





CHAPTER 4

Be Watchful

This is chapter 4 of the new four-volume narrative history of the Church titled Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days. The book will be available in 14 languages in print, in the Church History section of the Gospel Library app, and at saints.lds.org. The next several chapters will be published in upcoming issues until volume 1 is released later this year. Those chapters will be available in 47 languages in the Gospel Library app and at saints.lds.org.

Twenty-one-year-old Emma Hale first heard about Joseph Smith when he came to work for Josiah Stowell in the fall of 1825. Josiah had hired the young man and his father to help him find buried treasure on his property.¹ Local legends claimed that a band of explorers had mined a silver deposit and hidden the treasure in the area hundreds of years earlier. Knowing Joseph had a gift for using seer stones, Josiah offered him good wages and a share of the findings if he would help in the search.²

Emma's father, Isaac, supported the venture. When Joseph and his father came to the Stowell farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania—a village some 150 miles (240 km) south of Palmyra—Isaac served as a witness when they signed their contracts. He also allowed the workers to live in his home.³

Emma met Joseph soon after. He was younger than she was, stood over six feet (1.8 m) tall, and looked like someone who was used to hard work. He had blue eyes and a light complexion, and he walked with a faint limp. His grammar was uneven, and he sometimes used too many words to express himself, but he displayed a natural intelligence when he spoke. He and his father were good men who preferred to worship on their own rather than attend the church where Emma and her family worshipped.⁴

Both Joseph and Emma liked being outdoors. Since childhood, Emma had enjoyed riding horses and canoeing in the river near her home. Joseph was not a skilled horseman, but he excelled in wrestling and ball games. He was at ease around others and quick to smile, often telling jokes or humorous stories. Emma was more reserved, but she loved a good joke and could talk with anyone. She also liked to read and sing.⁵

As the weeks passed and Emma got to know Joseph better, her parents grew anxious about their relationship. Joseph was a poor laborer from another state, and they hoped their daughter would lose interest in him and marry into one of the prosperous families in their valley. Emma's father had

also grown wary of the treasure hunt and was suspicious of Joseph's role in it. It did not seem to matter to Isaac Hale that Joseph had tried to convince Josiah Stowell to call the search off when it became clear nothing would come of it.⁶

Emma liked Joseph better than any other man she knew, and she did not stop spending time with him. After he succeeded in convincing Josiah to stop looking for silver, Joseph remained in Harmony to work on Josiah's farm. Sometimes he also worked for Joseph and Polly Knight, another farming family in the area. When he was not working, he visited Emma.⁷

Joseph and his seer stone soon became the subject of gossip in Harmony. Some of the older folks in town

In 2015 the Church rebuilt this replica of the Isaac and Elizabeth Hale home in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Joseph Smith met their daughter Emma when he lived on the property while working for Josiah Stowell.





The Smith family frame home in Manchester, New York, was restored using the original structure. After their marriage in 1827, Joseph and Emma lived here with his parents.

believed in seers, but many of their children and grandchildren did not. Josiah's nephew, claiming that Joseph had taken advantage of his uncle, brought the young man to court and charged him with being a fraud.

Standing before the local judge, Joseph explained how he had found the stone. Joseph Sr. testified that he had constantly asked God to show them His will for Joseph's marvelous gift as a seer. Finally, Josiah stood before the court and stated that Joseph had not swindled him.

"Do I understand," said the judge, "that you believe the prisoner can see by the aid of the stone?"

No, Josiah insisted, "I positively know it to be true."

Josiah was a well-respected man in the community, and people accepted his word. In the end, the hearing produced no evidence that Joseph had deceived him, so the judge dismissed the charge.⁸

In September 1826, Joseph returned to the hill for the plates [see chapter 3], but Moroni said he was still not ready for them. "Quit the company of the money diggers," the angel told him. There were wicked men among them.⁹ Moroni gave him one more year to align his will with God's. If he did not, the plates would never be entrusted to him.

The angel also told him to bring someone with him next time. It was the same request he had made at the end of Joseph's first visit to the hill. But since Alvin was dead, Joseph was confused.

"Who is the right person?" he asked.

"You will know," Moroni said.

Joseph sought the Lord's direction through his seer stone. The right person, he learned, was Emma.¹⁰

Joseph had been drawn to Emma as soon as he met her. Like Alvin, she was someone who could help him become the man the Lord needed to carry out His work. But there was more to Emma than that. Joseph loved her and wanted to marry her.¹¹

In December, Joseph turned 21 years old. In the past, he had let himself be pulled this way and that by the expectations of those who wanted to take advantage of his gift.¹² But after his last visit to the hill, he knew he had to do more to prepare himself to receive the plates.

Before returning to Harmony, Joseph spoke with his parents. "I have concluded to get married," he told them, "and, if you have no objections, Miss Emma Hale would be



On the night of September 22, 1827, Joseph and Emma drove a carriage to this hill, where the Book of Mormon plates were buried. After obtaining the plates, Joseph hid them in a hollow log for a time to protect them from treasure seekers.

my choice.” His parents were pleased with his decision, and Lucy urged him to come live with them after they married.¹³

Joseph spent as much time as he could with Emma that winter, sometimes borrowing the Knights’ sleigh when snow made it hard to travel to the Hales’ house. But her parents still did not like him, and his efforts to win over the family failed.¹⁴

In January 1827, Emma visited the Stowells’ home, where she and Joseph could spend time together without her family’s disapproving looks. Joseph proposed to Emma there, and at first, Emma seemed surprised. She knew her parents would oppose the marriage.¹⁵ But Joseph urged her to think about it. They could elope right away.

Emma considered the proposal. Marrying Joseph would disappoint her parents, but it was her choice, and she loved him.¹⁶

A short time later, on January 18, 1827, Joseph and Emma were married in the home of the local justice of the peace. They then went to Manchester and began life together in the new home of Joseph’s parents. The house was comfortable, but Joseph Sr. and Lucy had overspent on it, fallen behind on their payments, and lost the property.

They were now renting it from the new owners.¹⁷

The Smiths liked having Joseph and Emma with them. But their son’s divine call made them anxious. People in the area had heard about the gold plates and sometimes went looking for them.¹⁸

One day, Joseph went to town on an errand. Expecting him back for dinner, his parents were alarmed when he did not return. They waited for hours, unable to sleep. At last Joseph opened the door and threw himself into a chair, exhausted.

“Why are you so late?” his father asked.

“I have had the severest chastisement that I ever had in my life,” Joseph said.

“Who has been taking you to task?” demanded his father.

“It was the angel of the Lord,” Joseph replied. “He says I have been negligent.” The day of his next meeting with Moroni was coming soon. “I must be up and doing,” he said. “I must set myself about the things which God has commanded me to do.”¹⁹

After the fall harvest, Josiah Stowell and Joseph Knight traveled to the Manchester area on business. Both men

a group of men plotting to steal the gold plates. “We will have the plates,” one of them said, “in spite of Joe Smith or all the devils in hell.”

Alarmed, Joseph Sr. returned home and told Emma. She said she did not know where the plates were, but she was sure Joseph had protected them.

“Yes,” Joseph Sr. replied, “but remember that for a small thing Esau lost his blessing and birthright. It may be so with Joseph.”²⁸

To be sure the plates were secure, Emma mounted a horse and rode for more than an hour to the farm where Joseph was working. She found him by the well, caked in dirt and sweat from the day’s work.

Hearing of the danger, Joseph looked into the Urim and Thummim and saw that the plates were safe.

Back home, Joseph Sr. paced back and forth outside the house, glancing every minute down the road until he saw Joseph and Emma.

“Father,” Joseph said as they rode up, “all is perfectly safe—there is no cause of alarm.”²⁹

But it was time to act.

Hurrying to the hill, Joseph found the log where the plates were hidden and carefully wrapped them in a shirt.³⁰ He then ducked into the woods and headed for home, his eyes alert to danger. The forest concealed him from people on the main road, but it gave thieves plenty of places to hide.

Straining under the weight of the record, Joseph tramped through the woods as fast as he could. A fallen tree blocked the path ahead of him, and as he bounded over it, he felt something hard strike him from behind. Turning around, he saw a man coming at him, wielding a gun like a club.

Clutching the plates tightly with one arm, Joseph knocked the man to the ground and scrambled deeper into the thicket. He ran for about half a mile when another man

sprang from behind a tree and struck him with the butt of his gun. Joseph fought the man off and darted away, desperate to be out of the woods. But before he could get very far a third man attacked, landing a heavy blow that sent him reeling. Gathering his strength, Joseph hit the man hard and ran for home.³¹

Back at the house, Joseph burst through the door with his heavy bundle tucked beneath one arm. “Father,” he cried, “I have got the plates.”

His 14-year-old sister, Katharine, helped him set the bundle on a table as the rest of the family gathered around him. Joseph could tell that his father and younger brother

William wanted to unwrap the plates, but he stopped them.

“Can we not see them?” Joseph Sr. asked.

“No,” Joseph said. “I was disobedient the first time, but I intend to be faithful this time.”

He told them they could feel the plates through the cloth, and his brother William picked up the bundle. It was heavier than stone, and William could tell that it had leaves that moved like the pages of a

book.³² Joseph also sent his youngest brother, Don Carlos, to get a lockbox from Hyrum, who lived down the road with his wife, Jerusha, and their newborn daughter.

Hyrum arrived soon after, and once the plates were securely in the box, Joseph collapsed onto a nearby bed and started telling his family about the men in the woods.

As he spoke, he realized his hand ached. Sometime during the attacks he had dislocated a thumb.

“I must stop talking, Father,” he said suddenly, “and get you to put my thumb back in place.”³³ ■

A complete list of works cited is available at saints.lds.org.

The word *Topic* in the notes indicates additional information online at saints.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Agreement of Josiah Stowell and Others, Nov. 1, 1825, in *JSP*, D1: 345–52.
2. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 91–92; Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” *LDS Messenger and Advocate*, Oct. 1835, 2:200–202; Joseph Smith



Joseph borrowed a lockbox like this from his brother Hyrum to store the Book of Mormon plates.

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3. Agreement of Josiah Stowell and Others, Nov. 1, 1825, in *JSP*, D1: 345–52.
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 5. Baugh, “Joseph Smith’s Athletic Nature,” 137–50; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 47; Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer*, 66–67; *Recollections of the Pioneers of Lee County*, 96; Younggreen, *Reflections of Emma*, 61, 67, 65, 69; Emmeline B. Wells, “L.D.S. Women of the Past,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Feb. 1908, 36:49.
 6. Joseph Smith History, 1838–56, volume A-1, 8, in *JSP*, H1:234 (draft 2); Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 92; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 51–53; Staker, “Isaac and Elizabeth Hale in Their Endless Mountain Home,” 104.
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 8. William D. Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” *Chenango Union*, May 2, 1877, [3]; see also An Act for Apprehending and Punishing Disorderly Persons (Feb. 9, 1788), *Laws of the State of New-York* (1813), 1:114. **Topic:** Joseph Smith’s 1826 Trial
 9. “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, July 1859, 169.
 10. Knight, *Reminiscences*, 2.
 11. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 185, 96; see also Knight, *Reminiscences*, 2.
 12. See “The Original Prophet,” *Fraser’s Magazine*, Feb. 1873, 229–30.
 13. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 97.
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 15. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, Oct. 1, 1879, 289; Joseph Smith History, 1838–56, volume A-1, 8, in *JSP*, H1:236 (draft 2).
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