

EARLY CHALLENGES AND WEAKNESSES IN THE RISE OF JOSEPH SMITH AS A PROPHET OF GOD

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Joseph's Early State of Life

In Christ' effort to restore the fulness of His Gospel and build Mount Zion on the earth, the Lord said to Joseph Smith: "Unto this end have I raised you up, that *I might show forth my wisdom* through the weak things of the earth" (D&C 124:1; italics added).¹ Few men began life in as low and humble a state as did the Prophet Joseph.

In the Smith household, with nine children in his father's family after 1821, in rugged frontier conditions, there was the need of the constant labor of each family member in order to survive. Also under these conditions educational opportunities were extremely limited for Joseph and the family. "Suffice it to say," Joseph noted, "I was merely instructed in reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic, which constituted my whole literary acquirements."² His cousin, George A. Smith, spoke of Joseph at the beginning of his prophetic career as "a ploughboy, ... one who cultivated the earth, and had scarcely education enough to read his Bible."³

As a lowly and humble boy, Joseph had a deep desire to grow and expand in the knowledge of Christ, delving into the many gospel facets of His divine plan of life, salvation, and universal peace, justice, and equity for all men. This purpose of Christ' divine program, it was stated, is "that the scriptures might be fulfilled, which say – 'God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and

1 Brigham Young stated: "From the day that Joseph obtained the plates, and previous to that time, the Lord dictated him, ... day by day and hour by hour." JD, 8:66.

2 "History of Joseph Smith, Jr., by himself," in Joseph Smith's Letter Book at Kirtland, November 27, 1832 to August 4, 1835, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, hereafter abbreviated HDC.

3 JD, 7:111

base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.”⁴ Oliver Cowdery observed: “This, I conceive to be an important item – Not many mighty and noble were called in ancient times, because they always *knew so much* that God could not teach them.”⁵ And Christ was quoted as saying: “I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; the wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid.”⁶

By divine means Joseph was rapidly elevated from a state of almost total literary ignorance to a high state of divine and eternal knowledge and understanding. In the First Vision he learned more about the nature, character, and doctrine of God than all prior men knew, from the Dark Ages to the time he knelt to pray in the sacred grove.

When two men, E. L. and William H. Kelley, went to Palmyra to interview neighbors of the Smiths, a resident, Thomas H. Taylor, told them that Joseph “was always ready to exchange views with the best men they had.” In responding to the question, “Why didn’t they like Smith?” Taylor said: “To tell the truth, there was something about him they could not understand. Some way he knew more than they did, and it made them mad.”⁷ Relating to this, to members of the restored church Christ could thus say in a revelation: “Unto them is his [Joseph’s] calling, that all things might be revealed unto them, whatsoever I will, *according to their faith*” (D&C 25:9; italics added).

The need for faith applied to all converts, for God did not operate by arbitrary power, but by faith, with truth, love, mercy, grace, and judgment;⁸ and those who desire to come to Him had to come by faith – by the first principle and ordinance of His Gospel⁹ – and partake of *His righteousness*.¹⁰ While Jesus possesses a fulness of His Father’s glory, with all power in heaven and earth, He acts by faith, with truth, love, mercy, grace,

4 The Angel Moroni, reported in MA, 1 (Feb. 1835), 79.

5 *Ibid.*, (Mar. 1835), 95..

6 By the Angel Moroni, in *ibid.*, (Feb. 1835), 79.

7 Interview with E. L. & William H. Kelley, March 1881, *The Saints’ Herald*, Plano, Ill., XXVIII (June 1, 1881), 165; *Juvenile Instructor*, XVII (Oct. 1, 1882), 301-2, hereafter abbreviated JI, followed by specific details.

8 See Joseph Smith, *The Lecture On Faith*.

9 For the need for faith as an inward sacrificial ordinance, see 3 Ne. 9:18-20; 12:19. For Joseph’s use of faith as an ordinance, see *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Ill., Mar. 1, 1842), 709, hereafter abbreviated TS, followed by specific details.

10 See Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 25; 10:3, 6; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 11:7; Ether 12:28.

and judgment, within the framework of man's free agency,¹¹ which He gives to all people by the power of His infinite atonement.¹²

Christ could not raise Joseph up to be His latter-day oracle except, first, that in the First Estate¹³ – that is, in pre-earth life – in that sphere of existence, Joseph developed the required spiritual, mental, etc., qualities as a foundation for his glorious calling in this mortal life. And, second, Christ had to honor and sustain the principles of free agency and faith in order to bring Joseph up to the required level of divine communion that was necessary to achieve His purposes on earth.

These latent features within Joseph began to operate before his teen years. His ability to critically analyze the religions of his day and the practice of Christian life, and then determine how to rectify the inconsistencies reveals Joseph's ability to become the greatest penetrating expansive mind on earth since Jesus performed His divine mission in mortality.

Said Joseph: "At about the age of twelve years, my mind became seriously impressed with an all-important concern for the welfare of my immortal soul, which led me to search the Scriptures, believing, as I was taught, that they contained the word of God. Then, applying myself to them, and to my intimate acquaintance with those [people] of different denominations,¹⁴ led me to marvel exceedingly, for I discovered that they did not adorn their profession by a holy walk and godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred Depository.

"This was a grief to my soul. Thus, from the age of twelve years to [the] fifteen[th year of my life], I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind, the contentions and divisions, the wickedness and abominations, and the darkness which pervades the minds of mankind.

"My mind became exceedingly distressed, for I became convinced of my sins. And by searching the Scriptures I 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

11 See the Lord's statement in Moses 7:32 as it applied to what He said in D&C 93:30.

12 See 2 Ne. 2:26-27; John 8:36.

13 See Jude 1:6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Abr. 3:24-26.

14 For a time Joseph helped promote the revival around Palmyra, which gave him a chance to study the lives of revival leaders first hand.

denomination that built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament.

“And I felt to mourn for my own sins, and for the sins of the world, for I learned in the Scriptures that God was the same yesterday today and forever, that He was no respecter to persons.

“For He was God; for I looked upon the sun – the glorious luminary of the earth – and also the moon, rolling in their majesty through the heavens, and also the stars, shining in their courses; and the earth, also, upon which I stood, and the beasts of the field and fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters. And, also, men, walking forth upon the face of the earth, in majesty and in strength of beauty, whose power and intelligence in governing the things which are so exceedingly great and marvelous, even in the likeness of Him who created them.

“And when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed, ‘Well hath the wise man said, It is a fool that saith in his heart, there is no God (Ps. 14:1; 53:1)!’

“My heart exclaimed, all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipresent power, a being who maketh laws and decreeth and bindeth all things in their bounds, who filleth Eternity, who was and is and will be from all Eternity to [all] Eternity.

“And when I considered all these things, *and that that Being seeketh such to worship Him, as worship Him in Spirit and in truth*, therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy, for there was none else to whom I could go and obtain mercy.”¹⁵

Which of the great reformers of past ages had as clear a picture of Biblical Christianity and the way to truly establish it in their day? Which of the leading men of Joseph’s day – Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alexander Campbell, Theodore Parker, or Orestes A. Brownson – who studied contemporary Christianity and noted its limitations, deficiencies, and inconsistencies, came to such correct conclusions as Joseph did? Which of the American Founders saw the U. S. Constitution more clearly than the Prophet Joseph Smith? And, much more than this, which one of them, or which later political minds, viewed the U. S. Constitution as the nucleus of a world government

¹⁵ Joseph Smith, Jr., “History of the Life of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” “Joseph Smith's Letter Book, at Kirtland,” Nov. 27, 1832 to Aug. 4, 1835, HDC; emphasis added.

capable – without socializing the state – of establishing universal peace, justice, and equity among all men?¹⁶

The fact that Joseph, through the revelations of the Lord, expanded in vast knowledge from his First Vision to learn the eternal components of the fulness of Christ's Gospel and the vital principles of the free, open, and progressive order of Mount Zion's divine program of eternal life, society, and universal government, attests to the accuracy and significance of Joseph's pre- and early-teen insights.

Challenges and Weaknesses Following the First Vision

In the years following the First Vision, at times by bitter experience, Joseph Smith experienced the need to come to a standard of action and performance fully consistent with his high calling. As a young man, he was soon forced to struggle with the challenges of bitter opposition, primarily from the sectarian world, and the deficiencies and weaknesses of the natural man in mortality.

Having exercised supreme faith to receive his First Vision – where God the Eternal Father and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, personally communed with him – Joseph told a minister in the local revival of his experience, who treated it “not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions in these days.”

Said Joseph: “I soon found ... that my telling the story ... 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” (JS-H 1:22).

“However,” he emphasized, “it was nevertheless a fact that I ... beheld a vision.... I

¹⁶ The writer will discuss these issues in later works.

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 ... 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” (JS-H 1:24-5).

Joseph then explained that between the time of the First 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.”

Yet he stressed: “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 any one who recollects my youth, and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament.”

Still, he confessed: “In consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections” (JS-H 1:26-29; italics added).

Early Ministrations of the Angel Moroni

A revelation in April, 1830, coupled the First Vision and the ministry of the Angel Moroni to Joseph Smith together in the statement: “After it was truly manifested unto ... [Joseph, in his First Vision] that he had received a remission of his sins, he was

entangled again in the vanities of the world; but after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness; and gave unto him commandments which inspired him” (D&C 20:5-8).

Joseph, himself, said, referring to his improper actions: “In consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when, on the evening of the ... twenty-first of September, 1823, 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” (JS-H 1:29).

Of Joseph’s prayer, Oliver Cowdery wrote: “In this situation hours passed unnumbered – how many or how few I know not, neither is he able to inform me; but supposes it must have been eleven or twelve, and perhaps later, as the noise and bustle of the family, in retiring, had long since ceased.”¹⁷

Joseph continued: “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 ... His whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning ... When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me.”

Joseph explained: “He called me by name, and said ... he was a messenger sent from the presence of God ... He said there was a book deposited [in a nearby hill], 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; 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

¹⁷ *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, I, (Kirtland, Ohio, Feb. 1835), 79; hereafter abbreviated MA, followed by the source information.

times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book” (JS-H 1:30, 32-35).

Moroni returned two more times that night and repeated the same message, to impress its contents on Joseph, with further admonitions and counsel, which lasted till a cock crowed signaling the coming of a new day.

“The next day,” Mother Smith related, “my husband, Alvin, and Joseph, were reaping together in the field, and as they were reaping, Joseph stopped quite suddenly, and seemed to be in a very deep study. Alvin, observing it, hurried him, saying, “We must not slacken our hands or we will not be able to complete our task.’

“Upon this Joseph went to work again, and after laboring a short time, he stopped just as he had done before. This being quite unusual and strange, it attracted the attention of his father, upon which he discovered that Joseph was very pale.¹⁸

“My husband, supposing that he was sick, told him to go to the house, and have his mother doctor him. He accordingly ceased his work, and started, but on coming to a beautiful green, under an apple tree, he stopped and lay down, for he was so weak he could proceed no further.

“He was here but a short time when the messenger whom he saw the previous night visited him again; and the first thing he said was, ‘Why did you not tell your father that which I commanded you to tell him?’

“Joseph replied, ‘I was afraid my father would not believe me.’

“The angel rejoined, ‘He will believe every word you say to him.’

“Joseph then promised the angel that he would do as he had been commanded.

“Upon this, the messenger departed, and Joseph returned to the field, where he had left my husband and Alvin. But when he got there, his father had just gone to the house, as he was somewhat unwell.

“Joseph then desired Alvin to go straightway and see his father, and inform him that he had something of great importance to communicate to him, and that he wanted him to come out into the field where they were at work.

¹⁸ See Moses 1:1-2, 9-10 for an example of the strain which celestial glory has on the physical body of man.

“Alvin did as he was requested, and when my husband got there Joseph related to him all that had passed between him and the angel the previous night, and that morning.

“Having heard this account, his father charged him not to fail in attending strictly to the instruction which he had received from this heavenly messenger.”¹⁹

Joseph’s Visit to the Hill Cumorah

Soon after this conversation Joseph went to the place in the hill Cumorah where the Plates were deposited. Here, again, human weakness became a challenge, due largely to the indigent state of the Smith family. To Editor William W. Phelps of the *Messenger And Advocate*, Oliver Cowdery explained: “You will have wondered, perhaps, that the mind of our brother should be so occupied with the thoughts of the goods of this world, at the time of arriving at Cumorah, on the morning of the 22nd of September, 1823, after having been rapt in the visions of heaven during the night, and also seeing and hearing [the angel] in open day.”

“But,” he reasoned, “the mind of man is easily turned, if it is not held by the power of God through the prayer of faith ... Two invisible powers were operating upon his mind during his walk from his residence to Cumorah; and ... 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,” Oliver continued, “which occasioned a failure to obtain the Record at that time, 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 favored with a certain round of experiences.

¹⁹ *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith*, with notes and comments by Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1954), 79-80. For Joseph’s more brief statement, see JS-H 1:48-50. Being in the presence of a glorified being saps the natural strength of man. Moses was caught up to a high mount and, being endowed with glory, conversed with God face to face. When the glory withdrew, the record states, “he fell unto the earth” and it was “many hours before” he received “his natural strength like unto man” (Moses 1:1-2, 9-10).

“And yet,” he added, “while young, ... he was in a situation to be lead into the great work of God and be qualified to perform it in due time.

“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; and without first attempting to take it from its long place of deposit, he thought, perhaps, there might be something more equally as valuable, and to take only the Plates might give others an opportunity of obtaining the remainder, which, could he secure, would add to his store of wealth.

“These ... were his reflections, without once thinking of the solemn instruction of the heavenly messenger, that all must be done with an express view of glorifying God.

“On attempting to take possession of the Record 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.

“What was the occasion of this he knew not – *there* was the pure unsullied Record, as had been described – he had heard of the power of enchantment, and a thousand like stories, which held the hidden treasures of the earth, and supposed that physical exertion and personal strength was only necessary to enable him to yet obtain the object of his wish.

“He therefore made a third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times; and without premeditating, he exclaimed, ‘Why can I not obtain 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.

“In an instant all the former instructions, the great intelligence concerning Israel and the last days, were brought to his mind: he thought of the time when his heart was

ferverly engaged in prayer to the Lord, when his spirit was contrite, and when his holy messenger from the skies unfolded the wonderful things connected with this Record.

“He had come, to be sure, and found the word of the Angel fulfilled concerning the reality of the Record; but he had failed to remember the great end for which they had been kept, and in consequence could not have power to take them into his possession and bear them away.”²⁰

Taught Contrasting Powers by Vision

Oliver continued his account, stating: “At that instant he [Joseph] looked to the Lord in prayer, and as he prayed darkness began to dispense 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 Joseph beheld the Prince of Darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates.

“All this passed before Joseph; and the heavenly messenger said, ‘All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and the 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 to 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

²⁰ MA, II, (Oct. 1835), 197-98. For Joseph Smith’s account, see JS-H 1:51-53. Joseph made his statement in 1838; and, writing in retrospect, he said: “The time for bringing them [the Plates] forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time” (JS-H 1:53). Mother Smith and Oliver Cowdery indicate that, at the time, Joseph did not know that the Record was not to be taken from the hill. His visits, instead, were part of his learning experiences.

strict, and that if ever these sacred things are obtained they must be by prayer and faithfulness in obeying the Lord.

“They are not deposited here for the sake of accumulating gain and wealth for the glory of the world: they were sealed by the prayer of faith, and because of the knowledge which they contain they are of no worth among the children of men, only for their knowledge.

“On them is contained the fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it was given to his people on this land, and when it shall be brought forth by the power of God it shall be carried to the Gentiles, of whom many will receive it, and after will the seed of Israel be brought into the fold of their Redeemer by obeying it also.

“Those who kept the commandments of the Lord on this land desired this at his hand, and through the prayer of faith obtained the promise that if their descendants should transgress and fall away, that a record might be kept and in the last days come to their children.

“These things are sacred, and must be kept so, for the promise of the Lord concerning them must be fulfilled.

“No man can obtain them if his heart is impure, because they contain that which is sacred; and, besides, should they be entrusted in unholy hands the knowledge could not come to the world, because they cannot be interpreted by the learning of this generation; consequently, they would be considered of no worth, only as precious metal.

“Therefore, remember that they are to be translated by the gift and power of God. By them will the Lord work a great and a marvelous work: the wisdom of the wise shall become as naught, and the understanding of the prudent shall be hid; and because the power of God shall be displayed, those who profess to know the truth but walk in deceit shall tremble with anger. But with signs and with wonders, with gifts and with healings, with the manifestations of the power of God, and with the Holy Ghost, shall the hearts of the faithful be comforted.

“You have now beheld the power of God manifested and the power of Satan: you see that there is nothing that is desirable in the works of darkness; that they cannot bring happiness; that those who are overcome therewith are miserable, while, on the other

hand, the righteous are blessed with a place in the kingdom of God where joy unspeakable surrounds them. The glory of God crowns them, and they continually feast upon his goodness and enjoy his smiles.

“Behold, notwithstanding you have seen this great display of power, by which you may ever be able to detect the evil one, yet I give unto you another sign, and when it comes to pass then know that the Lord is God and that he will fulfil his purposes, and that the knowledge which this Record contains will go to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people under the whole heaven. –

“This is the sign: When these things begin to be known, that is, when it is known that the Lord has shown you these things, the workers of iniquity will seek your overthrow: they will circulate falsehoods to destroy your reputation, and also will seek to take your life.

“But remember this, if you are faithful, and shall hereafter continue to keep the commandments of the Lord, you shall be preserved to bring these things forth; for in due time he will again give you a commandment to come and take them ...

“Now, go thy way, remembering what the Lord has done for thee, and be diligent in keeping his commandments, and he will deliver thee from temptations and all the arts and devices of the wicked one. Forget not to pray, that thy mind may become strong, that when he shall manifest unto thee, thou mayest have power to escape the evil, and obtain those precious things.”²¹

This vision greatly matured Joseph’s will to act only by the light and truth of the Holy Spirit. Said Mother Smith: “The angel showed him ... the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God, in such a striking manner, that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the end of his days; and in giving a relation of this circumstance, not long prior to his death, he remarked, that ever afterwards he was willing to keep the commandments of God.”²²

Oliver Cowdery’s Reasoning

21 MA, II, (Oct. 1835), 198-99.

22 *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 81.

In his account of the angel's work of preparing Joseph to be Christ's chosen oracle, Oliver explained: "You see the great wisdom in God in leading him thus far, that his mind might begin to be more mature, and thereby be able to judge correctly the spirits.

"I do not say that he would not have obtained the Record had he went according to the direction of the angel – I say that he would; but God knowing all things from the beginning, began thus to instruct his servant. And in this it is plainly to be seen that the Adversary of truth is not sufficient to overthrow the work of God ...

"Two invisible powers were operating upon the mind of our brother while going to Cumorah. In this ... I discover wisdom in the dealings of the Lord. It was impossible for any man to translate the Book of Mormon, by the gift of God, and endure the afflictions and temptations and devices of Satan without being overthrown, unless he had been previously benefitted with a certain round of experience. And had our brother obtained the Record the first time, not knowing how to detect the works of darkness, he might have been deprived of the blessing of sending forth the word of truth to this generation.

"Therefore, God knowing that Satan would thus lead his mind astray, began at that early hour, that when the full time should arrive he might have a servant prepared to fulfil his purpose.

"So, however afflicting to his feelings this repulse might have been, he had reason to rejoice before the Lord and be thankful for the favors and mercies shown; that whatever other instruction was necessary to the accomplishing of this great work, he had learned by experience how to discern between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the devil."²³

Mother Smith added: "The angel bade Joseph to come to this place every year, at the same time of the year, and he would meet him there and give him further instructions."²⁴

²³ MA, II, (Oct. 1835), 199-200.

²⁴ *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 81.

Joseph's Experiences Made a Family Affair

Joseph's experiences with Moroni became a family affair, which played an important role in the Prophet's development, giving him support and added strength to make the preparations that were required of him. Having spoken of the angel's appearance on the hill Cumorah, Mother Smith reported: "The ensuing evening, when the family were altogether, Joseph made known to them all that he had communicated to his father in the field, and also of his finding the record, as well as what passed between him and the angel while he was at the place where the plates were deposited.

"Sitting up late that evening in order to converse upon these things, together with over-exertion of mind, had much fatigued Joseph; and when Alvin observed it, he said, 'Now, brother, let us go to bed, and rise early in the morning, in order to finish our day's work at an hour before sunset, then, if mother will get our suppers early, we will have a fine long evening, and we will all sit down for the purpose of listening to you while you tell us the great things which God has revealed to you.'

"Accordingly, by sunset the next day, we were all seated, and Joseph commenced telling us the great and glorious things which God had manifested to him. But, before proceeding he charged us not to mention out of the family that which he was about to say to us, as the world was so wicked that when they came to a knowledge of these things they would try to take our lives; and that when we should obtain the Plates, our names would be cast out as evil by all people. Hence the necessity of suppressing these things as much as possible, until the time should come for them to go forth to the world.

"After giving us this charge, he proceeded to relate further particulars concerning the work which he was appointed to do, and we received them joyfully, never mentioning them except among ourselves, agreeable to the instructions which we had received from him.

"From this time forth Joseph continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented an aspect as singular as any that ever lived upon the face of the earth – all seated in a circle, father, mother,

sons and daughters, and giving the most profound attention to a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life: he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study.

“We were now confirmed in the opinion that God was about to bring to light something upon which we could stay our minds, or that would give us a more perfect knowledge of the plan of salvation and the redemption of the human family.

“This caused us greatly to rejoice; the sweetest union and happiness pervaded our house, and tranquility reigned in our midst. During our evening conversations Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them.”²⁵

Later, in relating these early manifestations to Wandle Mace, Mother Smith stated that the things which Joseph related were shown to him “in vision.”²⁶ And evidence suggests that they helped Joseph translate the Book of Mormon. Said George Q. Cannon: “*To prepare Joseph for his mission, [Moroni] came and ministered and talked to him from time to time, and he had vision after vision in order that his mind might be fully saturated with knowledge of the things of God, and that he might comprehend the great and holy calling that God had bestowed upon him.*”²⁷ Thereby he became so familiar with the ancient civilization that he could intelligently ask Christ for the translation of those things which he was seeing through the Urim and Thummim, or the Seer Stone. (See D&C 9:8-9.) And Christ could more easily dictate the words of the text.

Joseph’s 1824 Visit to Cumorah

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-83.

²⁶ “Journal of Wandle Mace,” typewritten copy, BYU Library, 46-47.

²⁷ JD, 23:362.

By further challenging experiences Joseph learned that he had to apply the principle of strict obedience in every detail which the Lord required. Failure to do so caused another disappointment when he went to Cumorah the following year, again expecting to receive the plates. Said Mother Smith: "On the twenty-second of September, 1824, Joseph again visited the place where he found the plates the year previous; and supposing at this time that the only thing required, in order to possess them, until the time for their translation, was to be able to keep the commandments of God – and he firmly believed he could keep every commandment which had been given him – he fully expected to carry them home with him.

"Therefore having arrived at the place, and uncovering the Plates, he put forth his hand and took them up. But, as he was taking them hence, the unhappy thought [again] darted through his mind that probably there was something else in the box besides the plates, which would be of some pecuniary advantage to him. So, in the moment of excitement, he laid them down very carefully for the purpose of covering the box, lest some one might happen to pass that way and get whatever there might be remaining in it.

"After covering it, he turned around to take the record again. But, behold, it was gone, and where he knew not, neither did he know the means by which it had been taken from him.

"At this, as a natural consequence, he was much alarmed. He kneeled down and asked the Lord why the Record had been taken from him; upon which the angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that he had not done as he had been commanded, for in a former revelation he had been commanded not to lay the plates down, or put them for a moment out of his hands, until he got into the house and deposited them in a chest or trunk, having a good lock and key; and, contrary to this he had laid them down with the view of securing some fancied or imaginary treasure that remained.

"In the moment of excitement Joseph was overcome by the powers of darkness, and forgot the injunction that was laid upon him.

"Having some further conversation with the angel on this occasion, Joseph was permitted to raise the stone again, when he beheld the Plates as he had done before.

“He immediately reached forth his hand to take them, but, instead of getting them as he anticipated, he was hurled back upon the ground with great violence.

“When he recovered the angel was gone, and he arose and returned to the house weeping for grief and disappointment.

“As he was aware that we would expect him to bring the plates home with him,” Mother Smith explained, “he was greatly troubled, fearing that we might doubt his having seen them.

“As soon as he entered the house, my husband asked if he had obtained the plates.

“The answer was, ‘No, father, I could not get them.”

“His father then said, ‘Did you see them?’

“‘Yes,’ replied Joseph, ‘I saw them, but could not take them.’

“‘I would have taken them,’ rejoined his father, with much earnestness, ‘if I had been in your place.’

“‘Why,’ returned Joseph in quite a subdued tone, ‘you do not know what you say. I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me.’

“Joseph then related the circumstance in full, which gave us much uneasiness, as we were afraid that he might utterly fail to obtain the record through some neglect on his part. We therefore doubled our diligence in prayer and supplication to God, in order that he might be more fully instructed in his duty and be preserved from all the wiles and machinations of him ‘who lieth in wait to deceive.’”²⁸

A Further Major Chastisement by Moroni

This was not the end of Joseph’s refining experiences by which he finally rose to the standard of obedience and wisdom required to fulfil the mighty mission of his brief life on earth. In January 1827, Joseph brought his newly-married wife, Emma, to live for a

²⁸ *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 83-85.

time with his parents. Mother Smith then stated that her husband “had occasion to send him to Manchester on business.” And, she noted: “As he set off early in the day we expected him home at most by six o'clock in the evening. But when six o'clock came he did not arrive.”

She observed: “We always had a peculiar anxiety about him whenever he was absent, for it seemed as though something was always taking place to jeopardize his life.”

She continued: “He did not get home till the night was far spent. On coming in he threw himself into a chair, apparently much exhausted.

“My husband did not observe his appearance,” she said, “and immediately exclaimed, ‘Joseph, why are you so late? Has anything happened to you? We have been much distressed about you these three hours.’

“As Joseph made no answer he continued his interrogations, until, finally, I said, ‘Now, father, let him rest a moment – don't trouble him now – you see he is home safe and he is very tired, so pray wait a little.’”

She observed: “The fact was I had learned to be a little cautious about matters with regard to Joseph, for I was accustomed to see him look as he did on that occasion and I could not easily mistake the cause thereof.”

She then said: “Presently he smiled and said in a calm tone, ‘I have taken the severest chastisement that I have ever had in my life.’

“My husband, supposing that it was from some of the neighbors, was quite angry and observed, ‘I would like to know what business anybody has to find fault with you!’

“‘Stop, father, stop,’ said Joseph, ‘it was the angel of the Lord. As I passed by the hill of Cumorah, where the plates are, the angel met me and said that I had not been engaged enough in the work of the Lord; that the time had come for the record to be brought forth; and that I must be up and doing and set myself about the things which God had commanded me to do. But, father, give yourself no uneasiness concerning the reprimand which I have received, for I now know the course that I am to pursue, so all will be well.’”

Finally, Mother Smith noted: “It was also made known to him at this interview that he should make another effort to obtain the plates, on the twenty-second of the following September, 1827; but this he did not mention to us at that time.”²⁹

Joseph Given the Ancient Record

When Joseph went to the hill Cumorah on September 22, 1827, he took Emma with him; and they set out soon after midnight, at the beginning of the appointed day. This time the Prophet was successful in his effort, and in taking the plates from the hill he secluded them in a hollow log in the woods. But information of his annual visits had leaked out; and while he was later bringing the plates to the Smith home he was waylaid, in succession, by three men who were hiding in the brush. But with fist and brawn he knocked each one down; and though exhausted, with a dislocated thumb, he finally put the ancient record in a secret place in the Smith home.

Mob elements then repeatedly sought to get the plates; and Joseph and Emma were finally forced – financially assisted by Martin Harris, a wealthy farmer near Palmyra who had accepted divine witnesses of the Prophet’s testimony – to move to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where they purchased a small house across the road near the residence of Emma’s parents.

The Lost Manuscript of The Book of Lehi

Later, Martin Harris joined Joseph in Harmony and acted as his scribe in translating the first section of the ancient Record, – beginning around April 12, 1828, and finishing it on June 14 – called the “Book of Lehi,”³⁰ consisting of 116 pages written on foolscap paper.

During this period Martin’s wife, Lucy, – who largely dominated the Harris family

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-101.

³⁰ Joseph Smith’s Preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, HC, 1:20-21.

and sought unsuccessfully to extend her influence over Joseph – then came to Harmony and, in her disappointment, “did all that lay in her power to injure Joseph in the estimation of his neighbors – telling them that he was a grand imposter, and, that by his specious pretensions, he had seduced her husband into the belief that he (Joseph Smith) was some great one, merely through a design upon her husband’s property.”³¹

Thus, as the work of translation progressed, Martin urged Joseph to ask the Lord to let him take the manuscript of the Book of Lehi to show his wife and other family members.

Being willing to gratify Martin’s desires, Joseph made the request. But, consent from the Lord was denied.

This did not satisfy Martin, and he soon persuaded Joseph to make a second request, to which the Lord also gave a negative response.

Still Martin persisted; and, when he induced Joseph to make a third request, the Lord gave permission, if Martin would only show the manuscript to “his brother, Preserved Harris, his own wife, his father and his mother, and a Mrs. Cobb, a sister to his wife.” Said Joseph: “In accordance with this last answer, I required of him that he should bind himself in a covenant to me in a most solemn manner, that he would not do otherwise than had been directed. He did so. He bound himself as I required of him, took the writings, and went his way.”³²

Though Martin was an honest man, he tended to brag and boast of his achievements. To let Harris take the manuscript was a matter of such great importance that if these opening chapters were lost it could destroy the effort to bring forth the ancient record, for they were the foundation of the whole historical treatise.

Soon after Martin left Harmony, Joseph’s wife, Emma, gave birth to their first child, a son who lived but a short time; and thereafter Emma then hovered between life and death. For two weeks, as Joseph cared for her, he had scarcely an hour of undisturbed sleep. By then Martin “had been absent nearly three weeks, and Joseph had received no intelligence whatever from him, which was altogether aside of the arrangement when

³¹ *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 122.

³² HC, 1:21.

they separated.”³³

Joseph, therefore, began to fear that he, himself, had transgressed by continuing to present Martin’s request to Christ. And moved with “fearful apprehensions,” sleep fled from Joseph, and he had no desire for food.

When Emma began to recover, she mentioned the possible problem and requested Joseph to ask her mother to stay with her while he went to learn the cause of Martin’s neglect. Meanwhile, Joseph contemplated “the course which Martin had taken, and the risk which he (Joseph) had run in letting the manuscript go out of his hands – for it could not be obtained again, in case Martin had lost it through transgression, except by the power of God, which was something Joseph could hardly hope for – and that, by persisting in his entreaties to the Lord, he had perhaps fallen into transgression, and thereby lost the manuscript.”

By such thoughts “his soul was moved with fearful apprehensions”; and he took the first stage going toward Palmyra, in which there was “only one passenger ... besides himself.” This man, “observing Joseph’s gloomy appearance, inquired the cause of his affliction, and offered to assist him if his services would be acceptable.

“Joseph thanked him for his kindness, and mentioned that he had been watching some time with a sick wife and child, that the child had died, and that his wife was still very low; but refrained from giving any further explanation.

“Nothing more passed between them upon this subject, until Joseph was about leaving the stage; at which time he remarked, that he still had twenty miles further to travel on foot that night, it being then about ten o’clock.

“To this the stranger objected, saying, ‘I have watched you since you first entered the stage, and I know that you have neither slept nor eaten since that time, and you shall not go on foot twenty miles alone this night; for, if you must go, I will be your company ... I fear that ... you will be in danger of falling asleep in the forest, and of meeting with some awful disaster.’

“Joseph again thanked the gentleman for his kindness; and, leaving the stage, they proceeded together.

³³ *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 125.

“When they reached our house,” Mother Smith reported, “it was nearly daylight.” The stranger stated that “he was under the necessity of leading Joseph the last four miles by the arm; for nature was too much exhausted to support him any longer.” He would “fall asleep as he was walking along, every few minutes, towards the last of this distance.”

Joseph immediately requested that Martin be sent for; and, said Mother Smith, “when we had given the stranger his breakfast [before he left], we commenced preparing breakfast for the family ... We supposed that Mr. Harris would be there, as soon as it was ready, to eat with us, for he generally came in such haste when he was sent for.”

But, she said: “At eight o'clock we set the victuals on the table, as we were expecting him every moment. We waited till nine, and he came not – till ten, and he was not there – till eleven, still he did not make his appearance. But at half past twelve we saw him walking with a slow and measured tread towards the house, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground.

“On coming to the gate, he stopped, instead of passing through, and got upon the fence, and sat there some time with his hat drawn over his eyes. At length he entered the house, soon after which we sat down to the table, Mr. Harris with the rest.

“He took up his knife and fork as if he were going to use them, but immediately dropped them.

“Hyrum, observing this, said, ‘Martin, why do you not eat; are you sick?’

“Upon which Mr. Harris pressed his hands, upon his temples, and cried out in a tone of deep anguish, ‘Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!’

“Joseph who had not expressed his fears till now, sprang from the table, exclaiming, ‘Martin, have you lost that manuscript? Have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head as well as your own?’

“‘Yes; it is gone,’ replied Martin, ‘and I know not where.’

“‘Oh, my God!’ said Joseph, clinching his hands. ‘All is lost! All is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned – it is I who tempted the wrath of God. I should have been satisfied with the first answer which I received from the Lord; for he told me that it was not safe to

let the writing go out of my possession.’

“He wept and groaned, and walked the floor continually.

“At length he told Martin to go back and search again.

“‘No,’ said Martin, ‘it is all in vain; for I have ripped open beds and pillows; and I know it is not there.’

“‘Then must I,’ said Joseph, ‘return with such a tale as this? I dare not do it. And how shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?’ ... He continued pacing back and forth, meantime weeping and grieving, until about sunset, when, by persuasion, he took a little nourishment.

“The next morning he set out for home,” Mother Smith stated. “We parted with heavy hearts, for it now appeared that all which we had so fondly anticipated, and which had been the source of so much secret gratification, had in a moment fled, and fled forever.”³⁴

Christ’s Judgments upon Joseph

Nothing was heard from Joseph for nearly two months; and being concerned, his parents went to visit him. Alluding to his seeric powers, his Mother said: “When we came within three-quarters of a mile of the house, Joseph started to meet us, telling his wife, as he left, that father and mother were coming. When he met us, his countenance wore so pleasant an aspect that I was convinced he had something agreeable to communicate with regard to the work in which he was engaged. When I entered [their home] the first thing which attracted my attention was a red morocco trunk, lying on Emma’s bureau, which Joseph shortly informed me contained the Urim and Thummim, and the Plates.”³⁵

That evening he explained: “On leaving you I returned immediately home. Soon after my arrival, I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord, and, as I was pouring out my soul in supplication to God, that if possible I might obtain mercy at

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 124-29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

his hands and be forgiven of all that I had done contrary to his will, an angel stood before me, and answered me, saying that I had sinned in delivering the manuscript into the hands of a wicked man, and, as I had ventured to become responsible for his faithfulness, I would of necessity have to suffer the consequences of his indiscretion, and I must now give up the Urim and Thummim into his (the angel's) hands.”

“This I did as I was directed,” he continued, “and as I handed them to him, he remarked, 'If you are very humble and penitent, it may be you will receive them again; if so, it will be on the twenty-second of next September, [1828].”³⁶

In her account, Mother Smith stated that, “soon after the angel visited” Joseph, he was given a revelation now found in Section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which began: “The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught” (D&C 3:1).

This was a great comfort, for it gave reason to hope that the ancient record could still be brought forth, and that the work of building Zion could still go on.

Jesus then stressed, in a classic statement, the principle of free agency, as a foundation of all He was seeking to do and to bring forth. He began by declaring: “God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.”

Christ then emphasized: “Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men; for, [speaking of Martin – yet not excluding Joseph – to whom Jesus had revealed some things], although a man may have many revelations and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him.”

To Joseph, Jesus then said: “Behold, you have been entrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises which were made to you, if you did not transgress them. And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men.

³⁶ *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 133-34.

For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words – yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble.”

Christ warned: “Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall.”

“But remember,” He continued, “God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift” (D&C 3:2-11).

This was also a comfort to Joseph. Yet Christ did not explain how the seemingly insurmountable problem of the lost manuscript could be solved. And toward the end of the revelation He merely restated His chastisement in a broader historical setting, declaring: “When thou deliveredst up that which God had given thee sight and power to translate, [alluding to the visionary principle of the Urim and Thummim], thou deliveredst up that which was sacred into the hands of a wicked man, who has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises which were made before God, and has depended upon his own judgment and boasted in his own wisdom. *And this is the reason that thou hast lost thy privileges for a season – for thou hast suffered the counsel of thy director [the angel Moroni] to be trampled upon from the beginning.* Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come [in this Record] unto my people” (D&C 3:12-16; italics added).

Christ’s Solution to the Lost Book of Lehi

After Mother Smith related the above incidents, she returned to Joseph’s recital to her and his father. “After the angel [who took the Urim and Thummim from him] left me,” Joseph continued, “I continued my supplications to God, without cessation, and on the twenty-second of September I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim

and Thummim, with which I have again commenced translating, and Emma writes for me.”

Joseph also stated: “The angel seemed pleased with me when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim, and he told me that the Lord loved me, for my faithfulness and humility.”³⁷

Yet Joseph still did not know how the problem of the lost Book of Lehi would be solved, only that he was permitted to continue his work of translation, until March, 1829, when he was instructed to cease for a time (see D&C 5:30-34).

In the March revelation Jesus returned to the need for Joseph to come to a state of mature sensitivity and complete obedience to His will. “And now I command you, my servant Joseph,” He declared, “to repent and walk more uprightly before me, and to yield to the persuasions of men no more; and that you be firm in keeping the commandments wherewith I have commanded you; and if you do this, behold I grant unto you eternal life, even if you should be slain” (D&C 5:21-22).

Returning again to Mother Smith’s report, she stated: “A few months after Joseph received them [the Urim and Thummim, on September 22, 1828], he inquired of the Lord and obtained the following revelation,”³⁸ now found in Section 10 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which was originally dated May, 1829. Therein Christ finally revealed how the problem of the lost Book of Lehi was to be solved.

By His foreknowledge, Christ had provided a solution many hundred years before this problem occurred. Centuries before His own birth on earth as the infant Babe of Bethlehem, Jehovah instructed Nephi, a faithful son of the Patriarch Lehi, to make two sets of plates: the Large Plates of Nephi – to be an ongoing record of the people of Lehi – and the Small Plates of Nephi (see 1 Ne. 19:1-5; Jac. 1:1-2), on which Lehi, Nephi, and other prophets recorded many sacred visions and glorious truths which the Lord gave to them, along with several chapters of the Book of Isaiah, – the earliest copies now extant of Isaiah’s works – containing prophecies to be fulfilled in the latter days.³⁹

37 *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 135.

38 *History of Joseph Smith, By His Mother*, 135.

39 Some of these prophecies were partially fulfilled in ancient times, but would again be fulfilled in the latter days. The Prophet Jacob thus said to his people: “Now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things *which are*, and

Later, when the Prophet Mormon abridged the Large Plates of Nephi to create his history on the Plates of Mormon, – which his son, the Prophet Moroni, finished, hid up, and later revealed to Joseph Smith – the Lord instructed him [Mormon] to attach the Small Plates of Nephi to the Plates of Mormon (see W of M 1:3-7), which covered the same historical period as the Book of Lehi.

In this revelation, again, given in May 1829, Joseph Smith was told to translate the Small Plates of Nephi and place their contents at the beginning of the Book of Mormon (see D&C 10:38-41). And these last documents to be translated then became the first contents in the final manuscript of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Continues to Develop

Yet the Prophet continued to grow and matured in various ways. Lorenzo Snow, later the fifth President of the Church, took note of some developments, in the early 1830s, stating: “The first time I saw Joseph Smith I was seventeen years of age. It was in the fall of 1831. He was going to hold a meeting in Hiram, Portage County, Ohio, about four miles from my father's home. Having heard many stories about him, my curiosity was considerably aroused and I thought I would take advantage of this opportunity to see and hear him.

“When we reached there, the people were already assembled in a small bowery. There were about two hundred or two hundred and fifty people present. The meeting had already commenced, and Joseph Smith was standing in the door of Father [John] Johnson's house looking into the bowery and addressing the people.

“I made a critical examination as to his appearance, his dress, and his manner as I heard him speak. He was only twenty-five years of age and was not, at that time, what would be called a fluent speaker. His remarks were confined principally to his own experiences, especially the visitation of the angel, giving a strong and powerful testimony in regard to these marvelous manifestations. He simply bore his testimony to what the Lord had manifested to him, to the dispensation of the gospel which had been committed

things *which are to come*, wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah” (2 Ne. 6:4; italics added).

to him, and to the authority that he possessed.

“At first he seemed a little diffident and spoke in rather a low voice. But as he proceeded, he became very strong and powerful and seemed to affect the whole audience with the feeling that he was honest and sincere. It certainly influenced me in this way, and it made impressions upon me that remain until the present day.

“As I looked upon him and listened, I thought to myself that a man bearing such a wonderful testimony as he did, and having such a countenance as he possessed, could hardly be a false prophet. He certainly could not have been deceived, it seemed to me. If he was a deceiver, he was deceiving the people knowingly; for when he testified that he had had a conversation with Jesus, the Son of God, and had talked with Him personally, as Moses talked with God upon Mount Sinai, and that he had also heard the voice of the Father, he was telling something that he either knew to be false or to be positively true.

“When I went to Kirtland some three or four years later, I was on the street with my sister, Eliza, when Joseph Smith came along. He was in a great hurry, and stopped just long enough to be introduced and shake hands. He turned to my sister and said, "Eliza, bring your brother over to the house to dinner."

Eliza Snow was then boarding at his home and teaching his private school. As he left us I watched him just as far as I could see him, then I turned to my sister and said: "Joseph Smith is a most remarkable man; I want to get better acquainted with him. Perhaps, after all, there is something more to Joseph Smith and to Mormonism than I have ever dreamed.

“Accordingly, the next time I saw the Prophet was at his own house in Kirtland. He sat down at one end of the table and I sat next to him. He seemed to have changed considerably in his appearance since I first saw him at Hiram, four and a half years before. He was very ready in conversation, and had apparently lost that reserve and diffident feeling that he seemed to have before. He was free and easy in his conversation with me, making me feel perfectly at home in his presence. In fact, I felt as free with him as if we had been special friends for years.

“I became perfectly acquainted with the Prophet. I sat at his table frequently, and had many conversations with him. I listened to the teaching of the gospel and received

these truths with an open heart. I was exceedingly anxious to know without doubt that Joseph Smith was a true prophet.

“I heard the Prophet discourse upon the grandest of subjects. At times he was filled with the Holy Ghost, speaking as with the voice of an archangel and filled with the power of God. His whole person shone, and his face was lightened until it appeared as the whiteness of the driven snow.

“Finally, I was convinced of the truth sufficiently to want to be baptized, to get a knowledge for myself of the testimony that Joseph Smith had seen God.

“After my baptism, everything that I had thought about in a religion was changed. Every part of my system became convinced, through the power of the Holy Ghost, that God is my Father, that Jesus Christ is my Elder Brother, and that Joseph Smith is His prophet.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *The Improvement Era*, XL (February, 1937), 82-84.