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# The Lost Manuscript

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D&C 3:12–13

In April 1828 Martin Harris journeyed to the home of Joseph Smith in Harmony, Pennsylvania. There he commenced writing as Joseph translated the Book of Lehi, the first abridged book in a series of books inscribed on the gold plates. After a while, Martin asked Joseph for “liberty to carry the writings home and show them” to his wife, Lucy, and other family members. “[He] desired of me that I would inquire of the Lord, through the Urim and Thummim, if he might not do so,” Joseph wrote. “I did inquire, and the answer was that he must not.”<sup>1</sup>

Martin asked a second and third time before permission was granted to show the 116 manuscript pages to his wife, Lucy, his brother Preserved Harris, his father and mother, Nathan and Rhoda Harris, and Polly Harris Cobb, a sister of his wife. Martin agreed to the specified conditions. He entered into a written covenant with Joseph “in a most solemn manner that he would not do otherwise than had been directed [and] required of him.”<sup>2</sup>

On June 14, 1828, about two months after the translation process had begun, Martin “took the writings, and went his way.”<sup>3</sup> He had the manuscript of the Book of Lehi in his possession for three weeks or until about July 7, 1828. It is assumed that Martin showed the manuscript to the family members named, but nothing is written on the subject. What is written is that Martin showed the manuscript to others. “A very particular friend of his made him a visit, to whom he related all that he knew concerning the record. The man’s curiosity was much excited, and, as might be expected, he earnestly desired to see the manuscript. Martin was anxious to gratify his friend” and showed him the manuscript.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], p. 9. Joseph Smith Papers.

<sup>2</sup> History, 1838–1856, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:21.

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, p. 7. Joseph Smith Papers.

Having broken his covenant once, it was easier for Martin the next time to do the same. As days passed, Martin showed the manuscript to others, or as Joseph Smith wrote, "Notwithstanding . . . the great restrictions which he had been laid under, and the solemnity of the covenant which he had made with me, he did show them to others."<sup>5</sup>

When Martin did not return to Harmony, Pennsylvania, as promised, Joseph determined to journey to Palmyra to see Martin and recover the manuscript. Mother Smith reported that as soon as Joseph arrived at her farmhouse, he requested that Martin be summoned at once. Anticipating his quick response, at 8:00 a.m. victuals were set on the table.

The Smiths "waited till nine, and he came not—till ten, and he was not there—till eleven, still he did not make his appearance." It was not until "half-past twelve" that Martin was seen "walking with a slow and measured tread towards the house, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground." When he reached the gate in the yard, "he stopped, instead of passing through, and got upon the fence, and sat there some time with his hat drawn over his eyes."

When he entered the house, he sat down at the table next to those who were already seated. "He took up his knife and fork as if he were going to use them, but immediately dropped them." Seeing this, Hyrum Smith asked, "Martin, why do you not eat? are you sick?"

Martin pressed "his hands upon his temples" and cried with "a tone of deep anguish, 'Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!'"

Joseph, who was seated at the table, jumped to his feet and asked, "Martin, have you lost that manuscript? Have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head, as well as your own?"

"Yes, it is gone," replied Martin, "and I know not where."

"Oh, my God!" said Joseph, clenching his hands. "All is lost! all is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God. I should have been satisfied with the first answer which I received from the Lord; for he told me that it was not safe to let the writing go out of my possession." Joseph then "wept and groaned, and walked the floor continually."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, History of the Church, 1:21.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, pp. 130–131. Joseph Smith Papers.