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Moroni's Mission and the Bible

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Abstract: This article describes the first visitation of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith, Joseph's call to the ministry, and scriptures quoted and interpreted by Moroni. Emphasis is placed on prophecies of key events in the latter days.

MORONI'S MISSION AND THE BIBLE

By DR. SIDNEY B. SPERRY

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SOME three years after the appearance of God, the Father, and the Son to Joseph Smith, the young boy Prophet had another visitation from the heavenly realm. It happened on the evening of the twenty-first of September, 1823, when he called upon God in prayer and supplication that he might know his state and standing before his Maker. The earnest petition was granted and a glorious white-robed messenger appeared to him. In the words of the Prophet, "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 went on to tell the young man of a hidden record, written on gold plates, that revealed the secrets of the history of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent. It also contained the fullness of the Gospel as delivered by the Christ to these people. This record we call the Book of Mormon.

An Angel's Visits

IN answer to fervent prayer, the Prophet Joseph Smith was visited by the resurrected Angel Moroni in his home near Palmyra, New York (see cover) during the night of September 21-22, 1823—112 years ago this week.

Following the Angel's instructions, Joseph visited Hill Cumorah September 22 of each year for four years, and on September 22, 1827 the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated were delivered to him by Moroni.

The angelic visitor explained, too, "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." The attention of the Bible student is immediately

riveted on this statement. Bible scholars have never fully understood the exact function and use of the Urim and Thummim as mentioned in the sacred text. Moroni's explanation is enlightening and of the greatest interest.

When, some years later, Joseph Smith was translating the gold plates into English, by means of the Urim and Thummim, he came to the following remarkable portion of a conversation of two men in the Book of Mosiah, chapter 8: 13-18:

Now Ammon said unto him : I can assuredly tell thee, O King, of a man that can translate the records ; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date ; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer. . . .

And Ammon said that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also ; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can ; yet a man may have great power given him from God.

But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.

Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles ; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.

THIS clear statement makes abundantly luminous many passages in the Bible relating to the functions of Urim and Thummim and the powers of the seers of old. Some years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith translated a portion of a papyrus that contained some writings of Abraham, the father of the faithful. In chapter three, verse one, of the English version (The Pearl of Great Price) it is recorded. "And I Abraham, had the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given unto me, in Ur of the Chaldees." It was probably no mere coincidence, therefore, when the Saviour declared to the Jews : "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8 : 56.) As a seer, Abraham was given power to discern the ministry of the Saviour centuries before His earthly advent.

Moroni, the heavenly teacher, made many important scriptures plain to the mind of Joseph Smith. Among others he quoted a number of prophecies from the Old Testament. The Prophet says he quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi and also the fourth chapter, with some variation from the way it reads in our present bibles. Modern revelation makes clear that these chapters refer to the yet future advent in the glory of Christ, the deliverance of Israel and the coming of Elijah the Prophet to deliver the keys of the sealing powers of the Priesthood, so necessary for the redemption of the living and the dead.

From this information we infer that most scholars have not fully understood Malachi's message.

The fact that Moroni also quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah ought to call attention to it. Joseph Smith was told it was about to be fulfilled. In March, 1838, the Prophet explained certain matters pertaining to this chapter. His explanations are published in Section 113, verses 1-6, of Doctrine and Covenants :

Who is the stem of Jesse spoken of in the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the 11th chapter of Isaiah ?

Verily thus saith the Lord, It is Christ.

What is the rod spoken of in the first verse of the 11th chapter of Isaiah, that should come of the stem of Jesse ?

Behold, thus saith the Lord : It is a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse as well as Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power.

What is the root of Jesse spoken of in the 10th verse of the 11th chapter ?

Behold, thus saith the Lord, it is a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the Priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days.

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and death appeared so near that my wife, one Sunday morning, arose at 4 a.m. to prepare the linen for the child's death. I remained with the child, and had come to the same conclusion at 4:30 a.m.

We both knelt down by the cot in which the child lay, and asked our Heavenly Father to take him to Himself, and relieve him of his sufferings.

This prayer was immediately answered, but not in the manner we expected at the moment. We had on the previous fast Sunday both testified that we knew the Lord would eventually restore our loved one to his wonted health and strength. While we were yet on our knees in supplication to the Lord, we were reminded of these testimonies, that if they were given under the inspiration of His Holy Spirit and through the Melchizedek Priesthood which I hold, the child should be restored to health again. We rose from our knees and looked at the child, and although death had apparently settled on him, we knew that even under these conditions he would be restored to health again.

We are thankful to be able to testify that the prayer has been fully realized, our little one has been restored to his health again, new muscles have taken the place of the old ones, new skin has grown over his body, new finger and toe nails have replaced the old ones, and a new smiling countenance has displaced the old one.

Today Lawrence Mercer Gregson is an active worker in the Church, as are his two older brothers, William and Joseph Mercer.

These sons are following in the footsteps of their father, who has been active in the Church since his conversion. Brother Gregson has been superintendent of Bury branch Sunday School (1902-03), Stockport branch president (1904-07), Burnley branch Sunday School superintendent (1910-13), Stockport branch president (1913-16), Manchester branch president (1930-34). Those years in which he did not occupy an office he lived in Macclesfield, where there is no branch.

Early this year Brother Gregson was set apart by President Joseph J. Cannon as president of Manchester district, with Brothers B. W. T. Norman and Frank Kelsh as first and second counsellors, respectively.

Office and Church work occupy nearly all of President Gregson's time, but he manages to keep up his hobby of raising poultry and gardening. His White Leghorn chickens have won many ribbons in fairs and exhibits.

President Gregson's life is a silent song of work, full of happy melodies which come through living the Gospel. He is respected as a man of sound judgment whose advice is always the wise counsel of one who has been through the mill and come out triumphantly by perseverance and faith in the Lord.

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A careful reading of the 11th chapter of Isaiah in the light of what has been pointed out, will show that Moroni was trying to impress on the young Prophet the importance of certain great events to take place in the relatively near future. The dispersed of Israel were to be gathered, and there was to be ushered in that golden age for which prophets and seers have looked, the Millennial era, when peace and righteousness shall abound on the earth. The Church proclaims these prophecies have only in

part been fulfilled since Moroni's appearance, but that still greater events are shortly to take place in complete fulfillment of Isaiah's predictions.

Joseph Smith states: "He also quoted the second chapter of Joel, from the 28th verse to the last. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled but was soon to be." Note that Moroni evidently knew the events mentioned in the verses he quoted were to take place prior to "the terrible day of the Lord"—to use an expression of Joel's. The latter is doubtless a reference to the second advent of the Messiah. It is interesting to note that few scholars understand Joel's predictions in the way the heavenly messenger explained them. Most of the commentators who write about the prophet spend a great deal of time arguing about the data of his book and its "eschatology" and "apocalyptic" without apparently comprehending the fact that Joel was writing of some of the most fascinating themes of the Gospel, viz., the troubles of the house of Israel, its redemption, the coming advent of the Lord in glory, and certain events to precede it, a time of judgment and eventual peace. The Angel Moroni's explanation that the above mentioned passages were soon to be fulfilled makes the Book of Joel a book of warning and judgment to this generation.

THEREFORE, it must be apparent that one of the greatest contributions of modern revelation to the understanding of the Bible is the teaching that the Gospel was in the world from the days of the great patriarchs. All the great prophets of the Old Testament understood the plan of salvation and looked forward to the advent of the Saviour in the flesh, and His sacrifice for the sins of the world. Thus a certain Book of Mormon prophet by the name of Jacob, after explaining he was writing for the benefit of coming generations, says:

For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

Behold, they believed in Christ and worshipped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son. (Jacob 4: 4-5.)

The Book of Mormon points out the reason such teaching is not more clearly given in our Bible is that, following the death of some of the apostles in the first century A.D., many parts of the Scriptures, at first easy to understand, were taken away. Hence we easily understand why many outside our faith do not comprehend how the Gospel could be in the world before Christ's coming in the flesh.

Attention could be called to numerous other contributions which modern revelation has made to an understanding of the Gospels, the Revelation of John, and many other books of the Bible. The Church invites all men to read and investigate the modern scriptures given by the great prophet and seer of this generation, Joseph Smith.—(Condensed from a talk delivered over Radio Station KSL in Salt Lake City, August 18.)