Section 5

About a year after Martin Harris went to Pennsylvania to scribe for Joseph, he arrived there again in spring 1829. This time he said his neighbors were gathering evidence for a lawsuit and threatening to put him in jail if he did not condemn Joseph for deception. Martin said he needed to know, really know, that Joseph had plates engraved with ancient, sacred writings.1

The Lord spoke to that situation but not to Martin. In sections 4 and 6 and dozens of others, the Lord spoke through Joseph to his father or Oliver Cowdery or others. In section 5, it seems like the Lord was not on speaking terms with Martin. Rather, the Lord told Joseph that Martin’s desire for more evidence could be granted if Martin chose to meet the conditions of humility, faith, and patience.

The Lord told Joseph to remind Martin that Joseph was under covenant not to show the plates to anyone unless commanded, implying a stinging reminder to Martin, the covenant breaker who showed off the translation manuscript and lost it, contrary to his solemn promise.

The Lord told Joseph he intended to select three witnesses to testify. He would show them the plates and their witness would accompany His words to all mankind. However, the Lord made it clear that seeing is not believing.

This revelation reoriented Martin. He came to the Lord saying, “Show me and I’ll believe. And let me prove to others so they’ll believe.” With Joseph as mediator, the Lord responded that he would show Martin after he chose to believe and to be humble, not before. Martin eventually received the greater witness he sought. He became one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates and artifacts. That happened after he chose to meet the conditions the Lord set in section 5, not before.

Chapter 4 in The Book of Commandments.