

Hard Questions in Church History

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Moroni's Visitations

Opening the Scriptural Canon: An Abrupt Departure from Nineteenth-Century American Christianity

In 1823, a completely new definition of scripture was about to change the world. Even with hundreds of self-proclaimed prophets and visionaries and thousands of seekers who heard divine calls during the American Second Great Awakening, no one else at that time claimed to add to the sacred scriptural text. Joseph Smith was not another Luther hoping to purify the church. He did not fit into the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century efforts to return Christian primitivism. Rather than comparing young Joseph Smith to his contemporaries who endeavored to reform Christianity, Jan Shipp perceived Smith's restoration as totally distinct: “[a] reiteration, reinterpretation, recapitulation, and ritual re-creation of the significant events in Israel's past and . . . early Christianity” (*Mormonism*, 54).

Nineteenth-century American Christians held firmly to the Bible as the revealed word of God. In conformity with the *Westminster Confession* (the Protestant creed), they believed in *sola scriptura*—solely scripture; the Bible alone was the source of revelation. Biblical authors were “organs of God,” and their writings “infallible” (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.152). Protestants also believed the Bible was the source of their authority and a tool to feel the Spirit of God.

Many early American families had a Bible and studied from it daily—especially New Englanders, whose high literacy rates can be traced to their commitment to read the holy book. In 1816, the American Bible Society rose to meet the needs of distributing Bibles across the expanding nation. This group hoped that people who owned a Bible would read it and live by it. Similarly, in 1824, the American Sunday School Union organized with the goal of keeping frontier Americans literate and studying the Bible.

With this as a backdrop, Joseph Smith did not intentionally react against society. He also did not deny the truth of the Bible. His introduction of *newly revealed scripture* to the canon were highly offensive to his unbelieving neighbors. Nearly everything the Christian community found offensive about Mormon doctrines stemmed from Joseph's new revelations. Yet Joseph felt that he had no choice; God had called him as a seer, prophet, and revelator. Although he was not infallible, he was tutored by divine messengers. He learned to obey with exactness and to act as a conduit of God's word.

Angel Moroni's Visitations to Joseph Smith (1823-1827)

By 1823, Joseph Smith, Jr. was seventeen years old. He longed for more divine direction. On the evening of September 21, 1823, he recalled having “full confidence” that God would answer his prayer (JS-H 1:29). Not deterred by his crowded living quarters—eleven family members in a log cabin (the foundation stones measured only 24' x 30') and likely multiple siblings in the same bed—he prayed for guidance (JS-H 1:29):

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 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.

In answer to his prayer, an angel named Moroni visited him.

Thousands of other Americans at this time prayed for divine forgiveness and direction. Hundreds recorded having heard divine calls (Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 41-49, 66, 230-232, etc.). Joseph's experience, however, was unique in many ways. We have multiple accounts that all share overlapping details, three of which we review in detail. Joseph and his mother Lucy Mack Smith recorded their memories of the September 1823 visitation: Joseph in 1838 (which is now canonized in the Pearl of Great Price) and Mother Smith in 1844/1845 (which is available in its unedited form on www.JosephSmithPapers.org). Close friends Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Knight likewise recorded their second-hand accounts in the early 1830s.

Joseph's Record of Moroni's Visitations (September 21-22, 1823)

There is no vagueness in the Prophet Joseph's account of angel Moroni's visitations. Many of his day spoke of a visionary essence. Others initially recorded that they saw a being, but then later altered their stories to describe a more ethereal experience. Joseph described his angelic visitor in great detail as a resurrected, glorified man with visible characteristics and a name. Moroni had introduced himself as the last Israelite prophet from the New World and Joseph had a purposeful conversation with the angelic being. Multiple first- and second-hand retellings over the years show a great deal of similarity with the canonized account he began in 1838 (JS-H 1:31-33):

He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. . . . 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 bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. . . . 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.

His description of the angel Moroni does not fit the stereotypical image of the cherub with wings. Neither his appearance—an angel without wings—nor his message of prophetic calling fit Joseph's cultural understanding. A completely new definition of scripture was about to shake the American Second Great Awakening.

Prophetic Call

Angel Moroni informed Joseph Smith that the Lord had a work for him to accomplish that involved a book written on golden plates buried in a hill about three miles from the Smith log home:

God had a work for me to do . . . He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from 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. . . . 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 . . . 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 (JS-H 1:33-34, 42).

Susan Juster documents over 300 published sources of unorthodox prophets who circulated their visions in early America (*Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution*, 209-210), yet none of them claimed to bring forth new scripture. This was a radical departure from American Christianity. Claiming a need for new scripture attacked the source of Protestant authority and the inerrancy of the Bible.

Moroni Quoted Biblical Prophecies

Moroni ended his visitations by quoting biblical prophecies including references to Acts 3:22-23; Isaiah 11; Joel 2:28-29; and Malachi 3-4, with a slightly modified version of 4:1, 4:5-6. Joseph’s account is canonized in the Pearl of Great Price. He took a few lines from his 1838/9 history of Moroni’s message and added them to the Doctrine and Covenants (current-day D&C 2). The verses he selected for canonization prophesied the future visit of Elijah, similar to Malachi 4:5-6.

Malachi 4:5-6 (and JST)	D&C 2	3 Nephi 25:5-6
Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse	1 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. 2 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. 3 If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.	5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse

While the wording of Malachi in the KJV and 3 Nephi are identical, Moroni’s recitation differed by identifying Elijah as the one whose role it was to pass priesthood [keys] to seal the saints so they could avoid the curses of the last days. Moroni also referred to the need for Elijah to “plant” the priesthood “*promises made to the fathers.*” Planting speaks of potential growth. The interrelationship between children and parents refers to the sealing of families, genealogy work, and unifying eternal promises.

Could this refer to “the blessings” that Abraham also sought from “the fathers” (Abr 1:2)? Abraham sought for priesthood blessings and a Zion society from the great high priest Melchizedek (Abraham 1:3-4). Elijah’s return was so important that the Savior also shared Malachi’s prophecy during his visit to the Nephites. At least three other revelations spread over a dozen years reference parts of this same scripture from Malachi. Each reference includes something about either priesthood keys, power, sealing, or welding link for intergenerational families:

D&C 27:9 (Aug 1830)	D&C 110:13-16 (April 1836)	D&C 128:18 (Sept 1842)
And also Elijah unto whom I have committed the keys of the	For Elijah the prophet . . . said:	the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some

power of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, that the whole earth may not be smitten with a curse	14 Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come— 15 To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse — 16 Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors.	kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject
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1823-1827—Moroni’s Visits Coincide with Jewish Holy Days

The Lord’s miracles are often miracles of timing. This is the case with the Moroni’s visits of days of September 21 and 22 in the years 1823 through 1827. Each of the days happened to be important Israelite Holy Days in those years. Book of Mormon Central published:

- September 21, 1823—the initial visit of Angel Moroni coincided with that year’s celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth)
- September 22, 1824 was the eve of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and the beginning of the fall festivals.
- September 22, 1825 was precisely the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).
- September 22, 1827—the day Moroni delivered the plates to Joseph (JS-H 1:59) was the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), also known as the Feast of the Trumpets.

See Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Moroni Deliver the Plates on September 22?”](#), *KnowWhy* #193, Published September 22, 2016.

Lucy Mack Smith’s Memoirs of Moroni’s Visits September 21-22, 1823

In addition to Joseph’s memories, we also have accounts from his mother and close friends. Lucy’s memoirs were edited and enhanced in *The History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*. To gain a greater understanding of the pre-edited account, as well as other accounts, JosephSmithPapers.org is invaluable. Lucy’s memories are filled with more details—like the family’s main crop—producing maple sugar. The Smiths “averaged 1000 lbs per year.” It is estimated that their farm had several maples, but the Smiths planted more such that after a few years they had 1,500 sugar maples, an orchard including apple trees, and a vegetable garden. The maple grove and one of the apple trees became the settings for Joseph’s first and fourth visions. Mother Smith adds her perspective and memories of Joseph’s visitations twenty-one years after the September 1823 visits—

The 3rd harvest time had now arrived since we opened our new farm and all ~~the~~ our sons were actively employed in assisting their Father to cut down the grain and storing it away in order, ~~for winter~~. One evening we were sitting till quite late conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture Joseph ~~who~~ never said many words upon

any subject but always seemed to reflect more deeply than common persons of his age upon everything of a religious nature ("Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [10], bk. 3", <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/40>).

Lucy's awareness of her son's deeply religious nature would have been easier to observe with the family living and working together in the same small space, and as they gathered every morning and evening for scriptures and prayer. Lucy's next memoir only recounts one visit by Angel Moroni the night of September 21-22, 1823.

After we ceased the conversation he went to bed <and wile pondering in his mind which of the churches were the true one. But he had not laid there long till <he saw> a bright <light> enter the room where he lay he looked up and saw an angel of the Lord <standing>by him The angel spoke I perceive that you are enquiring in your mind which is the true church . . . the churches that are now upon the Earth are all man made churches There is a record for you and Joseph but you cannot get it until you learn to keep the commandments of God <For it is not to get gain> But it is to bring forth that light and intelligence which has been long lost in the Earth Now Joseph beware <or> when you go to get the plates your mind will be filld [*sic*] with darkness and all manner of evil . . . and you must tell your father of this for he will believe every word you say the record is on the side hill on the Hill of Cumorah 3 miles from this place remove the Grass and moss and you will find a large flat stone pry that up and you will find the record under it laying on 4 pillars <of cement> then the angel left him (*ibid.*, p. [10-11], bk. 3).

Moroni instructed Joseph to tell his father about his vision, but it was difficult for Joseph to be that vulnerable yet again. Even though his father had had divine dreams himself, perhaps his reticence stemmed from their minister's rejection of his First Vision. Years after the fact, Joseph remembered the sting of rejection by the local minister:

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 (JS-H 1:21).

Whatever the motivation, young Joseph feared that his father would not believe him.

The morning of September 22, Joseph worked with his father and Alvin harvesting, but Joseph did not open the subject until Moroni repeated his instructions. Lucy remembered that:

The next <day> he <and his father> and Alvin were reaping in the field suddenly <suddenly> [*sic*] Joseph stopped and seemed to be in a deep study for sometime Alvin hurried <him> saying Joseph we must keep to work or we shall not get our task done Joseph worked again diligently then stopped in the same way <a second time> when <his father> Saw that he was very pale and urged him to go the house and tell his mother that he was sick he went a short distance till he came to a green sward under an apple tree here he lay down <on his face> for he was so weak he could go no farther

The personage whom he saw the night before came to him again and said why did you not tell your father what I told you Joseph and he was afraid his father would not believe him [,] he

will said the angel believe every word you say to him . . . an evil Spirit will try to crowd your mind . . . <but you must keep your mind always staid upon God that that [sic] no evil may come into your heart> Joseph then promised to do as he was told by the angel . . . when his Father went to him Joseph rehearsed to him all that he had and seen and heard (ibid.).

For more information on the Lucy Mack Smith account of angel Moroni's visitations to the Prophet Joseph, see *josephsmithpapers.org*; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [11], bk. 3l.

Lucy Mack Smith's Memoirs—After Moroni's September 22 Visit to November 1, 1823

In the Joseph Smith Papers, we read more details from Lucy's memoirs about how the family was included by angel Moroni in Joseph's prophetic call.

When Joseph came in the evening he told ~~all~~ the <whole> family all that he had made known to his father in the field. we sat ~~up~~ up very late and listened attentively to all that he had to say to us but his mind had been so exercised that he became very much fatigued When Alvin saw this he said now brother let us go to bed and we will get up early in the morning and go to work so as to finish our days labor by ~~an~~ an hour before sunset & if Mother will get our suppers early we will then have a fine long evening ~~to~~ <and> all set down and hear you talk The next day ~~they~~ <we> worked with great ambition <*> <by sunset were ready to be seated and give our ~~atten~~ undivide[d] to Josephs recitals. ~~and this pro~~ before he began to explain to us the instructions which he had received he ~~told~~ charged us <not> to not to mention what he told us out of the family as the world was so wicked that ~~if they~~ when they did come to a knowledge of these things they would try to take our lives and as soon as we obtained the plates our names would be cast out as evil by all people . . . (ibid., p. [12], bk. 3).

Joseph's mother, Lucy, also recorded that he learned much about the ancient Nephite civilization from his divine tutoring before he received the plates:

Joseph continued to receive instructions from time to time and every evening we gathered our children together ~~And gave our our time up to the discussion~~ . . . I think that <we> presented the most peculiar aspect of any family that ever lived upon the Earth all seated round in a circle father Mother sons and Daughters listening in breathless anxiety to the <religious> teachings of a boy ~~46~~ <19> yars [sic] of age who had never read the Bible through by course in his life for Joseph was less inclined to the study of books than any child we had but much more given to reflection and deep study We were convinced that God was about to bring to light something that we might stay our minds upon some thing that we could get a more definite idea of than anything which had been taught us heretofore and we rejoiced in it with exceeding great joy ~~Un~~ the sweetest union and happiness pervaded our house no jar nor discord disturbed our peace and tranquility reigned in our midst In the course of our evening conversations Joseph would give us some of the most ammusing [sic] recitals which could be immagined [sic] he would de[s]cribe the ancient inhabitants of this continent their dress thier [sic] maner [sic] of traveling the animals which they rode The cities that were built by them the structure of their buildings with every particular of their mode of warfare their religious worship as particularly as though he had Spent his life with them it will be recollected by the reader that all that I mentioned and much more took place within the compass of one short year (ibid., p. [1-2], bk. 4).

Lucy’s confusion of Joseph’s age may suggest that these events might have spanned more than just the year 1823, as it was four years before Joseph received the plates. Lucy’s and Joseph Knight’s accounts do not add up to five consecutive Septembers. Yet in Joseph’s 1838 account, he summarizes: “the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time” (JS-H 1:53). Here is a chart of the accounts referred to in this collection.

Moroni’s Visits Sept 21/22, 1823	Joseph Smith’s 1838 Account	Lucy Mack Smith 1844-45 Account	Oliver Cowdery 1835 Account	Joseph Knight 1833-1847 Account
1823	JS-H 1:30-47, 49	X	X	X
1824	JS-H 1:53	X		
1825	JS-H 1:53			
1826	JS-H 1:53			X
1827	JS-H 1:59	X		X

September 22, 1823—Oliver Cowdery

There were others who wrote their second-hand accounts. Oliver Cowdery, the future scribe of most of the Book of Mormon recorded the early history of the church in 1834. When he describes September 22, 1823, Oliver goes into great detail about Hill Cumorah, and then moves onto Joseph’s three attempts to remove the plates. He said that Joseph was unable to receive the plates and even felt something like an electrical shock.

As you pass on the mail-road, from Palmyra, . . . about four miles . . . wo invisible powers were operating upon his mind during his walk from his residence to Chumorah [*sic*], and that the one urging the certainty of wealth and ease in this life, had so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great object so carefully and impressively <named by the angel had entirely> gone from his recollection that only a fixed determination to obtain now urged him forward. In this, which occasioned a failure to obtain, at that time, the record, do not understand me to attach blame to our brother: he was young, and his mind easily turned from correct principles, unless he could be favoured [*sic*] with a certain round of experience. . . .

After arriving at the repository, a little exertion in removing the soil from the edges of the top of the box, and a light pry, brought to his natural vision its contents. No sooner did he behold this sacred treasure than his hopes were renewed, and he supposed his success certain . . . On attempting to take possession of the records a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before. . . . [He] made the third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditation he exclaimed, “why can I not obtained this book?” “[]because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord,” answered a voice, within a seeming short distance. He looked, and to his astonishment, there stood the angel who had previously given him the directions concerning this matter. . . . At that instant he looked to the Lord in prayer, and as he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul was lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit; and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy: the heavens were opened and the glory of the Lord shone round about and rested upon him. While he thus stood gazing and

admiring, the angel said, “Look!” and as he thus spake he beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. All this passed before him, and the heavenly messenger said, “All this is shown, the good and the evil [sic], the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one Behold, whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one, It is he that fills the hearts of men with evil, to walk in darkness and blaspheme God; and you may learn from henceforth, that his ways are to destruction, but the way of holiness is peace and rest. You now see why you could not obtain this record; that the commandment was strict, and that if ever these sacred things are obtained[,] they must be by prayer and faithfulness in obeying the Lord (“History, 1834–1836,” p.94).

Oliver explains that Joseph was tutored until he learned to control his thoughts and prioritize the things of God. His accounts adds much more advice from Moroni, including warnings of persecution and temptations, encouragement to pray and obey with exactness, and promises of God’s priesthood power and protection. Oliver does not include any of the future visits to Cumorah in this historical record.

September 22, 1823—Joseph Knight’s Memories

Between 1833 and 1847, Joseph Knight, a beloved and faithful friend of the Prophet, wrote his second-hand memories of angel Moroni’s visitation to young Joseph at the Hill Cumorah on September 22, 1823. The first page of the manuscript has been lost but the second page begins with Joseph walking to the designated hill:

From thence he went to the hill where he was informed the Record was and found no trouble for it appeared appears [sic] plain as tho he was acquainted with the place it was so plain in the vision that he had of the place. He went and found the place and opened it and found a plane Box. He uncovered it and found the book and took [it] out and laid it Down By his side and that he would Cover the place over again thinking there might be something else here. But he was told to take the Book and go right away. And after he had Covered the place he turned round to take the Book and it was not there and he was astonished that the Book was gone. He thot he would look in the place again and see if it had not got Back again. He had heard people tell of such things. And he opened the Box and Behold the Book was there he took hold of it to take it out again and Behold he could not stur the Book any more then he could the mountin [sic]. He exclaimed “why Cant I stur this Book?” and he was answerd [sic], “you have not Done rite; you should have took the Book and a gone right away. You cant have it now.” Joseph says “when can I have it?” The answer was the 22nt Day of September next if you Bring the right person with you. Joseph says, “who is the right person?” The answer was “your oldest Brother” (Dean Jessee, *BYU Studies*, 17.1).

Joseph Knight wrote that angel Moroni told Joseph Smith to return the following year (1824) with his brother Alvin. However, that did not happen, as Alvin died two months later.

Lucy Mack Smith’s Memoirs—Alvin Smith (February 11, 1798–November 19, 1823)

Moroni's instructions to Joseph brought his oldest brother Alvin into the puzzle of how to receive the plates. Alvin played a large part in Joseph's early life. Joseph loved and admired him—as did the whole family. Lucy recorded the details of his premature death, at only twenty-five. (The full account can be found in: "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [3-7], bk. 4," <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>)

. . . On the 15 of Nov Alvin was taken very sick ~~with bilious~~ about 10 o'clock in the day with the bilious cholick and came to <the> house in great distress and requested his Father to go for a p[h]ysician which he accordingly did but ~~as~~ the Doctor whom generally attended upon our family being absent he was compelled to go farther than he expected however he found in the next village one Dr. Greenwood who when he came immediately administered to him although the patient objected much against it a heavy dose of Calomel this lodged in his stomach and all the power [p. [3], bk. 4] medicine which was afterwards prescribed by 4 skillful physicians [*sic*] could ~~never~~ <not> remove it on the 3rd day ~~Do~~ Dr. Mackentire [Alexander McIntyre] the favorite of the family a man of Great skill and experience [*sic*] was brought and with him 4 others professors [*sic*] of Medicine but all their exertions were of no avail as Alvin declared to them ~~and us~~ For said <he> the calomel is still lodged in same place and you cannot move it consequently it must take my life. He then called Hyrum to him and said Hyrum I must die and now I want to say a few things to you that ~~you~~ you must remember I have done all that I could do to make our dear Parents comfortable I now want you to go on and finish the House take <of> care them in their old age and do not ~~let~~ ever let them work hard any more. he then called sophtonia [*sic*] . . . he called for all the children and again exhorted them separately to the same effect as before but to Joseph I he said Joseph I am going to die now the distress which I suffer and the sensations that I have tell me my time is very short I want you to be a good boy & do everything that lays in your power to obtain the records be faithful in receiving instruction and keeping ~~a~~ every commandment that is given you Your brother Alvin ~~is~~ must now leave you but ~~he~~ remember [*sic*] I the example which he has set for you and set a good example for the children that are younger than you & always be kind to Father & Mother he then asked me to take his ~~<up>~~ little sister Lucy up . . .

I turned he said Father Mother brothers sisters farewell I can now breathe out my life as calm as a clock and immediately closed his eyes in death ~~just~~ the child still cried to go back to Alvin. One present said ~~he~~ Alvin is gone an angel has taken his spirit to Heaven when the babe heard this She renewed her cries and as I bent over his corpse she again threw her arms round it and kissed him repeatedly screaming as before— and untill the Body was taken from the House .

. . .

Thus was our happiness blasted in a moment when we least expected the blow it came upon us the poisoned shaft entered our very hearts core and diffused its deadly effect throughout our veins we were for a time almost swallowed up in grief so much so that it seemed impossible for us to interest ourselves at all about the concerns of life the feeling of every heart was to make speedy preparation to follow him who had been too much the Idol of our heart<s> and then if it pleased God to take us also we would receive the call as a favor at his hands from whom it came Alvin had ever manifested a greater zeal and anxiety if it were possible than any of the rest with regard to the ~~plates~~ record which had been shown to Joseph

and he always showed the most intense interest concerning the matter With this before our minds we could not endure to hear or say one word upon that subject for the moment that Joseph spoke of the record it would immediately bring Alvin to ~~their~~ <our> minds with all his kindness his affection his zeal and piety and when we looked to his place and realized that he was gone from it to return no more in this life we ~~wept~~ <all> wept with one accord our irretrievable loss and ~~it seemed as though~~ we could not be comforted because he was not (ibid., p. [7], bk. 4).

Lucy Mack Smith Memoirs—After November 19, 1823

The next line in Lucy's memoirs changes the subject to a revival in the area, but it is crossed out—by either her scribe, an editor, or herself. Camp meetings and revivals were common in the region, and the family often sold cakes and root beer to earn extra money (*Saints*; also see CMF #2). Lucy likely thought of this as a prelude to Joseph's refusal to join in with revival worship, as her account then describes:

~~About this time there was a great revival in religion and the whole neighborhood was very much aroused to the subject and we among the rest flocked to the meeting house to see if there was a word of comfort for us that might relieve our overcharged feelings but as there was <at this time> a man then laboring in that place to effect a union of all the churches that all denominations might be agreed to worship God with one mind and one heart This I thought looked right and tried to persuade My Husband to join with them as I wished to do so myself and it was the inclination of them all except Joseph he refused from the first to attend the meeting with us ~~The~~ He would say Mother I do not wish to prevent you from going to meeting or joining any church you like or any of the Family who desire the like only do not ask me to go <do so> for I do not wish to go But I will take my Bible and go out into the woods and learn more in two hours than you could if you were to go to meeting two years . . . (ibid., p. [7], bk. 4).~~

Joseph's response speaks of his understanding of the seriousness of his call and his need to focus his energies on the Lord's work.

Lucy Mack Smith Memoirs—Moroni's 2nd Annual Visit: September 22, 1824

Lucy gave us another detailed account of the 1824 visitation of Moroni to Joseph. Her account expresses the family's faith filled expectations followed by dashed hopes. But the divine tutor felt eighteen-year-old Joseph had more to learn.

<On> the <22nd of the> ensuing [*sic*] September ~~and if~~ <he visited the place where the plates were laid and> <thinking> he could keep every commmandment [*sic*] given him <supposed> that it would be possible for him to take them from their place and carry them home<> but said the divine messenger you must take them into your hands and go straight to the house without delay ~~not and not stopping~~ <and put them in immediately and lock them up> Accordingly when the time arrived he went to the place appointed and removed the moss and grass from the surface of the rock and then pryed [*sic*] up the flat stone according to the directions which he had received he then discovered the plates laying ~~on~~ on 4 pillars in the inside of the box <*> he put forth his hand <and> took them up <but> when he lifted them

from their place the thought flashed across his mind that there might be something more in the box that ~~might~~ would be a benefit to him in a pecuniary point of view in the excitement of the moment he laid the record down in order to cover up the box least some one should come along and take away whatever else might be deposited there When he turned again to take up the record it was gone but where he knew not nor did he know by what means it was taken away he was much alarmed at this ~~th~~ ~~and~~ ~~he~~ ~~and~~ > kneeled down <&> asked the Lord why it was that the record was taken from him The angel appeared to him and told him that he had not done as he was commanded in that he laid down the record ~~and~~ in order ~~to~~ to secure some imaginary treasure that rema ined [*sic*] <x> <x after some further conversation Joseph> Joseph was then permitted to ~~open th~~ raise the stone again and there he beheld the plates the ~~the~~ same as before He reached forth his hand to take them but was ~~hurled back~~ <thrown (the angel gone—> to the ground— <*> <when he recovered he went cred was the angel was gone and he arose and went to the house.> We were much disturbed by this ~~as it showed to us more strikingly than anything which had previously come to our understanding. the insinuations & power of the adversary.~~ And we doubled our diligence in prayer ~~before God~~ that Joseph might be more fully instructed and preserved from all the wiles and machinations ~~of the Power of the~~ Him who lieth in wait to deceive (*josephsmithpapers.org*; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [3], bk. 4).

This is the last visit Lucy recorded until Joseph received the plates on September 22, 1827. We do not have many reports of Moroni’s visits September 22, 1825 and 1826, yet the visitations must have become well known, as antagonistic neighbors expected Joseph to receive the plates and lay in wait for him on September 22, 1827.

Joseph Knight’s Record—Moroni’s 4th Annual Visit: September 22, 1826

During Moroni’s annual visit on September 22, 1826, he said Joseph could take the plates the next year if brought the right person. His friend Joseph Knight remembered that Joseph asked Moroni:

Who is the right person the answer was you will know then he looked in his glass and found it was emma hale daughter of old mr hail of pensyl vany a girl that he had seen before for he had bin down there before with me he came to me perhaps in november and worked for me until about the time that he was married and I1 furnished him with a horse and cutter to go and see his girl down to mr hails and soon after this he was married and mr stowel moved him and his wife to his fathers in palmyra ontario county (Dean Jessee, “Joseph Knights Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17.1, 1976, 31-32).

This may have motivated Joseph to court Miss Emma Hale and may also explain their future elopement.

Sources:

Joseph Smith Papers; Dean Jessee, *BYU Studies* vol 17, “Joseph Knight’s Recollections of Early Mormon History,” 1-1- 1977; Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 2000). Lynne Hilton Wilson *Dissertation: Comparing Joseph Smith’s Doctrine the Spirit with Contemporaries* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010). Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology in three volumes*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1871. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, IL:

University of Illinois, 1985). Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, in three volumes*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1871; 1.152.