
Establishing the Foundations of the Church

Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

Visits of the Angel Moroni

On the evening of 21 September 1823, three years after receiving the First Vision, Joseph Smith prayed to the Lord for forgiveness of the follies of his youth and asked for further direction. The Lord answered by sending a heavenly messenger to instruct him. Joseph wrote:

“He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.

“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” (JS—H 1:33–34).

Moroni had been the last prophet to write on this ancient record, and as directed by the Lord, he had buried it in the Hill Cumorah. He had also buried the Urim and Thummim, which was used by prophets anciently and which Joseph was to use to translate the record.

The angel directed Joseph to go to the hill, which was nearby, and told him many important things about the Lord’s work in the latter days. He told Joseph that when he obtained the plates, he was not to show them to any person unless the Lord commanded



At the Hill Cumorah, Joseph Smith received the gold plates from the angel Moroni and was told to begin the work of translation.

him to do so. Moroni returned to Joseph two more times that night and once again the next day. Each time he repeated his important message and provided additional information.

On the day following the angel's visits, Joseph went to the Hill Cumorah as instructed. He said of this experience:

"On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth.

"Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger" (JS—H 1:51–52).

The angel Moroni appeared and told Joseph to meet him at the hill in one year at that same time and to continue the yearly meetings until the time came to receive the plates. At each visit, Moroni gave further instructions about what the Lord was going to do and how his kingdom was to be conducted (see JS—H 1:27–54).

The Work of Translation

On 22 September 1827, after four years of preparation, Moroni gave the Prophet Joseph the gold plates and told him to begin the work of translation. Emma Hale, whom Joseph had married earlier that year, accompanied him on that occasion and was waiting at the foot of the Hill Cumorah when her husband returned with the plates. She became an important help to the Prophet and acted as one of the Book of Mormon scribes for a brief period.

Because of the repeated and strenuous efforts of a local mob to steal the gold plates, Joseph and Emma were forced to leave their home in Manchester, New York. They took refuge at the home of Emma's father, Isaac Hale, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, about 120

miles southeast of Manchester. There Joseph began translating the plates. He was soon joined by his friend, Martin Harris, a well-to-do farmer, who became his scribe.

Martin asked Joseph if he could take 116 pages of translated material home to show his family members to prove to them the validity of the work they were doing. Joseph asked the Lord for permission, but the Lord's answer was no. Martin pleaded for Joseph to ask again, which Joseph reluctantly did two more times and finally received permission. Martin made a covenant to show the manuscript only to certain people, but he broke his promise, and the pages of manuscript were stolen. This loss caused Joseph inconsolable grief, for he thought that all his efforts to serve the Lord had been lost. He cried, "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."¹

Joseph sincerely repented, and after a brief period when the plates and the Urim and Thummim were taken away, the Lord forgave him and he began translating once again. The Lord instructed him not to retranslate the lost material, which contained a secular history. Instead, Joseph was to translate other plates prepared by the prophet Nephi that covered the same period of time but contained greater prophecies of Christ and other sacred writings. The Lord had foreseen the loss of the 116 pages and inspired Nephi to prepare this second history. (See 1 Nephi 9; D&C 10:38–45; see also D&C 3 and 10, which were received during this period.)

At this time, Joseph was blessed with the help of Oliver Cowdery, a young schoolteacher who was directed by the Lord to the Prophet's home. Oliver commenced to write on 7 April 1829. Of that momentous time he said, "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom!" (JS—H 1:71, footnote).

Oliver further declared: "That book is true. . . . I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet. It contains the everlasting

gospel, and comes in fulfillment of the revelations of John where it says he saw an angel come with the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, tongue and people. It contains principles of salvation. And if you will walk by its light and obey its precepts you will be saved in the everlasting kingdom of God.”²

In the midst of their work, Joseph and Oliver found that their dedication to the translation of the record had left them without food or money; they lacked even the necessary writing materials. Learning of their plight, Joseph Knight Sr., a former employer and friend of the Prophet, determined to give them assistance. He described the nature of his most timely aid:

“I bought a barrel of mackerel and some lined paper for writing. . . . I bought some nine or ten bushels of grain and five or six bushels taters [potatoes].” He then visited the two men in Harmony and recalled that “Joseph and Oliver were gone to see if they could find a place to work for provisions, but found none. They returned home and found me there with provisions, and they were glad for they were out. . . . Then they went to work and had provisions enough to last till the translation was done.”³

Is it any wonder that the Prophet Joseph said of this righteous man: “It shall be said of him, by the sons of Zion, while there is one of them remaining, that this man was a faithful man in Israel; therefore his name shall never be forgotten.”⁴

Because of increasing persecution, Joseph and Oliver left Harmony and completed the work of translation at the Peter Whitmer farm in Fayette, New York, during June 1829. The completion of this work in the midst of such trying circumstances is truly a modern-day miracle. With little formal education, Joseph Smith dictated the translation in just a little over two months of actual working time and made very few corrections. The book stands today essentially as he translated it and has been the source of testimony for millions of people throughout the world. Joseph Smith was a powerful instrument in the hands of the Lord in bringing forth the words of ancient prophets for the blessing of Saints in the latter days.

Witnesses to the Book of Mormon

While the Prophet Joseph Smith was in Fayette, the Lord revealed that Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris were to be three special witnesses who would be permitted to see the gold plates (see 2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:2–4; D&C 17). They, along with Joseph, would be able to testify of the origin and truth of this ancient record.

David Whitmer explained: “We went out into the woods, near by, and sat down on a log and talked awhile. We then kneeled down and prayed. Joseph prayed. We then got up and sat on the log and were talking, when all at once a light came down from above us and encircled us for quite a little distance around; and the angel stood before us.” This angel was Moroni. David said that he “was dressed in white, and spoke and called me by name and said ‘Blessed is he that keepeth His commandments.’ A table was set before us and on it the records were placed. The Records of the Nephites, from which the Book of Mormon was translated, the brass plates, the Ball of Directors, the sword of Laban and other plates.”⁵ While the men were viewing these things, they heard a voice that said: “These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.”⁶

Soon after this event, Joseph Smith showed the plates to eight additional witnesses, who handled them in a secluded setting near the Smith family home in Manchester, New York. The testimonies of both groups of witnesses are recorded at the beginning of the Book of Mormon.

Preaching with the Book of Mormon

When the work of translation was complete, the Prophet made arrangements with Egbert B. Grandin of Palmyra to print the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris entered into a mortgage agreement with Mr. Grandin to ensure payment of the \$3,000 required to print 5,000 copies of the book.

The first copies of the Book of Mormon were made available to the public at the E. B. Grandin Bookstore on 26 March 1830. Among the earliest missionaries to use the newly printed volume was Samuel Smith. In April 1830, he visited the Tomlinson Inn in the township of Mendon, New York. There he sold a copy of the book to a young man named Phinehas Young, brother of Brigham Young.

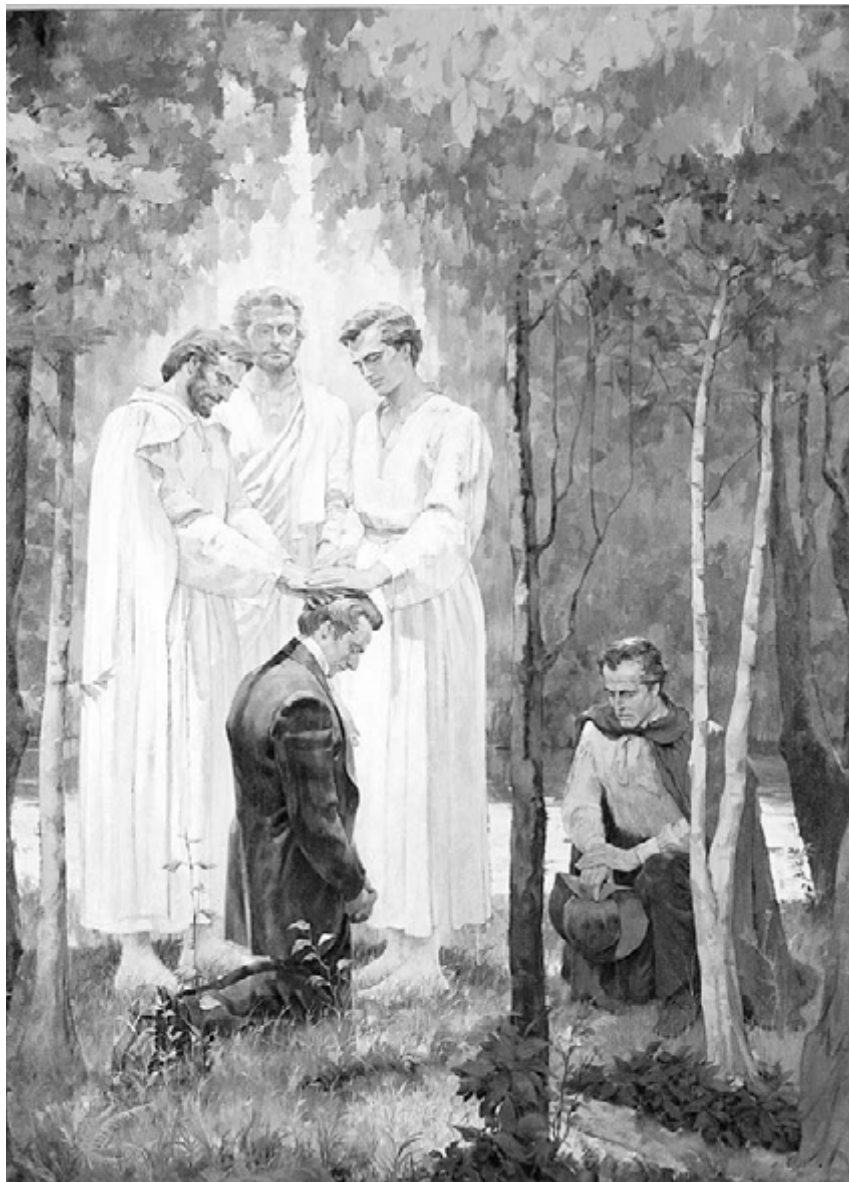
In June he retraced his steps, this time placing a copy of the Book of Mormon in the home of John P. Greene at Bloomfield, New York. John had married Rhoda Young, sister of Brigham Young. John Young, father of Brigham, next came in contact with the book, took it home, and read it through. He said that “it was the greatest work and the clearest of error of anything he had ever seen, the Bible not excepted.”⁷

Although Brigham Young had been exposed to the contents of the book since the spring of 1830 by both family members and missionaries, he needed time to investigate it thoroughly. He stated: “I examined the matter studiously for two years before I made up my mind to receive that book. I knew it was true, as well as I knew that I could see with my eyes, or feel by the touch of my fingers, or be sensible of the demonstration of any sense. Had not this been the case, I never would have embraced it to this day. . . . I wished time sufficient to prove all things for myself.”⁸

Brigham Young was baptized on 14 April 1832. Following his baptism and confirmation, he recalled, “According to the words of the Savior, I felt a humble, child-like spirit, witnessing unto me that my sins were forgiven.”⁹ He was later to become an Apostle and eventually the second President of the Church.

Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods

When the angel Moroni first met with Joseph Smith on the Hill Cumorah in September 1823, he gave important instructions about the restoration of priesthood authority to the earth, including the following declaration: “When [the gold plates] are interpreted *the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after*



Peter, James, and John appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood.

that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands."¹⁰

In the spring of 1829, Joseph participated in the partial fulfillment of the angel's words. As he and Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon, they found mention of baptism for the remission of sins. On 15 May they sought further knowledge on the subject from the Lord in prayer. While offering up their petition on the banks of the Susquehanna River, the two men were visited by a heavenly messenger. He identified himself as John the Baptist of New Testament times. Laying his hands on the heads of Joseph and Oliver, he said, "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins" (D&C 13:1).

After this ordination, Joseph and Oliver baptized one another as commanded by John the Baptist and ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood. John told them that "this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter." He also said that "he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred on us" (JS—H 1:70, 72; see also 1:68–72).

The Prophet said of this experience: "Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation" (JS—H 1:73).

Later, Peter, James, and John appeared to Joseph and Oliver and conferred upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood. They also bestowed the keys of God's kingdom upon them (see D&C 27:12–13; 128:20). The Melchizedek Priesthood is the highest authority given to men on earth. With this authority, the Prophet Joseph Smith was able to organize the Church of Jesus Christ in this dispensation and begin to establish the various priesthood quorums as they are known in the Church today.

Organization of the Church

The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that 6 April 1830 was the day on which the Church of Jesus Christ in this dispensation was to be organized (see D&C 20:1). Notices were sent to believers and friends, and some 56 men and women gathered at the log home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette, New York. Six men were chosen by the Prophet to assist in the organization "agreeable to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God" (D&C 20:1).

The Prophet recorded: "Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father, we proceeded, according to previous commandment, to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these several propositions they consented by a unanimous vote."¹¹

With the consent of those present, Joseph ordained Oliver an elder of the Church and Oliver ordained the Prophet an elder as they had been directed by the Lord. The sacrament was blessed and passed to the members present. Those who had been baptized were confirmed and given the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Prophet said that "the Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree—some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord, and rejoiced exceedingly."¹² During this meeting, Joseph received a revelation in which the Lord instructed the Church to give heed

to the words of the prophet as if they came from the Lord himself (see D&C 21:4–6).

The elements present at that meeting in 1830 continue in the Church today: exercise of the law of common consent, singing, praying, partaking of the sacrament, sharing of personal testimonies, bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, ordinations, personal revelation, and revelation through priesthood officers.

Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recorded a tender scene that occurred that day when Joseph Smith Sr., the Prophet's father, was baptized: "When Mr. Smith came out of the water, Joseph stood upon the shore, and taking his father by the hand, he exclaimed, with tears of joy, 'Praise to my God! that I have lived to see my own father baptized into the true Church of Jesus Christ!' "¹³ Joseph Knight Sr. said of that moment: "[The Prophet] was filled with the Spirit to a great degree. . . . His joy seemed to be full. I think he saw the great work he had begun and was desirous to carry it out."¹⁴

There was a strong bond of love between father and son. Later in a eulogy to his father, the Prophet said, "I love my father and his memory; and the memory of his noble deeds rests with ponderous weight upon my mind, and many of his kind and parental words to me are written on the tablet of my heart."¹⁵

The love that existed between the Prophet and his father was also manifested by Joseph Smith Sr. for his father, Asael Smith. In August 1830, Joseph Smith Sr. took copies of the Book of Mormon northeast into St. Lawrence County, New York, to give to his father and mother and brothers and sisters. Asael Smith read the book nearly through before his death in October 1830 and declared that his grandson, Joseph Smith Jr., "was the very Prophet that he had long known would come in his family."¹⁶ Three more of the sons of Asael eventually joined the Church—Silas, John, and Asael Jr. The Prophet had the privilege of seeing all his immediate family immersed in the waters of baptism, and many of his father's family.

Sidney Rigdon, who later became a member of the First Presidency, spoke of the humble beginnings of the Church and the grand vision of the future that the organizers had even then: "I met the whole church of Christ in a little old log house about 20 feet square, near Waterloo, N.Y. and we began to talk about the kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command; we talked with great confidence, . . . although we were not many people; . . . we saw by vision, the church of God, a thousand times larger; . . . the world being entirely ignorant of the testimony of the prophets and without knowledge of what God was about to do."¹⁷

The events that transpired on 6 April 1830 in western New York have changed the lives of millions of people. From a handful of converts in a small log house, the gospel has spread throughout the world. Now the Church is established in many lands, often in circumstances as humble as those that surrounded the original organization at Fayette. Saints across the world rejoice and find solace in the promise of the Savior: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, . . . behold, there will I be in the midst of them" (D&C 6:32).

"Go to the Ohio": The Gathering of Latter-day Israel

Persecution in Colesville

During the very month when the Church was organized, the Prophet Joseph Smith went on a mission to teach his friends, the Joseph Knight Sr. family, who resided in Colesville, New York. On 28 June, many Knight family members and friends were prepared to make the baptismal covenant.

There was strong opposition to the preaching of the gospel in Colesville, and a mob tried to stop the baptisms by breaking down the dam the brethren had built for the purpose of holding water. This was soon repaired, however. Joseph Knight Jr. described the measures that were resorted to by enemies of the faith: "When we were going from the [baptisms], we were met by many of our neighbors, pointing at us and asking if we had been washing sheep. . . . That night our wagons were turned over and wood

piled on them, and some sunk in the water, rails were piled against our doors, and chains sunk in the stream and a great deal of mischief done.”¹⁸

At this same time, those in opposition attempted to distract the Prophet by having him arrested and tried for disturbing the peace. However, Joseph Knight Sr. hired lawyers, who soon cleared him of all charges.

Whenever important advances are being made by the Church, it seems that the adversary of all righteousness mounts a concerted effort to stop the growth of the kingdom of God. But dedicated Saints of God overcome the problems and grow stronger, as did the Colesville Saints, who welded themselves into a strong and united branch.

Missionaries to the Indians

In September and October 1830, four young men were called by revelation to take the gospel and the Book of Mormon message to the Indians of the Americas, who were descendants of the Book of Mormon people. These missionaries were Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer Jr., Parley P. Pratt, and Ziba Peterson (see D&C 28:8; 30:5–6; 32). They traveled hundreds of miles under very trying conditions and were able to preach to the Catteraugus Indians near Buffalo, New York, the Wyandots of Ohio, and lastly the Delaware who lived west of the state of Missouri. But they had their greatest success with the settlers in Kirtland, Ohio, and vicinity, where they converted 127 people. After the missionaries left, the number of Saints in Ohio soon reached several hundred through the proselyting of those members left behind.

The Call to Gather to Ohio

Sidney Rigdon, a former minister and newly converted member from the Kirtland area, and a nonmember friend named Edward Partridge were anxious to meet the Prophet and learn more of the teachings of the Church. In December 1830 they traveled more than 250 miles to Fayette, New York, to visit Joseph

Smith. They asked him to seek the will of the Lord in relation to themselves and the Kirtland Saints. In response, the Lord revealed that the New York Saints should “assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C 37:3). At the third and last conference of the Church in New York, held at the Whitmer farm on 2 January 1831, the Lord repeated his directive to the members:

“And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless—Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:31–32). This was the first call in this dispensation for the Saints to gather together.

While a few members chose not to dispose of their properties and make the long journey from New York to Ohio, the majority of the Saints heard the voice of the Shepherd to gather Israel. Newel Knight is representative of the disciples who followed priesthood leadership and answered the call:

“Having returned home from conference, in obedience to the commandment which had been given, I, together with the Colesville Branch, began to make preparations to go to Ohio. . . . As might be expected, we were obliged to make great sacrifices of our property. The most of my time was occupied in visiting the brethren, and helping to arrange their affairs, so that we might travel together in one company.”¹⁹

Joseph Knight Sr. is also an example of those who willingly made sacrifices in the sale of their properties in order to join the Prophet in Ohio. His simple notice in the *Broome Republican* says much about his commitment to the gospel: “The farm lately occupied by Joseph Knight, situate in the town of Colesville, near the Colesville Bridge—bounded on one side by the Susquehanna River, and containing about one hundred and forty two acres. On said Farm are two Dwelling Houses, a good Barn, and a fine Orchard. *The terms of sale will be liberal.*”²⁰ Some 68 members from Colesville were on their way to Ohio by mid-April 1831.

Equally obedient to the Lord's command were 80 Saints from the Fayette Branch and 50 from the Manchester Branch, who left their homes in early May 1831. Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet, was asked to take charge of the exodus of the members from Fayette. When they arrived at Buffalo, New York, they found that the harbor on Lake Erie was clogged with an ice field, and the steamboat carrying the Fayette Saints was unable to leave port. In this difficult situation, she called upon the members to exercise their faith: "Now, brethren and sisters, if you will all of you raise your desires to heaven, that the ice may be broken up, and we be set at liberty, as sure as the Lord lives, it will be done." At that very moment a noise was heard "like bursting thunder." The ice parted and a narrow passage formed through which the boat was able to move. They had barely passed through when the avenue again closed, but they were in open water and could continue their journey. Following this miraculous escape, the company was called together in a prayer meeting to offer up their thanks to God for his mercy on their behalf.²¹

By mid-May all the branches of the Church from New York had been able to travel by ship across Lake Erie to Fairport Harbor, Ohio, where they were met by fellow Saints and taken to destinations in Kirtland and Thompson townships. The great gathering of latter-day Israel had begun. The Saints were now in a position to be taught as a body by the Lord's chosen servants, to be instructed in his laws, and to build holy temples.