

Text and Commentary

JOSEPH SMITH—HISTORY

AN EXTRACT FROM THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET

PROLOGUE: THE PURPOSE
BEHIND THE HISTORY

Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons in relation to the rise and progress of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world—I have been induced to write this history to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church, so far as I

have such facts in my possession.² In this history I shall present the various events in relation to this Church, in truth and righteousness, as they have transpired, or as they at present exist, being now the eighth year since the organization of the said Church.

THE JOSEPH SMITH SR. FAMILY

³ I was born in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five, on the twenty-third day of December, in the town of Sharon, Windsor county, State of Vermont. My father, Joseph Smith, Sen., left the State of Vermont, and moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) county, in

1:1–2 At the outset of this history, the Prophet specifies the purpose behind his writing. Events leading up to the drafting of this history included the tribulations of the Kirtland apostasy of 1837 and the mounting tensions that eventually exploded as the Missouri Mormon War of 1838, which ended with Joseph Smith's incarceration in Liberty Jail that winter. In addition, since the founding of the Church in 1830, publications that sought to discredit Joseph and the Church continued to multiply and circulate (compare Doctrine and Covenants 123:1–6). The intent behind the 1838 history and Joseph Smith's sometimes defensive, even defiant language is made more comprehensible in this historical context. **1:3** *The Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith Family*. Joseph Smith Sr. (1771–1840) and Lucy Mack (1775–1856) were married in Tunbridge, Vermont, on January 24, 1796. Both came from multigenerational New England families. Their first unnamed son died in childbirth in 1797 and is left unmentioned by the Prophet in this brief family history (as is another brother, Ephraim, who died less than two weeks after his birth in 1810). Here the Prophet names his surviving siblings by age starting with his brothers and then his sisters. When left unadjusted for gender and survival into adulthood, the order of the children in the family goes unnamed son (1797), Alvin (1798–1823), Hyrum (1800–1844), Sophronia (1803–1876), Joseph Jr. (1805–1844), Samuel Harrison (1808–1844), Ephraim (1810), William (1811–1893), Katharine (1813–1900), Don Carlos (1816–1841), and Lucy (1821–1882). *Missing content*. An addendum penned by scribe Willard Richards on or before December 2, 1842, recounts episodes from the Prophet's boyhood, such as the harrowing experience of having his leg operated on after contracting typhus fever and the abuse the boy suffered at the hands of a certain Caleb Howard, who had been hired by Joseph Sr. to help move the family to New York. An interlinear note here in the manuscript from Richards alerts

the State of New York, when I was in my tenth year, or thereabouts. In about four years after my father's arrival in Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester in the same county of Ontario, ⁴ his family consisting of eleven souls, namely, my father, Joseph Smith; my mother, Lucy Smith (whose name, previous to her marriage, was Mack, daughter of Solomon Mack); my brothers, Alvin (who died November 19th, 1823, in the 26th year of his age), Hyrum, myself, Samuel Harrison, William, Don Carlos; and my sisters, Sophronia, Catherine, and Lucy.

REVIVALISM IN WESTERN NEW YORK

⁵ Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, "Lo, here!" and others, "Lo, there!" Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presby-

readers to this content, but it appeared too late for the *T&S* and *MS* printings of the history, and consequently the 1851 edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*. Another addendum here in the manuscript provides the birth information and paternal genealogy of Joseph Sr. (see also the commentary at Joseph Smith—History 1:20, 27–28). **1:4** *The Year of Alvin Smith's Death*. In the manuscript the date of Alvin's death is provided as November 19, 1823, in an interlinear insertion by Willard Richards. This is the date found on Alvin's tombstone, which is still standing in the Palmyra, New York, cemetery. In the published version of the history in both the *T&S* and the *MS* as well as in the 1851 edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*, the date is not provided. In a history prepared between 1834 and 1836, Joseph mistakenly gave the date of Alvin's death as November 19, 1825. The 1902 edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* prepared by James E. Talmage also incorrectly gave the date as November 19, 1824, an error that was perpetuated until the 1981 edition. *The move to Palmyra, New York*. Joseph Sr. moved to Palmyra, New York, in the summer of 1816. Lucy and the children, including Joseph Jr., left for New York to meet Joseph Sr. later that winter. Before moving to Palmyra, Joseph Sr. and Lucy had lived in multiple towns in Vermont and New Hampshire (including Tunbridge, Vermont; Randolph, Vermont; Royalton, Vermont; Sharon, Vermont; Lebanon, New Hampshire; and Norwich, Vermont). *The move to Manchester, New York*. Manchester Township lies just a few miles south of the Palmyra village to which the Smith family relocated between 1816 and 1817. During the winter of 1818–1819 the family moved into a log home that was adjacent to forested land in Manchester. Although the forested land was in Manchester Township, the cabin itself was still in Palmyra Township (but not the village). **1:5** *The timing of the First Vision*. Here the Prophet places the timing of the events leading to the First Vision as beginning "some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester," meaning 1819–1820. In a previous history (JS1832) he specified that he became "seriously impressed" with religious matters and the welfare of his soul "at about the age of twelve years," meaning in 1818. Harmonizing the accounts indicates that the events leading up to the First Vision (Joseph's personal quest for salvation, his concern over the contention he saw between religious denominations and local revivalism) took place

terian, and some for the Baptist. ⁶ For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased. Yet when the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert, so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a

strife of words and a contest about opinions. ⁷ I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My father's family was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that church, namely, my mother Lucy; my brothers Hyrum and Samuel Harrison; and my sister Sophronia.

YOUNG JOSEPH'S CONFUSION OVER THE RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENT

⁸ During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness. But though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist

between the years 1818 and 1820. *Revivals in the Palmyra, New York, area*. Historians have documented religious revivals and camp meetings occurring in the “region of country” or “the whole district of country” near Palmyra (or western New York more generally) beginning in 1818. Although the 1838 history seems to place this activity principally in 1820, it does not confine it to only Palmyra. In light of Joseph's other histories (primarily JS1832), a broader chronological perspective should be kept in mind. *Methodism, Presbyterianism, and Baptists*. In addition to these three branches of Protestantism, the early United States was home to Congregationalists, Quakers, Shakers, Episcopalians, Universalists, and other groups in a diverse religious cultural landscape. Joseph, by his own account, favored Methodism (1:8) but did not join the movement, while his mother, Hyrum, Samuel, and Sophronia joined the Presbyterians (1:7). Joseph Sr. was attracted to Universalism and was otherwise religiously unaffiliated, as were Joseph's brothers Alvin and William. 1:7 Joseph's age at the time of the First Vision is given here as occurring in his “fifteenth year” (meaning when he was fourteen years old). Elsewhere in this account, Joseph gives his age as “between fourteen and fifteen years of age” (1:22) and “a little over fourteen years of age” (1:23) at the time of the event. In other histories Joseph gave his age as “in the 16th year of my age” (JS1832), “about 14 years old” (JS1835), and “about fourteen years of age” (JS1842). The age given in the 1838 history is consistent with the 1835 and 1842 histories and with contemporary secondhand accounts (OP1840, OH1842, DNW1843). Joseph's age in the 1832 history was inserted interlineally by scribe Frederick G. Williams and is off by one year in the other accounts (Joseph would have been fifteen years old in the sixteenth year of his age). Assuming the stated age in the 1832 history came from Joseph and not from Williams, it merely indicates a lapse in memory or

sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them. But so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong.⁹ My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.¹⁰ In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, “What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right, or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?”

JOSEPH TURNS TO THE BIBLE

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

poor arithmetic on the Prophet’s part. **1:11** The first of many scriptural citations in the 1838 history appears here. The language at 1:5 draws from Luke 17:21 (“Lo, here! Lo, there!”), but this is the first overt scriptural citation. James 1:5, however, was not the only biblical passage that Joseph drew inspiration from as he wrestled with which faith to join. His 1835 account (JS1835) reports that Matthew 7:7 also prompted him to seek God in prayer. Additionally, the 1832 history (JS1832) recounts the influence of Hebrews 13:8 and Psalm 14:1 on young Joseph’s thinking at the time. But as the Prophet indicates here, it was James 1:5 that had the most profound effect on him, as also mentioned in the other contemporary first- and second-hand renditions of the First Vision. **1:13** Joseph’s primary motivation to seek God in prayer in this account is to resolve his confusion over which denomination to join. In the 1832 history (JS1832) the emphasis is on Joseph seeking forgiveness for his sins. These motives are not mutually exclusive. Besides the obvious fact that one of the main reasons people join a particular religious denomination over another is precisely to achieve a sense of salvation and an assurance of eternal security, historians have pointed out how these two categories had conceptual overlap in conversion accounts (especially Methodist accounts) contemporary with

must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to ask of God, concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.

THE FIRST VISION

¹⁴ So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally. ¹⁵ After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone,

I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. ¹⁶ But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any

the Prophet. Both motivations could be true at the same time: confused and dismayed over the religious divisions of his day (and even in his own family, which was religiously split), Joseph felt insecure and unsure about his eternal standing before God and so sought wisdom about which church to join precisely to find some assurance that he would achieve salvation. **1:14–15** *Timing of the vision.* In this history Joseph places the timing of the First Vision “early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty.” This is the most precise any of the Prophet’s firsthand accounts get in timing the vision. *Satan attempts to stop Joseph.* The supernatural opposition that attempted to prevent young Joseph from praying is also mentioned in the Prophet’s 1835 account (JS1835). In this account Joseph describes how his “tongue seemed to be swollen in [his] mouth” so that he was unable to speak, and he writes that he “heard a noise behind [him], like some person walking towards [him].” When he looked around he “saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking.” The language and imagery of Joseph being surrounded by darkness and feeling doomed to destruction but rallying his strength to continue calling on God parallels the experience of Moses described at Moses 1:20. The secondhand account provided by Orson Hyde (OH1842) speaks of this “thick darkness” as a “dark cloud” and mentions the adversary filling Joseph’s mind “with doubts and . . . all manner of inappropriate images.” **1:16** Each of Joseph’s firsthand accounts mentions a bright, fiery light that the boy saw in the vision. In the 1832 history (JS1832) the Prophet described seeing “a pillar of fire” but then crossed out “fire” and substituted it with the word “light.” The 1835 account (JS1835) mentions “a pillar of fire,” or a “pillar of flame which was spread all around and yet nothing consumed.” And the 1842 Wentworth Letter (JS1842) speaks of “a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day.” Contemporary secondhand accounts report the same thing: Orson Pratt (OP1840) described “a very bright and glorious

being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. ¹⁷ (It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound.)

When the light rested upon me, I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description,

standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” ¹⁸ My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the

light in the heavens above,” and David Nye White (DNW1843) simply calls it “a light,” while Alexander Neibaur (AN1844) records “a fire towards heaven.” **1:17** *Two Personages*. With one exception, each first- and secondhand account of the First Vision from the Prophet’s lifetime explicitly speaks of young Joseph seeing two heavenly personages. Some of these accounts (JS1835; DNW1843; AN1844) describe one personage appearing before the other, and other accounts (OP1840; OH1842; JS1842) describe the two personages as appearing exactly alike in features and likeness. Although Joseph himself did not record a detailed description of the personages he saw, one secondhand account (AN1844) records that Joseph described the personage in the pillar of fire or light as having “light complexion [and] blue eyes” with “a piece of white cloth drawn over his shoulders, his right arm bare.” The exception mentioned above is the 1832 history (JS1832), which does not overtly speak of two personages. It records, “The Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord.” Scholars have proposed various ways to reconcile the 1832 history with the later accounts. The most persuasive is that the title Lord, used twice, is referring to God the Father in the first instance and then to the Son in the second. This would harmonize with the accounts that speak of one personage appearing before the other and that claim that the two personages looked exactly alike. “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” Two secondhand accounts (DNW1843, AN1844) report that this testimony was given by the Father during the vision. The 1832 and 1835 accounts (JS1832, JS1835) might allude to the Father’s testimony but are not explicit. These two accounts, as well as Orson Pratt’s (OP1842), mention that the Lord forgave Joseph’s sins. **1:18** As noted above (see the commentary at 1:13), in this account the main question Joseph raises is which church he should join. This agrees with many of the other reports of the vision (JS1835; OP1840; OH1842; JS1842; DNW1843; AN1844). In his earliest account (JS1832), the Prophet emphasized his personal search for salvation without explicitly couching this quest in the context of what denomination he should join. *Never entered into my heart*. This phrase (“for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong”) was, for reasons unknown, omitted in the 1902 edition of the Pearl of Great Price and was not restored until the 1981 edition. It is present in the manuscript version of this history, in the *T&S* and *MS* printings, and in the first two editions of the Pearl of Great Price (1851 and 1878). In another draft of the 1838 history the parenthetical comment reads, “For I supposed that that one of them were so,” which suggests some amount of ambivalence was still in Joseph’s mind at the time of the vision. At first glance, this parenthetical remark would appear to contradict Joseph Smith—History 1:10 (“Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together?”) and the 1832 account (JS1832) in which Joseph reports he had “found that mankind did not come unto the Lord, but that they had apostatized from the true and living faith, and there was no society or denomination that

light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong) and which I should join. ¹⁹I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.

²⁰He again forbade me to join with any of them, and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength. But soon recovering in some degree, I went home. And as I leaned up to the fireplace, mother inquired what the matter was. I replied, “Never mind, all is well—I am well enough off.” I then said to my mother, “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not

[was] built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament.” Scholars have proposed various ways to read these accounts in harmony and stress that minor variations such as these do not suggest calculating attempts to fabricate a story. **1:19** *They were all wrong.* Here and in the next verse Joseph is informed by the Lord that the churches of his day were in apostasy and that he should join none of them. This point is captured in all the extant accounts of the vision from the Prophet’s lifetime except one (JS1835). Joseph’s choice to report the Lord’s rather blunt and sweeping condemnations in this account (for example, “they were all wrong . . .,” “all their creeds were an abomination . . .,” “those professors were all corrupt . . .”) may be at least partially in response to the recent opposition and hostility in Kirtland and Missouri that were fresh on the Prophet’s mind (see also the discussion in the commentary at Joseph Smith—History 1:1, 22–23). Another one of Joseph’s firsthand accounts (JS1842) uses much softer language than is used in this verse. It should also be kept in mind that this is Joseph’s paraphrasing of what the Lord told him, not necessarily a direct quotation, so it is uncertain how much of the language is specifically from the Lord and how much was shaped by Joseph himself. *They draw near . . . the power thereof.* Quotations or paraphrases of Isaiah 29:13 and 2 Timothy 3:5. According to two accounts (JS1832 and AN1844) the Lord also drew from the language of Psalm 14:3 (“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”). The totalizing language in Psalm 14:3 is congruent with the Lord’s sweeping condemnations in Joseph Smith—History 1:19. **1:20** Joseph indicates that he deliberately left out some of the Lord’s words to him in the vision. We are left to speculate on exactly what else the Lord may have told him, but from details in the other extant accounts of the vision, it most likely included matters related to the apostasy, the forthcoming restoration of the gospel, and Joseph’s personal standing before God. In the 1835 account (JS1835) the Prophet indicates that he saw “many angels” in the vision. The number and identity of these angels and whether they too related anything to Joseph in the vision is unknown. Joseph also fails to describe how long the vision lasted. Since he was told “many other things” during the vision that are not recorded and since, as he says next, when he came to himself he was lying on his back and physically exhausted (see also DWN1843), it might be supposed that the vision lasted some time. *Joseph’s reply to his mother.* When asked by his mother what was on his mind, young Joseph refrained from telling her what he had just experienced. Instead, he provides a roundabout and ironic way of informing her of what the Lord had just told him about not joining any church, including her own (re-

true.” It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom, else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?

THE AFTERMATH OF THE VISION

²¹ Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement. And, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior. He treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations

in these days, that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them. ²² I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase. And though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution. And this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me.

²³ It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be

calling that earlier at 1:7 he specifies that his mother and some siblings had joined the local Presbyterian church). *When the light . . . almost in my infancy*. This portion of the narrative was inserted into the text as an addendum by Willard Richards on December 2, 1842, probably at the time Joseph related the incident to him. **1:21–23** *The Methodist preacher*. The identity of this preacher is unknown. One promising candidate is Reverend George Lane (1784–1859). Lane was active as an itinerant minister in northern Pennsylvania and western New York between 1819 and 1825. Secondhand sources (for example, OC1834) identify Lane as being one of the ministers who had a pronounced influence on young Joseph in prompting him to seek God in prayer. But there are problems with accepting Lane as this minister, not the least being that the Prophet himself does not positively identify him. *The preacher’s reaction*. Joseph remembers how shocked he was at how contemptuously the preacher treated the account of his vision. The reaction obviously made enough of an impression that eighteen years later the Prophet still remembered it. This negative first reaction to Joseph telling others about his vision may account, in part, for why the Prophet was generally reluctant to publicly report his visionary experiences. *Persecution*. Here the theme of persecution against the Prophet appears at its strongest. Joseph mentions the negative, skeptical reaction he received when he told others about his vision in some of his other accounts (for example, JS1832), but it is in this retelling that the language is most potent. It is very likely that Joseph’s recollection of the de-

thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself.

JOSEPH AFFIRMS THE REALITY OF HIS VISION

²⁴ However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice, but still there were but few who believed him. Some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad, and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise. And though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe

otherwise.

²⁵ So it was with me. I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me, and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true. And while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, “Why persecute me for telling the truth?” I have actually seen a vision, and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision. I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it. At least I knew that by so doing I would offend God and come under condemnation. ²⁶ I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned—that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but to continue as I was until further directed. I had found the testimony of James to be true—that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided.

gree and severity of this opposition, as well as the language he chose to describe it, was influenced by the recent persecutions of Kirtland and Missouri. **1:24–26** *Joseph compares himself to the Apostle Paul.* See Acts 26. Joseph uses the bold defense Paul offered before Herod Agrippa II as a comparable example to his own feelings and experience as he affirmed the reality of his vision before a skeptical public. Joseph’s biblical-minded audience would have immediately understood the significance of this comparison. *What Joseph learned from the vision.* Latter-day Saints today have extrapolated several important truths from the First Vision, including points that touch on the nature of the Godhead and the reality of modern revelation. Per his own account (see Joseph Smith—History 1:26), Joseph himself walked away from the First Vision with two primary truths in mind: that he was not to join any of the churches of his day

JOSEPH FALLS INTO YOUTHFUL ERRORS

²⁷ I continued to pursue my common vocations in life until the twenty-first of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision. ²⁸ During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three—having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me—I was left to all kinds of temptations. And, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature, which,

I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God.

In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature. But I was guilty of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been. But this will not seem very strange to anyone who recollects my youth and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF MORONI

²⁹ In consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections, when, on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for

(inasmuch as they were in apostasy) and that God does in fact answer prayers. **1:27–28** This portion of the history transitions the narrative from the Prophet's early life and the First Vision to the first appearance of Moroni on the night of September 21, 1823. This sequence (early life > First Vision > appearance of Moroni) can be found in both earlier and later histories prepared by the Prophet (JS1832; JS1835; JS1842) and in histories prepared by contemporaries (OP1840). The First Vision and the appearance of Moroni were thus two of the pivotal early events of the unfolding Restoration as narrated by the Prophet himself. *Youthful errors.* The Prophet's 1832 history (JS1832) also mentions how young Joseph "fell into transgressions and sinned in many things" in the intervening years between the First Vision and the appearance of Moroni. The 1835 history (JS1835) likewise describes how Joseph "had not kept the commandments" during this time. However, here the Prophet insists that he is not guilty "of any great or malignant sins." (This qualifier was likely added both to prevent the wrong impression and to rebut public accusations of Joseph's alleged deplorable behavior.) In these accounts, as in the 1838 history, Joseph is quick to also describe how he repented of his youthful sins and that it was during his penance that Moroni made his first appearance. *In making this*

a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him. For I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.³⁰ While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.³¹ He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen, nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist. So, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bo-

som.³² Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me.³³ He called me by name and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do, and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.

MORONI TELLS JOSEPH OF THE BOOK OF MORMON AND QUOTES PROPHECY

³⁴He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from

confession . . . cheery temperament. This portion of text was added to the history in an addendum penned by Willard Richards on December 2, 1842 (see also the commentary on Joseph Smith—History 1:1, 20). **1:30–32** The appearance of Moroni is retold in other firsthand and contemporary secondhand reports (see JS1832, JS1835, JS1842, OC1834, OP1840, OH1842, LMS1844). *Description of the messenger.* In an earlier history (JS1835) the Prophet described how with the angel's appearance "the room was illuminated above the brightness of the sun." According to this account, Moroni's features were "naked, pure, and white," and the personage was "clothed with purity inexpressible." Oliver Cowdery (OC1834) similarly reported "a light like that of day, only of a purer and far more glorious appearance and brightness" appearing in the room with the visitation of the angel, who Cowdery described as having a "countenance [like] lightning" and wearing a "garment [that] was perfectly white." **1:33** In the manuscript copy, the name of the angel is given here as Nephi. This was almost certainly a clerical or scribal error. Sources from both before and after the 1838 history, including those from Joseph himself, identify the messenger as Moroni. The error in the manuscript, however, was not caught until decades after its composition, and so the mistaken identity of the angel was perpetuated in print, including in the *T&S* and *MS* printings of the history in the 1840s and in the 1851 first edition of the Pearl of Great Price. **1:34** Here the Book of Mormon, including its origin and contents, is referenced for the first time in this history. Joseph's narrative about

whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants.³⁵ Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates;

and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted “seers” in ancient or former times, and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.

³⁶After telling me these things, he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament. He first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi;

bringing forth and translating the record will occupy the next thirty-four verses. As with the First Vision, the Prophet gave multiple accounts of the coming forth and translation of the Book of Mormon. Many of these accounts, in fact, were retold right alongside his other renditions of the First Vision (see JS1832; JS1835; JS1842). Clearly in Joseph’s mind the two events were linked and were considered foundational to his prophetic calling. *Written upon gold plates*. Joseph and other witnesses to the plates, or those who otherwise handled them in some capacity, described them as being gold or having “the appearance of gold”; weighing between forty to sixty pounds; measuring about six or seven inches wide, eight inches long, and four to six inches thick; having individual plates as thick as “common tin” or parchment; having a portion sealed; having three D-shaped rings binding the plates; and being “engraved” on both sides with “characters” or “hieroglyphics.” *An account of the former inhabitants of this continent*. Although on occasion the Prophet appealed to artifacts from both North and Central America as evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, he never gave a detailed description of the geography or of the ancient setting of the events recorded in the text. During the Prophet’s lifetime, readers of the book began formulating geography theories to situate the text in a real-world setting, but none of these nor any subsequent theories have ever arisen to the level of revealed authority for the Church as a whole. In her memoirs (LMS1844), Joseph’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, related how Moroni instructed young Joseph about the ancient inhabitants of America as the boy prepared for the recovery and translation of the record, a detail the Prophet also reported in another history (JS1842). **1:35** Joseph’s use of the term “Urim and Thummim” to describe the instrument he recovered with the plates (compare JS1835) likely takes its lead from early Church leaders W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery (OC1834, including the excerpted passage below), who both had previously drawn a connection between the biblical oracular device and the Nephite “interpreters” (see Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21; Mosiah 8:13; 28:11, 13) in Church publications. In his earliest account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (JS1832), the Prophet described this instrument as a set of “spectacles” that had been prepared to translate the book without giving it the name Urim and Thummim. Besides attesting to the use of the Nephite interpreters that were deposited with the plates, eyewitnesses to the translation of the Book of Mormon also described Joseph placing another seer stone in his possession in the bottom of a hat, drawing the brim of the hat over his face to block out external light, and then reading off the translated words as they appeared in the stone. It is unclear precisely when in the course of translation the Prophet used the Nephite interpreters and when he used his personal seer stone. Part of this confusion is because the term “Urim and Thummim” was eventually used to describe both the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone. In any case, the overriding theme that is emphasized in these and other accounts of the translation of the record is the miraculous nature of the work that was beyond Joseph’s natural abilities. **1:36–41** Toward the end of his life, nearly twenty years after Moroni’s appearance, Joseph would return to Malachi 3–4 in his exposition on the doc-

and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books, he quoted it thus,³⁷ “For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble. For they that come shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”³⁸ And again, he quoted the fifth verse thus, “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”³⁹ He also quoted the next verse differently, “And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.”

⁴⁰In addition to these, he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty-second and twenty-third verses, precisely as they

stand in our New Testament. He said that that prophet was Christ, but the day had not yet come when they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people, but soon would come.⁴¹ He also quoted the second chapter of Joel, from the twenty-eighth verse to the last. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be. And he further stated that the fulness of the Gentiles was soon to come in. He quoted many other passages of scripture and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here.⁴² Again, he told me, that when I got those plates of which he had spoken—for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled—I should not show them to any person, neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim, only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them. If I did, I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it.

trine of sealing and of baptism for the dead (See Doctrine and Covenants 128:17–18; compare Doctrine and Covenants 2; 27:9; 110:13–16). *That prophet was Christ*. Moroni’s quotation of Acts 3:22–23 in turn draws from Deuteronomy 18:15, 19 and Leviticus 23:29 (compare 1 Nephi 10:4; 22:20). *The fulness of the Gentiles*. Alluding, perhaps, to Romans 11:25 (compare Luke 21:24; Doctrine and Covenants 45:24–30). **1:42** The Book of Mormon foretold that special witnesses would be selected to view the plates “by the power of God” and bear testimony to the world (see 2 Nephi 27:12–13; Ether 5). These special witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer) were selected by revelation (see Doctrine and Covenants 5:11–18; 17). Other men and women had tactile encounters with the plates in various indirect ways (for instance, hefting the plates as they were wrapped in a tow frock or tracing them with a finger as they were left covered on a table). The testimony of the Eight Witnesses complements the testimony of the Three by describing their experience of having been shown the plates and

THE SECOND APPEARANCE OF MORONI

⁴³ After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark, except just around him. When, instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance. ⁴⁴ I lay musing on the singularity of the scene and marveling greatly at what had been told to me by this extraordinary messenger. When, in the midst of my meditation, I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside. ⁴⁵ He commenced and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit, without the least variation. Which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence, and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things, he again ascended as he had done before.

THE THIRD APPEARANCE OF MORONI

⁴⁶ By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard. But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before, and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom. Otherwise, I could not get them. ⁴⁷ After this third visit, he again ascended into heaven as before, and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced. When almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me for the third time, the cock crowed, and I found that day was approaching, so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.

handling them directly without any supernatural or visionary experience. **1:45** The apocalyptic warnings of Moroni during his second visit are consonant with the scriptures the angel cited during the first visit, particularly with Joel 2:28–32. **1:46** Moroni's warning was prescient since according to Joseph in his 1832 history (JS1832) and Oliver Cowdery (OC1834), upon his first encounter with the plates Joseph was tempted by their monetary value. For this he

THE FOURTH APPEARANCE OF MORONI

⁴⁸ I shortly after arose from my bed, and, as usual, went to the necessary labors of the day. But, in attempting to work as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as to render me entirely unable. My father, who was laboring along with me, discovered something to be wrong with me, and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house. But, in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me, and I fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything. ⁴⁹ The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name. I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received. ⁵⁰ I obeyed. I returned to my father in the field and rehearsed the

whole matter to him. He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited, and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there.

JOSEPH DISCOVERS THE PLATES

⁵¹ Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth. ⁵² Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked

earned the angel's censure. **1:48–50** Lucy Mack Smith recounts (in LMS1844) how Joseph was initially reluctant to tell his father about his encounter with the angel out of fear that his father would not believe him. On the contrary, as related here and in another history (JS1835), Joseph Sr. not only believed the boy's account but "wept" and assured Joseph that "it was a vision from God." **1:51** The "hill of considerable size" where the plates lay deposited goes unnamed in this history as it does in Joseph's other firsthand accounts of the recovery of the plates. During the Prophet's lifetime, Latter-day Saints began identifying this hill as Cumorah, the same hill mentioned in the Book of Mormon as the location of the final Nephite destruction. Joseph appears to have accepted this identification but did not explicitly make the connection until the end of his life (see Doctrine and Covenants 128:20). Whether the Prophet arrived at this identification by revelation or simply adopted a usage that was already common among members of the Church is unknown. *Convenient to . . . the top.* This block of text was inserted into the manuscript of the 1838 history by scribe James Mulholland on a loose slip of paper pinned to the manuscript and marked with an asterisk. A brief note from Mulholland on the

in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them.

⁵³I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the messenger, and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time. But he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates. ⁵⁴Accordingly, as I had been commanded, I went at the end of each year, and at each time I

found the same messenger there and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.

JOSEPH IS HIRED BY JOSIAH STOAL AND MARRIES EMMA HALE

⁵⁵As my father's worldly circumstances were very limited, we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring out by day's work and otherwise, as we could get opportunity. Sometimes we were at home, and sometimes abroad, and by continuous labor were enabled to get a comfortable maintenance. ⁵⁶In the year 1823 my father's family met with a great affliction by the death of my eldest brother, Alvin. In the month of October, 1825, I hired with an

slip of paper explains that this text was included at his (Mulholland's) recommendation "in order that the history be satisfactory." 1:53 Unmentioned here (see commentary at Joseph Smith—History 1:46) is the rebuke Joseph received from the angel after being tempted by the monetary value of the gold plates. Also unmentioned here is the detail preserved in the recollection offered by Joseph Knight (an early supporter of the Prophet) that the Prophet was instructed to bring his older brother Alvin with him to the hill the next year. 1:56 *Date of Alvin's death*. The year of Alvin's death was erroneously given as 1824 in the manuscript of the 1838 history and the *T&S* and *MS* printings. This error was not corrected until the 1981 edition of the Pearl of Great Price. In fact, Alvin died on November 19, 1823. (See also the commentary at 1:4.) *Josiah Stoyal*. Josiah Stoyal (or Stowell; 1770–1844) was a farmer and sawmill owner and early supporter of the Prophet, acting as a witnesses for the defense when in 1826 Joseph was brought before a court in South Bainbridge, New York, on charges of being a "disorderly person" because of his money digging. Stoyal was also present in the Smith home in New York when Joseph arrived with the plates in 1827, and he joined the Church in 1830. *Money digging*. Searching for lost items and purported lost treasure through "magical" means such as seer stones or divining rods was practiced by some in Joseph's day. The Smith family participated, to some extent, in this folk magic culture, which they and other devout Christians of the time did not necessarily see as incompatible with their faith in biblical miracles. Joseph himself had a local reputation for being someone who could be consulted to locate lost objects with a seer stone, which is why Stoyal hired him in the first place. The Prophet never denied his youthful

old gentleman by the name of Josiah Stoyal, who lived in Chenango county, State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehanna county, State of Pennsylvania, and had, previous to my hiring to him, been digging in order, if possible, to discover the mine.

After I went to live with him, he took me, with the rest of his hands, to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger.⁵⁷ During the time that I was thus employed, I was put to board with a Mr. Isaac Hale, of that place. It was there I first saw my wife (his daughter), Emma Hale. On the 18th of January, 1827, we were married, while I was yet employed in the service of Mr. Stoyal.⁵⁸ Owing to my continuing to assert that I had seen a vision, persecution still followed me, and my wife's father's family were very much opposed to our being married. I was, therefore, under the necessity of taking her elsewhere. So we went and were married at the house of

Squire Tarbill, in South Bainbridge, Chenango county, New York. Immediately after my marriage, I left Mr. Stoyal's, and went to my father's, and farmed with him that season.

JOSEPH OBTAINS THE PLATES

⁵⁹ At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate. On the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, having gone as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge: that I should be responsible for them, that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off, but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.⁶⁰ I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Ev-

forays into money digging, but he later did distance himself from these activities and downplayed the influence folk magic had on his early upbringing. **1:57–58** Isaac Hale (1763–1839), his wife, and their daughter Emma (1804–1879) were living in Harmony, Pennsylvania, at the time of the 1825 digging excursion. Isaac was a farmer, hunter, innkeeper and, along with his daughter, active in the Methodist church in Harmony. He was deeply skeptical of his son-in-law's claims to having seen visions (as mentioned here and confirmed by other sources), which led to increased tensions between the two and likely influenced Joseph's memory of having felt persecuted during this time. **1:59–60** Reminiscences from sources both hostile and friendly toward Joseph confirm that some local Palmyra residents took his claims to having golden

ery stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible.

But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand. When, according to arrangements, the messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him. And he has them in his charge until this day, being the second day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight.⁶¹ The excitement, however, still continued, and rumor with her thousand tongues was all the time employed in circulating falsehoods about my father's family, and about myself. If I were to relate a thousandth part of them, it would fill up volumes. The persecution, however, became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester, and going with my wife to Susquehanna county, in the State of Pennsylvania. While preparing to start—being very poor, and the persecution so heavy upon us that there

was no probability that we would ever be otherwise—in the midst of our afflictions we found a friend in a gentleman by the name of Martin Harris, who came to us and gave me fifty dollars to assist us on our journey. Mr. Harris was a resident of Palmyra township, Wayne county, in the State of New York, and a farmer of respectability.

TRANSLATION OF THE RECORD BEGINS

⁶² By this timely aid was I enabled to reach the place of my destination in Pennsylvania, and immediately after my arrival there I commenced copying the characters off the plates. I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them, which I did between the time I arrived at the house of my wife's father, in the month of December, and the February following.⁶³ Sometime in this month of February, the aforementioned Mr. Martin Harris came to our place, got the characters which I had drawn off the plates, and started with them to the city of New York.

plates so seriously that they attempted to steal them on multiple occasions. **1:61–62** Joseph and Emma moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania, in December 1827 with the financial assistance of Martin Harris (1783–1875), a prosperous and well-regarded Palmyra farmer. They lived at first with Emma's parents but shortly thereafter moved into their own small home near her parents' house. **1:63** According to Joseph's 1832 history (JS1832) the decision to send Martin to New York with a copy of the characters from the Book of Mormon plates came at the prompting of a revelation. Some sources (including LMS1844) indicate that Joseph was at first unsure precisely how to accomplish the translation, and so the decision to consult with scholars arose, in part, to help get some initial assistance or bearings therewith. *His own account*. It is unknown when Harris penned this first-person account of his visit with Charles Anthon (1797–1867), a renowned scholar of ancient cultures and languages in his day. It is only preserved here in the 1838 history and was likely drafted sometime before his excommunication from the Church in December 1837 (in any event, it must have been drafted before the com-

For what took place relative to him and the characters, I refer to his own account of the circumstances, as he related them to me after his return, which was as follows:

THE VISIT WITH CHARLES ANTHON

⁶⁴“I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic, and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such

of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. ⁶⁵He then said to me, ‘Let me see that certificate.’ I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, ‘I cannot read a sealed book.’ I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and the translation.”

mencement of the composition of this history in the spring of 1838). **1:64–65** Besides Charles Anthon, Harris also visited with and consulted the linguist and diplomat Luther Bradish (1783–1863) and the scholar Samuel Mitchell (1764–1831) respecting the characters. The details and outcome of Harris’s visit with Bradish are unknown. Historical sources do not make it clear whether Harris visited Mitchell before or after Anthon. By his account, Harris makes it sound as though he visited Anthon and then Mitchell (1:65), but other sources reverse the order. In either case, these are the three known contacts Harris made as he consulted with scholars. *Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic*. At the time of the composition of this report “Chaldaic” or “Chaldean” was used to designate Aramaic, and “Assyriac” to designate cuneiform (that is, the script of ancient Assyria). *Anthon’s account of the meeting*. Anthon left three known accounts describing this encounter. In each of them, he indicates that he expressed skepticism that the characters were authentic and claimed that he warned Harris that he was being conned. Anthon’s own version of this episode thus differs dramatically from Harris’s. Anthon’s accounts are not entirely free from problems, however, because he contradicts himself in some key details. Whatever exactly was said in their meeting, Harris left convinced Joseph had an ancient record in his possession and was a lifelong supporter of the Book of Mormon. ‘*I cannot read a sealed book*.’ Paraphrase of Isaiah 29:11. Anthon may have uttered this line sarcastically, but Martin and Joseph took it as a sign that the biblical prophecy in

OLIVER COWDERY SERVES AS SCRIBE

⁶⁶On the 5th day of April, 1829, Oliver Cowdery came to my house, until which time I had never seen him. He stated to me that having been teaching school in the neighborhood where my father resided, and my father being one of those who sent to the school, he went to board for a season at his house, and while there the family related to him the circumstances of my having received the plates, and accordingly he had come to make inquiries of me. ⁶⁷Two days after the arrival of Mr. Cowdery (being the 7th of April) I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon, and he began to write for me.

THE RESTORATION OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

⁶⁸We still continued the work of translation, when, in the ensuing month (May, 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found mentioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying, ⁶⁹“Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gos-

Isaiah 29:11–12 had been fulfilled (see JS1832). **1:66** *Chronological jump.* Martin Harris’s consultation with scholars occurred in February 1828. As it appears in the canonical text, the narrative skips ahead a year to April 1829, leaving out significant events like the birth (and soon death) of Joseph and Emma’s firstborn child (a son) and the loss of the 116 pages of the translated Book of Mormon manuscript in the summer of 1828. An account of the loss of the 116 pages had previously been recorded in Joseph’s 1832 history (JS1832), and in fact, the manuscript version of this history as well as the *T&S* and *MS* publications contain an account of the loss of the 116 pages and reproduce the revelations that are now sections 3, 4, 5, and 10 of the Doctrine and Covenants. For reasons unknown (maybe to conserve space) Franklin D. Richards opted to drop this content from the 1851 Pearl of Great Price. *Oliver Cowdery.* Oliver Cowdery (1806–1850) served as the principal scribe in the translation of the Book of Mormon from April 1829 to its completion in mid- or late-June of that year. With some assistance, he also prepared a copy of the original manuscript of the book for publication. Besides being informed of Joseph’s divine calling by the Smith family (as mentioned in this verse), according to Joseph’s 1832 history Oliver also had a vision of the plates and felt a confirming witness from God that he should assist in the work (compare Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–23). *Omitted material.* The manuscript version of the history and the *T&S* and *MS* versions reproduce sections 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants along with additional narrative about Joseph’s work of translating with Oliver, which was omitted in the 1851 edition of the Pearl of Great Price. **1:68–70** *Priesthood restoration accounts.* The restoration of the priesthood is mentioned briefly in Joseph’s 1832 history, which speaks of “the reception of the holy priesthood by the ministering of angels.” From this it seems that the 1832 history was going to give a fuller account of the priesthood restoration, but unfortunately the text ends abruptly with Joseph narrating his time in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Over his lifetime Joseph only gradually divulged the details about the priesthood restoration, partly because of “a spirit of persecution” which obliged him to keep the details private at first (Joseph Smith—History 1:74). First-

pel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. And this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.”⁷⁰ He said this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter. And he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and that afterwards he should baptize me.

JOSEPH AND OLIVER ARE BAPTIZED; PROMISED MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

⁷¹Accordingly we went and were baptized. I baptized him first, and afterwards he baptized me, after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same Priesthood, for so we were commanded.†⁷² The messenger who visited us on this occasion and conferred this Priesthood upon us, said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priest-

hood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred on us, and that I should be called the first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second. It was on the fifteenth day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger, and baptized.

⁷³Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE RESTORATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

⁷⁴Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the

and secondhand accounts of the priesthood restoration were recorded in scattered reports. Some contemporary hostile sources from the early 1830s indicate that Oliver Cowdery and other early Latter-day Saints were claiming divine commission and the visitation of angels connected to their ecclesiastical authority. *Until the sons of Levi . . . righteousness.* Paraphrase of Malachi 3:3. 1:72 Joseph reports that the Aaronic Priesthood was restored on May 15, 1829. He does not, however, in this history or in any other known firsthand account record the date of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood (compare Doctrine and Covenants 128:20). Rather, he only indicated vaguely in this verse that the angelic messenger promised him and

true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of. In the meantime, we were forced to keep secret the circumstances of having received the Priesthood and our having been baptized, owing to a spirit of persecution which had already manifested itself in the neighborhood.⁷⁵ We had been threatened with being mobbed, from time to time, and this, too, by professors of religion. And their intentions of mobbing us were only counteracted by the influence of my wife's father's family (under Divine providence), who had become very friendly to me, and who were opposed to mobs, and were willing that I should be allowed to continue the work of translation without interruption, and therefore offered and promised us protection from all unlawful proceedings, as far as in them lay.

OLIVER COWDERY'S ACCOUNT

† Oliver Cowdery describes these events thus: "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the

utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, 'Interpreters,' the history or record called 'The Book of Mormon.'

"To notice, in even few words, the interesting account given by Mormon and his faithful son, Moroni, of a people once beloved and favored of heaven, would supersede my present design; I shall therefore defer this to a future period, and, as I said in the introduction, pass more directly to some few incidents immediately connected with the rise of this Church, which may be entertaining to some thousands who have stepped forward, amid the frowns of bigots and the calumny of hypocrites, and embraced the Gospel of Christ.

"No men, in their sober senses, could translate and write the directions given to the Nephites from the mouth of the Savior, of the precise manner in which men should build up His Church, and especially when corruption had spread an uncertainty over all forms and systems practiced among men, without desiring a privilege of showing the willingness of the

Oliver that the higher priesthood would "in due time be conferred on [them]." The precise date of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood is thus unknown, and historians have offered different possibilities ranging from May 1829 to the summer of 1830. Although a later date cannot be rule out, an earlier date seems more likely. In any case, later reports of the priesthood restoration are broadly corroborated by earlier accounts that refer to Joseph and Oliver's receiving a divine commission from God through the ministry of angels. **1:75** As with the opening verses, the concluding verse in the canonized version of this history ends on a note of defiance in the face of persecution. As so presented in its canonized form, this serves as a sort of narrative envelope that frames the entire history. The 1838 history itself continues well past where it concludes here in the canonized text. **Oliver Cowdery's Account** This ac-

heart by being buried in the liquid grave, to answer a ‘good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’

“After writing the account given of the Savior’s ministry to the remnant of the seed of Jacob, upon this continent, it was easy to be seen, as the prophet said it would be, that darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people. On reflecting further it was as easy to be seen that amid the great strife and noise concerning religion, none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the Gospel. For the question might be asked, have men authority to administer in the name of Christ, who deny revelations, when His testimony is no less than the spirit of prophecy, and His religion based, built, and sustained by immediate revelations, in all ages of the world when He has had a people on earth? If these facts were buried, and carefully concealed by men whose craft would have been in danger if once permitted to shine in the faces of men, they were no longer to us; and we only waited for the commandment to be given ‘Arise and be baptized.’

“This was not long desired before it was realized. The Lord, who is rich in mercy, and ever willing to answer the consistent prayer of the humble, after we had called upon Him in a fervent manner, aside from the abodes

of men, condescended to manifest to us His will. On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the veil was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the Gospel of repentance. What joy! what wonder! what amazement! While the world was racked and distracted—while millions were groping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a general mass, our eyes beheld, our ears heard, as in the ‘blaze of day’; yes, more—above the glitter of the May sunbeam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature! 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 an 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 wrapped in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt? Nowhere; uncertainty had fled, doubt had sunk no more to rise, while fiction and deception had fled forever!

“But, dear brother, think, further think for a moment, what joy filled our hearts, and with what surprise we must have bowed, (for who would

count first appeared in the *Messenger and Advocate* in October 1834 in the first of a series of eight letters to William W. Phelps (OC1834). It has appended the Prophet’s own narrative as published in the Pearl of Great Price in each edition of the text since the 1851 first edition.

not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hand the Holy Priesthood as he said, ‘Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!’

“I shall not attempt to paint to you the feelings of this heart, nor the majestic beauty and glory which surrounded us on this occasion; but you will believe me when I say, that earth, nor men, with the eloquence of time, cannot begin to clothe language in as interesting and sublime a manner as this holy personage. No; nor has this earth power to give the joy, to bestow the peace, or comprehend the wisdom which was contained in each sentence as they were delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit! Man may deceive his fellow-men, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have

power to seduce the foolish and untaught, till naught but fiction feeds the many, and the fruit of falsehood carries in its current the giddy to the grave; but one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Savior, from the bosom of eternity, strikes it all into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind. The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel, the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Savior’s goodness with wonder and thanksgiving while I am permitted to tarry; and in those mansions where perfection dwells and sin never comes, I hope to adore in that day which shall never cease.”