crowning monument to the life and mission of the Prophet. God was the architect, but Joseph was the engineer. “And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house, and the priesthood thereof, and the place whereon it shall be built. And ye shall build it on the place where you have contemplated building it, for that is the spot which I have chosen for you to build it” (D&C 124:42–43). Three other temple-building passages specifically state that the pattern would be revealed by the Lord, and the Prophet’s history makes it clear that a pattern was indeed given. In February 1844, the Prophet called on William Weeks, temple architect. In Weeks’s drawings, Joseph Smith noticed semicircular windows in the half stories separating the upper and lower halls. The Prophet politely instructed Weeks that the windows should be completely circular. Weeks protested, stating that circular windows were “a violation of all the known rules of architecture.” Determined to have circular windows, Joseph responded, “I wish you to carry out my designs. I have seen in vision the splendid appearance of that building illuminated and will have it built according to the pattern shewn me.”⁹¹

Visionary Dreams

Holy writ teaches that certain dreams can be visions or views sent from God. Ancient scripture contains numerous examples of God communicating to his servants visually through dreams. However, an examination of the historical sources leads to the conclusion that Joseph Smith did not receive most of his divine understanding through dreams in the night. Apparently, God chose more direct methods of communicating to him. Although the Prophet told of some of his dreams, he did not usually interpret what he envisioned in those dreams.

to a height of two or two and a half feet. See William A. Wood, “An Old Mormon City in Missouri,” *Magazine of American History* 16 (1886): 99; and Cook, *Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 237.

91. “History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1,” 1875–76; *History of the Church*, 6:196–97; underlining in original.

On January 28, 1836, Joseph recorded, “While my eyes were closed in sleep the visions of the Lord were sweet unto me & his glory was round about me.”⁹² On January 20, 1843,

Joseph told his dream in council— I dreamd. this morni[n]g that I was in the Lobby of the Representative Hall. at Springfield. when some of the members who did not like my being there. began to mar & cut. & pound my shins with pieces of Iron.— I bore it as long as I could. then Jumped over the rail into the hall. caught a rod of Iron. & went at them cursing & swearing at them in the most awful manner. & drove them all out of the hou[s]e I went to the door & told them to send me a clerk & will <would> make some laws <that would do good>

There was quite a collection aro[un]d the <state> house trying to raise an army to take me.— & there were many horses— tied round the square. I thought th[e]y would not have the privilege of getting me so. I took a rod of Iron & mowed my way. through their way <ranks> looking after their best race horrsse thinki[n]g they might catch me when the[y] could find me when I was awake.)⁹³

Joseph later dreamed that the writing of his history “must go a head before any thing else.”⁹⁴

On February 2, 1844, he told the following dream to Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, and W. W. Phelps:

I was standing on a peninsula, in the midst of a vast body of water, where there appeared to be a large harbor or pier built out for boats to come into, I was surrounded by my friends, and while looking at this harbor I saw a steamboat approaching the harbor, there were bridges on the pier for persons to cross; and there came up a wind and drove the steamboat under one of the bridges and upset it. I ran up to the boat, expecting the persons would all drown, and wishing

92. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 144; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, *Journals, Volume 1*, 175; *History of the Church*, 2:387.

93. “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1,” 141–43; Hedges, Smith, and Anderson, *Journals, Volume 2*, 247; *History of the Church*, 5:254–55.

94. “History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1,” 1553; Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers, eds., *Journals, Volume 3: May 1843–June 1844*, vol. 3 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 18–19; *History of the Church*, 5:394.

to do some thing to assist them, I put my hand against the side of the boat, and with one surge I shoved it under the bridge, and righted it up, and then told them to take care of themselves, but it was not long before I saw them starting out into the channel or main body of the water again. The storms were raging, and the waters rough. I said to my friends, that if they did not understand the signs of the times and the spirit of prophecy they would be apt to be lost. It was but a few moments after when we saw the waves break over the boat, and she soon foundered, and went down with all on board. The storm and waters were still very rough yet I told my friends around me that I believed I could stem those waves and storm, and swim in the waters better than the steam boat did, at any rate I was determined to try it, but my friends laughed at me and told me I could not stand at all, but would be drowned. The waters looked clear and beautiful though exceedingly rough, and I said I believed I could swim and I would try it anyhow: they said I would drown; I said I would have a frolic in the water first if I did, and I dove off into the raging waves; I had swam but a short distance, when a towering wave overwhelmed <me> for a time, but I soon found myself on the top of it, and soon I met the second wave in the same way, and for a while I struggled hard to live in the midst of the storm, and waves, <and> soon found I gained upon every wave and skimmed the torrent better and better, and I soon had power to swim with my head out of water, so the waves did not break over me at all, and I found that I had swam a great distance, and in looking about me I saw my brother Samuel by my side. I asked him how he liked it, he said first rate, and I thought so too, I was soon enabled to swim with my head and shoulders out of water, and I could swim as fast as any steamboat. In a little time it became calm, and I could rush through the water and only go into my loins, and soon I only went into my knees, and finally could tread on the top of the water and went almost with the speed of an arrow. I said to Samuel see how swift I can go: I thought it was great sport and pleasure to travel with such speed, and I awoke.⁹⁵

On June 13, 1844, Joseph reported a dream of struggling:

Evening, I attended meeting in the Seventies Hall; Geo. J. Adams preached, <and I made some observations afterwards, and related a dream which I had > <had a short time since. I thought I was riding out in my carriage, and my guardian angel was along with me;

95. "History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1," 1874–75; *History of the Church*, 6:194–95.

we went past the Temple, and had not gone much further before we espied two large snakes so fast locked together that neither of them had any power. I enquired of my guide what I was to understand by that; he answered “those snakes represent D^r. Foster and Chauncey L. Higbee— they are your enemies, and <desire to> destroy you, but you see they are so fast locked together that they have no power of themselves to hurt you”. I then thought I was riding up Mullholland Street, but my guardian angel was not along with me. On arriving at the Prairie I was overtaken and seized by Wm & Wilson Law and others saying “Ah, Ah! we have got you at last, we will secure you and put you in a safe place”; and without any ceremony, dragged me out of my carriage, tied my hands behind me, and threw me into a deep dry pit, where I remained in a perfectly helpless condition, and <they> went away. While struggling to get out I heard Wilson Law screaming for help hard by; I managed to unloose myself so as to make a spring, when I caught hold of some grass which grew at the edge of the pit; I looked out of the pit and saw Wilson Law at a little distance attacked by ferocious wild beasts and heard him cry out “Oh brother Joseph, come and save me”. I replied “I cannot for you have put me into this deep pit”. On looking out another way I saw William Law with outstretched tongue, blue in the face; and the green poison forced out of his mouth caused by the coiling of a large snake round his body; it had also grabbed him by the arm a little above the elbow ready to devour him. He cried out in the intensity of his agony “Oh brother Joseph, brother Joseph come and save me or I die”. I also replied to him “I cannot William— I would willingly, but you have tied me and put me in this pit and I am powerless to help you or to liberate myself”. In a short time after my guide came and said aloud “Joseph, Joseph! what are you doing there? I replied “my enemies fell upon me, bound me, and threw me in”. He then took me by the hand, drew me out of the pit, set me free, and we went away rejoicing.⁹⁶

And on June 27, the day of his martyrdom, Joseph reported that he had the following dream the previous night:

I was back in Kirtland, Ohio, and thought I would take a walk out by myself, and view my old farm, which I found grown up with weeds

96. “History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” 94, Church History Library, available on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/100>; *History of the Church*, 6:461–62.

and brambles, and altogether bearing evidence of neglect and want of culture. I went into the barn which I found without floor or doors, with the weather boarding off, and was altogether in keeping with the farm. While I viewed the desolation around me, and was contemplating how it might be recovered from the curse upon it, there came rushing into the barn a company of furious men, who commenced to pick a quarrel with me. The leader of the party ordered me to leave the barn and <the> farm, stating it was none of mine, and that I must give up all hope of ever possessing it. I told him the farm was given me by the Church, and although I had not had any use of it for some time back, still I had not sold it, and according to righteous principles it belonged to me or the Church. He then grew furious, and began to rail upon me and threaten me, and said it never did belong to me nor the Church. I then told him that I did not think it worth contending about; that I had no desire to live upon it in its present state, and if he thought he had a better right I would not quarrel with him about it, but leave; but my assurance that I would not trouble him at present did not seem to satisfy him, as he seemed determined to quarrel with me, and threatened me with the destruction of my body. While he was thus engaged, pouring out his bitter words upon me, a rabble rushed in and nearly filled the barn, drew out their knives, and began to quarrel among themselves for the premises; and for a moment forgot me, at which time I took the opportunity to walk out of the barn about up to my ankles in mud. When I was a little distance from the barn I heard them screeching and screaming in a very distressed manner, as it appeared they had engaged in a general fight with their knives. While they were thus engaged the dream or vision ended.⁹⁷

Conclusion

On October 9, 1843, Joseph Smith spoke at the funeral services of James Adams. “Could you gaze into heaven five minutes,” he remarked, “you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.”⁹⁸ He was privileged to view the heavens not just for five minutes but for extended periods on many occasions. As far as historical records indicate, Joseph Smith received more documentable visions than any other prophet, past or present. His

97. “History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1,” 177–78; *History of the Church*, 6:609–10.

98. “History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1,” 1750; Hedges, Smith, and Rogers, *Journals, Volume 3*, 109; *History of the Church*, 6:50.

receiving numerous visions occurred in part because he was called and appointed to bring about the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21).

But Joseph's calling as a seer also came because of his spiritual capacity and sensitivity. As Brigham Young taught, “There are thousands in the world who are natural born Seers, but when the Lord selected Joseph Smith to be his vice-regent and mouthpiece upon the earth in this dispensation, he saw that he would be faithful and honor his calling.”⁹⁹

Extolling the visionary gifts of Joseph Smith, President John Taylor penned a poem entitled “The Seer,” which was later set to music by Ebenezer Beesley. A portion of its first stanza follows:

The seer;—the seer:—Joseph the seer—
 I'll sing of the Prophet ever dear:
 His equal now cannot be found,—
 By searching the wide world around.
 With Gods he soared, in the realms of day;
 And men he taught the heavenly way.
 The earthly seer! the heavenly seer,

 He gazed on the past, on the present too;—
 And oped the heav'nly world to view.¹⁰⁰

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99. “Tabernacle,” *Deseret News Weekly*, December 26, 1860, 337, available on J. Willard Marriott Library, *Utah Digital Newspapers*, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?core=udn&id=2585856#children_2585856, quoted in Ronald W. Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” *BYU Studies* 24 (fall 1984): 468.

100. John Taylor, “The Seer,” broadside (n.p.: John Taylor, c. 1844–45), Perry Special Collections, available on “Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://cdm15999.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/13779>; reprinted as “The Seer, Joseph the Seer,” in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1927), no. 96.