

The Early Restoration

Come and See

The story of Joseph Smith and the Restoration

BRIGHAM RINDLISBACHER

Contents

1. A Famine of Hearing	3
2. Seeds in Stony Ground.....	21
3. Lucy and Joseph	36
4. The Boy Who Would Not Be Bound	51
5. A Pillar of Light	65
6. The Last Words of Malachi	79
7. By the Gift and Power of God	97
8. Come and See.....	112
9. The Lord's House	128
10. The Refiner's Fire	144
11. A City Beautiful	162
12. Carthage, and the Work Rolls On.....	178

Scripture is quoted from the King James Version. A dagger (†) marks a scene detail that is imagined; each is explained in the chapter notes. The pictures are public-domain historical engravings, lithographs, paintings and photographs, credited where they appear. None shows the faces of God the Father or Jesus Christ.

A Famine of Hearing

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

Amos 8:11

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Malachi 4:5

A Plowboy's Bible

In the late winter or early spring of 1820, in a log house in western New York, a fourteen-year-old farm boy sat with a Bible open to the Epistle of James. One verse stopped him.

“If any of you lack wisdom,” it said, “let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Years later he wrote, “Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine.”¹

His name was Joseph Smith. He will fill the rest of this book. But first, look at the book in his hands. It was an English Bible, the King James Version, printed in words a farm boy could read without a priest or a professor beside him. Three hundred years earlier, no such Bible existed. Some of the men who made it possible died at the stake.

This chapter tells how that Bible came into his hands, and why the boy reading it felt that something was still missing. It is a story of people who listened at a closed door for heaven to speak. Latter-day Saints believe a Hand was over them all the while.

It begins in a cold cell, with a man who asked for a candle.



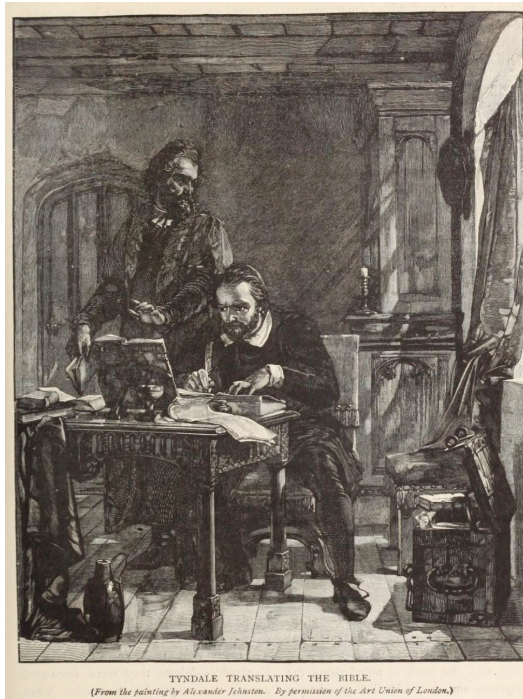
The Prisoner at Vilvoorde

In the winter of 1535, in a castle prison a few miles north of Brussels, a slight English scholar took up his pen and wrote a letter in Latin to the governor who held him.

He did not ask to be released. His case seemed to be going against him, and he knew it. He asked for small things. “A warmer cap,” he wrote, “for I suffer extremely from cold in the head.” He asked for “a warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin,” and for “a piece of cloth to patch my leggings.” His shirts were worn out. He asked for “a candle in the evening, for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark.”

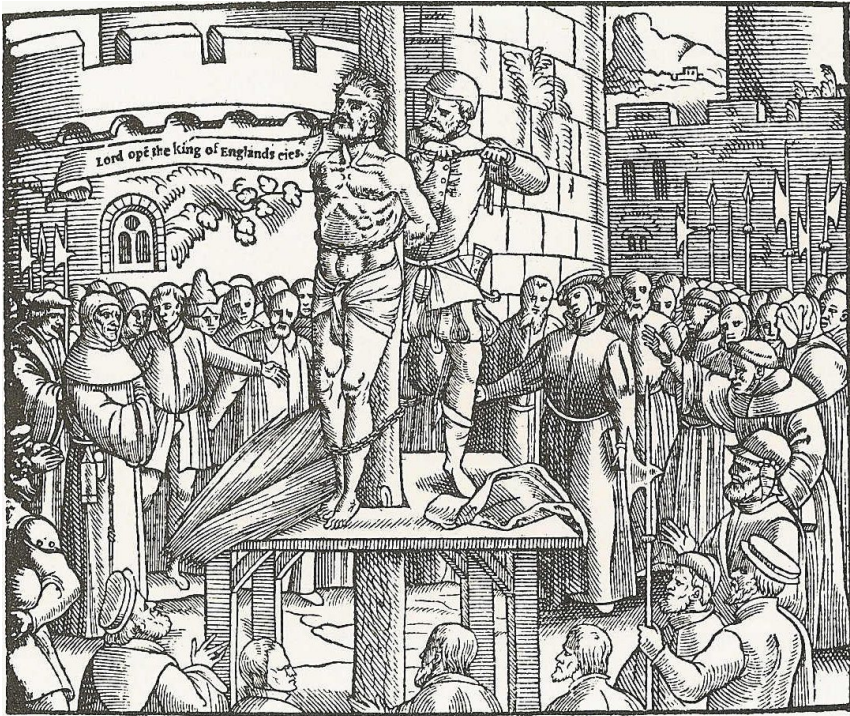
Then he came to the request that mattered most. “But above all,” he wrote, “I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procurer that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend my time with that study.”²

The prisoner was William Tyndale. For more than a decade he had lived as a fugitive on the European continent, bent over one task: putting the Bible into the English that farmers and weavers actually spoke. His New Testament, first printed complete in 1526, had been smuggled into England hidden among merchants’ goods. There it was bought, read aloud, confiscated and burned.³ Even now, cold and alone, he wanted the Hebrew scriptures of Moses and the prophets so that he could keep translating.



*William Tyndale at work on his translation, as a Victorian illustrator imagined him. No portrait made from life survives. Alexander Johnston, illustration in *The Church of England: A History for the People*, 1898. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

We do not know whether the governor sent the cap or the candle. We can picture the cell that winter: stone that never warmed, a narrow window, and long northern nights falling early over the Flemish countryside.[†] We do know how the story ended. In early October 1536, Tyndale was led out to the place of execution at Vilvoorde, tied to the stake, strangled and burned. The martyrologist John Foxe, writing some decades later, recorded that Tyndale cried out “with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice, ‘Lord! open the king of England’s eyes.’”⁴



Tyndale's execution at Vilvoorde, from the woodcut in John Foxe's Actes and Monuments (the Book of Martyrs). Woodcut from John Foxe, Actes and Monuments, 1563. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Why would a man give his life to put the Bible into the hands of a plowboy? To answer that, we have to go back much further, to a promise made to a man named Abraham, and to a famine that a herdsman prophet warned would come.



The Covenant and the Prophets

The story of the Restoration does not begin in America. It begins, as so much of the world's faith begins, with a man from Ur who left his country at God's word.

"I will make of thee a great nation," the Lord promised Abraham, "and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing... and

in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Later God renewed the promise as “an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”⁵ In the Book of Abraham, a book of Latter-day Saint scripture, the Lord adds a line this book will keep coming back to: “My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.”⁶

Jews, Christians and Latter-day Saints all read the promises to Abraham as their own family history. For the Jewish people they are the charter of a covenant that has been kept for nearly four thousand years, through exile, return and dispersion. That covenant was never revoked, and this book will treat it that way. Latter-day Saints hold the covenant dear too. They believe its blessings were meant to reach “all families of the earth,” and that the God of Abraham never stops speaking to His children.

That last belief is the hinge of everything that follows. The God of the Hebrew Bible is a God who speaks. He spoke to Moses from a bush that burned and was not consumed. He called Samuel as a boy in the night. He sent prophets to kings and to shepherds. One of them, Amos, insisted he was nobody special: “I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit.”⁷

It was this herdsman from Tekoa who gave one of the most haunting warnings in scripture:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.⁸

A famine of hearing. People would still have the old words. What they would lack was the living voice, the sense that heaven was open and someone had been sent.



“He Gave Them Power”

Christians believe that the living voice spoke again in Galilee. Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish teacher who read from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, gathered disciples around Him. Among them were fishermen and a tax collector. From these followers He chose twelve.

The Gospels are careful to say that He did more than teach the Twelve. “When he had called unto him his twelve disciples,” Matthew wrote, “he gave them power.”⁹ “Ye have not chosen me,” Jesus told them, “but I have chosen you, and ordained you.”¹⁰ A later New Testament writer, drawing on Israel’s own priesthood, put the principle plainly: “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”¹¹

The early church guarded that idea. When a man named Simon saw that the Holy Ghost was given “through laying on of the apostles’ hands,” he offered them money: “Give me also this power.” Peter’s answer was blunt: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.”¹² Authority could not be bought, borrowed or claimed. It had to be given by God.

The apostle Paul described a church built on that authority. Christ “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers,” so that believers might come “in the unity of the faith” and be “no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”¹³

But Paul also saw trouble coming. Saying farewell to church leaders at Miletus, he warned them: “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”¹⁴



The Long Night

What happened next is told differently by different traditions. This book tells it from the Latter-day Saint point of view, and tries to tell it fairly.

The apostles were persecuted, and one by one they died, most of them violently. Latter-day Saints believe that as the apostles passed from the earth, the authority they held passed with them. In the words of the Church's own teaching, "after the deaths of the Savior and His Apostles, men corrupted the principles of the gospel and made unauthorized changes in Church organization and priesthood ordinances." As a result, the Lord "withdrew the authority of the priesthood from the earth."¹⁵

That is a serious claim, and it needs to be made with humility. It does not mean the centuries that followed were empty of God. The Latter-day Saint apostle Robert D. Hales put it this way: "In the centuries that followed, God's children had the Light of Christ, could pray, and could feel the influence of the Holy Ghost. But the fulness of the gospel had been lost."¹⁶ Through those centuries countless believers lived and died in sincere devotion. They fed the poor and nursed the sick. Monks copied the scriptures by hand, letter by patient letter, and carried the Bible across a thousand years. Without them there would have been no Bible for Tyndale to translate.

Even some of Christianity's great reformers sensed that something had changed early on. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, looked back on the early church and observed that the extraordinary spiritual gifts of the New Testament had grown rare after the Roman emperor Constantine embraced Christianity in the fourth century. Many Christians explained the change by saying the gifts were simply no longer needed. Wesley called this "a miserable mistake." The real cause, he wrote, was that "the love of many,' almost of all Christians, so called, was 'waxed cold.'" The Christians, he went on, "had no more of the Spirit of Christ than the other Heathens," and had "only a dead form left."¹⁷

Those are Wesley's words, not ours, and they are harsher than this book would choose. But they show that the longing in this chapter was not invented by Latter-day Saints. It ran through Christianity itself: a sense that the church of Peter and Paul, with its open heavens and its apostles, was somehow no longer on the earth.

In the long night, a few people began to light candles.



Candles in the Dark

In England in the late 1300s, an Oxford scholar and priest named John Wycliffe argued that ordinary people should have the scriptures in their own language. He and his followers produced the first complete Bible in English, translated by hand from the Latin. Church authorities condemned his teachings. Decades after his death, his bones were dug up and burned and the ashes thrown into a river. “But God’s work could not be stopped,” Elder Hales said of it.¹⁸

Around 1455, in the German city of Mainz, Johannes Gutenberg printed a Bible using movable metal type. Before him, each copy of the scriptures had taken a scribe years to produce. After him, Bibles could be printed in quantity and at a price that ordinary people could eventually afford.¹⁹

Then, on April 18, 1521, a German monk and professor stood before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, at the Diet of Worms. Martin Luther had challenged the sale of indulgences and other practices of the church of his day. Now he was ordered to take back what he had written. His answer, as recorded by his supporters, has echoed ever since:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.²⁰

Many retellings add the stirring words “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise.” They may be authentic, but the earliest and best reports of that day do not clearly contain them. This book will tell you when a famous line rests on uncertain ground.²¹

Tyndale belonged to the same generation. According to Foxe, during a heated argument with a learned churchman who declared that “we were better to be without God’s laws than the pope’s,” the young scholar replied: “I defy the pope, and all his laws,” adding that “if God spared him life, ere many years he would cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than he did.”²² Foxe is the only source for that exchange, and he

wrote it down about forty years later. Whatever the exact words, the ambition was real, and Tyndale kept it. Much of his phrasing survived into the King James Version of 1611. That was the Bible the farm boy in New York would one day open to James.²³

Others paid the same price Tyndale did. On October 16, 1555, two English bishops, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, were chained to a single stake in Oxford. Foxe's 1583 edition records that as the fire was lit, the elderly Latimer turned to his companion: "Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."²⁴

Latter-day Saints honor these men. They see the Lord's hand in their courage, in the printing press, and in a Bible that ordinary people could read. Yet they also notice something the reformers themselves said. Luther and the others did not claim that an angel had visited them, or that apostolic authority had been handed back to them. They sought to *reform* the church from the scriptures they had. As Elder Hales put it, the work that would follow was different: "not to reform nor... to protest what was already on the earth. It was to restore what had been on earth and had been lost."²⁵



Martin Luther before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms, April 1521, as imagined by a nineteenth-century painter. Anton von Werner (1843–1915), Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1877. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons

Restoring would take more than a Bible. It would take someone willing to wait for heaven to act.



A Seeker in Providence

The Reformation splintered into many churches, and many of their members crossed the Atlantic. One of them was a young Puritan minister named Roger Williams, who arrived in Massachusetts in 1631.

Williams had a conscience that would not sit still. He insisted that civil magistrates had no right to punish people for matters of faith, and that the colonists ought to pay the Native peoples for their land. In 1635 the Massachusetts authorities banished him. He made his way south and, in 1636, founded a settlement he named Providence. It became a haven for people of every faith and of none, including Baptists, Quakers and Jews. One of the oldest synagogues in America still stands in the colony he founded.²⁶

In Providence, Williams helped found what became the first Baptist church in America. But within months he withdrew from it. He had become what his contemporaries called a “Seeker,” one of a scattered group of Christians on both sides of the Atlantic who believed they were waiting for something no existing church had.

Latter-day Saint writers have often quoted Williams as saying, in the first person, that there was “no regularly constituted church on earth... nor can there be until new apostles are sent.” Honesty requires a correction. Those exact words are not Williams’s own. They come from an 1843 history of Providence by William Staples, who was summarizing a 1673 letter by one of Williams’s former Baptist neighbors. Here is what Staples wrote:

According to Mr. Williams’ new views as a Seeker, there was no regularly constituted church on earth, nor any person authorized to administer any church ordinance, nor could there be, until new apostles should be sent by the Great Head of the church, for whose coming he was seeking.²⁷

Even secondhand, the picture is striking: a devout Christian minister in New England, two centuries before Joseph Smith, waiting for apostles.

He was not the only one waiting.



A Cup Poured for Elijah

Far from the meetinghouses of New England, another people were waiting too, and had been for far longer.



A family at the Passover Seder, painted by the German Jewish artist Moritz Daniel Oppenheim. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (1800–1882), Seder (Der Oster-Abend), about 1867. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Every spring, at Passover, Jewish families gather around the Seder table to retell the story of the Exodus: how God brought Israel out of Egypt “with a mighty hand.” Picture such a table in some spring of the early 1800s, in Amsterdam or London or a small new congregation in New York. There are candles and unleavened bread, children asking the four questions, and the old

words sung in Hebrew.[†] Near the end of the meal, by long tradition, a cup of wine is filled and left untouched. It is the cup of Elijah the prophet. Someone rises and opens the door of the home, so that the family can go out to greet him if he has come.²⁸

Why Elijah? Because of the last words of the prophet Malachi. In most Christian Bibles, they are the final words of the Old Testament:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.²⁹

In the Hebrew Bible these verses are numbered Malachi 3:23–24. They are read aloud in synagogues on Shabbat HaGadol, “the Great Sabbath,” the Sabbath just before Passover. So that the reading will not end on a word of curse, the reader goes back and repeats the promise: *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet.*³⁰ For generations, Jewish tradition has seen Elijah as the herald of redemption. He will return before the great day of the Lord, settle questions the sages could not resolve, and turn the hearts of parents and children toward each other.

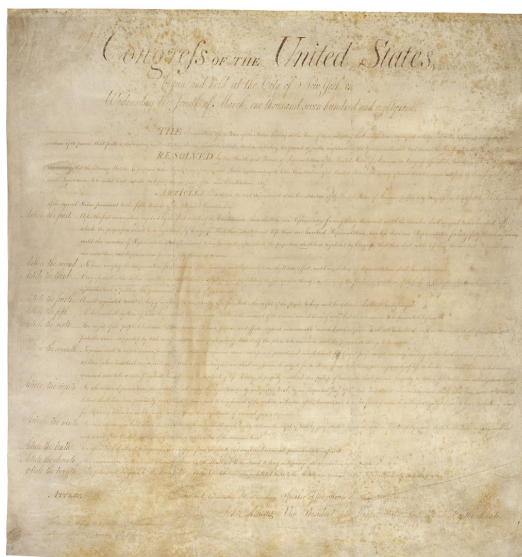
Hold that open door and that waiting cup in mind. They will come back in this story, once at a farmhouse bedside in 1823 and once in a newly finished temple in Ohio, its rough sandstone walls hidden under stucco and plaster, during Passover week of 1836. For now it is enough to see that the longing for heaven to speak again belonged to both Jews and Christians. The covenant people of Abraham were waiting for Elijah. Seekers like Roger Williams were waiting for apostles. Across the centuries both were listening at the same door.



A Land of Liberty

By the end of the 1700s, something new had appeared in the world: a nation whose founding law promised that its government would “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise

thereof.” The First Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified in 1791. The states took longer, and Massachusetts kept a tax-supported church until 1833, but the direction was set.³¹



The amendments Congress sent to the states on September 25, 1789; the article on religion was ratified in 1791 as the First Amendment. Engrossed Bill of Rights, September 25, 1789; U.S. National Archives, via World Digital Library. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

The effect on American faith was explosive. With no single church backed by the government, preachers of every stripe competed for souls. Methodists and Baptists, once small, swelled into the largest denominations in the country. Revival meetings drew thousands. One historian has called it “the democratization of American Christianity.”³² Latter-day Saints see the Lord’s hand here too. A boy who wanted to ask God which church was right needed a country where he was free to ask.

But freedom could also be bewildering. If every preacher read the same Bible and reached a different answer, how could an honest seeker know which was right?

In the hill country of Vermont lived a farmer who had thought hard about that question. Asael Smith had been born in Topsfield, Massachusetts, in 1744, and had served in the Revolutionary War. He had a large family and strong opinions, and he distrusted the harsher doctrines of the churches

around him. On April 10, 1799, at the age of fifty-five, he sat down to write a letter that his wife and children were to read after his death. He opened it with an unusual, tender phrase: “My Dear Selfs.”³³

We can imagine him writing by the light of a tallow candle after a long day’s work, his children asleep upstairs.† What he wrote is documented, and it is worth hearing:

And as to religion, I would not wish to point out any particular form to you; but first I would wish you to search the Scriptures and consult sound reason and see if they (which I take to be two witnesses that stand by the God of the whole earth) are not sufficient to evince to you that religion is a necessary theme.³⁴

Asael urged his children to ask whether religion “consists in outward formalities” or in the “hidden man of the heart,” and whether they could save themselves “by outward forms, rites and ordinances,” or needed “help from any other hand than your own.” If they found that they needed a Savior, he wrote, “Christ saith, ‘Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth.’ Then look to Him.”³⁵

He did not tell them which church to join. He told them to search and to look to Christ.



“There Was No Society or Denomination...”

Among the children who might one day read that letter was Asael’s son Joseph, then twenty-seven, a Vermont farmer who had married a spirited young woman named Lucy Mack three years before. Six years later, on a farm in Sharon, Vermont, rented from Lucy’s father, Lucy would give birth to a son and name him after his father.

That boy is the one we met at the start of this chapter, with a Bible open to James. He grew up in a family that took Asael’s counsel seriously. They searched the scriptures, they prayed, and they found the competing churches confusing. When he was about twenty-six, the younger Joseph Smith wrote an account of his early life, partly in his own handwriting. He remembered

being troubled as a boy by what he saw in the churches of his neighbors, and wrote that “this was a grief to my Soul.” He went on:

thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind the contentions and divi[si]ons the wicke[d]ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind... by searching the scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and living faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.³⁶

The spelling is that of a farm boy with little schooling. The insight is the one that ran through Wycliffe and Tyndale, through Williams and Wesley, and back to Amos’s warning of a famine. The scriptures were there. A plowboy could now read them, just as Tyndale had hoped. But the scriptures themselves told of something more: a God who spoke, apostles who were called, and authority that could not be bought or simply assumed.

Eighteen centuries earlier, the apostle Peter had stood in the temple courts in Jerusalem. He told a crowd of his fellow Jews, the children of Abraham, that heaven had received Jesus “until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”³⁷

Restitution means giving back what was lost. Tyndale had died praying for a king’s eyes to be opened. Williams had waited for apostles. Jewish families kept pouring a cup for Elijah and opening the door. And in the hill country of New England, a grandfather had told his children to search the scriptures and look to Christ.

Back in the cell at Vilvoorde, Tyndale had asked for a candle, “for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark.” Across the centuries, many others had felt the same way. The story that follows is about a family who kept asking for light, and about a boy who did more than read about it. He went into the woods to ask God for it.

But he was not the first in his family to see a light in the dark. Nearly ten years before that spring, in a New Hampshire farmhouse, his grandfather Solomon Mack lay sleepless at midnight and saw a light “about a foot from my face as bright as fire.”³⁸



Key: † marks a sentence or passage of imagined connective detail; the note explains what is documented. Full citations and verification status are in 01-sources.md.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:11–12, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1>. The verse is James 1:5 (KJV). On the season, see JS-H 1:14 (“early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty”); the reading came before the prayer. Chapter 5 tells the full story. Elder Robert D. Hales (2005; see note 6) describes the King James Version finding its way “to a new land” to “be read by a 14-year-old plowboy named Joseph Smith.”
2. William Tyndale to the governor of Vilvoorde Castle, winter 1535 (Latin), trans. J. I. Mombert, reprinted in *Christian History* 123 (2017), “I shall be patient,” <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/i-shall-be-patient>. This is Tyndale’s only surviving letter in his own hand.
3. On Tyndale’s New Testament (Worms, 1526), its smuggling and its burning, see David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (Yale, 1994); and Elder Robert D. Hales, “Preparations for the Restoration and the Second Coming,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005.
4. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (“Book of Martyrs”), Tyndale narrative, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/foxe/martyrs/files/fox112.htm>. The traditional date of execution is October 6, 1536. Foxe is the only source for the last words. † The description of the cell and the northern nights is imagined. The cold, the thin coat and the darkness are documented in the letter (note 2).
5. Genesis 12:2–3; 17:7 (KJV).
6. Abraham 2:8 (Pearl of Great Price), quoted by Elder Robert D. Hales as the theme of “Preparations for the Restoration and the Second Coming: ‘My Hand Shall Be over Thee,’” October 2005 general conference, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2005/10/preparations-for-the-restoration-and-the-second-coming-my-hand-shall-be-over-thee>.
7. Amos 7:14 (KJV); on Tekoa see Amos 1:1.
8. Amos 8:11–12 (KJV).
9. Matthew 10:1 (KJV).
10. John 15:16 (KJV).
11. Hebrews 5:4 (KJV).
12. Acts 8:18–20 (KJV).
13. Ephesians 4:11–14 (KJV).
14. Acts 20:29–30 (KJV).
15. Gospel Topics, “Apostasy,” Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/apostasy>.

16. Robert D. Hales, "Preparations for the Restoration and the Second Coming: 'My Hand Shall Be over Thee,'" October 2005 general conference (see note 6).
17. John Wesley, Sermon 89, "The More Excellent Way," para. 2, Wesley Center Online, <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-89-the-more-excellent-way/>.
18. Hales, "Preparations for the Restoration" (source of the Wycliffe summary and the line "But God's work could not be stopped"). The Council of Constance condemned Wycliffe in 1415. His remains were exhumed and burned in 1428 and the ashes cast into the River Swift; see Anne Hudson and Anthony Kenny, "Wyclif [Wycliffe], John," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Scholars credit the translation largely to Wycliffe's associates working under his inspiration.
19. Hales, "Preparations for the Restoration" ("By 1455 Johannes Gutenberg had invented a press with movable type").
20. "Luther at the Diet of Worms," *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 32 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 112–13. This is the account "prepared by the friends of the Reformation."
21. The editors of *Luther's Works* 32:113 note the textual problem. See also Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation*, 460; and "Reformation 500: 50 things you may not know about Luther," *Living Lutheran*, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/reformation-500-50-things-may-not-know-luther/>.
22. Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, as above. On the anecdote's sole source and its reliability, see "William Tyndale, John Foxe, and the 'Boy That Driveth the Plough,'" *Religious Educator* 17, no. 2 (2016), Religious Studies Center, BYU, <https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-17-no-2-2016/william-tyndale-john-foxe-boy-driveth-plough>.
23. Elder Hales cites an estimate that more than 80 percent of Tyndale's New Testament wording was retained in the King James Version ("Preparations for the Restoration"). Estimates vary among scholars. Elder Hales calls the young Joseph Smith "a 14-year-old plowboy."
24. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1583), 1794, account of Ridley and Latimer (1555). The words first appear in the 1583 edition, not in the 1563 edition. Historians note that they echo Eusebius's account of Polycarp, and whether Latimer said them is uncertain. Hales quotes them in "Preparations for the Restoration."
25. Hales, "Preparations for the Restoration."
26. On Williams's banishment (1635) and the founding of Providence (1636), see Edwin S. Gaustad, *Roger Williams* (Oxford, 2005). The Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, dedicated in 1763, is the oldest surviving synagogue building in the United States.
27. William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence* (Providence, 1843), 409, summarizing a letter by Richard Scott appended to *A New England Fire-Brand Quenched*, which Staples dates "about 1673." On how Staples's summary became a first-person "quote" (via an 1847 review and William Cullen Bryant's *Picturesque America*, 1872, 1:502), see "'For whose coming I am seeking': Quote-unquote Roger Williams," *Times and Seasons* blog, June 2012, <https://archive.timesandseasons.org/2012/06/for-whose-coming-i-am-seeking-quote-unquote-roger-williams/index.html>. Elder Hales (2005) correctly paraphrases the statement in indirect speech.

28. "Elijah the Prophet," My Jewish Learning, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/elijah-the-prophet/>; "What Is Elijah's Cup?," Chabad.org, https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/6430337/jewish/What-Is-Elijahs-Cup.htm. † The table setting is a composite. The cup and the opened door are documented customs. No specific family is described.
29. Malachi 4:5–6 (KJV).
30. "Haftarah Helper: Shabbat HaGadol," Orthodox Union, <https://www.ou.org/holidays/haftarah-helper-shabbat-hagadol/>. The haftarah is Malachi 3:4–24, and verse 23 is repeated at the end.
31. U.S. Constitution, Amendment I (ratified Dec. 15, 1791). Massachusetts ended its established church in 1833 (Article XI of the Articles of Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution). See Church History Topics, "Christian Churches in Joseph Smith's Day," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/christian-churches-in-joseph-smiths-day>.
32. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale, 1989), cited in the bibliography of "Christian Churches in Joseph Smith's Day." That topic also notes that Methodists and Baptists eclipsed the Congregationalists "by the mid-1800s." The sentence on the Lord's hand states a Latter-day Saint belief; compare Hales, "Preparations for the Restoration" ("Under God's hand they secured religious freedom for every citizen").
33. Asael Smith to "My Dear Selfs," April 10, 1799, Asael Smith Letter and Genealogy Record, 1799, ca. 1817–1846, Church History Library, MS 8605 (catalog description: written "to be read after his death"); cited in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 1, note 19. Asael's birth (7 March 1743/4, Topsfield) is from the JSP "Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart." On his military service and religious views, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, rev. ed. (2003).
34. Asael Smith letter, 1799, as transcribed in Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, and in Joseph Fielding Smith, "Asael Smith of Topsfield, with Some Account of the Smith Family," Topsfield Historical Society *Historical Collections* 8 (1902), [archive.org](https://archive.org/stream/AsaelSmithOfTopsfield/asael_smith_of_topsfield_djvu.txt), https://archive.org/stream/AsaelSmithOfTopsfield/asael_smith_of_topsfield_djvu.txt. † The tallow candle and sleeping children are imagined. The letter's date, its address and its content are documented.
35. Asael Smith letter, 1799 (same sources). The biblical quotation is Isaiah 45:22.
36. Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832, 1–2, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/2>. Original spelling retained. The JSP editors' bracketed letters are kept, and the strikeout "mand" (corrected by Joseph to "mankind") is silently resolved.
37. Acts 3:12, 21, 25 (KJV).
38. Solomon Mack, *A Narratve of the Life of Solomon Mack* (Windsor, VT, [1811]), about 22–23, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/narratvesicofli00mack>. Mack dates his illness to "the fall of the year 1810." The scene is told in full at the start of Chapter 2.

Seeds in Stony Ground

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth... But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Matthew 13:5, 8

A Light in Gilsum

The old man could not sleep. The doors were shut, and no one in the house was stirring. Then, about midnight, he saw “a light about a foot from my face as bright as fire.”



Gilsum, New Hampshire, where Solomon Mack spent the winter of 1810–11, in a bird's-eye view of about 1908. Bird's-eye view of Gilsum, N.H., photographer unknown, about 1908. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

He thought he had only moments to live. He prayed that the Lord would have mercy on his soul.¹

It was the winter of 1810–11, in the hill town of Gilsum, New Hampshire. Solomon Mack had been a soldier, a teamster, a sea captain, a merchant and a farmer. He had been scalded, had broken his wrist, had cut his leg with an axe, had been battered by storms at sea, and had been cheated more than once. Now, by his own reckoning in “the 76th year” of his age, he had been “taken with the Rheumatism” that fall, and the pain kept him in bed all winter. His wife, Lydia, had to help him into bed at night and out of it in the morning.²

Lying there, he had begun to think about his life. A passage from the Gospel of Matthew came into his mind, and he could not place it. So he asked Lydia whether those words were in the Bible. She told him they were. Solomon was stung. “My wife was my only instructor,” he later wrote; “I had never read the bible.”³

The light was not the last. Another night he saw a second one. Another night, in the dark, he heard himself called by his Christian name, and he rose up to answer.⁴

We can picture the farmhouse in that long New Hampshire winter: a fire banked low, snow against the walls, an old man awake in the dark while his wife slept beside him.[†] What Solomon himself recorded is plainer and more striking. He prayed most of the winter. Then, as spring came on, he wrote, “light shined into my soul.”⁵

One evening, sitting by the fire, he asked the Lord for a sign: if God was with him, let his pains be eased for that one night. “And blessed be the Lord,” he wrote, “I was entirely free from pain that night.” After that, he said, “every thing appeared new and beautiful. Oh how I loved my neighbors; how I loved my enemies—I could pray for them.”⁶

The next year, an old man who had never learned to read well paid a printer in Windsor, Vermont, to publish his story. He called it *A Narratve of the Life of Solomon Mack*. The spelling of the title was his own. So was the hard-won faith.⁷

Solomon was Joseph Smith’s grandfather. This chapter is about two families of plain New England people, the Macks and the Smiths. Neither was famous. Neither belonged comfortably to any church. Their ground was stony, both on their farms and, at times, in their hearts. But seeds fell there.

Look closely, and you can already see the boy who would be born to them: a grandfather's grit and dry humor, a grandmother's morning and evening prayers, a plain-spoken honesty that would not pretend to be sure. Latter-day Saints see in these families the Lord's hand at work long before anyone knew what He was preparing.



“Like the Wild Ass's Colt”

Solomon Mack was born in Lyme, Connecticut, near the mouth of the Connecticut River. The Joseph Smith Papers give his birth as September 15, 1732. Solomon's own book, and his daughter Lucy's history after it, give a later date.⁸ Either way, his childhood was short. His father had once owned “a large property,” Solomon wrote, but misfortunes came, and when Solomon was four the family scattered. “I was bound out to a farmer in the neighborhood.”⁹

The arrangement was common in colonial New England, and often hard. Solomon remembered being “rather considered as a slave than a member of the family.” His master “taught me to work, and was very careful that I should have little or no rest,” but “never taught me to read or spoke to me at all on the subject of religion.” Solomon grew up, as he put it, “like the wild ass's colt,” borrowing a phrase from the book of Job.¹⁰

One detail from those years is worth remembering. As a boy, Solomon suffered “a terrible fever sore on my leg, which had well nigh proved fatal to my life.” His master paid for the best physicians and surgeons, and the leg was saved.¹¹ Two generations later, a fever sore in a little boy's leg would bring Solomon's grandson to the edge of amputation.

When his indenture ended, at about twenty-one, Solomon enlisted to fight in the French and Indian War. Lucy later copied his war stories into her own history, and they read like adventure tales. Once, driving the general's baggage near Fort Edward, he lost three oxen and went back alone to find them. Four warriors came out of the woods. He had only a walking staff in his hand, and one other man was some distance behind him. He did the only thing he could think of. He charged, shouting, “rush on! rush on my boys!

we'll have the devils." The warriors fled. In his own book Solomon added, dryly, "I am bound to say the grass did not grow under my feet."¹²

That dry humor ran in the family. Solomon's grandson would one day own up, a little sheepishly, to his own "native cheery temperament."¹³

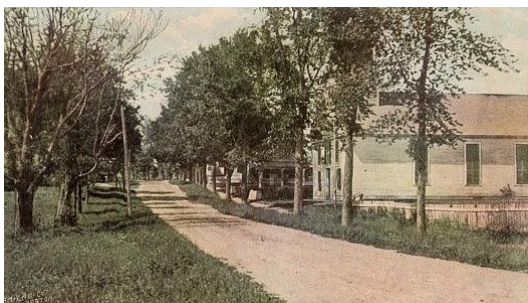
In 1758, near Lake George, "a musket ball passed under my chin within half an inch of my neck." At Fort Ann, he wrote, "the tomahawks and bullets flew round me like hail stones." As he ran, he saw a wounded man with the enemy close upon him, "nevertheless I turned aside for the purpose of assisting him," and got the man to safety.¹⁴

Those words are from a young soldier who, by his own account, "had no reflection only that I thought I had by my good luck escaped a narrow shot."¹⁵ It would be fifty years before he thought otherwise.



Morning and Evening

In 1759, the year he left the army, Solomon met "an accomplished young woman, a school teacher, by the name of Lydia Gates," the daughter of a well-to-do family in East Haddam, Connecticut. They were married shortly afterward.¹⁶



Main Street in Marlow, New Hampshire, photographed in 1907. Solomon and Lydia Mack moved to Marlow in 1761. Photographer unknown, 1907. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Solomon had money from the war and put it into land. Then he cut his leg with an axe, and the man he hired to finish the work ran off with the

payment. "The consequence was," he wrote, "I lost the land altogether."¹⁷ It was the first of many such sentences in his life.

In 1761 the young couple moved to Marlow, New Hampshire. It was "no other than a desolate and dreary wilderness," Solomon said, where "only 4 families resided within 40 miles." There were no schools. So Lydia became the school.

Solomon's tribute to her is the warmest passage in his story. She "assumed the charge of their education, and performed the duties of an instuctress as none save a mother is capable of." He went on:

She, besides instructing them in the various branches of an ordinary education, was in the habit of calling them together both morning and evening, and teaching them to pray; meanwhile urging upon them the necessity of love towards each other, as well as devotional feelings towards Him who made them.¹⁸

Solomon himself did not yet pray. He was away much of the time: freighting cargo, fighting again in the Revolution, sailing as a privateer with his two oldest sons, Jason and Stephen. He went to sea, bought a ship, lost it to "storms and wrecks," and came home after four years "about pennyless."¹⁹ It was Lydia who stayed, taught, prayed and held the family together.

Those four years were among the hardest of Solomon's life, and his own account of them is raw. At sea a hurricane carried both masts overboard. Another voyage ended on a reef, and he had to sell his ship to pay the men who helped free her. He lay sick in Salem for weeks. Meanwhile, at home, men he had trusted with his business took advantage of his absence, and his family was "turned out of doors." When he finally came back, he found he had "won nothing." "Kind reader," he wrote, "look at the nature of mankind, what they will do for silver and gold." He admitted that he no longer cared "whether I lived or died."²⁰

Looking back from old age, Solomon saw those years differently. He had been in danger again and again, and "my God must have given me some warnings of my danger," he wrote. Then he added a line that sums up his whole book: "the devil had great hold on me and I served him well, but the Lord was with me."²¹

Lucy, the youngest daughter, never forgot one scene from her childhood. When she was about eight, her mother fell so ill that everyone, including Lydia herself, expected her to die. Lydia called her children around her bed and urged them “to always remember the instructions which she had given them: to fear God and walk uprightly before him.” Then she gave little Lucy to her son Stephen, asking him to raise her as his own, and said goodbye to each child. Lydia recovered. The instruction stayed with her daughter for life.²²

Her children remembered. Jason, the oldest, became what Lucy called “a Seeker” before he was sixteen. He believed “that, by prayer and faith the gifts of the gospel might be attained which were enjoyed by the ancient disciples of Christ,” and that God “would, at some subsequent period, manifest his power as he anciently had done—in signs and wonders.”²³ He became a preacher. Years later he gathered about thirty poor families onto land he had bought for them in New Brunswick, and he wrote that the Lord had given him “the gift of healing by the prayer of faith.”²⁴

Like the Seekers of Roger Williams’s day, Jason Mack was waiting for the old gifts to return. He did not live to see what his little sister’s son would claim.



Two Sisters

That little sister was Lucy, born in Gilsum in July 1775.²⁵ Her history of the family, dictated in 1844 and 1845 after the deaths of her sons, is one of the great sources for this book. It is also, in places, heartbreaking.

Lucy’s two older sisters, Lovisa and Lovina, both fell ill with consumption, the wasting lung disease we now call tuberculosis. Lucy helped nurse Lovina. She remembered carrying her sister to bed near the end. “Although I was but thirteen years old,” she said, “she was so emaciated I could carry her with considerable ease.” Lucy’s hand slipped, and Lovina cried out: “Oh! Sister, that hurt me.” Decades later, the memory still stung. Lucy wrote that “the thought that I had caused her pain in laying her on her death bed wounded me much.”²⁶

Lovina said goodbye to her family—“father, mother, brothers, sister, and dear companions, all farewell—I am going to rest, prepare to follow me”—and asked to recite a hymn. Then “she folded hands across her breast, and then closed her eyes forever.”²⁷

Lovisa died not long after. Her father had gone to bring her home. At an inn on the road, he settled her in an easy chair and stepped into the next room for a little water and wine. “He was absent but a moment,” Lucy wrote, “but when he returned it was too late.”²⁸

The grief stayed with Lucy for years. She became, in her own words, “pensive and melancholy.” She read the Bible, prayed, and longed for what the preachers called “a change of heart.” But she ran into the same problem her son would later describe. If she joined one church, “all of the rest will say I am in an error.” Each church claimed to be right, “and this makes them witnesses against each other.”²⁹

Lucy Mack would carry that question with her to Tunbridge, Vermont, where her brother Stephen lived. There she would meet a young man from a family that asked the same question in a very different way.



The Captain's Son

Southeast of Gilsum, across the line in Massachusetts, the Smith family had lived in one town for generations.



A New England farm in a lithograph of 1853. It is not the Smith farm. It shows the kind of hill-country farming the family took up in Tunbridge. Fanny Palmer (1812–1876), artist; N. Currier, publisher, American Farm Scenes No. 1, lithograph, 1853; Library of Congress. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Asael Smith was born in Topsfield, Massachusetts, on March 7, 1744. His father, Samuel Smith, was a leading man in town, a militia captain and a representative to the colonial legislature, remembered at his death as “a sincere friend to the liberties of his country, and a strenuous advocate for the doctrine of Christianity.”³⁰ Asael’s mother died shortly after his birth. He was raised by a stepmother, and the memory was not a happy one.

He carried another mark from childhood. When he was small his neck was badly burned, and as the scar healed it drew the cords tight, leaving his neck stiff and his head held a little to one side. A later family history noted that this was the origin of a nickname, “Crooked-neck Smith,” and took pains to add that he “was not deformed in any way.”³¹

On February 12, 1767, Asael married Mary Duty. They would have eleven children together.³² They lived for a time in several New Hampshire towns, and during the Revolution Asael served in the American army. After his father died in 1785, he brought his family home to Topsfield. Their son

Joseph, the future father of the Prophet, had been born there on July 12, 1771.³³

Asael did not fit comfortably in Topsfield. A great-grandson who wrote the family's history in 1902 described him as "a man of very liberal views," who "always expressed his honest opinions whether they were in accord with prevailing views or not." In religion he was "somewhat of a Universalist," believing that God would ultimately save all His children, and he held "that in America, all men should have free and equal religious liberty." It was "commonly reported in the family" that these views cost him the goodwill of his neighbors.³⁴

Of Mary Duty herself, the surviving record says less than we would like. She was born in Rowley, Massachusetts, in October 1743, and she outlived her husband by nearly six years. She raised eleven children through war, debt and repeated moves. What we know of her character comes mostly from the end of her life. In 1836, at the age of ninety-two, she made a long journey to Ohio to see her grandson Joseph, a journey this book will follow in Chapter 9. Women like Mary Duty Smith rarely wrote their own stories. Their lives can be traced in the children they raised, and her children grew up to be stubborn, hardworking, honest and serious about God, even when they disagreed about how to worship Him.³⁵

In 1791 the Smiths left Massachusetts for good. They went north to Tunbridge, in the hill country of Vermont, where Asael and his sons cleared a farm out of "a heavy growth of timber."³⁶ In 1797, Asael's son Joseph joined a Universalist society in Tunbridge.³⁷



"Do More Than You Talk Of"

In Chapter 1 we heard part of the letter Asael wrote on April 10, 1799, for his family to read after his death. He addressed it, unusually, to "My Dear Selfs," and urged them to "search the Scriptures and consult sound reason," and to look to Christ. The rest of the letter is worth hearing too, because it shows the kind of home Joseph Smith Sr. grew up in.

Asael began with his wife. He knew he was “not free in speech, especially when sick or sad,” so he wrote down what he might not manage to say on his deathbed. To Mary he wrote, “I do with all the strength and power that is in me, thank you for your kindness and faithfulness to me.” He commended her to God, “the husband of the widow.” Then, remembering his own childhood, he added a practical request. If she married again, she should “remember what I have undergone by a stepmother.”³⁸

To his children he was earnest about the soul. “Trifle not in this point; the soul is immortal; you have to deal with an infinite Majesty.” He believed in a God who was fair to everyone. If scripture and reason taught “that God is just to all and His tender mercies are over all His works,” then, he wrote, “believe them.” He told his children that God’s love “is ten thousand times greater towards you than ever any earthly father’s could be to his offspring.”³⁹

Then came counsel that sounds like a Vermont farmer talking across a fence:

Do not talk and make a noise to get the name of forward men, but do the thing and do it in a way that is fair and honest, which you can live and die by and rise and reign by; therefore, my children, do more than you talk of, in point of religion.⁴⁰

He told them to work hard and not to fear failure. “It is better to be a rich cobbler than a poor merchant; a rich farmer than a poor preacher.” For his own part, he wrote, “I never found anything too hard for me in my calling, but discouragement and unbelief.” His grandson would need that sentence.⁴¹

Asael Smith lived for more than thirty years after writing that letter. He died in 1830, in St. Lawrence County, New York, the same year his grandson published the Book of Mormon. That summer, his son Joseph traveled to northern New York to see him and told him about the book. According to another son, John, the old man received the news “with gladness; and remarked, that he had always expected, that something would appear to make known the true gospel.”⁴²



A Meeting in Tunbridge

The roads of the two families crossed in Tunbridge.

Lucy's brother Stephen Mack had settled there and become a successful merchant. He was the brother to whom their mother had once promised Lucy if she died, and he looked after his youngest sister. After Lovina's death, Lucy's parents hoped a stay with Stephen "might serve to divert my mind." While she was there, Lucy wrote, "I became acquainted with a young man by the name of Joseph Smith; (to whom I was subsequently married)." ⁴³

It is a quiet sentence for so large a turning. A grieving young woman from a praying mother's home met a farmer's son from a household of independent thinkers. Picture the two of them in a Vermont meetinghouse yard or at Stephen's store, she quick and talkative, he tall and steady.† The record does not say how their courtship went. It says only that Lucy went home, came back, and stayed until she married "the next January." ⁴⁴

Neither of them belonged to a church. Both of them were searching. Behind them stood two very different parents. Lydia Mack taught her children to pray morning and evening. Asael Smith taught his children to search the scriptures, trust their reason, and do more than they talked of in religion. Their son would inherit both.



A Late Harvest

Solomon Mack lived to see the beginning of the story this book tells, though he could not have known it. He died at Gilsum on August 23, 1820. ⁴⁵ That spring, in a grove in western New York, his grandson Joseph, then fourteen, had knelt down to pray. Whether the old man ever heard of it, we do not know.

What we do know is how Solomon closed his book. After a lifetime of what he called chasing phantoms, he wanted others to learn sooner than he had. "Time will come when we shall all be called for," he warned, "sooner or later, when money cannot buy our breath one moment." Then he turned to

his readers who were raising children: “Parents, a little caution how to train up your children in the sight of the Lord.”⁴⁶

He had married a woman who did exactly that. It took Solomon until his seventy-sixth year, by his own count, to pray the way Lydia had taught their children to pray. But the seed she planted did not die in stony ground. It went with her daughter Lucy to Vermont, and from there to New York.

Jesus told a parable about a sower whose seed fell in different places: by the wayside, on stony ground, among thorns and on good ground. The parable does not say the sower stopped sowing because some ground was hard. It ends instead with a harvest, “some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”⁴⁷

In the Mack and Smith families, the sowing had been patient and often unseen. A mother’s prayers, a soldier’s late conversion, a grandfather’s letter in a drawer: none of it looked like much. But the next generation would inherit it all. That generation began with a wedding in Tunbridge, on a January day in 1796.

Within six years, the bride would lie in a sickroom so weak that she “could scarcely endure, even a foot fall upon the floor,” while the doctors gave her up. What she promised God there would shape everything that followed.⁴⁸



Key: † marks a sentence or passage of imagined connective detail; the note explains what is documented. Full citations and verification status are in 02-sources.md. Quotations from Solomon Mack’s Narratve are transcribed from the 1811 printing with the old “long s” (ſ) rendered as a modern s; spelling is otherwise his.

Notes

1. Solomon Mack, *A Narratve of the Life of Solomon Mack* (Windsor, VT: printed for the author, [1811]), about 22–23, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/narratvesicofli00mack>. The shut doors and the household asleep are in Mack’s account; so is his fear that he had only moments to live.

2. Mack, *Narrative*, about 19–20. Mack dates the illness to “the fall of the year 1810” and says the pain kept him in bed through the winter.
3. Mack, *Narrative*, about 19–21. He asks his wife whether the words of Matthew 11:28–30 (“Come unto me, all ye that labour...”) were “in the Bible or not.”
4. Mack, *Narrative*, about 22–23.
5. Mack, *Narrative*, about 23. † The banked fire, the snow and the sleeping Lydia are imagined. The illness, the sleepless nights, the lights and the voice are documented in Mack’s own account.
6. Mack, *Narrative*, about 23–24. The scriptural phrase he then recalls (“what things soever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”) echoes Matthew 21:22 and Mark 11:24 (KJV).
7. The *Narrative* carries no date on its title page. It is usually dated 1811 from internal evidence; see the Joseph Smith Papers biography of Solomon Mack Sr., <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/solomon-mack-sr>. Mack says he did not know “how to write, or read to any amount” as a young man (*Narrative*, about 9). The traits named at the end of this section are the author’s summary of what follows in this chapter; the sentence on the Lord’s hand states a Latter-day Saint belief.
8. Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart and Solomon Mack Sr. biography, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/solomon-mack-sr> (15 Sept. 1732). Mack’s *Narrative*, 3, and Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 1, give September 26, 1735. See **02 - sources.md**.
9. Mack, *Narrative*, 3–4.
10. Mack, *Narrative*, 4–5. Compare Job 11:12 (KJV): “though man be born like a wild ass’s colt.”
11. Mack, *Narrative*, 5.
12. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 2–3, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/8>, quoting her father’s narrative; Mack, *Narrative*, 6–7 (“grass did not grow under my feet”). Both versions use the language of a colonial soldier about his Native opponents; we quote only the shout and the outcome.
13. Joseph Smith—History 1:28, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1>. The context, his confession of “levity” as a youth, is told in Chapter 6. The family resemblance is the author’s observation, not Joseph’s.
14. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 3–4, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/9>.
15. Mack, *Narrative*, 7.
16. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 5, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/11>. The JSP biography gives the marriage date as January 4, 1759.
17. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 5. In his own *Narrative*, 9–10, Mack says he “cut my leg and lay under the Doctors care the whole season.”
18. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 5–6, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/12>, quoting Solomon Mack. Original spelling (“instuctress”) retained.

19. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 6–8, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/14>.
20. Mack, *Narrative*, about 14–17. Mack names several of the men involved and the debts at issue; we summarize.
21. Mack, *Narrative*, about 14.
22. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 27, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/34>.
23. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 8, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/14>.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 45–47, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/53>, including Jason Mack to Solomon Mack Jr., June 30, 1835.
25. JSP biography of Lucy Mack Smith (8 July 1775). Lucy's own history, 1845, 26–27, says July 8, 1776. See **02 - sources .md**.
26. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 16, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/22>.
27. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 16–17.
28. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 17–18, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/25>.
29. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 27–28, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/35>.
30. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Asahel Smith of Topsfield, with Some Account of the Smith Family," Topsfield Historical Society, *Historical Collections* 8 (1902), 88–89, quoting the *Salem Gazette*, Nov. 22, 1785, <https://archive.org/details/AsaelSmithOfTopsfield>. Asael's birth date is from the JSP Pedigree Chart.
31. J. F. Smith, "Asahel Smith of Topsfield," 90. The 1902 text explains the stiff neck and denies any deformity. The nickname is reported in family tradition and in Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, rev. ed. (2003); see **02 - sources .md**.
32. JSP, Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/back/joseph-smith-pedigree-chart>; J. F. Smith, "Asahel Smith of Topsfield," 89. The family register in Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 31, lists the marriage date.
33. J. F. Smith, "Asahel Smith of Topsfield," 89–90, 97; JSP, Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart.
34. J. F. Smith, "Asahel Smith of Topsfield," 90.
35. JSP, Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart (Mary Duty, b. 11 Oct. 1743, Rowley, MA; d. 27 May 1836, Kirtland, OH); Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 31 (family register, "Mary Duty May 27, 1836 in Kirtland"). The character sketch in the last two sentences is the author's summary, not a quotation.
36. J. F. Smith, "Asahel Smith of Topsfield," 97.
37. JSP biography of Joseph Smith Sr. ("Joined Universalist Society at Tunbridge, 1797"), <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/joseph-smith-sr>, citing Larry C. Porter's 1971 dissertation. Whether Asael also joined is reported in secondary works but was not confirmed for this draft; see **02 - sources .md**.

38. Asael Smith to “My Dear Selfs,” April 10, 1799, as printed in J. F. Smith, “Asahel Smith of Topsfield,” 91–92; original in Church History Library, MS 8605.
39. Asael Smith letter, 1799, in J. F. Smith, “Asahel Smith of Topsfield,” 92–93. “His tender mercies are over all his works” echoes Psalm 145:9 (KJV).
40. Asael Smith letter, 1799, in J. F. Smith, “Asahel Smith of Topsfield,” 94.
41. Asael Smith letter, 1799, in J. F. Smith, “Asahel Smith of Topsfield,” 94. The last sentence of the paragraph is the author’s forward glance.
42. JSP, Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart (Asael d. 31 Oct. 1830); Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 172–73, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/181>, quoting the journal of John Smith on the 1830 visit of Joseph Sr. and Don Carlos Smith to Asael at Stockholm, New York. John Smith wrote this recollection years after the event.
43. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 27–28, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/35>.
44. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 28. † The setting and the descriptions of Lucy and Joseph are imagined; the record says only that they met while she was staying with Stephen at Tunbridge. Joseph Sr.’s height is described in later family recollections, not here.
45. JSP biography of Solomon Mack Sr. (d. 23 Aug. 1820, Gilsum, NH).
46. Mack, *Narrative*, about 24–25. The scanned text reads “in the sight of the Lord” (with a long s that the scan renders as “fight”); see `02 - sources .md`.
47. Matthew 13:3–8 (KJV).
48. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 39, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/46>. The illness came about six months after the family moved to Randolph, Vermont, in 1802; Chapter 3 tells the story.

CHAPTER 3

Lucy and Joseph

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened
unto you.*

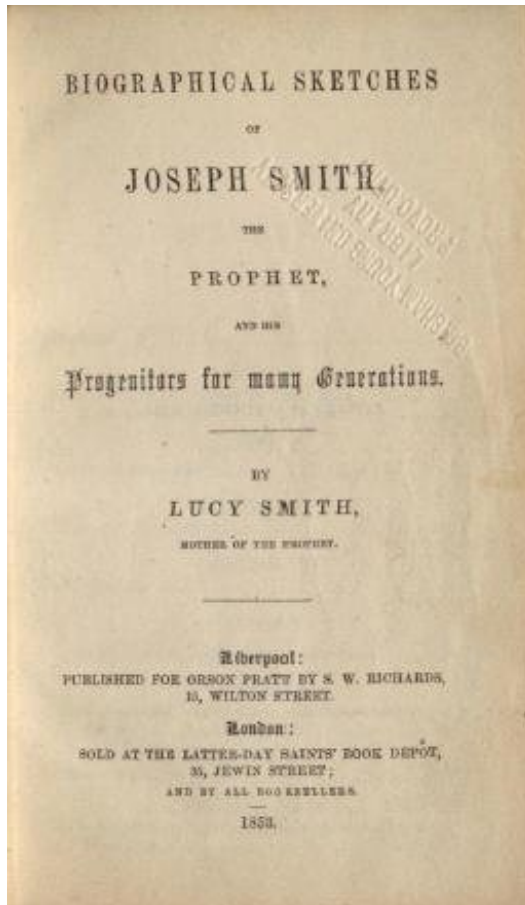
Matthew 7:7

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

John 14:1

“My Wife, My Wife”

In the winter of 1802, in the small Vermont town of Randolph, a young mother lay in bed, too weak to bear the sound of a footstep.



*Title page of Lucy Mack Smith's history of her family (Liverpool, 1853), the main source for this chapter. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 1853. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

Lucy Mack Smith was about twenty-seven. She had two little boys, Alvin and Hyrum. Six months after the family moved to Randolph, she caught a heavy cold that settled into her lungs. A “hectic fever set in,” she remembered, “and the physician pronounced my case to be, confirmed consumption.”¹ It was the same disease that had killed her sisters Lovisa and Lovina.

She grew so weak that she “could scarcely endure, even a foot fall upon the floor.” Her mother came to nurse her, and no one was allowed to speak in the room above a whisper. Picture the shutters drawn against the light, a cup of water on the stand, and two little boys hushed in the next room.[†] One day

a Methodist exhorter called. His ordinary knock at the door shook her so badly that it took a long time for her nerves to settle. He sat in silence by the bed, and Lucy was afraid he would ask whether she was ready to die. She knew she was not. “There appeared to be a dark and lonesome chasm between me and the Savior,” she said, “which I dare not attempt to pass.”²

After the visitor left, her husband came to the bed and took her hand. “Oh Lucy! my wife, my wife! you must die!” he said. “The doctors have given you up; and all say you cannot live.”³

That night Lucy prayed as she never had. She “begged and plead” with the Lord to spare her, so that she could raise her children and comfort her husband. Her thoughts swung between heaven and her babies. Then, she said, “during the night I made a solemn covenant with God: that, if he would let me live, I would endeavor to serve him according to the best of my abilities.”⁴

Shortly after, she heard a voice:

Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you—let your heart be comforted, ye believe in God, believe also in me.⁵

The words were from the Sermon on the Mount and from the Gospel of John, two passages she knew. They came to her as a personal answer. Less than twenty years later her son would kneel in a grove and receive an answer of his own. Lucy’s came first, in a sickroom in Randolph. Latter-day Saints see the Lord’s hand in both.

In a few moments her mother came into the room, looked at her and exclaimed, “Lucy, you are better.” Lucy found that she could speak again. “Yes, mother,” she answered, “the Lord will let me live, if I am faithful to the promise which I made him.”⁶

She did live, and she spent the rest of her life trying to keep that promise. To understand what it cost her, and what it would mean for her children, we have to go back to her wedding.



A Wedding Gift

Lucy Mack and Joseph Smith were married in Tunbridge, Vermont, on January 24, 1796. She was twenty, and he was twenty-four.⁷

Soon after the wedding, the couple set out to visit Lucy's parents. Lucy's brother Stephen and his business partner, John Mudget, saw them off. Lucy remembered their conversation word for word, or close to it. "Well," said Mr. Mudget, "Lucy ought to have something worth naming, and I will give her just as much as you will." "Done," said Stephen, "I will give her 500 dollars in cash." "Good," said the other, "and I will give her 500 dollars more."⁸

It was a large sum for a farm couple in 1796. Lucy laid the check aside, since she had enough of her own to furnish a house. The young couple went back to Tunbridge, where Joseph owned "a handsome farm," and for about six years they lived there "tilling the earth for livelihood."⁹

Their first child, a son, did not live long enough to be named. Alvin was born on February 11, 1798. Hyrum followed on February 9, 1800, and a daughter, Sophronia, on May 16, 1803.¹⁰ Lucy's history lists them in a family record, with the dates of their births, marriages and deaths. Reading it now, knowing what lay ahead for several of those children, is not easy.

In 1802 the Smiths rented out their farm and moved to Randolph to open a store. It was there that Lucy fell ill.



"What Man Can Neither Give nor Take Away"

When Lucy recovered, she went looking for someone to teach her how to keep her covenant.

She called on a deacon she regarded as "exceedingly pious," expecting to hear him praise God for her recovery. Instead the whole household fussed over her comfort: "Oh! Mrs. Smith has come, help her in—run, build a fire—make the room warm—fill the tea kettle—get the great-arm chair." Not a word about Christ. Lucy went home "sorrowful and disappointed."¹¹

She went to hear a well-known preacher at the Presbyterian meetinghouse, listening with “deep attention.” She came away convinced “that he neither understood nor appreciated the subject upon which he spoke.” She was not bitter, but she reached a hard conclusion: “I said in my heart: there was not then upon earth the religion, which I was seeking after.”¹²

That might have been the end of her search. Instead it became the beginning of a new one. She resolved, she said, “taking Jesus and disciples for my guide, to endeavor to obtain from God, what man can neither give nor take away.” She would listen to every preacher and read every book she could, “but the Bible should be my guide to life and Salvation.”¹³

Years later, Lucy decided that she ought to be baptized. She found a minister “who was willing to baptize me, without compelling me to join any religious denomination,” and she received the ordinance. Then she went on reading her Bible and waiting.¹⁴

Baptism in those years usually meant joining the congregation that performed it. Lucy wanted the ordinance without the membership, and she had to look for a minister willing to give it on those terms. It was an unusual request, and it tells us how seriously she took both halves of her belief: that baptism mattered, and that no church she knew had a clear claim to be Christ’s.

She was not alone. Many Americans of her time felt the same way. Lucy’s way of living with the question would shape her children far more than any sermon.



The Ginseng Venture

Years later, Lucy could still describe the moment the truth came out: a young man the worse for drink, a trunk thrown open, and inside it the money that should have been her husband’s. To see how it got there, start with a root that grew wild in the Vermont woods.

Joseph’s store in Randolph was doing well, and he saw a chance to do better.

He learned that “chrystalized Gin seng root, bore a very high price in China.” Ginseng grew wild in the Vermont woods. Joseph put all his money into buying the root and preparing it for market. A merchant named Stevens, from nearby Royalton, offered him three thousand dollars for the lot. Joseph refused, since the offer was only about two-thirds of what he believed it was worth. He went to New York City and arranged with a ship’s captain to sell the ginseng in China and bring him the proceeds.¹⁵

Stevens followed him to New York, found the same ship, and sent his own son along with some ginseng of his own. When the ship came back, young Stevens told Joseph a sad story: the sale had failed, and all he had to show for it was a small chest of tea.

The truth came out by accident. Lucy’s brother Stephen visited the younger Stevens, who had set up his own ginseng operation and was, as Lucy put it, “considerably intoxicated.” Stephen casually asked how much Joseph’s venture had brought. Stevens led him to a trunk, opened it and said, “there, sir, are the proceeds of Mr. Smith’s Ginseng.” It was full of silver and gold.¹⁶

Stephen rode for Randolph that same night. But when Stevens sobered up, he guessed what he had done. He dismissed his workers, called his carriage and “fled with his cash to Canada.” Joseph chased him for a while and then gave up. Lucy never heard of the man again.¹⁷

We have only Lucy’s side of this story, told forty years later, and no court record or letter from Stevens survives to check it against. But the outline is consistent with what historians know of the family’s sudden poverty after 1803, and Lucy tells it without self-pity.¹⁸

The loss was ruinous. On top of it, Joseph discovered about two thousand dollars in bad debts, and he still owed eighteen hundred dollars to merchants in Boston for store goods. The Smiths did what honest people in their position could do. They sold their Tunbridge farm, worth about fifteen hundred dollars, for eight hundred to raise money quickly. Then Lucy brought out the wedding check she had never cashed. The two sums together paid the Boston debt.¹⁹

From that point on, the Smiths would never again own land free and clear for long. They would rent, work for others and start over, again and again.

But they paid what they owed. Their son Joseph would grow up in a house where honesty had cost a fortune and was kept anyway.



A Visit from Jason

During these lean years on the Tunbridge farm, Lucy's oldest brother, Jason Mack, came to see them. He brought with him "a young man by the name of William Smith, a friendless orphan, whom he had adopted." Jason asked the Smiths to keep the boy for a while so that he could go to school. They did, for six months, until Jason came back for him.²⁰

Lucy's description of her brother on that journey is one of the loveliest passages in her history. Jason had bought a stock of store goods as presents for his mother and sisters. But "on his way he found so many objects of charity, that he gave, not only all his goods, but most of his cash away before he arrived at his father's house." Once he met a widow with six children, newly bereaved and destitute. He gave her fifteen dollars and "an entire suit of clothes for herself, and each of her children."²¹

Jason went back to New Brunswick, where he gathered poor families onto his land, planned their work and sailed their produce to market in his own schooner. Lucy never saw him again. Twenty years later a single letter came, full of faith, describing the healings he had witnessed "by the prayer of faith." Not long after that, word came that Jason, his wife and their oldest son had died.²²

The Smiths had little to spare when Jason came. They took in his orphan anyway. Kindness of that kind, to strangers and to the poor, runs through Lucy's history like a thread. It would mark her household for the rest of her life.



Two Trees

While the family was living on the Tunbridge farm, Lucy began attending Methodist meetings, and Joseph went with her to please her. His family did not like it. Lucy says that when his oldest brother heard of it, there was so much displeasure that Joseph decided it was “hardly worth our while to attend meetings” anymore. It would “prove but little advantage to us,” he told her, and it upset his relatives.²³



South Tunbridge Methodist Episcopal Church, Tunbridge, Vermont (photographed 2014). Not the meetinghouse Lucy attended. Photo: John Phelan, 2014. CC BY-SA 3.0; via Wikimedia Commons.

Lucy was hurt, but she did not argue. She took her hurt to God. “I retired to a grove not far distant,” she wrote, “and prayed to the Lord in behalf of my husband: that the true gospel might be presented to him; and, that his heart might be softened, so as to receive it.”²⁴

Readers who know where this story is going may notice the grove. Years later, Lucy’s son Joseph would also go into the woods to pray. Lucy does not draw the connection. She simply tells us that she went home depressed, went to bed, and dreamed.

In her dream she stood in a beautiful meadow near their house. A clear stream ran through it, and beside the stream stood two tall trees. A bright light surrounded one of them, “like a belt of burnished gold.” When a gentle breeze passed, that tree “bent gracefully before the wind,” and its branches moved as if in joy. The other tree “stood erect and fixed as a pillar of marble.” No matter how hard the wind blew, “not a leaf was stirred, not a bow was bent.”²⁵

The interpretation, she said, was given to her. The stiff tree was her husband’s oldest brother, Jesse. The bending tree was her husband. The breeze was “the pure and undefiled gospel of the son of God,” which Jesse would always resist. But Joseph, “when Joseph should be more advanced in life,” would “hear the pure gospel, receive it with his whole heart, and rejoice therein.”²⁶

It helps to remember the world Lucy and Joseph lived in. Vermont at the turn of the nineteenth century was full of religious variety and religious argument. The old Congregational churches of New England, supported by town taxes, still stood on the village greens. Methodist circuit riders and Baptist preachers traveled from farm to farm, holding meetings in homes and barns. Universalists like Asael taught that God would save everyone. Many families, like the Smiths, were divided among these views. Many people did not join any church, not because they did not believe, but because they could not decide which church was right.²⁷

Lucy and her husband were different in temperament. She was drawn to meetings and longed for a church home. He was wary of them and distrusted creeds that seemed to divide Christians. Both of them read the Bible. Both of them prayed. Neither of them was willing to pretend to be sure. That stubborn honesty would pass, whole, to their son.

Lucy recorded this dream more than forty years after she had it, knowing how things turned out. Readers can weigh it as they wish. What it shows beyond doubt is how she saw her husband. He was not a scoffer. He was a searcher who had not yet found what he was looking for.



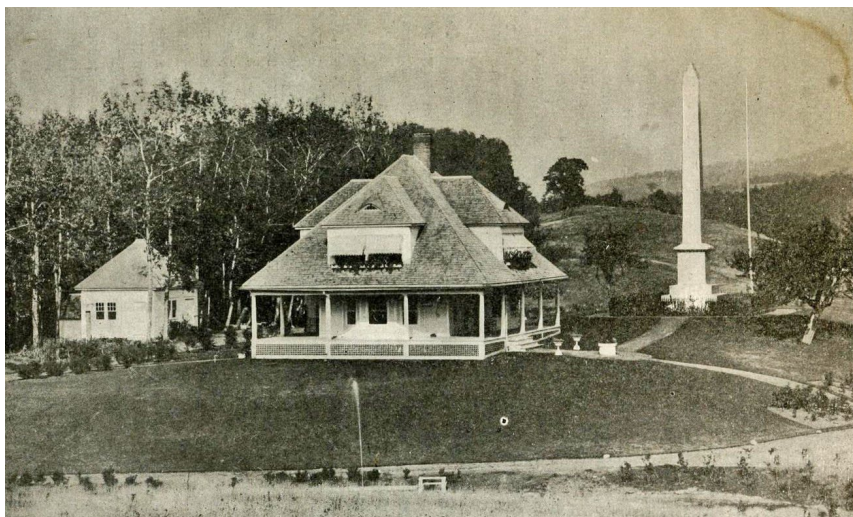
A Son Named Joseph

After selling the Tunbridge farm, the family moved to nearby Royalton for a few months and then to Sharon, in Windsor County, Vermont. There Joseph Sr. rented a farm from Lucy's father, Solomon Mack. He farmed it in summer and taught school in winter, and slowly, Lucy wrote, "our circumstances gradually improved, until we found ourselves quite comfortable again."²⁸

It was in Sharon that the family's fifth child was born. "Meantime we had a son whom we called Joseph, after the name of his father," Lucy wrote. "He was born December 23d, 1805; whom I shall speak more particularly of, by and by."²⁹

That is all she says about the birth. Picture a small farmhouse two days before Christmas, the ground frozen and the hills white, a midwife or a neighbor woman at the bedside and three children waiting in the next room for news.[†] Lucy, writing in 1845 after both Joseph and Hyrum had been killed, chose not to linger. She would have much more to say about her son "by and by."

Today a tall granite obelisk stands on that Sharon hillside. It was dedicated on December 23, 1905, the hundredth anniversary of the birth, and its polished granite shaft is 38½ feet tall, one foot for each year of Joseph Smith's life.³⁰ In 1805 there was nothing to mark the place but a rented farmhouse, a family that had already lost a fortune, and a schoolteacher father who would walk out on winter mornings to teach other people's children.



The Joseph Smith birthplace memorial at Sharon, Vermont, with the granite obelisk dedicated in December 1905, as published in 1907. Photographer unknown; published in the Improvement Era, December 1907. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

The family kept moving: back to Tunbridge, where Samuel Harrison was born on March 13, 1808, and then to Royalton, where another son, Ephraim, was born on March 13, 1810. Ephraim lived only eleven days. A year later, on March 13, 1811, William was born.³¹ Three sons born on the same day of the year: Lucy noted the dates without comment.



The Box

About this time, Lucy says, her husband's mind "became much excited upon the subject of religion." Yet "he would not subscribe to any particular system of faith, but contended for the ancient order, as established by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and his Apostles."³²

One night he went to bed thinking about "the confusion and discord that reigned in the religious world," and he had a dream. He told it to Lucy the next morning, and she recorded it in his words.

He was traveling through an open, barren field. In every direction he could see "nothing save dead fallen timber: not a vestige of life." There was a

“death-like silence.” With him was an attendant spirit, and Joseph asked what this place was. The guide answered: “this field is the world which now lieth inanimate and dumb in regard to the true religion, or plan of salvation.” If he traveled on, he would find a box on a log, and its contents would “make you wise, and give unto you wisdom and understanding.”³³

Joseph found the box, raised the lid and began to taste what was inside. At once beasts of every kind rose up around him, “tearing the earth, tossing their horns, and bellowing in the most terrific manner.” He had to drop the box and run. “Yet, in the midst of all this terror,” he said, “I was perfectly happy; though I awoke, trembling with fear.”³⁴

From then on, Lucy wrote, he was “more confirmed than ever” that none of the churches around him knew any more about the kingdom of God than people who professed no religion at all.³⁵

It is a striking picture of a man’s inner life. Joseph Smith Sr. was a Vermont farmer and schoolteacher with no formal theology. Yet in his dream he saw the religious world of his day as a field of dead timber, silent and lifeless. He saw that there was wisdom to be found. He saw that reaching for it would bring fierce opposition. And he saw that, even in the middle of that opposition, he could be “perfectly happy.” His son would one day describe very much the same experience while awake.

In 1811 the family moved across the Connecticut River to Lebanon, New Hampshire. There Joseph Sr. had another dream. He walked a narrow path beside a stream, holding to a rope that ran along the bank, and came to a tree whose white fruit was “delicious beyond description.” “I cannot eat this alone,” he said in the dream, “I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me.” He brought them, and they ate and praised God together, while people in “a spacious building” across the valley “pointed the finger of scorn at us.”³⁶ It may be the most revealing line in all his dreams. Joseph Smith Sr. could not bear to enjoy something good without his wife and children beside him. His son would be the same.

Readers of the Book of Mormon will notice how closely this resembles the dream of the prophet Lehi in its opening pages. Lucy, writing years after that book was published, recorded the dream as her husband’s and left the comparison to her readers.



What They Carried

Look at this family in 1811. They had lost a fortune to a dishonest partner, sold their farm at a loss and paid their debts. They had buried two infant sons. They had moved at least six times in fifteen years. They had six living children, a rented farm, and, for the moment, enough to eat.

They also had something harder to measure. Lucy had made a covenant with God and was keeping it the only way she knew: by reading the Bible, praying, and refusing to settle for less than she believed Christ's church should be. Joseph Sr. had dreamed of a dead world, a box of wisdom, and a tree whose fruit he could not bear to eat alone. Neither of them had found the church they wanted. Neither of them had stopped looking. And without quite meaning to, they were teaching their children by example: that God answers prayer, that a covenant is to be kept, that debts are to be paid, that an orphan at the door is to be fed, and that it is better to keep searching honestly than to settle for an answer you do not believe.

In Lebanon, for the first time in years, things were going well. The Smiths sent Hyrum to an academy in nearby Hanover and the younger children to a common school. "We doubled our diligence," Lucy remembered, and "were greatly blessed in our labors."³⁷ It would not last.

Their son Joseph was five years old. Within two years a fever would sweep through Lebanon, and surgeons would come to the Smiths' door to take off his leg. And in a few years more, he would take up his parents' question as his own.



*Key: † marks a sentence or passage of imagined connective detail; the note explains what is documented. Full citations and verification status are in **03-sources.md**. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from the 1845 fair copy of her history (JSP), with original spelling.*

Notes

1. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 39, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/46>. Lucy says this happened after they had lived in Randolph “but six months”; they moved there in 1802. Her age is reckoned from the JSP birth date (8 July 1775).
2. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 39. † The drawn shutters, the cup and the hushed boys are imagined. The illness, the whispering rule and her sensitivity to every sound are Lucy’s own account; Alvin and Hyrum were then about four and two.
3. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 40, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/47>.
4. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 40.
5. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 40. The words combine Matthew 7:7 and John 14:1 (KJV). Original spelling retained.
6. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 40.
7. JSP, Joseph Smith Pedigree Chart, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/back/joseph-smith-pedigree-chart>; JSP biographies of Joseph Smith Sr. (b. 12 July 1771) and Lucy Mack Smith (b. 8 July 1775).
8. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 38, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/45>. Punctuation of the dialogue is lightly regularized; the words are Lucy’s.
9. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 38.
10. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 32 (family register), JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/39>.
11. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 40–41, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/48>. Lucy names him “Deacon Davis.”
12. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 41.
13. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 41–42, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/49>.
14. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 42. Lucy does not name the minister or give a date.
15. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 42–43, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/49>. See also Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, ch. 1.
16. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 43–44, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/51>.
17. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 44.
18. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, ch. 1, relies on Lucy for the ginseng episode; no independent record of it has been identified for this draft. See **03-sources.md**.
19. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 44–45, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/52>.
20. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 45, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/52>.

21. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 45–46, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/53>.
22. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 46–48, including Jason Mack to Solomon Mack Jr., June 30, 1835.
23. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 48–49, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/55>. The manuscript says “my longer,” which we read as “any longer”; see **03 - sources .md**.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 49, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/56>.
25. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 49–50.
26. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 50–51, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/57>.
27. Church History Topics, “Christian Churches in Joseph Smith’s Day,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/christian-churches-in-joseph-smiths-day>; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, ch. 1. This paragraph is the author’s summary of the religious setting.
28. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 51, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/58>.
29. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 51. † The farmhouse scene (frozen ground, attendants, children waiting) is imagined. The date and place are documented; Lucy describes nothing of the birth itself.
30. *Proceedings at the Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument, at Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, December 23rd, 1905* (1906), Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsatded00salt>. Height (38½ feet, one foot per year): Church historic sites, “Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial,” <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/exhibit/historic-sites/vermont/joseph-smith-birthplace/birthplace>; *Liahona*, Dec. 2002.
31. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 32, 51. Lucy’s register gives Ephraim’s death as “Mar. 24th 1820,” evidently a slip for 1810; the JSP Pedigree Chart gives 24 March 1810. See **03 - sources .md**.
32. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 52, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/59>.
33. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 52. Original spelling (“undertstanding”) retained.
34. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 52–53, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/60>.
35. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 53.
36. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 53–55, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/60>. Compare 1 Nephi 8 in the Book of Mormon.
37. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 55–56, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/63>.

CHAPTER 4

The Boy Who Would Not Be Bound

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

“I Will Not Be Bound”

The surgeons arrived at the Smith house in Lebanon, New Hampshire, in about 1813, and Lucy Mack Smith met them at the door.



Dr. Nathan Smith, the surgeon whose operation saved Joseph's leg. Ulysses Dow Tenney, portrait of Nathan Smith, 1870, after an earlier portrait. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

They had already operated on her son's leg twice. Now they had come to take it off. Lucy showed them into a room apart from the one where seven-year-old Joseph lay, and asked them plainly what they could do to save the leg. "We can do nothing," they answered. "We have cut it open to the bone, and find it so affected, that we consider it as incurable; and amputation absolutely necessary to save his life."¹

"This was like a thunderbolt," Lucy remembered. She turned to the principal surgeon and pleaded with him. Could they not make one more trial, cutting around the bone and taking out only the diseased part? "You will not, you must not take off his leg until you try once more," she said. "I will not consent to have you enter the room, until you make me this promise."² After a few moments' consultation, the doctors agreed.

When they came to his bedside, Joseph spoke first. "I see you have," he said when they greeted him, "but you have not come to take off my leg, have you, Sir?" No, the surgeon told him. "It is your mother's request that we make one more effort."³

Then the surgeon ordered cords brought to tie the boy to the bedstead. Joseph objected. "No, Dr, I will not be bound," he said. "I can bear the operation much better, if I have my liberty." The doctor offered brandy, then wine. Joseph refused them both. "I will not touch one particle of liquor, neither will I be tied down; but I will tell you what I will do: I will have my father sit on the bed and hold me in his arms, and then I will do what is necessary to be done."⁴

He looked at his mother, his eyes swimming with tears. "Mother, I want you to leave the room," he said. "I know you cannot bear to see me suffer so: father can stand it; but you have carried me so much and watched over me so long, you are almost worn out." He made her promise. "The Lord will help me, and I shall get through with it."⁵

Lucy folded sheets under his leg and walked several hundred yards from the house so she would not hear. We can imagine her standing in the field, hands pressed over her ears, counting the minutes.† There was no anesthesia in 1813. The surgeon bored into the bone on one side and then the other, then broke away pieces of it with a kind of forceps. At the first piece Joseph screamed so loudly that Lucy ran back to the house. "Oh, mother, go back, go

back,” he cried. “I do not want you to come in—I will try to tough it out, if you will go away.”⁶

When the third piece came out, she burst into the room again. “And Oh my God! what a spectacle for a mother’s eye!” The wound was torn open and the bed was covered with blood. “Joseph was as pale as a corpse, and large drops of sweat were rolling down his face.”⁷ They forced her out until it was over.

When she was allowed back in, the bed was clean and the instruments were gone. Her son lay quiet, pale and exhausted, but in a measure free from pain. From that day, Lucy wrote, he “commenced getting better.”⁸

A seven-year-old who would not be tied down, who would not drink, who asked only that his father hold him and that his mother be spared: it is hard to read that scene and not see in it the man he became. The same boy would one day face mobs and jailers in much the same spirit. He would not be bound.



A Fever in Lebanon

The trouble had begun with an epidemic. In 1812 and 1813, typhoid fever swept through the upper Connecticut River valley. Lucy called it “the typhus fever,” and it “raged tremendously” in Lebanon. One after another, every one of the Smith children fell ill.⁹

The family had finally been doing well. They had settled in Lebanon, were “greatly blessed” in their labors, and had begun saving for their old age. They had even sent their son Hyrum to an academy in nearby Hanover.¹⁰ Now Hyrum came home sick from school, and Alvin and the others followed.

Their daughter Sophronia came nearest to death. After eighty-nine days, the doctor said medicine could do no more for her and stopped coming. That night she lay motionless, eyes open, with what Lucy called “that peculiar aspect which bespeaks the near approach of death.” Lucy and her husband knelt by the bed and pleaded with God to spare her. When they rose, the child seemed to have stopped breathing. Lucy wrapped her in a blanket, took her in her arms and began walking the floor. The neighbors told her she was

crazy, that the child was dead. Lucy would not stop. “At length she sobbed,” Lucy wrote. “She sobbed again,—then looked up into my face and commenced breathing quite freely.” Lucy laid her on the bed and collapsed beside her.¹¹

Joseph had seemed to be recovering when, sitting in a chair, he screamed with a pain in his shoulder. A doctor diagnosed a sprain and rubbed in liniment. It was not a sprain. After two weeks a deep infection was found and lanced. Then, Lucy wrote, using her son’s own words, the pain “shot like lightning down his side into the marrow of the bone of his leg.”¹² “Oh father,” the boy cried, “the pain is so severe, how can I bear it?”¹³

Today we would call it osteomyelitis, an infection of the bone. In 1813 it usually ended in amputation or death.

Lucy carried him in her arms until she made herself ill. Then Hyrum, “always rather remarkable for his tenderness and sympathy,” asked to take her place. For days and nights he sat beside his younger brother, holding the diseased part of the leg between his hands and pressing it, so that Joseph could better bear the pain.¹⁴ Hyrum was about thirteen. The bond between the two brothers would last until they died together, thirty-one years later.



A Surgeon Named Smith

Years afterward, Joseph dictated his own short account of the illness. He remembered that the fever “settled under my shoulder,” that a doctor “freely applied the hot shovel,” and that the disease then “desended into my left Leg & ancle & terminated in a fever sore of the worst kind.” At one point, he said, “eleven Doctors came from Dartmouth Medical college, at Hanover New Hampshire, for the purpose of amputation, but, young as I was, I utterly refused to give my assent to the operation.” He agreed instead to “their Trying an experiment by removing a large portion of the bone from my left leg.”¹⁵

Lucy remembered the surgeon as “Dr Stone.” Joseph named “Drs. Smith, Stone & Perkins. of Hanover.” Historians believe the principal surgeon was Dr. Nathan Smith, no relation to the family, who had founded the medical

school at Dartmouth College. He had developed a procedure for removing infected bone while saving the limb, at a time when most surgeons simply amputated. He may well have been the only surgeon in the United States in 1813 who could have saved the boy's leg, and he lived just a few miles away.¹⁶ Latter-day Saints have long seen the Lord's hand in that nearness. A family that had moved again and again had come to rest, for a few years, beside a surgeon who could help.

Recovery was slow. Joseph remembered that "fourteen additional peices of bone afterwards worked out before my leg healed," and that he was "reduced so very low that my mother could carry me with ease."¹⁷ When he could travel, he went with his uncle Jesse Smith to Salem, Massachusetts, hoping the sea air would help. It did. He walked on crutches for about three years and limped slightly for the rest of his life.¹⁸

Readers who remember Chapter 2 may recall that his grandfather Solomon Mack also nearly died of "a terrible fever sore" on his leg as a boy, and was saved by good surgeons. Lucy does not mention the parallel. But the Mack family's capacity for surviving what should have killed them seems to have come down to her son intact.

The illness cost the family more than suffering. "After about a year of sickness and distress," Lucy wrote, health returned to the household, but it "found us in quite low circumstances."¹⁹ Doctor bills took what they had saved. They would have to start over again. Before they could, the sky itself would turn against them.



The Year Without a Summer

Snow in June. Frost in July and again in August. Across New England, 1816 would be remembered as the year without a summer, and it would finally break the Smiths' hold on Vermont.

The family moved across the river to Norwich, Vermont, and rented a farm. The first year, the crops failed. The second year they failed again. Joseph Sr. resolved to plant once more, and if that failed, to go to New York, "where wheat was raised in abundance."²⁰

The third year was 1816. Half a world away, in April 1815, a volcano called Tambora had erupted on an island in what is now Indonesia, one of the largest eruptions in recorded history. Its ash drifted around the globe and dimmed the sun. In New England the next year, snow fell in June, killing frosts struck in July and August, and 1816 passed into memory as “the year without a summer.”²¹ In Lucy’s plain words, “an untimely frost destroyed the crops,” and that, “being the third year in succession that the crops had failed, almost caused a famine. This was enough.”²²

Thousands of New England families packed up and moved west that year and the next. The Smiths were among them. Joseph Sr. settled his accounts, calling in witnesses where creditors had not brought their books, and set out for Palmyra, New York, with a man named Howard. Lucy and the eight children were to follow when he sent for them.

As Lucy was ready to leave, several of those creditors appeared with their account books and demanded payment of debts that had already been settled. Lucy decided it was better to pay than to risk a lawsuit with the wagon waiting, and she handed over one hundred and fifty dollars. Two neighbors, indignant at the fraud, offered to take up a collection for her. “This I utterly refused,” Lucy wrote. “The idea of receiving assistance in such a way as that, was indeed very repulsive to my feelings.”²³



A Mother’s Last Admonition

Lucy’s own mother, Lydia Mack, now elderly, had been living with the family. She helped them prepare and rode with them as far as Royalton, Vermont. There, at a tavern, mother and daughter said goodbye.

“My mother wept over me long and bitterly,” Lucy remembered. Lydia told her it was unlikely they would ever see each other again in this life:

I have lived long—my days are nearly numbered—I must soon exchange the things of this world, for that which pertains to another state of existence, where I hope to enjoy the society of the blessed.—And now, as my last admonition, I beseech you to continue faithful in the service of God

to the end of your days, that I may have the pleasure of embracing you, in another and fairer world above.²⁴

It was the same counsel Lydia had given her children all their lives: to fear God, to pray, and to be faithful. Lydia had been hurt when the sleigh overturned on the road, and Lucy believed she never fully recovered. She died about two years later.²⁵ Lucy never saw her again.



“As Sure As There Is a God in Heaven”

The journey west, in the winter of 1816–17, was some three hundred miles over snowy roads. It turned into an ordeal.



A New England homestead in winter, from an 1868 lithograph. The Smiths set out over roads like these in the winter of 1816–17. Currier & Ives, American Homestead Winter, lithograph, 1868; Library of Congress. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

The teamster, whom Joseph remembered as Caleb Howard, quickly proved to be what Lucy called “an unprincipled, unfeeling wretch.” He spent the money they had paid him on drinking and gambling. The Smiths fell in with another family, the Gateses, who were also traveling west, and Howard wanted two of the Gates daughters to ride with him. Picture the sleighs creaking over frozen ruts, the younger children bundled in quilts, and a lame boy of eleven trudging beside them through the drifts.[†] So, Joseph remembered, “Howard drove me from the waggon & made me travel in my weak state through the snow 40 miles per day for several days.” Joseph was about eleven and still lame. When his older brothers protested, Howard “would knock them down with the butt of his whip.”²⁶

About twenty miles west of Utica, Alvin came to his mother one morning with bad news. Howard had thrown the family’s goods out of the wagon and was about to drive off with the team. Lucy called him into the barroom of the inn, where a number of travelers had gathered. Then she turned to the room:

Gentlemen and ladies, please give your attention for a moment: now, as sure as there is a God in heaven, that team, as well as the goods, belong to my husband; and this man intends to take them from me, or at least the team, leaving me with eight children, without the means of proceeding on my journey.²⁷

Then she turned to Howard. “Sir, I now forbid your touching the team, or driving it one step farther—you can go about your own business, for I have no use for you—I shall take charge of the team myself.”²⁸

And she did. It is not hard to see where her son learned to stand his ground.

The rest of the way was no easier. Joseph remembered riding on the last sleigh of the company, and being “knocked down by the driver, one of Gate’s Sons, & left to wallow in my blood until a stranger came along, picked me up, & carried me to the Town of Palmyra.” With Howard’s money gone, Lucy paid the innkeepers along the road with cloth and clothing, “the last payment being made with the drops taken from Sister Sophronia’s ears.”²⁹

She had brought eight children three hundred miles through a New York winter on courage and cloth. When they finally reached Palmyra, Lucy

wrote, they had “a small portion of our effects, and barely two cents in money.” But her husband was there. “I was quite happy,” she said, “in once more having the society of my husband, and in throwing myself and children upon the care and affection of a tender companion and father.”³⁰



A Log House in the Woods

The family sat down together and made a plan. They would “unite our energies,” Lucy wrote, and get a piece of land.³¹

Lucy set up a business painting oilcloth table coverings, and it “did extremely well.” She earned enough to feed the family and buy furniture. Joseph Sr. and the older boys hired out for day labor. They dug wells, harvested, made barrels and boiled maple sap into sugar. After about two years in Palmyra village, they contracted for a hundred acres of forest just south of town, in the township of Manchester.³² They built a log house and began the slow work of clearing the land, cutting and burning trees one acre at a time. When a payment came due, Alvin went away to earn it and came back with the money.

Lucy remembered those years with gratitude. “We had a snug log house, neatly furnished, and the means of living comfortably.” And “the hand of friendship was extended on every side; and we blessed God with our whole heart, for his mercy which endureth forever.”³³

Joseph Sr. was still dreaming. In one dream, he was so lame he could hardly walk, until his guide led him to a garden where twelve images rose and bowed to him one by one, and he was healed. In another, he came to the door of a great building on the day of judgment and was told he was too late. He prayed until “my flesh was withered upon my bones.” At last he called on God “in the name of his son Jesus,” asking forgiveness, and the porter told him “it was necessary to plead the merits of Jesus, for he was the Advocate with the Father.” Then he was made whole, and the door opened.³⁴

In 1819 Joseph Sr. dreamed that a peddler came to the door with a pack on his back. The man said he had called seven times and had always found Joseph “strictly honest in all your dealings: your measures are always heaped,

and your weights overbalance.” This would be his last visit, he said, and “there is but one thing which you lack in order to secure your salvation.” Joseph begged him to write it down. He ran to get paper, and in his excitement he woke up.³⁵

Lucy recorded the dream without explaining it. But it captures the family’s situation in 1819 with painful exactness. They were honest and hardworking and they believed in God. And they were still sure that something was missing, something no one around them could name.

The household had grown again. A daughter, Katharine, had been born in Lebanon in 1812, and a son, Don Carlos, in Norwich in 1816, just before the move. A last child, named Lucy for her mother, would be born in 1821.³⁶

Of her son Joseph’s boyhood in these years, Lucy says almost nothing on purpose. She knew readers wanted remarkable stories, but “nothing occurred during his early life, excepting those trivial circumstances which are common to that state of human existence.” She describes him as “a remarkably quiet, well disposed child.”³⁷ Joseph himself later wrote that the family’s poverty meant hard work for every child old enough to help. His schooling, he said, amounted to “reading writing and the ground rules of Arithmetic.”³⁸

He was a quiet farm boy with a limp. He also thought deeply about God, and the noise of religion around him was about to grow louder.



“Who of All These Parties Are Right?”

Western New York in those years was alive with religion. Methodist circuit riders, Baptist preachers and Presbyterian ministers competed for converts. In June 1818 Methodists held a camp meeting in Palmyra, and the next summer another gathered about fifteen miles from the Smith farm.³⁹ People would later call the region “the burned-over district,” because revival fires had swept through it so many times.

Joseph remembered the excitement vividly. “There was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion,” he wrote in his 1838 history. “Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the

Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.” It began with good feeling, but when converts began to choose churches, “a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert.”⁴⁰

The arguments came home. “My father’s family was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith,” Joseph wrote, “and four of them joined that church, namely, my mother, Lucy; my brothers Hyrum and Samuel Harrison; and my sister Sophronia.” Joseph Sr. stayed away, as he always had. Joseph himself went to meetings “as often as occasion would permit” and leaned toward the Methodists. But he could not decide.⁴¹

He later remembered that at the revival meetings he wanted to “feel & shout like the Rest,” but “could feel nothing.”⁴² At about twelve, he said, “my mind become seriously impressed with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul.” He began to search the scriptures, and he noticed that many professing Christians “did not adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation.” He also felt his own sins keenly.⁴³

And he looked at the world around him. The boy who spent his days clearing fields and his nights under the open sky wrote of it years later in halting, heartfelt language:

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 beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in majesty and in the strength of beauty.⁴⁴

“My heart exclaimed,” he wrote, “all all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipresent power.”⁴⁵ He did not doubt that God existed. He doubted only that anyone around him could tell him how to find Him.

“In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions,” he remembered, “I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?”⁴⁶

It was his mother’s question from her own girlhood, and his father’s from the field of dead timber. It was his grandfather Asael’s question too, when he

urged his children to search the scriptures and look to Christ. Now it belonged to a fourteen-year-old boy. And one day, reading his Bible, he came across a verse in the Epistle of James that seemed written for him alone.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 04-sources.md. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy); Joseph Smith's own recollection of his illness and the journey is from "Note A" in the addenda to his manuscript history (JSP, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1), written in Nauvoo in the 1840s.

Notes

1. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 60, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/67>. The year is approximate; Church History Topics, "Joseph Smith's Leg Surgery," dates the operation to 1813. Joseph's own note says he was "5 years old or thereabouts" when the fever began. See 04-sources.md.
2. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 60.
3. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 60–61, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/68>.
4. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 61. Original spelling ("operation") retained.
5. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 61.
6. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 61–62, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/69>. † Her posture in the field is imagined. The distance, her purpose (so as not to hear) and her running back at his scream are Lucy's own account.
7. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 62.
8. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 62.
9. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 56, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/63>. On the 1812–13 epidemic, see Church History Topics, "Joseph Smith's Leg Surgery," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/joseph-smiths-leg-surgery>, and LeRoy S. Wirthlin, "Nathan Smith (1762–1828) Surgical Consultant to Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 3 (1977). The disease Lucy called typhus is usually identified as typhoid.
10. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 55–56.
11. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 56–58, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/64>.
12. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 58–59, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/66>.
13. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 59.

14. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 59.
15. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, addenda, Note A, 131, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/137>. Original spelling retained.
16. Church History Topics, “Joseph Smith’s Leg Surgery”; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 1, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/01-ask-in-faith>; Wirthlin, “Nathan Smith.”
17. JS, History, vol. A-1, Note A, 131.
18. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 62–63, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/70> (Salem). On the crutches and limp, see Church History Topics, “Joseph Smith’s Leg Surgery,” and *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 1.
19. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 63.
20. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 63–64, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/71>.
21. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 1, which draws on Gillen D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora* (2014), and William K. and Nicholas P. Klingaman, *The Year without Summer* (2013).
22. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 64.
23. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 64–66, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/72>.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 66, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/73>.
25. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 66; JS, History, vol. A-1, Note A, 132. Lucy says the injury came “in getting upset in a wagon”; Joseph says it was a sleigh.
26. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 67, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/74>; JS, History, vol. A-1, Note A, 131–32, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/138>. † The quilts and frozen ruts are imagined. The winter journey, the snow and Joseph’s forced walking are documented in Lucy 1845 and JS, History A-1, Note A.
27. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 67. The manuscript has “without out”; we silently correct the doubled word.
28. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 67.
29. JS, History, vol. A-1, Note A, 132. “Drops” are earrings. Joseph places Howard’s attempt to take the team at Utica; Lucy places it about twenty miles west of Utica.
30. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 67–68, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/75>.
31. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 68.
32. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 68; Church History Topics, “Palmyra and Manchester,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/palmyra-and-manchester> (two years renting in the village, day labor and a small shop; farm acquired about 1820); *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 1. The list of jobs follows *Saints* and Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, ch. 2.
33. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 69–70, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/76>.

34. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 68–71, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/77>.
35. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 72, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/79>. Lucy calls it her husband's "seventh Vision" and dates it to 1819.
36. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 32–33 (family register), JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/40>. The register gives birthplaces for Katharine (Lebanon) and Lucy (no place); Don Carlos's birthplace (Norwich) is from the JSP Pedigree Chart.
37. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 71–72, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/78>.
38. Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832, 1, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1>.
39. Church History Topics, "Palmyra and Manchester." The phrase "burned-over district" was popularized by Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District* (1950).
40. Joseph Smith—History 1:5–6, Pearl of Great Price, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1>, from JS, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1. Quoted from the canonized text, which has light editing of the 1838–39 manuscript.
41. Joseph Smith—History 1:7–8.
42. Alexander Neibaur, Journal, May 24, 1844, recording Joseph Smith's account, as quoted in Church History Topics, "Awakenings and Revivals," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/awakenings-and-revivals>. This is a secondhand report written down twenty-four years after the events.
43. JS, History, circa Summer 1832, 1–2, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/2>.
44. JS, History, circa Summer 1832, 2.
45. JS, History, circa Summer 1832, 3, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/3>.
46. Joseph Smith—History 1:10.

A Pillar of Light

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

James 1:5

And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

1 Samuel 3:10

A Clear Spring Morning

It was, he remembered, “the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty.”¹ A fourteen-year-old boy left the log house on his father’s farm in Manchester, New York, and walked toward the trees.

He was going there to pray out loud, something he had never done in his life. He was going because of one verse of scripture. And he was going alone.



A Verse in James

We glimpsed him in the first pages of this book, sitting with a Bible in that log house in the late winter or early spring of 1820, reading one verse again and again. He was Joseph Smith Jr., the limping farm boy of the last chapter. He was troubled about his sins and confused by the churches. His mother and three of his brothers and sisters had joined the Presbyterians; he leaned toward the Methodists; his father would join no one. Every preacher read the same Bible and came to a different answer. Then, Joseph remembered, “I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”²



Title page of the first edition of the King James Bible, 1611, the translation Joseph read. *The Holy Bible* (London: Robert Barker, 1611), title page. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Many people have read that verse without being stopped by it. Joseph was stopped.

Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know.³

The problem, as he saw it, was that the Bible alone could not settle the question, because “the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in

settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.”⁴ He would have to do what James said. He would have to ask God directly.

That was a bold thing for a boy to decide. He knew the stories of God speaking to Moses at the burning bush and to the boy Samuel in the night. But almost every preacher he had heard taught that such things belonged to Bible times. Joseph came to the conclusion that he “must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God.” If God gave wisdom liberally and did not scold those who asked, he reasoned, “I might venture.”⁵



Into the Woods

“So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt.”⁶



The grove west of the Smith farm in Manchester, New York, known to Latter-day Saints as the Sacred Grove, photographed about 1907. George Edward Anderson (1860–1928), photograph, about 1907. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons

The woods were on his father's land, a stand of hardwood trees west of the log house. Years later, Joseph told a visiting newspaper writer that he went to a place where he had been clearing trees, and that he had left his axe there in a stump.⁷ Picture the morning: sunlight slanting through branches not yet in full leaf, the ground still damp from the thaw, the sound of a farm waking up somewhere behind him.[†] Joseph looked around to make sure he was alone. "It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt," he said, "for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally."⁸

By 1820 the Smiths had cleared about thirty acres. The rest of the farm was still forest, much of it old-growth hardwood, with trees as tall as a hundred feet and four to six feet thick at the base. Today Latter-day Saints call that stand of trees the Sacred Grove. No one knows the exact spot where Joseph knelt. It was somewhere in those woods, probably near the edge of the land the family was clearing.⁹

He knelt and began to pray. What happened next he described more than once, to different people, over the course of twenty years. Each time he tried to put it into words, the words seemed too small. This chapter lets those accounts speak side by side, the way the four Gospels tell the life of Jesus, each adding what the others leave out.



Thick Darkness

The first thing Joseph felt was not light but darkness.

In his 1838 history he wrote: “I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.”¹⁰

In 1835, telling the story to a visitor in Kirtland, Ohio, he described the same struggle in a different way. “My tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter,” he said. “I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, I strove again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet, and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking.”¹¹

He was sure it was not his imagination. In 1838 he insisted that he had felt himself in danger “not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being.”¹²

He called on God with all his strength, “at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair.” He did not give up. He kept praying.



“Above the Brightness of the Sun”

Then the light came.

Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!¹³

That is the account most Latter-day Saints know, from the history Joseph began in 1838 and published in 1842. But the earliest account is in his own handwriting, written in 1832, when he was twenty-six. His spelling was rough and his sentences ran on, but he wrote with feeling:

I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in the attitude of calling upon the Lord in the 16th year of my age a pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee.¹⁴

In the 1835 telling, the light was “a pillar of fire,” which “rested down upon me, and filled me with joy unspeakable.” He said, “a personage appeared in the midst, of this pillar of flame which was spread all around, and yet nothing consumed.” Then “another personage soon appeared like unto the first,” who “said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee.” Joseph added a detail found in no other account: “I saw many angels in this vision.”¹⁵

Readers who know the Hebrew Bible may hear an echo in that phrase “and yet nothing consumed.” When the Lord appeared to Moses at Horeb, “the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”¹⁶

In 1842, writing for a newspaper editor who knew nothing about the Latter-day Saints, Joseph summed it up in a single sentence. He was “enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day.”¹⁷



“Join None of Them”

Joseph had come with one question. As soon as he could speak, he asked it. “My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join.” He added, “at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong.”¹⁸

The answer surprised him. “I was answered that I must join none of them.” The Lord, quoting the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul, said that people “draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me,” that they taught “for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”¹⁹ In the 1842 account Joseph put it this way: he was told “that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom.” He was “expressly commanded to ‘go not after them,’” and he received “a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”²⁰

Those are strong words, and Christians of other traditions sometimes hear them as an insult. It helps to notice what they do and do not say. They are aimed at creeds and at a form of godliness without power, not at the sincerity or goodness of believers. Joseph’s mother and brothers were faithful Presbyterians, and he loved them. Throughout his life he counted Methodists, Baptists and others among his friends, and he later wrote that his people claimed the right to worship God according to conscience and allowed “all men the same privilege.”²¹ The message of the vision was not that other Christians were bad. It was that something had been lost, and that God was about to restore it.

The 1832 account remembers the vision not chiefly as an answer about churches but as an experience of forgiveness and love. “My soul was filled with love,” Joseph wrote, “and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me.”²²

“When I came to myself again,” he said in 1838, “I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven.” The light had gone. He had no strength. After a while he got up and walked home.²³



Four Accounts, One Witness

Joseph Smith wrote or dictated four accounts of the First Vision during his lifetime: in 1832, 1835, 1838 and 1842. At least five other people who heard him tell it wrote down what they remembered.²⁴ The accounts are not identical. In 1832 he writes of “the Lord”; in the later accounts he names two personages, the Father introducing the Son. The 1835 account alone mentions angels. The 1832 account emphasizes his sins and forgiveness; the 1838 account emphasizes his question about the churches. He gives his age as “in the 16th year,” “about 14,” and “in my fifteenth year.”

Some critics have argued that these differences show the story grew over time. The Church’s own essay on the accounts takes that question seriously. It points out that “the various accounts of the First Vision tell a consistent story, though naturally they differ in emphasis and detail.” It notes that the New Testament gives three accounts of Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus, and they differ too. And it suggests that the 1832 account, which speaks of “the Lord” opening the heavens and then of seeing “the Lord,” can reasonably be read as describing two beings.²⁵

There is also the matter of how hard it was for Joseph to write. In 1832, the same year as his first account, he told a friend that he felt imprisoned by “paper pen and Ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect Language,” and called the written word a “little narrow prison.”²⁶ His later accounts were dictated to scribes. They flow more easily, and they say more.

Every one of them, though, comes back to the same few things. What all the accounts share is more striking than how they differ. A boy, troubled about his soul and confused by religious argument, went to the woods to pray. He felt an opposing power. A light brighter than the sun came down on him. He saw heavenly beings who spoke to him, told him his sins were forgiven, and told him not to join any of the churches. He came away changed. Whatever else a reader decides about it, the boy who walked out of those woods was not the boy who walked in.

Historians cannot prove or disprove a vision. As the Church’s essay says, “neither the truth of the First Vision nor the arguments against it can be proven by historical research alone.” What historians can do is set out the record honestly. And the record shows a man who told the same essential

story, in his own words and through others, for more than twenty years, at great cost to himself.



A Story Kept Close

For most of the next decade, Joseph said little about the vision outside his family. After the Methodist preacher's scorn and the neighbors' ridicule, he seems to have learned to keep it to himself. The first written account would not come until 1832, twelve years later. The account most people know was not published until 1842.²⁷

Even his mother, when she came to write her history in 1845, did not tell the story in her own words. At the point where her son "arrived at the age of fourteen," she simply copied out his published account from the *Times and Seasons*, saying that it would show "more clearly than I can express, the state of his feelings and the result of his reflections on this occasion."²⁸ She had told and retold many family stories. This one she left to him.

That restraint is itself a kind of evidence about how the family regarded it. They did not treat it as a tale to impress the neighbors. To Joseph it was sacred, and it was painful to share, because sharing it had brought him nothing but trouble. Historians who study memory point out that people often understand an early experience more fully as later events unfold, and tell it differently as a result. Joseph did not grasp everything about the vision in 1820. He understood more of it in 1838, after the Church had been organized and the priesthood restored, than he had at fourteen.²⁹

What he never changed was the heart of it. Whether he was writing in his own hand at twenty-six, talking to a stranger in Kirtland at twenty-nine, dictating a formal history at thirty-two, or answering a Chicago editor at thirty-six, he said that he had prayed, that light had come, and that God had answered him.



“Why Persecute Me for Telling the Truth?”

He would pay for that story for the rest of his life. The cost began almost immediately.

“Some few days after I had this vision,” Joseph wrote, “I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement.” Joseph told him about the vision, expecting, perhaps, that a man of God would understand. “I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.”³⁰

The preacher’s view was common in his day, and it was sincerely held. Many Protestants believed that revelation had ended with the Bible, and that anyone claiming new visions was deceived. To them, a farm boy’s story could only be dangerous.

Word spread, and Joseph found that his story “had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion.” He was struck by how strange it was that “an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day.”³¹

Lucy recorded a frightening incident from about this time. When Joseph was fourteen, coming home one evening across the dooryard, someone fired a gun across his path. Joseph sprang into the house, unhurt. The next morning the family found the shooter’s tracks under a wagon, and the shot lodged in a cow. “The man, who attempted this murder, we have not as yet ascertained,” Lucy wrote twenty-five years later, “neither can we imagine the cause thereof.”³²

Joseph found comfort in an ancient parallel. He remembered how the apostle Paul told King Agrippa of the light and the voice on the road to Damascus, and how few believed him. “But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision,” Joseph wrote. “So it was with me.”

I 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 while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; 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.³³

The 1832 account is quieter but just as poignant. Joseph “could find none that would believe the hevnlly vision,” he wrote, “nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart.”³⁴ Those last words echo what Luke wrote of Mary, the mother of Jesus, after the shepherds came: she “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”³⁵



“I Have Learned for Myself”

Go back one last time to that spring morning in 1820, to the moment after the light had gone.

Joseph walked home weak and shaken. He came into the log house and leaned against the fireplace. His mother, busy with the work of a household of ten, looked at him and asked what was the matter.³⁶

“Never mind, all is well—I am well enough off,” he told her. Then he said something more: “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.”³⁷

It was a boy’s answer, a little blunt, spoken to a mother who had just joined the Presbyterians. It was not the whole story, and he did not tell her the whole story then. But one phrase in it holds the meaning of this chapter: *I have learned for myself*.

His grandfather Solomon had learned late, in his seventies, that heaven could be reached by prayer. His grandfather Asael had told his children to search the scriptures and trust that God was just. His mother had made a covenant on what she thought was her deathbed and spent twenty years

searching for a church. His father had dreamed of a dead and silent field. Now the youngest of them to ask had received an answer, and he had received it himself, by doing what a verse in James said to do.

“I had found the testimony of James to be true,” he wrote, “that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided.”³⁸

Thousands of years earlier, a boy named Samuel had lain down in the temple at Shiloh and heard a voice call his name. In those days, the Bible says, “the word of the LORD was precious,” and “there was no open vision.”³⁹ Samuel answered, “Speak; for thy servant heareth.” Latter-day Saints believe that in a grove of trees in western New York, the heavens opened again for another boy who was willing to listen.

He was told to wait. He was promised that the fulness of the gospel would be made known “at some future time.” For three years nothing more seemed to happen. Then, one September night, his room began to fill with light.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 05-sources.md. Joseph Smith—History in the Pearl of Great Price is the canonized text of the history Joseph began in 1838 (JSP, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1), lightly edited; the 1832, 1835 and 1842 accounts are quoted from Joseph Smith Papers transcripts with original spelling.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:14, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1>. The walk from the house is implied in the account and in the David Nye White interview cited below; the rest of the paragraph introduces scenes documented later in this chapter.
2. Joseph Smith—History 1:11, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1>. James 1:5 (KJV). The season is from JS-H 1:14 (“early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty”).
3. Joseph Smith—History 1:12.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:12.
5. Joseph Smith—History 1:13.
6. Joseph Smith—History 1:14.
7. Interview by David Nye White, Aug. 21, 1843, published in the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, Sept. 15, 1843, as summarized in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 2, <https://>

- www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/02-hear-him, and its note 1. We paraphrase; the White interview is a secondhand account.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:14. † The light, the damp ground and the farm sounds are imagined. The clear spring morning, the woods, his looking around to be alone and his first vocal prayer are documented (JS-H 1:14–15).
 9. Church History Topics, “Sacred Grove and Smith Family Farm,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/sacred-grove-and-smith-family-farm>.
 10. Joseph Smith—History 1:15.
 11. Joseph Smith, Journal, Nov. 9–11, 1835, 23–24, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/25>. Recorded by his scribe Warren Parrish as Joseph told the story to a visitor, Robert Matthews.
 12. Joseph Smith—History 1:16.
 13. Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17.
 14. Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832, 3, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/3>. In Joseph’s own handwriting. Original spelling retained.
 15. JS, Journal, Nov. 9–11, 1835, 24, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/25>.
 16. Exodus 3:2 (KJV).
 17. Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (Mar. 1, 1842): 706–7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/1>. This is the “Wentworth letter.”
 18. Joseph Smith—History 1:18.
 19. Joseph Smith—History 1:19. The phrases echo Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8–9 and 2 Timothy 3:5 (KJV).
 20. JS, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, 707, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2>.
 21. JS, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, 710 (the eleventh Article of Faith), JSP. See Ch. 11. The statement that Joseph counted members of other churches among his friends is the author’s summary; see Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, chs. 2, 22.
 22. JS, History, circa Summer 1832, 3.
 23. Joseph Smith—History 1:20.
 24. Gospel Topics Essays, “First Vision Accounts,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/first-vision-accounts>; JSP, “Primary Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision of Deity,” [josephsmithpapers.org](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org).
 25. “First Vision Accounts.” The three New Testament accounts of Paul’s vision are Acts 9, 22 and 26.
 26. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, Nov. 27, 1832, as quoted in “First Vision Accounts.”
 27. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 2; Gospel Topics Essays, “First Vision Accounts.”
 28. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 71–73, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/80>. Lucy’s fair copy introduces the extract from Joseph’s history in the *Times and Seasons* (1842).

29. Steven C. Harper, *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2019). This paragraph summarizes Harper's general argument; it does not quote him.
30. Joseph Smith—History 1:21.
31. Joseph Smith—History 1:22–23.
32. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 72, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/79>. Lucy dates it only to Joseph's fourteenth year and does not connect it to the vision.
33. Joseph Smith—History 1:24–25.
34. JS, History, circa Summer 1832, 3.
35. Luke 2:19 (KJV).
36. Joseph Smith—History 1:20; JS, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, addenda, Note B, 132, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/138>. In spring 1820 the household numbered ten: Joseph Sr., Lucy and eight children (Lucy, the youngest, was born in 1821). "Busy with the work" is the author's inference.
37. Joseph Smith—History 1:20. The manuscript Note B reads "never mind all is well— I am well enough— off" and "Presbyterianism is not True."
38. Joseph Smith—History 1:26.
39. 1 Samuel 3:1, 10 (KJV).

The Last Words of Malachi

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.

Malachi 4:5–6

A Light in the Loft

Late at night, in the upstairs room of a log house in western New York, a light began to grow. It grew until the room was brighter than noon. And in the middle of it, beside the bed, stood a man whose feet did not touch the floor.¹

The young man in the bed was seventeen. He had been praying to know whether God was still pleased with him. What came instead would set the course of the rest of his life.

To see why he was praying that night, go back a few hours, and a few years.



Three Years of Waiting

It was the evening of September 21, 1823, in the Smith family's log house near Palmyra and Manchester, New York. Joseph Smith shared the loft bedroom with his brothers.

Three and a half years had passed since Joseph Smith's vision in the grove. In that time, he later admitted, he had not always lived up to it. He had been "persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends," 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." He was careful to say that he meant nothing grave: "no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins." But he "was guilty of levity, and sometimes

associated with jovial company,” and he blamed this partly on “my native cheery temperament.”² Readers who met his grandfather Solomon Mack in Chapter 2 will recognize the family streak. In his 1832 account he put it more bluntly: “I fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul.”³

So that night, after the household had gone to bed, he prayed “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.” He had full confidence that he would receive one, he said, “as I previously had one.”⁴

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.⁵

The visitor wore “a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness,” and “his countenance truly like lightning.” Joseph was afraid at first, “but the fear soon left me.” The messenger called him by name and said that he had been sent from the presence of God, “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.”⁶

Moroni told him of “a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang.” The book contained “the fulness of the everlasting Gospel,” as the Savior had delivered it to those ancient people. With the plates were two stones set in silver bows, which Joseph called “the Urim and Thummim,” prepared by God “for the purpose of translating the book.”⁷

Then the angel began to quote scripture. And the first scripture he quoted came from the last book of the prophets, the same words Jewish families remember when they open the door for Elijah.



“With a Little Variation”

“He first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi,” Joseph remembered, “and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles.”⁸

Readers of Chapter 1 will remember these words. They close the Old Testament in Christian Bibles. In Jewish Bibles they close the book of the Twelve Prophets, and they are read aloud in synagogues on the Sabbath before Passover, when the reader repeats the promise so that the reading will not end on a curse. They are the reason a cup is poured for Elijah at the Seder and the door opened for him.⁹

In the King James Bible that Joseph knew, Malachi’s promise reads:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.¹⁰

Moroni quoted it differently:

Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.¹¹

Two changes stand out. In Moroni’s version, Elijah does not only come; he brings priesthood authority. And the “fathers” are not only parents. They are the patriarchs, to whom “the promises” were made. To any reader of Genesis, those promises are the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: a land, a posterity, and a blessing to “all families of the earth.”¹² Moroni was saying that Elijah would plant those ancient covenant promises in the hearts of their descendants.

Moroni also quoted Isaiah 11, which tells of a day when the Lord will “set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people” and “assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”¹³ He quoted Peter’s words in the third

chapter of Acts about the prophet like unto Moses, and Joel's promise that God would "pour out my spirit upon all flesh."¹⁴ The very first message of the angel, in other words, was steeped in the hopes of the house of Israel.

Many Jewish readers, and many Christians, will not accept Moroni's reading of Malachi. That is their right, and this book does not ask them to. But it is worth noticing that the first message of the Restoration, as Joseph recorded it, began where Jewish families end each Seder: with a promise that Elijah would come. Thirteen years later, the story would return to that promise.

There is a small coincidence of calendars here, which some Latter-day Saint writers have noticed. On the night of September 21, 1823, Jewish families were in the middle of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, living in their booths to remember Israel's journey through the wilderness.¹⁵ Joseph never mentioned it, and probably never knew. It is mentioned here only as a reminder that the God of the Restoration is the God of Israel's festivals too.



Three Times in One Night

The angel left the way he had come, the light gathering around him until "a conduit open right up into heaven," and he was gone. Joseph lay "musing on the singularity of the scene," when the room filled with light again. Moroni returned and repeated everything, "without the least variation," and added warnings of judgments to come. He left and came back a third time, repeating it all again, and adding a caution: because the family was poor, Satan would tempt Joseph to get the plates "for the purpose of getting rich." He must have "no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God."¹⁶

When the angel left the third time, "the cock crowed, and I found that day was approaching, so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night."¹⁷

The next morning Joseph went out to the field with his father and his brother Alvin, but he was too exhausted to work. His father told him to go home. Climbing the fence, he collapsed. The first thing he remembered was

a voice calling his name, and Moroni standing over him. The angel told him to go back and tell his father everything.¹⁸

He did. Joseph Sr. listened to his son's story there in the field, and his answer was immediate. "He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger."¹⁹ The man who had dreamed for years of a dead world and a box of wisdom did not hesitate. His son, who had once been mocked by a preacher, was believed by his father in a single breath.



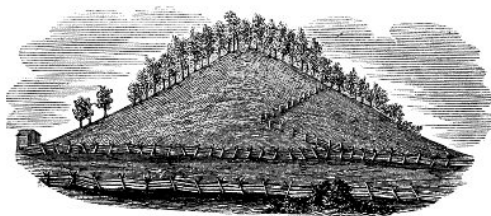
The Hill

About three miles south of the Smith farm stood "a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood." Joseph knew it from the vision the moment he saw it. Near the top, on the west side, he found a large rounded stone, its center showing above the ground. He pried it up with a lever. Beneath it, in a box made of stones set in cement, "there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger."²⁰



The hill about three miles from the Smith farm, now called the Hill Cumorah, photographed in 1907. George Edward Anderson (1860–1928), photograph, 1907. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

He tried to take them out. The messenger forbade him. The time had not yet come, and would not for four years. Joseph was to return to the hill on the same day each year to receive further instruction.²¹



The earliest known engraving of the hill, published in 1841 as "Mormon Hill," a northern view from the road about three miles south of Palmyra. John W. Barber and Henry Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New York, 1841. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

In his 1832 account Joseph confessed what he had felt at the hill. He made “three attempts to get them,” and was so frightened that he thought it might have been a dream, “but when I considred I knew that it was not.” He cried to

the Lord, “why can I not obtain them?” The angel answered that he had not kept the commandments, and that “thou wast left unto temptation that thou mightest be made acquainted with the power of the advisory therefore repent and call on the Lord thou shalt be forgiven and in his own due time thou shalt obtain them.”²² He had been thinking of what the gold might be worth. He would have four years to learn to think of something else.



Around the Fire

That evening Joseph told the whole family. He was so tired from sitting up late that Alvin, the oldest, proposed a plan: “now brother, let us go to bed, and rise early in the morning, in order to finish our days 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, and listen to you, while you tell us the great things which God has revealed to you.”²³



"Farm and Fireside," an 1878 lithograph of a family evening at home. It is not the Smith family. Farm and Fireside, lithograph, 1878; Library of Congress. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

So it became a family custom. Lucy remembered the scene with a kind of wonder:

I presume we presented an aspect as singular, as any family 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; for he was much less inclined to the perusals of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study.²⁴

Joseph charged them not to speak of these things outside the family, warning that the world would turn against them. Lucy said that "the sweetest union and happiness pervaded our family, and peace and tranquillity reigned in our midst." Sometimes, in those evenings, Joseph would describe the ancient people of the plates, "their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, and their buildings," as easily "as if he had spent his whole life with them."²⁵

Picture the scene in the autumn of 1823: the fire, the younger children sitting up past their bedtime, Alvin at twenty-five leaning forward with his elbows on his knees.[†] Alvin, his mother said, showed “greater zeal and anxiety in regard to the before mentioned record, than any of the rest of the family.”²⁶



Alvin

Alvin was the son who carried the family. He managed the building of a new frame house for his parents, and that November the frame was up and the materials gathered. “I am going to have a nice, pleasant room for father and mother to sit in,” he would say, “and every thing arranged for their comfort; and they shall not work anymore as they have done.”²⁷



The Smith family farm in Manchester, New York, the land Alvin worked to pay for, photographed about 1907. George Edward Anderson (1860–1928), photograph, about 1907. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

On November 15, 1823, about ten in the morning, Alvin came into the house doubled over with what Lucy called “bilious cholic.” A doctor gave him a heavy dose of calomel, a mercury compound commonly prescribed at the time, “though much against the will of the patient.” The calomel lodged in his stomach. Other physicians tried to remove it, without success. Alvin knew he was dying.²⁸

He called his brothers and sisters to him one by one. To Hyrum he said, “I want you to go on and finish the house, and take care of them in their old age.” To Sophronia: “Be kind to them, and remember what they have done for us.” Then he turned to Joseph:

I am now going to die, the distress which I suffer, and the feelings that I have, tell me, my time is very short.—I want you to be a good boy, and do every thing that lays in your power to obtain the record—Be faithful in receiving instruction, and in keeping every commandment that is given you.²⁹

Last of all he asked to see his little sister Lucy, not yet three, who called him “Amby.” She woke, ran to him, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him over and over. “Lucy,” he said, “you must be the best girl in the world, and take care of mother—you cant have your Amby any more—Amby is going away.” Then, as his mother turned away with the child, he said, “Father, Mother, brothers, and sisters, farewell; I can now breathe out my life as calmly as a clock.” He closed his eyes. He died on November 19, 1823, at the age of twenty-five.³⁰ Outside, the frame of the new house stood in the November cold, the room he had planned for his parents still open to the sky.†

Joseph had lost the brother who believed in him most. Lucy said that “lamentation and mourning filled the whole neighborhood.” For a long time afterward, the family could not bear to talk about the plates, because every mention of them brought Alvin to mind. “We all with one accord wept over our irretrievable loss,” she wrote, “and we could ‘not be comforted because he was not.’”³¹

Alvin had never been baptized into any church. Some in the family’s world believed that meant he was lost. The question of what happens to good people who die without baptism would weigh on Joseph for years.

Thirteen years later, in the temple at Kirtland, he would receive an answer that he recorded with joy. We will come to it.



A Seer for Hire

Grief had to give way to work. The family needed money to make the last payment on their farm, and in October 1825 Joseph and his father hired on with a well-to-do farmer named Josiah Stowell, from Chenango County, New York.³²

This is a part of the story that critics have long pointed to, and it deserves a frank account. Stowell had heard of an old Spanish silver mine near Harmony, Pennsylvania, and he wanted Joseph's help to find it because, as Lucy put it, Joseph "was in possession of certain means, by which he could discern things, that could not be seen by the natural eye."³³ Joseph had a seer stone, a small stone in which he and others believed he could see hidden things. In the rural America of his day, many people accepted such "seeing" as a natural gift. The Church's own historians acknowledge plainly that "Joseph Smith and his family, like many around them, accepted these familiar folk practices."³⁴

Joseph tried to talk Stowell out of the venture, Lucy said, but the old man insisted and offered good wages. After about a month of digging with no success, Joseph "prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it." Joseph did not hide this part of his life. In his own history he wrote simply: "Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger."³⁵ In March 1826 Stowell's nephew, claiming Joseph had taken advantage of his uncle, brought him before a local justice in South Bainbridge, New York. Stowell himself testified that Joseph had not deceived him. *Saints* reports that the charge was dismissed. Other accounts of the hearing, written down later, describe the outcome differently.³⁶ That September, when Joseph went to the hill again, the angel told him to leave the company of the money diggers.³⁷

Latter-day Saints see the treasure seeking as a stage that God redirected. Joseph's father, according to the Church's account, "considered his son's ability sacred" and hoped he would stop using it for earthly treasure. As

Joseph prepared to receive the plates, he was told to have nothing more to do with treasure seekers.³⁸ The gift, they believe, was turned from looking for silver to translating scripture. Critics see it otherwise. Both can agree on the facts: Joseph worked for Stowell, he used a seer stone, and he never denied it.

Around this time, Lucy recorded, a preacher came through the neighborhood trying to unite the churches, and most of the family were inclined to join. Joseph refused even to attend. "I do not wish to prevent you from going to meeting," he told his mother, "or any of the rest of the family, or even your joining any church you please; but do not ask me to join them: I can take my Bible and go into the woods, and learn more in two hours, than you can learn at meeting in two years."³⁹



Emma

While working for Stowell, Joseph boarded with a family in Harmony named Hale. Isaac and Elizabeth Hale were prosperous, and their daughter Emma, born July 10, 1804, had attended Methodist meetings with her mother since she was seven. She had likely studied at a nearby female seminary and later taught school.⁴⁰ She liked to read and to sing. She was twenty-one. Joseph was nineteen, over six feet tall, blue-eyed, with a faint limp.⁴¹

Joseph "immediately commenced paying his addresses to her," Lucy wrote.⁴² Emma's parents did not approve. Joseph was a poor laborer from another state, and Isaac Hale had grown suspicious of his part in the treasure hunt, even though Joseph had persuaded Stowell to call it off.⁴³ Joseph later wrote that because he kept insisting he had seen a vision, "my wife's father's family were very much opposed to our being married."⁴⁴

Back in Manchester, Joseph spoke to his parents. "I have been very lonely ever since Alvin died," he told them, "and I have concluded to get married; and, if you have no objections, Miss Emma Hale would be my choice before any other woman I have ever seen."⁴⁵ They gave their blessing gladly, and Lucy began getting the house ready for a new daughter-in-law.

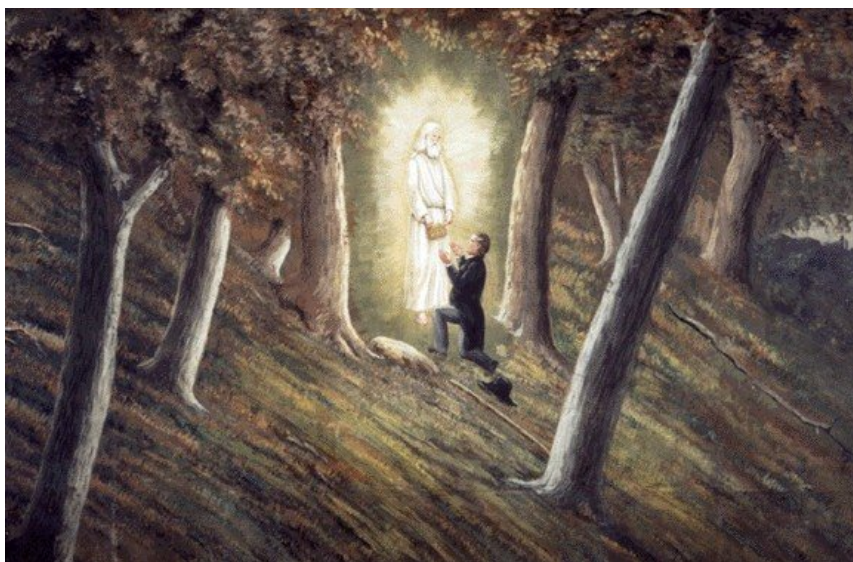
Joseph and Emma did not wait for her father's permission. On January 18, 1827, they were married "at the house of Squire Tarbill, in South Bainbridge, Chenango county, New York." Then they went to live with his family in Manchester.⁴⁶ Through jails, mobs and grief, Emma would stand by him for the rest of his life. Emma had left her parents' comfortable home for a family that had just lost its farm. That winter a dishonest scheme had cost the Smiths the deed to their land, and the farm had passed at the last hour to a friendly buyer, a Mr. Durfee, who let them remain.⁴⁷

That year, coming home late from an errand, Joseph sat down exhausted and told his worried parents that he had received "the severest chastisement, that I have ever had in my life." When his father angrily asked who dared find fault with him, Joseph stopped him. "It was the angel of the Lord," he said. The angel had told him "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." "Father," he added, "give yourself no uneasiness concerning the reprimand that I have received; for I now know the course that I am to pursue; so all will be well."⁴⁸



The Night of September 21, 1827

Four years after the first visit, the time came.



*The angel Moroni and Joseph Smith at the hill, as C.C.A. Christensen painted the scene in the nineteenth century. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Hill Cumorah*, 19th cent. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

Josiah Stowell and another friend, Joseph Knight Sr., were staying with the Smiths that September. On the night of the 21st, Lucy sat up late finishing her work. About midnight Joseph came to her and asked whether she had a chest with a lock and key. She did not, and she was alarmed. “Never mind,” he told her, “I can do very well for the present without it—be calm, all is right.”⁴⁹

“Shortly after this,” Lucy remembered, “Emma passed through the room with her bonnet and riding dress; and in a few minutes they left together, taking Mr. Knight’s horse and wagon.” We can picture the wagon creaking out of the yard into the dark, Emma beside her husband on the seat, the hill three miles away.[†] Lucy did not go to bed. “I spent the night in prayer and supplication to God, for the anxiety of my mind would not permit me to sleep.”⁵⁰

In the morning she made breakfast with her heart fluttering “at every footstep.” Joseph Sr. wanted to know where Joseph was, and Lucy put him off, suggesting he let Joseph eat breakfast with his wife for once. Then

Joseph Knight came in upset: his horse was gone. And his wagon. Lucy soothed him as best she could.⁵¹

Then Joseph and Emma came home. Lucy was trembling so hard, afraid that something had gone wrong, that she had to leave the room. Joseph followed her. “Do not be uneasy, mother,” he said, “all is right—see here, I have got a key.” He handed her something to examine; she did not know what it was. He took it back and said nothing more about the record.⁵²

Joseph’s own account is brief and solemn:

On the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, having gone as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge: that I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.⁵³

That night, too, fell on a Jewish holy day. At sundown on September 21, 1827, Jewish communities began Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, the day the Torah calls “a memorial of blowing of trumpets.”⁵⁴ Again, nothing suggests that Joseph knew. Latter-day Saints who have noticed it have seen it as a quiet grace note, nothing more.

The plates were now in Joseph’s keeping. He had no chest to lock them in and, Lucy noted, “not a shilling in the house” to pay for one. He went off to dig a well for a widow in Macedon to earn the money. Meanwhile, word had leaked out. A group of neighbors, Lucy reported, had banded together and even “sent 60 or 70 miles for a certain conjuror, to come and divine the place where they were secreted.”⁵⁵

The angel had warned that Joseph’s name would be “had for good and evil among all nations.” In the fall of 1827 it was not yet known among the nations. But it was already known in Manchester. The plates were in his keeping, and half the neighborhood wanted them. The trouble had begun. So had the work.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 06-sources.md. Joseph Smith—History (JS-H) is the canonized text of Joseph’s 1838–39 history. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy).

Notes

1. Paraphrased from Joseph Smith—History 1:29–30, which is quoted directly below. The “loft bedroom he shared with his brothers” follows *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 3 (see 06-sources.md).
2. Joseph Smith—History 1:28, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1>.
3. Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832, 4, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/4>.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:29.
5. Joseph Smith—History 1:30.
6. Joseph Smith—History 1:31–33.
7. Joseph Smith—History 1:34–35.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:36.
9. See Ch. 1 and its notes 28–30: “Haftarah Helper: Shabbat HaGadol,” Orthodox Union; “What Is Elijah’s Cup?,” Chabad.org; “Elijah the Prophet,” My Jewish Learning. In Jewish Bibles the Twelve Prophets close the second division (Prophets), and the Hebrew canon ends with Chronicles.
10. Malachi 4:5–6 (KJV); Malachi 3:23–24 in Hebrew Bibles.
11. Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39; also Doctrine and Covenants 2.
12. Genesis 12:3; 17:7; 28:13–14 (KJV).
13. Joseph Smith—History 1:40; Isaiah 11:11–12 (KJV).
14. Joseph Smith—History 1:40–41; Acts 3:22–23; Joel 2:28 (KJV).
15. Hebrew calendar conversion via Hebcal (hebc.al.com/converter): September 21, 1823 (daytime) = 16 Tishrei 5584, the second day of Sukkot; that evening began 17 Tishrei, within the festival week. Leviticus 23:42–43 (KJV) on dwelling in booths.
16. Joseph Smith—History 1:43–46.
17. Joseph Smith—History 1:47.
18. Joseph Smith—History 1:48–49; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 83–84, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/91> (naming Alvin in the field).
19. Joseph Smith—History 1:50.
20. Joseph Smith—History 1:51–52. The distance is from Church History Topics, “Angel Moroni,” and *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 3, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/03-plates-of-gold>.
21. Joseph Smith—History 1:53–54.
22. JS, History, circa Summer 1832, 4. Original spelling retained.

23. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 85–86, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/92>.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 86–87, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/93>. Lucy’s “perusals... then” is retained.
25. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 86–87.
26. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 93, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/100>. † The fire, the children and Alvin’s posture are imagined. The evening gatherings and Alvin’s eagerness are documented.
27. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 89–90, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/96>.
28. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 90, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/97>.
29. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 90–91, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/98>.
30. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 91–92, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/99>. The death date (Nov. 19, 1823) follows the JSP Pedigree Chart and *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 3; Lucy’s family register (p. 32) gives “Nov. 19th 1824,” evidently a slip. † The image of the open frame is imagined. That the frame was raised and the materials gathered that November, and that Alvin had planned “a nice, pleasant room for father and mother,” is in Lucy 1845 (see the note to Alvin’s words about the house, above).
31. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 92–93. Compare Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:18 (KJV).
32. Joseph Smith—History 1:56; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 4, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/04-be-watchful>.
33. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 95, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/102>.
34. Church History Topics, “Treasure Seeking,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/treasure-seeking>; see also “Seer Stones” and Gospel Topics Essays, “Book of Mormon Translation.”
35. Joseph Smith—History 1:56; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 95.
36. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 4; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, ch. 3. See **06-sources.md** on the 1826 hearing.
37. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 4, which quotes the angel from Joseph Knight Sr.’s reminiscence.
38. Church History Topics, “Treasure Seeking.”
39. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 94, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/101>.
40. Church History Topics, “Emma Hale Smith,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/emma-hale-smith>.
41. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 4.
42. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 96, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/103>.
43. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 4.
44. Joseph Smith—History 1:58.

45. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 97, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/104>. The manuscript has a dash after “Alvin” (“ever since Alvin— died”).
46. Joseph Smith—History 1:57–58.
47. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 97–103, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/105>. Lucy names the purchaser as Mr. Durfee, the high sheriff; that the family stayed on afterward is from her later narrative and *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 4–5; see **06 - sources .md**.
48. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 103–4, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/111>.
49. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 105, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/112>.
50. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 105. † The wagon leaving in the dark and Emma on the seat are imagined from Lucy’s statement that they left together in Knight’s wagon.
51. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 105–6, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/113>.
52. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 106–7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/114>. Lucy elsewhere describes the “key” as the Urim and Thummim; see **06 - sources .md**.
53. Joseph Smith—History 1:59.
54. Leviticus 23:24 (KJV). Hebc al conversion: September 22, 1827 = 1 Tishrei 5588 (Rosh Hashanah), which began at sundown on September 21.
55. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 107–8, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/115>.

By the Gift and Power of God

And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed.

Isaiah 29:11

A Slow Walk to the Gate

In the summer of 1828, at the Smith farm in Manchester, New York, the family sent for Martin Harris and set out breakfast. He did not come. They waited until eight, nine, ten, eleven. At half past twelve, Lucy wrote, they saw him “walking with a slow and measured tread towards the house—his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground.” He stopped at the gate, sat on the fence “with his hat drawn over his eyes,” and finally came in. At the table he picked up his knife and fork and dropped them.¹

Joseph Smith sat at that table. He had left his wife in Pennsylvania, barely recovered from a labor that nearly killed her, and he had buried their first child only weeks before. He had not slept on the journey. Now he watched Martin’s hands.^{†2}

What Martin said next would make it the hardest summer of Joseph’s life. To understand why, go back to the winter before, and to a barrel of beans.



A Barrel of Beans

For weeks after Joseph brought the plates home, people tried to steal them. He hid them under the hearth, beneath the floor of his father’s shop, and in piles of grain. Neighbors begged to see them, and some offered money. Joseph refused them all.³

One man in Palmyra took the story more seriously than the rest. Martin Harris was a prosperous farmer, more than twenty years older than Joseph,

who had sometimes hired him for farm work. Martin questioned the family closely. “If it is the devil’s work,” he said, he would have nothing to do with it. But if it was the Lord’s, he wanted to help. He went home and prayed, and he later said a still, small voice assured him that the work was of God.⁴

By late 1827 Emma was expecting a child, and her parents agreed to let the young couple come back to Harmony. But Joseph had debts and no money for the move. One day in Palmyra, Lucy recorded, Martin walked up to him in a public house, took out a bag of silver and said: “here, Mr. Smith, is 50 dollars; I give this to you to do the Lord’s work with—No, I give it to the Lord for his own work.” Joseph offered to sign a note for it. Martin refused, and called everyone present to witness that it was a free gift.⁵

Joseph and Emma set out for Pennsylvania that December with the plates hidden in a barrel of beans.⁶ In Harmony, Emma’s father demanded to see what was in the box. Joseph would only let him lift it. Isaac Hale felt its weight, and remained unconvinced.⁷



“I Cannot Read a Sealed Book”

Joseph began by copying characters from the plates onto paper. In February 1828, Martin Harris carried a sheet of them to New York City and showed them to Charles Anthon, a professor of Latin and Greek at Columbia College. According to Martin’s account, Anthon at first said the characters were genuine and gave him a certificate. Then he asked how Joseph had found the plates. When Martin answered “that an angel of God had revealed it unto him,” Anthon asked for the certificate back and tore it up, “saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them.” Martin explained that part of the plates were sealed. “He replied, ‘I cannot read a sealed book.’”⁸

Anthon later gave a different account, and historians still debate what was said in that room.⁹ What matters for this story is what Martin and Joseph took from it. Martin came home convinced that if the most learned men could not read the characters, then Joseph, unlearned as he was, would have to. “I cannot,” Joseph said when Martin urged him on, “for I am not

learned.”¹⁰ Both men heard an echo of Isaiah, who wrote of a sealed book given to “one that is learned,” who could not read it, and then to one who said, “I am not learned.”¹¹



Emma at the Table

That spring Joseph and Emma moved into a small frame house on the Susquehanna River, near her parents. Joseph began translating, and Emma was his first scribe.



Emma Smith in later life, about 1870. Photographer unknown, about 1870; Brigham Young University. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Years later, near the end of her life, her son Joseph Smith III asked her about those days. Her answers are among the most important testimony about how the Book of Mormon came to be. She “frequently wrote day after day” at a small table, she said, with Joseph “sitting with his face buried in his hat, with

the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.” The plates “often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth.”¹² Joseph used the interpreters found with the plates and, often, a single seer stone, placed in a hat to shut out the light.¹³

Emma was certain he had no notes to work from. “He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.” She told her son:

The Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for, when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me for hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him.¹⁴

At that time, she said, Joseph “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictat[e] a book like the Book of Mormon.”¹⁵ Once, *Saints* relates, he stopped in the middle of dictating, grew pale, and asked whether Jerusalem had walls around it. When Emma said it did, he was relieved; he had been afraid he was being deceived.¹⁶

Picture the little house in the spring of 1828: the river high with snowmelt outside, Emma heavy with her first child, bent over the paper while her husband’s voice came slowly out of the hat.[†] The words that came were the beginning of a record that, by its own account, began in Jerusalem, “in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah.”¹⁷



“All Is Lost”

In April, Martin Harris came to Harmony to take over as scribe. By mid-June the two men had filled 116 pages.¹⁸

Martin’s wife, Lucy Harris, had been suspicious of the whole enterprise from the start. Martin was sure that if she could read the translation, she would come around. He asked Joseph to let him take the pages home. Joseph

asked the Lord, and the answer was no. Martin asked again. Joseph prayed again, and again the answer was no. Martin pressed a third time, and this time Joseph was permitted to do as he wished, on the condition that Martin show the pages only to a few named family members. Martin swore to it and left for Palmyra with the only copy.¹⁹

The next day, on June 15, 1828, Emma gave birth to a son after an agonizing labor. The baby died the same day. A gravestone still stands on the Hale property in Harmony: "In Memory of An Infant Son of Joseph And Emma Smith June 15th 1828."²⁰ For a time it seemed that Emma would die too. Joseph hardly left her side.

When Emma began to recover, after about two weeks, her thoughts turned to Martin, who had not written. She urged Joseph to go and find out what had happened, and asked that her mother be sent to stay with her. Joseph took the stagecoach north. He could not eat or sleep. A fellow passenger, seeing his state, asked what was wrong. Joseph told him only part of it: that he had left a sick wife, and "he had buried his first and only child but a few days previous." The stranger insisted on walking the last twenty miles through the forest with him, and for the final four miles had to hold him up by the arm.²¹ Latter-day Saints have long seen the Lord's hand in small mercies like that one: a stranger on a dark road who would not let a grieving man walk alone.

The next morning came the long wait at his parents' table, and the slow walk to the gate that opens this chapter. Then Martin pressed his hands to his temples and cried out in deep anguish that he had lost his soul: "I have lost my soul!!"²²

Joseph sprang up. "Martin, have you lost that manuscript?"

"Yes, it is gone," Martin said, "and I know not where."

"Oh my God!" said Joseph. "All is lost! all is lost! what shall I do? I have sinned; it is I who tempted the wrath of God; for I should have been satisfied with the first answer, which I received from the Lord."²³

He told Martin to go back and search again. "It is all in vain," Martin said. "I have ripped open beds and pillows; and I know it is not there." Joseph paced the floor and wept. "Then must I," he said, "return with such a tale as this? I dare not do it. And how shall I appear before the Lord?" Lucy tried to

comfort him, but “sobs and groans, and the most bitter lamentation filled the house.” The next morning he left for Harmony. “We parted with heavy hearts,” his mother wrote, “for it now appeared that all which we had so fondly anticipated... was in a moment fled.”²⁴



“Thou Art Still Chosen”

Back in Harmony, the angel took the plates and the interpreters from him. Joseph had lost his child, nearly lost his wife, and lost the manuscript, all in a few weeks. Now he had lost the gift too.

That July, after a season of repentance, Joseph received a revelation. It is the earliest revelation that survives in his own records, and it does not flatter him:

The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught.... Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men.²⁵

The Lord rebuked him: “how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God.” And then: “But remember, 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.”²⁶

That Joseph wrote this down at all, and later published it for anyone to read, says something about him. Prophets in the Bible are often rebuked by God in their own books. Joseph’s first written revelation was a rebuke too. He could have hidden it. He published it.

The plates and the gift were restored. When Joseph’s parents came to Harmony that fall to see how he was, they found him “looking calm and happy,” and he told them that the angel had said “the Lord loved me for my faithfulness and humility.” He added: “Emma writes for me now, but the angel said that the Lord would send someone to write for me, and I trust that it will be so.”²⁷ The lost pages were never recovered. Joseph was later told

not to retranslate them, and the account was replaced by a parallel record that now opens the Book of Mormon.²⁸



A Schoolteacher from Vermont

The someone was already on his way. In the fall of 1828, a young schoolteacher named Oliver Cowdery, a year younger than Joseph, took a teaching job near the Smith farm and boarded with Joseph's parents. Over the winter he earned the family's trust, and they told him about the plates. Oliver prayed and, he later said, the Lord showed him the plates and Joseph's work in a vision.²⁹

When the school term ended, Oliver and Joseph's brother Samuel walked more than a hundred miles to Harmony through the cold spring mud. "On the 5th day of April, 1829," Joseph wrote, "Oliver Cowdery came to my house, until which time I had never seen him." Two days later, "I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon, and he began to write for me."³⁰

What followed was one of the most remarkable stretches of work in the history of religion. Almost all of the Book of Mormon as we have it was dictated in about three months, between April and June of 1829.³¹ Oliver never forgot it:

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! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth.³²



What the Book Said

For readers who have never opened it, a word about what Joseph was dictating.

The Book of Mormon begins in Jerusalem, "in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah," when, it says, "there came

many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.”³³ One of those who heeded them was a man named Lehi. The book tells how the Lord led Lehi’s family out of Jerusalem shortly before the Babylonian conquest, across the desert and the sea, to a promised land in the Western Hemisphere. His descendants became two peoples, the Nephites and the Lamanites, and the book follows them for about a thousand years through prophets, wars, kings and reformers, quoting Isaiah at length along the way.

Its high point is the visit of the resurrected Jesus Christ to the people of the Americas. A multitude gathered at a temple “saw a Man descending out of heaven,” who “stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.”³⁴ He taught them, healed their sick, blessed their children one by one, and organized his church among them.

The record closes with a prophet named Moroni, the last of his people, burying the plates in a hill. He is the same Moroni, Latter-day Saints believe, who came to Joseph’s bedside fourteen centuries later. His last words in the book are an invitation that missionaries have quoted ever since: to read, to ponder, and to “ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.”³⁵



On the Banks of the Susquehanna

As they translated, Joseph and Oliver came to passages about baptism and the authority to perform it. Joseph, like his brother Alvin, had never been baptized. On May 15, 1829, the two young men went into the woods near the river to ask the Lord about it.



*Joseph and Oliver's baptism in the Susquehanna, May 15, 1829, in an engraving published in 1873. Engraving in T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, 1873. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying:

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; and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.³⁶

The messenger said “that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament.” He told them to baptize each other. They waded into the Susquehanna, Joseph baptized Oliver and Oliver baptized Joseph, and both, Joseph wrote, “were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation.”³⁷

Readers who know the Hebrew Bible will hear something familiar in John’s words. “The sons of Levi” and “an offering in righteousness” come from Malachi again, from the third chapter, which Moroni had quoted: “he

shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”³⁸ And the messenger himself, in the Gospel of Luke, was the son of a priest of the course of Abijah, a descendant of Aaron.³⁹ The first priesthood restored, as Latter-day Saints understand it, carried the name of Moses’s brother and the promise of the last of the prophets.

Oliver remembered the angel’s voice: “though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, ‘I am thy fellow-servant,’ dispelled every fear.”⁴⁰

John told them that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held a higher priesthood, and that it would be given to them later.⁴¹ It was. The date is not recorded, but Joseph later wrote of hearing “the voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom.”⁴²



“Not Any Longer ... Alone”

Opposition was building in Harmony, and in June 1829 David Whitmer, a friend of Oliver’s, came with a wagon to move Joseph, Emma and Oliver to his family’s farm in Fayette, New York. There, in an upstairs room of Peter Whitmer Sr.’s house, the translation was finished.⁴³

The book itself promised that witnesses would see the plates. Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer asked to be those witnesses. Joseph told Martin he must first “humble yourself before your God this day, that you may obtain a forgiveness of your sins.” The four men went into the woods to pray. Martin, feeling he was the obstacle, withdrew. The other three then saw an angel holding the plates and turning the leaves. Joseph found Martin praying alone, joined him, and the vision was repeated.⁴⁴

That afternoon, between three and four o’clock, Lucy was sitting in a bedroom with Mrs. Whitmer when Joseph came in and threw himself down beside her:

Father, mother; you do not know happy I am; the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself.—they have seen an angel, who has testified to them; and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said; for now they know for themselves, that I do not go about to deceive the people. And I feel as if I was relieved of a burden, which was almost too heavy for me to bear; and it rejoices my heart, that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.⁴⁵

For six years he had carried this alone. Now there were others. Of all the moments in his mother's history, this may be the one that shows most plainly how lonely the work had been.

Their testimony, printed in every copy of the Book of Mormon, reads in part: "We declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon."⁴⁶

A few days later, near the Smith home in Manchester, Joseph showed the plates to eight more men: his father, his brothers Hyrum and Samuel, four Whitmer brothers and their brother-in-law Hiram Page. They saw no angel. They held the plates in their hands. Their testimony is plainer: "we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken."⁴⁷

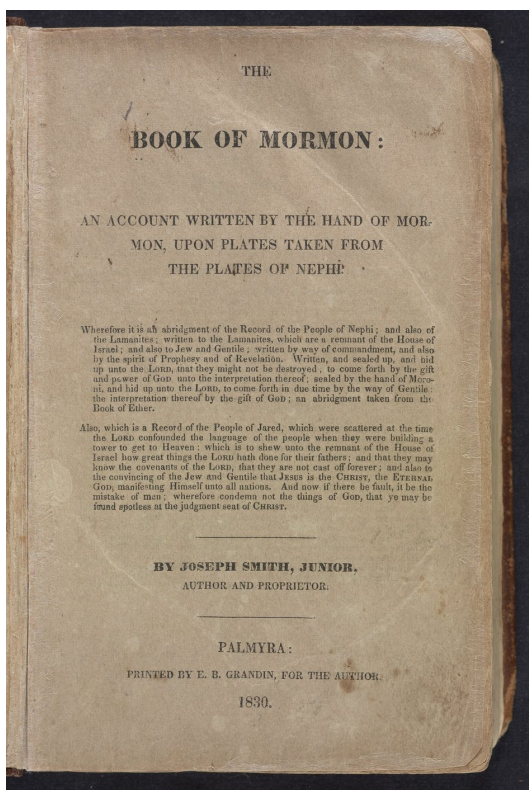
The Church's historians note something that has impressed many readers. Each of the Three Witnesses later separated from Joseph and the Church for a time, and two returned. Some of the Eight also became estranged. Yet "they continued to affirm their testimony as witnesses throughout their lives."⁴⁸



Five Thousand Copies

Joseph secured a copyright on June 11, 1829. The Palmyra printer Egbert B. Grandin at first refused the job, then agreed to print and bind five thousand copies for \$3,000, but he wanted the payment secured before he began. Martin Harris mortgaged his farm to guarantee it.⁴⁹ It took Grandin and his workmen about seven months. Hyrum Smith and Oliver Cowdery watched

over the work, and Oliver made a second handwritten copy so the original never had to leave their hands.⁵⁰



Title page of the first edition of the Book of Mormon, printed by E. B. Grandin in Palmyra, 1830. The Book of Mormon, first edition (Palmyra: E. B. Grandin, 1830). Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

By March 26, 1830, the first copies were bound and on sale on the ground floor of Grandin's printing office in Palmyra, 590 pages in brown leather.⁵¹ The title page said the book had been written in part "to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever." The last line of that page was a humble one: "And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men."⁵²

Inside was a passage that Jewish readers might not expect to find in a book from the American frontier. In it, the Lord rebukes Christians who had

received the Bible from the Jewish people and repaid them with contempt: “O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay; but ye have cursed them, and have hated them, and have not sought to recover them.... for I the Lord have not forgotten my people.”⁵³ Latter-day Saints have tried, imperfectly but sincerely, to take that rebuke to heart.

A farm boy who had never read the Bible through now had his name on the title page of a book of scripture. He called himself not its author but its translator. He had done it, he always said, “by the gift and power of God.”⁵⁴

Eleven days later, a small company would crowd into a log house in Fayette to organize a church. But the book had been stirring up Palmyra for months already.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 07-sources.md. Joseph Smith—History (JS-H) is the canonized text of Joseph’s 1838–39 history. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy).

Notes

1. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 130–31, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/137>. The scene continues later in this chapter (“All Is Lost”).
2. † In the chapter’s opening scene, Joseph watching Martin’s hands is imagined. His sleeplessness on the journey, Emma’s condition and the child’s death are documented in the notes to “All Is Lost”; the breakfast scene is Lucy’s (note 1).
3. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/05-all-is-lost>; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 109–114, JSP.
4. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5.
5. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 121, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/128>.
6. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5.
7. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:63–65 (Martin Harris’s account as recorded by Joseph).
9. See 07-sources.md. Anthon’s 1834 and 1841 letters deny that he authenticated the characters.
10. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5.

11. Isaiah 29:11–12 (KJV).
12. Emma Smith, interview with Joseph Smith III, February 1879, published as “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26 (Oct. 1, 1879); quoted in Gospel Topics Essays, “Book of Mormon Translation,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/book-of-mormon-translation>.
13. Gospel Topics Essays, “Book of Mormon Translation”; Church History Topics, “Seer Stones.”
14. “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” quoted in GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation.”
15. “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” quoted in GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation.” The bracket is the essay’s.
16. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5 (from Emma’s 1856 recollection to Edmund C. Briggs).
17. 1 Nephi 1:4.
18. GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation”; Church History Topics, “Lost Manuscript of the Book of Mormon.”
19. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 5; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 126–28.
20. Church History Topics, “Joseph and Emma Hale Smith Family,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/joseph-and-emma-hale-smith-family>. A relative later wrote the name “Alvin” in a family Bible, but Emma said the child was never named.
21. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 128–29, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/135>.
22. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 130–31, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/137>. The manuscript reads “Oh! I have a lost my soul! I have lost my soul!!” Only the second, clean phrase is quoted.
23. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 131, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/138>.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 131–32.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 3:1, 3; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 6, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/06-the-gift-and-power-of-god>.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 3:6–7, 10.
27. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 6, quoting Lucy Mack Smith’s history.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 10:30–45; Church History Topics, “Lost Manuscript of the Book of Mormon.”
29. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 6; Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–23.
30. Joseph Smith—History 1:66–67; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 6.
31. GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation.”
32. Oliver Cowdery, *Messenger and Advocate*, Oct. 1834, as printed in the note following Joseph Smith—History 1:75.
33. 1 Nephi 1:4; see also 1 Nephi 2:2–4; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 7.
34. 3 Nephi 11:8–10; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 7.
35. Moroni 10:4; quoted in GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation.” † The river, Emma’s posture and the scene are imagined. That Emma was pregnant and served as scribe in spring 1828 is documented (*Saints*, ch. 5).

36. Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69; Doctrine and Covenants 13.
37. Joseph Smith—History 1:70–73.
38. Malachi 3:3 (KJV).
39. Luke 1:5, 13 (KJV): “a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron.”
40. Oliver Cowdery’s account, note following Joseph Smith—History 1:75.
41. Joseph Smith—History 1:72.
42. Doctrine and Covenants 128:20; Church History Topics, “Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood,” which notes that the exact date cannot be determined.
43. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 7, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/07-fellow-servants>.
44. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 152–53, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/160>; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 7.
45. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 153–54, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/161>. Lucy’s “do not know happy I am” (a word evidently dropped) and “almost to heavy” are retained as written.
46. “The Testimony of Three Witnesses,” Book of Mormon.
47. “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses,” Book of Mormon; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 7.
48. Church History Topics, “Witnesses of the Book of Mormon,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/witnesses-of-the-book-of-mormon>.
49. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8 and notes (Copyright for Book of Mormon, June 11, 1829, JSP; Indenture, Martin Harris to Egbert B. Grandin, Aug. 25, 1829).
50. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 7; GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation” (printer’s manuscript).
51. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/08-rise-of-the-church-of-christ>.
52. Book of Mormon, title page.
53. 2 Nephi 29:5.
54. GTE, “Book of Mormon Translation,” quoting the preface to the 1830 edition.

Come and See

And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?

Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

John 1:46

A Stream in Fayette

On April 6, 1830, a young man stood on the bank of a stream in Fayette, New York, and reached down to help his father up out of the water. Then he threw his arms around him and buried his face in his father's chest, and he wept.¹

He was twenty-four. Ten years earlier he had gone into the woods alone and come out with a story almost no one believed. Now his own father had gone down into the water on the strength of it.

It had not been an easy road to that stream, and the road ahead would be harder. But for one day, the work had begun.



“Keep Your Coat On”

Go back a few months, to the winter before that baptism. Even before the book was bound, it had begun to stir the neighborhood. That winter of 1829–30, a former justice of the peace named Abner Cole, who rented Grandin's press at night for his own newspaper, began printing pirated excerpts of the Book of Mormon alongside mocking commentary. Hyrum and Oliver confronted him, and he told them it was none of their business. They sent for Joseph.²

Joseph found Cole at the printing office reading his own paper. “Mr. Cole,” he said, “the Book of Mormon and the right of publishing it belong to me, and I forbid you meddling with it.” Cole threw off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and challenged Joseph to fight. Joseph smiled. “You had better keep

your coat on,” he said. “It’s cold, and I am not going to fight you.” But, he added, “There is law... and you will find that out if you did not know it before.” Cole backed down and the excerpts stopped.³

Around the same time, a restless preacher named Solomon Chamberlin heard about the “Gold Bible” and came to the Smith door. “Is there anyone here,” he asked Hyrum, “that believes in visions or revelations?” Hyrum’s answer could stand as a motto for the family: “Yes,” he said, “we are a visionary house.”⁴



A Log House in Fayette

On Tuesday, April 6, 1830, people began arriving at the log home of Peter and Mary Whitmer in Fayette, New York. It was not a large house. By the time the meeting began, around forty men and women had crowded into it and around it.⁵ Picture benches and borrowed chairs, people standing shoulder to shoulder in the doorway, and faces at the windows.[†]



The reconstructed Whitmer log home at the Peter Whitmer Farm, Fayette, New York (photographed 2006). Photo: Jake from Utah, 2006. CC BY-SA 2.0; via Wikimedia Commons.

They had come to see a church organized. The revelation that would guide it, now known as Doctrine and Covenants section 20, opened with a sense of history: “The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeable to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day.”⁶ To meet the requirements of New York law, six people were named as the church’s founding members.⁷

Joseph and Oliver asked the congregation whether they accepted them as their teachers in the things of the kingdom of God and whether they agreed that the time had come to organize. Every hand went up. Joseph then laid his hands on Oliver’s head and ordained him an elder in the church; Oliver did the same for Joseph. They blessed bread and wine in remembrance of Christ, and laid their hands on those who had been baptized to confirm them and give them the gift of the Holy Ghost. “The Lord’s Spirit was poured out on those in the meeting,” *Saints* records, “and some in the congregation began to prophesy.”⁸

That day Joseph received the first revelation addressed to the church as a whole. “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you,” it began. It said that in that record Joseph “shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” and told the members: “his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.”⁹



“I Have Lived to See My Father Baptized”

After the meeting, Joseph stood on the bank of a stream and watched his parents go down into the water.

It was a moment decades in the making. Joseph Sr. had once belonged to a Universalist society and had long kept away from the churches. Lucy had searched for the true church since her near-death covenant in Randolph, and had been baptized years earlier by a minister who let her belong to no congregation. Now both were baptized together into the church their son had organized.¹⁰

As his father came up out of the water, Joseph took him by the hand and helped him onto the bank. Joseph Knight Sr., who was there, remembered what happened next. Joseph embraced his father and, burying his face in his father's chest, cried out: "My God, I have lived to see my father baptized into the true church of Jesus Christ!"¹¹

That evening he slipped away into the woods. When Joseph Knight and Oliver found him later that night, he was weeping. Ten years earlier he had gone into the trees alone and come out with a message no one wanted to hear. Now his father and mother believed it with him.¹² "His joy was full," *Saints* says. "The work had begun."¹³



A Knapsack of Books

The new church had a book to share, and the Smith family set out to share it.



Samuel H. Smith, Joseph's younger brother, in a drawing made after his likeness. Artist unknown, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Joseph's younger brother Samuel, twenty-two, had been baptized in Harmony the year before, soon after Joseph and Oliver.¹⁴ That spring he loaded copies of the Book of Mormon into a knapsack and set out west of Manchester on foot to sell them. Lucy recorded what happened on one of his first days. At a tavern he asked the landlord whether he would like to buy "a history of the origen of the Indians." When the man asked where it came from, Samuel told him it had been translated by his brother "from some gold plates that he found buried in the Earth." The landlord swore at him and threw him out. Lucy wrote that "this was the 5th time he had been turned out of doors that day." Samuel slept that night "upon the cold damp ground" under an apple tree. The next morning a poor widow fed him. She believed what he told her but could not afford a book, so he gave her one.¹⁵

At Bloomington, he left a copy with a Methodist preacher named John P. Greene, who promised to see whether anyone on his preaching circuit wanted to buy it. On Samuel's return, Greene's wife, Rhoda, told him there was no interest; he had better take the book back. Samuel, in his own words as his mother recorded them, "binding my knapsack upon my shoulders, arose to depart; but, as I bade her farewell, it was impressed upon my mind to leave the book with her. I made her a present of it, and told her that the spirit forbade my taking it away. She burst into tears, and requested me to pray with her."¹⁶

Samuel went home thinking his mission a failure. Picture him on the road back to Manchester, the knapsack lighter by one book, with nothing to show for it.[†] But Rhoda read the book and persuaded her husband to read it. Both were baptized. They gave it to Rhoda's brother Phineas Young. "It was next handed to Brigham Young," Lucy wrote, "and from him to Mrs. Fanny Young Murray, his sister."¹⁷ Brigham Young would become the second President of the Church and lead the Saints west after Joseph's death. That chain began with a book left behind on a doorstep.



“I Too Had Been in Bonds”

The new faith cost the Smith family dearly that first year. In the fall of 1830 a Quaker neighbor who held a note against Joseph Sr. came to the house demanding immediate payment. Joseph Sr. could pay six dollars and asked for time for the rest. Lucy recorded what the man said next, gesturing toward the fireplace: “thee will burn up them Books of Mormons; but, if thee will burn them up, then I will forgive thee the whole debt.” Joseph Sr. answered simply, “That, I shall not do.” Lucy took the gold beads from her own neck and offered them for the balance. The man refused.¹⁸

“We shall not burn the Book of Mormon,” Lucy told him, “nor deny the inspiration of the Almighty.” A constable took her husband away to the jail in Canandaigua, and ate the dinner she had made for him.¹⁹

When Samuel reached him days later, the fifty-nine-year-old had been held in a cell with a man charged with murder and given almost nothing to eat. He told his son what had sustained him:

I shuddered when I first heard these heavy doors creaking upon their hinges; but then, I thought to myself, I was not the first man, who had been imprisoned for the truth’s sake. And when I should meet Paul in the paradise of God, I could tell him, that I too had been in bonds for gospel which he preached.²⁰

He spent thirty days in confinement, working in a cooper’s shop in the jail yard, and preached every Sunday. When he was released, Lucy noted, “he baptized two persons, whom he had thus converted.”²¹ The man who had once kept away from every church was now its missionary.



Colesville

In June 1830 Joseph, Emma and Oliver went to Colesville, New York, home of the Knight family. Joseph Knight Sr. had supported Joseph since the days of the plates, and earlier that spring Joseph had prayed over Knight’s son

Newel in what he called the first miracle performed in the church. “It was done by God,” he said, “and by the power of godliness.”²²

Now the Knights and others were ready for baptism, and so was Emma. The men dammed a stream to make a pool. During the night someone tore the dam down. They held a Sunday meeting instead, and rebuilt the dam early Monday morning. Oliver baptized Emma, Joseph and Polly Knight, and ten others while men on the bank jeered.²³

That evening, as the new members gathered to be confirmed, a constable arrested Joseph for disturbing the peace by preaching the Book of Mormon. He was tried and acquitted, arrested again on similar charges, and tried and released again. Emma waited and prayed at her sister’s house while it went on.²⁴ Joseph and Emma went home to Harmony before she could even be confirmed.



“An Elect Lady”

Emma had now given up her family’s approval, her first child and her home’s privacy for her husband’s calling. That July Joseph received a revelation for her. It is the only revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants addressed to a woman by name.

Hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God, while I speak unto you,
Emma Smith, my daughter; for verily I say unto you, all those who receive
my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom.²⁵

It told her that her sins were forgiven, “and thou art an elect lady, whom I have called.” It asked her to be “a comfort unto my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., thy husband, in his afflictions, with consoling words, in the spirit of meekness.” It gave her a calling of her own, “to make a selection of sacred hymns,” and added a line that Latter-day Saints have loved ever since: “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.”²⁶

“Wherefore,” it closed, “lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made.”²⁷ Emma’s hymnbook appeared in 1835 and

gave the young church its first common voice in worship.²⁸ Not long after the revelation, she was confirmed.



“No One ... Excepting My Servant Joseph”

The church faced its first serious crisis that summer, and it came from within. Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses, had begun receiving what he believed were revelations for the church through a stone of his own. Many believed them, including Oliver Cowdery and some of the Whitmers.²⁹

Joseph prayed through the night. The answer came as a revelation addressed to Oliver: “No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith,” for “all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church.” At a conference that September, the members set aside Hiram Page’s revelations and unanimously sustained Joseph.³⁰ The church would have one prophet at a time, and it would govern itself by the consent of its members.

The same revelation sent Oliver on a mission far to the west, to the American Indians, whom the Book of Mormon described as a remnant of the house of Israel. Parley P. Pratt, Peter Whitmer Jr. and Ziba Peterson were called to go with him. Emma and the other women of Fayette spun, wove and sewed clothes for the missionaries.³¹



A Preacher Named Parley

Parley Pratt had himself come into the church only weeks earlier, in a way that seemed to him providential. A farmer turned preacher, he had sold his farm in Ohio to go preach the gospel as he understood it from the Bible. Traveling east by canal with his wife, Thankful, he felt impressed to get off the boat. “I will come soon,” he told her. “I have a work to do in this region.”³²

A few miles inland a Baptist deacon showed him a strange new book. Parley read the title page and the witnesses' testimonies, then began at the beginning, and could not stop. "Eating and sleeping were a burden," *Saints* records. He went looking for the translator, found Hyrum Smith instead, talked with him most of the night, and was baptized a few days later.³³

On the way west, in the fall of 1830, Parley led the missionaries to northeastern Ohio to see his former pastor, Sidney Rigdon. Rigdon was a powerful Reformed Baptist preacher with a congregation in and around Kirtland. Many of them, like Isaac and Lucy Morley, were already trying to live like the New Testament saints, with "all things common."³⁴

Rigdon was polite and unconvinced. The Bible was enough for him, he said. "You brought the truth to me," Parley reminded him. "I now ask you as a friend to read this for my sake." Rigdon agreed, though he said, "You must not argue with me on the subject." He read, and found he could not dismiss it. Joining would cost him his living as a minister. He asked his wife, Phebe, whether she was willing to follow him into poverty again. "I have counted the cost," she answered. "It is my desire to do the will of God, come life or come death."³⁵

The Rigdons were baptized, and so were many in his congregation and the Morley household. Oliver wrote back to Joseph: "There is considerable call here for books, and I wish you would send five hundred."³⁶ Then the missionaries walked on toward Missouri through deep snow. A small church in New York had suddenly found a larger family in Ohio.



"Of One Heart and One Mind"

Through all of this, Joseph had begun a new project. Using a Bible that Oliver had bought at Grandin's bookstore, he started a careful, prayerful study of the Bible beginning with Genesis, seeking inspiration about its passages.³⁷ Out of that study came revelations that Latter-day Saints now read as the Book of Moses.

The first is a vision of Moses on a high mountain, seeing the earth and its peoples and asking God why he made them. The answer is the verse that

may best sum up Latter-day Saint belief about the purpose of life: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”³⁸

Later, with Sidney Rigdon as his scribe, Joseph dictated an expanded account of Enoch, who in Genesis “walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”³⁹ In the new text, Enoch gathered a people so righteous that “the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.”⁴⁰

That verse became a goal the young church never stopped reaching for. In Colesville, the Saints pooled their means so the poor among them could make the journey west.⁴¹ In Kirtland, converts like the Morleys were already trying to share all things. They often fell short. But from then on, Zion was not only a hill in Jerusalem in their vocabulary. It was also a description of a people.



“Thou Art the Man!”

Late in 1830 Sidney Rigdon traveled east to meet Joseph, bringing his friend Edward Partridge, a hatmaker. Soon afterward the Lord directed the New York Saints to gather to Ohio. It was a hard commandment. Many had worked for years to build their farms. They would have to sell quickly, and at a loss.⁴²



The Newel K. Whitney store in Kirtland, Ohio, restored (photographed 2009). Photo: Jon Ridinger, 2009. CC BY 3.0; via Wikimedia Commons.

Joseph and Emma left for Kirtland that winter by sleigh. Emma was pregnant with twins and still recovering from a long illness, but she insisted on going. On February 4, a sleigh pulled up to a store in Kirtland owned by Newel K. Whitney. A twenty-five-year-old stepped out, strode inside and reached his hand across the counter. “Newel K. Whitney!” he cried. “Thou art the man!”

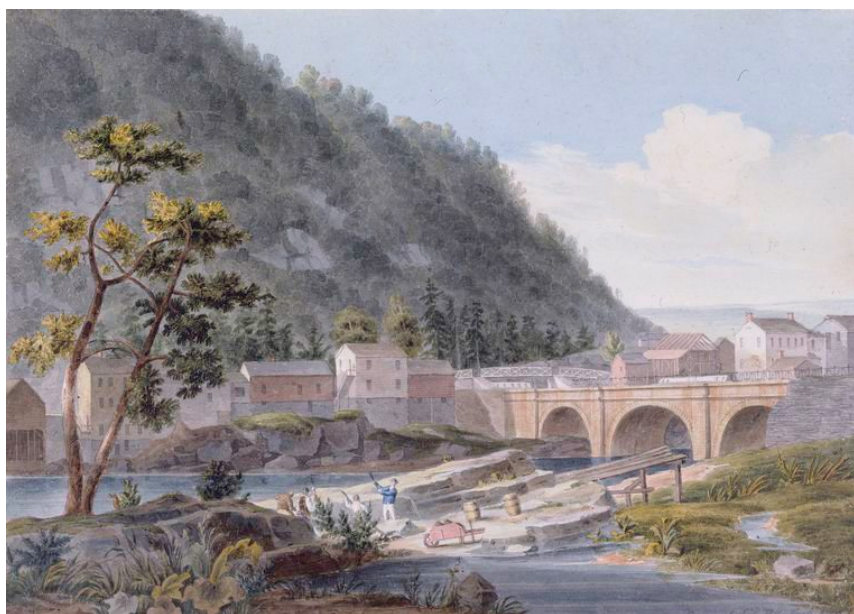
Whitney shook his hand, confused. “You have the advantage of me. I could not call you by name, as you have me.”

“I am Joseph the prophet,” the visitor said. “You have prayed me here, now what do you want of me?”⁴³ Whitney and his wife, Elizabeth Ann, had in fact been praying to know how to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁴ Joseph and Emma lived with the Whitneys for a time.



The Ice at Buffalo

That spring the rest of the New York Saints followed. Joseph's mother, Lucy, now in her mid-fifties, took charge of a company of about eighty from Fayette, traveling by canal boat to Buffalo and from there by lake steamer.⁴⁵ It was a miserable trip. The canal broke. Some of the sisters, Lucy wrote with dry humor, kept wishing they were back home where "we could sit in our rocking chairs and take as much comfort as we pleased." At Buffalo the harbor was choked with ice, reported to be piled twenty feet high. The captain expected to wait two weeks.⁴⁶



A view on the Erie Canal, drawn in 1831, the year Lucy's company traveled the canal west to Buffalo. John William Hill (1812–1879), View on the Erie Canal, watercolor, 1831; New York Public Library. No restrictions; via Wikimedia Commons.

As the company grumbled, a man on shore called out, "Is the Book of Mormon true?" Lucy answered him:

That book... was brought forth by the power of God, and translated by the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, if I could make my voice to sound as loud as the

trumpet of Micheal the Arch Angel, I would declare the truth of the same from land to land, and from sea to sea.⁴⁷

Then she turned to her own people and told them that if they would all pray “that the ice may be broke up, and we be set at liberty, as sure as the Lord lives it will be done.” In her account, “at that instant a noise was heard like bursting thunder.” The ice parted, “leaving barely a pathway for the boat,” so narrow that the paddle buckets were torn off as they squeezed through, and it closed again behind them. In Buffalo, onlookers were so sure the overloaded boat would sink that a newspaper reported them lost. “When we arrived at Fairport,” Lucy wrote, “we read the news of our own death in the Newspapers.”⁴⁸

Lucy’s account was written years later, and readers may weigh it as they will. She herself had no doubt whose hand had opened the ice. But it shows what kind of woman had raised the Prophet: when the church needed someone to lead eighty people through ice and complaint, it was Mother Smith.



Come and See

When Philip told his friend Nathanael that he had found the one “of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,” Nathanael doubted. Could anything good come from a village as small as Nazareth? Philip did not argue. He said, “Come and see.”⁴⁹

That has been the pattern of this chapter. Samuel did not argue with Rhoda Greene; he left her a book and told her to ask God about it. Parley did not argue with Sidney Rigdon; he asked him to read “for my sake.” Even Joseph, when Rigdon and Partridge came looking for him, simply let them see.

Within a year of six members organizing in a log house, the church had moved its center nearly three hundred miles west, and many of its members had never met Joseph Smith. Its people were poor and inexperienced, and many were still trying to understand what they had joined. Ahead of them in

Kirtland lay revelation, sacrifice and a house built for the Lord, and in it, the fulfillment of a promise made to the house of Israel. Ahead of Joseph and Emma, before any of that, lay a grief they could not yet see.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 08-sources.md. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy).

Notes

1. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8, drawing on Joseph Knight Sr., *Reminiscences*. Told in full, with Joseph's words, later in this chapter, in "I Have Lived to See My Father Baptized." Joseph was born Dec. 23, 1805.
2. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8; Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, ch. 33, JSP.
3. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8 (from Lucy's history). The *Saints* wording is used; Lucy's 1845 text reads "There is law; and you will find that out, if you do not understand it; but I shall not fight you sir."
4. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8.
5. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/08-rise-of-the-church-of-christ>. † The benches, chairs and faces at the windows are imagined; the small house and the crowd of about forty are documented.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 20:1.
7. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8. See 08-sources.md on the names of the six.
8. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 21:1, 5.
10. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8; see Ch. 3 and 4 of this book for Lucy's earlier baptism and Joseph Sr.'s Universalist ties.
11. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8, drawing on Joseph Knight Sr., *Reminiscences*, Church History Library.
12. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8.
13. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 8.
14. Church History Topics, "Early Missionaries" (Samuel's mission with a satchel of books). The baptism (May 1829, by Oliver Cowdery) follows JS, *History*, vol. A-1; see 08-sources.md.
15. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 169–70, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/178>. Original spelling retained.
16. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 186–87, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/194>. Lucy presents this as Samuel's own account.

17. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 187, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/195>; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9. † Samuel's walk home is imagined. That he left thinking there was "no prospect" is documented.
18. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 180, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/188>.
19. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 180–81, JSP.
20. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 185, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/193>.
21. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 186, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/194>.
22. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/09-come-life-or-come-death>.
23. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
24. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 25:1.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 25:3, 5, 11–12.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 25:13.
28. Church History Topics, "Emma Hale Smith." See **08-sources.md**.
29. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
30. Doctrine and Covenants 28:2, 13; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
31. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9; Doctrine and Covenants 28:8; 32:1–3.
32. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9 (from Parley P. Pratt's *Autobiography*).
33. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
34. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10, [https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/10-gathered-in; Acts 2:44 \(KJV\)](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/10-gathered-in; Acts 2:44 (KJV)).
35. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
36. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10 (Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, Nov. 12, 1830).
37. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10.
38. Moses 1:39 (Pearl of Great Price).
39. Genesis 5:24 (KJV).
40. Moses 7:18; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10.
41. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10.
42. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10; Doctrine and Covenants 37:3; 38:31–32.
43. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10.
44. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 10.
45. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, ch. 39–40, JSP; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 11. See **08-sources.md** on the size of the company.
46. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 196–201, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/205>.
47. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 202, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/210>. Lucy's spelling "Micheal" retained.

48. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 202–3, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/211>.
49. John 1:45–46 (KJV).

The Lord's House

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple.

Malachi 3:1

Behind the Veils

On a Sunday afternoon in early April 1836, two men in a newly finished temple in Ohio let down the canvas curtains around a pulpit and knelt in silence. On the other side of the curtains sat a congregation of Saints who had built that house with their own poor hands.

Around the world, on that same weekend, Jewish families had just poured a cup of wine for Elijah and opened their doors.

What the two men recorded seeing behind the curtains would close a circle this book opened in its first chapter.¹ But the road to that pulpit ran through five years of grief, sacrifice and stubborn faith.



“A House of God”

The Kirtland years began with grief. Emma had made the sleigh journey to Ohio that winter, pregnant with twins. On April 30, 1831, three months after arriving, she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. Both died within hours. The next day, a neighbor in the church, Julia Murdock, died after giving birth to twins of her own. Her husband, John, left with five children and no wife, gave the newborns to Joseph and Emma to raise. For the first time, the Smiths had living children in their home.²

The church grew around them. Revelations came almost monthly, and many of them are now in the Doctrine and Covenants. In December 1832, one of the longest of them, which Joseph called “the olive leaf,” gave a commandment that would shape the next four years:

Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.³

A month later, on January 22, 1833, the first session of what Joseph and his contemporaries called the School of the Prophets opened in an upper room of Newel K. Whitney's store. Men preparing for missions studied scripture, doctrine, and even grammar and geography, and they prayed together and washed one another's feet. The name, the Church's historians note, called to mind the "company of the prophets" gathered around Samuel, Elijah and Elisha in the Hebrew Bible.⁴ But a room above a store was not the house the revelation described. That would take a great deal more.



Hiram

In January 1832 Joseph, Emma and the twins were living with John and Elsa Johnson in Hiram, Ohio, about thirty miles south of Kirtland. On February 16, in an upstairs room of the Johnson home, Joseph and Sidney Rigdon received together a vision that changed how Latter-day Saints think about heaven. They saw that there is not one heaven and one hell, but kingdoms of glory, prepared for God's children according to how they lived and what they received. At the center of the vision was its testimony of Christ:

And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God.⁵

Some of those in the room said that when it was over, Sidney looked limp and pale. Joseph smiled and said, "Sidney is not used to it as I am."⁶

A month later came the opposite. One night in late March, a mob of men with blackened faces broke into the Johnson house. Joseph had been sitting up with the sicker of the twins, who both had measles, until Emma took the baby so he could rest. The men dragged him out into a meadow. We can imagine the frozen grass, the torches or lanterns, and the reek of the tar pot.[†] They choked him until he passed out, beat him, tore off his clothes, and

covered him in hot tar and feathers. They forced tar into his mouth and chipped one of his teeth. Sidney Rigdon was dragged out by his heels, his head bouncing on the frozen ground. When Joseph stumbled back to the house, Emma fainted at the sight of him. Friends spent the night scraping the tar from his skin.⁷



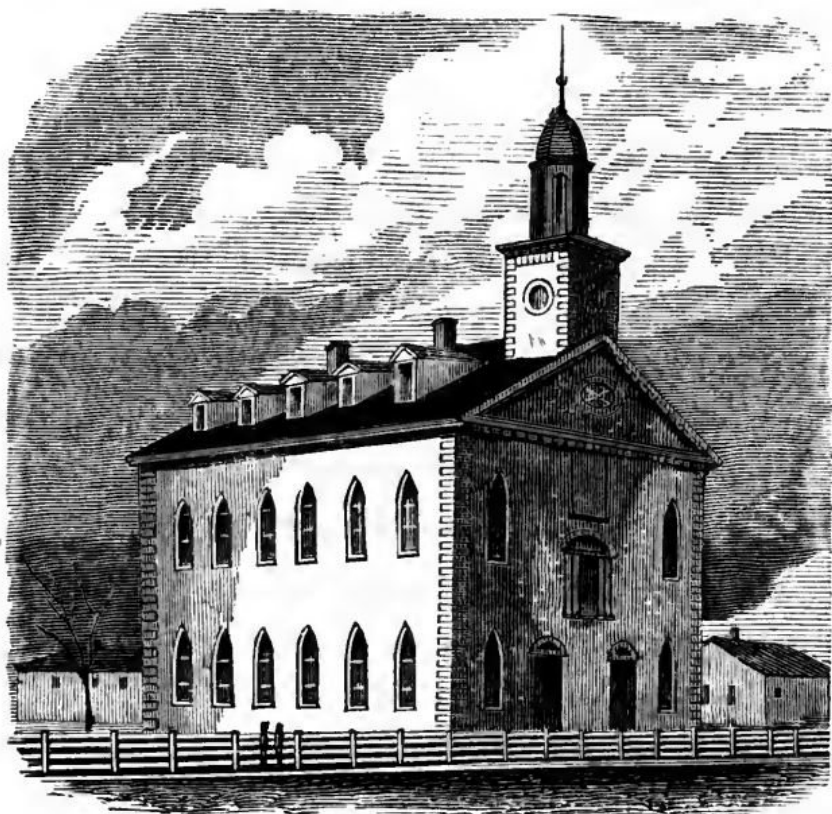
Hiram, Ohio, March 1832: the mob drags Joseph from the Johnson home at night, as Christensen painted it. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Tarring and Feathering the Prophet, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

The next morning, a Sunday, Joseph preached as usual. Some of the mob sat in the congregation. He said nothing to them. That afternoon he baptized three people. It is one of the plainest pictures in the record of the kind of man he was: beaten in the night, preaching in the morning, and without a word of revenge. But the baby he had been holding, little Joseph Murdock Smith, grew worse after the cold night air rushed into the house, and he died later that week.⁸



“Shall We ... Build a House for Our God of Logs?”

When the brethren met to discuss the building, Lucy remembered, some wanted a frame house and some a log one. Joseph listened to them all and then spoke. They were not building a house for man, but for God, “and shall we brethren,” he asked, “build a house for our God of logs? No, I have a better plan than that: I have a plan of the house of the Lord given by himself.”⁹



*The Kirtland Temple in an engraving published in 1873, decades after the Saints left Ohio. Engraving in T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, 1873. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

The site they chose was the corner of a wheat field the Smith brothers had planted the fall before. “In a few minutes the fence was removed,” Lucy wrote, “and the standing grain was levelled in order to prepare a place for the

building; and Hyrum commenced digging a trench for the wall, he having declared that he would strike the first blow upon the house.”¹⁰ The cornerstones were laid on July 23, 1833.¹¹

The Saints were poor, and few. Lucy said “not 30 families now remained in Kirtland” when the work began, most of the others having gone on to Missouri. Yet “they never suffered the work to stop untill it was accomplished.”¹² Men cut sandstone at a quarry about two miles south and hauled it in wagons. The rough, irregular blocks were laid in mortar to make thick walls, which were then covered with plaster inside and stucco outside. A sawmill run by volunteers cut the wood. Skilled carpenters, among them a young convert named Brigham Young, did the finish work.¹³ Children gathered discarded shards of crockery and china, and broken glassware was mixed into the last coat of stucco so the walls would glisten.¹⁴ Picture a few children with a basket between them, going from door to door asking for a cracked cup or a broken bottle.† When the stucco was done, the walls were tinted a soft bluish gray, and lines were painted on them to look like blocks of cut stone.

Lucy’s own house was a boardinghouse for the workers. Young women boarding with her spent their days “making and mending clothes for the men, who were employed on the house.” “There was but one main spring to all our thoughts and actions,” she wrote, “and that was, the building of the Lord’s House.” She remembered how often she had “parted every bed in the house for the accomodation of the brethren,” while she and her husband slept on a single blanket on the floor, “while Joseph and Emma slept upon the same floor, with nothing but their cloaks for both beds and bedding.”¹⁵

There was opposition, too. The walls had to be guarded at night. Lucy borrowed the words of a psalm for the builders: they “Gave no sleep to their eyes, nor slumber to their eyelids, until they found a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.”¹⁶



Trouble in Zion

Meanwhile, far to the west, the Saints in Jackson County, Missouri, were suffering. They had begun settling there in 1831, believing it the place for the city of Zion. Their neighbors grew alarmed at their numbers, their religion, and their antislavery reputation. In July 1833 a mob destroyed the church's printing office in Independence. By November the Saints had been driven out of the county altogether. "It is a horrid time," William W. Phelps wrote to Kirtland on November 6. "Men, women, and children are fleeing, or preparing to, in all directions."¹⁷



November 1833: Latter-day Saints driven from Jackson County, Missouri, in Christensen's painting C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Saints Driven from Jackson County, Missouri, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

In the spring of 1834 Joseph led about two hundred thirty men, women and children on a thousand-mile march to Missouri to help restore the Saints to their land. The expedition, called the Camp of Israel and known today as Zion's Camp, did not accomplish that goal. Cholera broke out at the end, killing thirteen members of the camp and two Missouri Saints. But many of

the men who would lead the church for the next half century were tested and trained on that march.¹⁸

The temple in Kirtland rose through all of it.



“My Brother Alvin”

By January 1836 the inside of the temple was nearly finished. On the afternoon of January 21, Joseph met with his counselors and his father in the unfinished building for sacred washings and anointings, patterned, as *Saints* notes, on the way Moses washed and anointed Aaron and his sons.¹⁹ Joseph Sr. anointed his son’s head and blessed him.

Then the heavens opened. Joseph saw the celestial kingdom of God, its gate “like unto circling flames of fire,” and God the Father and his Son on their thrones. And he saw people he knew:

I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept;
And marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.²⁰

Twelve years earlier Alvin had urged his little brother from his deathbed to “do every thing that lays in your power to obtain the record.” He had died unbaptized, and Joseph had carried the question of his fate ever since. Now the answer came:

All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God;... For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.²¹

It was a doctrine of breathtaking generosity, and it would grow. God’s judgment would not be cut off by the accident of where or when a person was born. The vision also taught Joseph that little children who die “are

saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.” He and Emma had buried four infants by then.²²



Hosanna

On Sunday, March 27, 1836, the temple was dedicated. People began lining up early in the morning. About a thousand crowded into the lower hall, and so many were turned away that an overflow meeting was held next door.²³ Sidney Rigdon preached for more than two hours. Then Joseph rose and offered a dedicatory prayer, which he had received by revelation and which is now section 109 of the Doctrine and Covenants.



*The Kirtland Temple, photographed in the early twentieth century. Its walls are sandstone rubble under a coat of stucco. C. R. Savage Co., photograph, published in James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 1912. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

“We ask thee, O Lord, to accept of this house,” it began, “the workmanship of the hands of us, thy servants, which thou didst command us to build.”²⁴ He prayed for the missionaries, for the Saints driven from Missouri, for the leaders of the nations. And then, in a passage that Jewish readers may find

surprising in a frontier Christian prayer, he prayed for the Jewish people and for Jerusalem:

But thou knowest that thou hast a great love for the children of Jacob, who have been scattered upon the mountains for a long time, in a cloudy and dark day.

We therefore ask thee to have mercy upon the children of Jacob, that Jerusalem, from this hour, may begin to be redeemed;

And the yoke of bondage may begin to be broken off from the house of David;

And the children of Judah may begin to return to the lands which thou didst give to Abraham, their father.²⁵

This was 1836. There was no Zionist movement and no talk of a Jewish return outside synagogue prayers. Yet in the first temple of the Restoration, a prophet from Vermont prayed that the children of Judah would come home.

When he finished, the choir sang a new hymn by W. W. Phelps:

The Spirit of God like a fire is burning; The latter-day glory begins to come forth. The visions and blessings of old are returning; The angels are coming to visit the earth.²⁶

Then the whole congregation rose and shouted together, three times: "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna to God and the Lamb!"²⁷

The weeks that followed felt to many like the day of Pentecost. That evening men spoke in tongues and prophesied, and some reported seeing angels. People outside said they saw a bright cloud and a pillar of fire resting over the temple.²⁸

Among those listening that day were the members of the new Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, called the year before. When they were set apart in 1835, Joseph had told them that they alone held the authority to unlock the doors of the nations for the gathering of Israel.²⁹ One of them, a thirty-one-year-old former store clerk named Orson Hyde, had hoped ever since his baptism to serve a mission to Jerusalem.³⁰ Five years later, he would stand on the Mount of Olives and pray the same prayer.

Three days after the dedication, Joseph met with about three hundred priesthood leaders in the temple and washed their feet, as Jesus had washed

his disciples' feet. "This is a year of Jubilee to us and a time of rejoicing," he told them. He sent the apostles out with simple counsel: "Go in all meekness, in sobriety, and preach Jesus Christ." They were to avoid quarrels over religion and stay true to their own faith.³¹ The word *jubilee* came, of course, from the Torah, where every fiftieth year liberty was proclaimed throughout the land.³²



Passover and Easter

One week after the dedication, on Sunday, April 3, 1836, about a thousand Saints came to the temple again. In the Christian world it was Easter Sunday.

In the Jewish world it was the second day of Passover. The first Seder had been held on Friday evening, April 1, and in Jewish communities outside the land of Israel the second Seder was held on Saturday evening, April 2.³³ On both nights, in homes from Vilna to Charleston, a cup of wine had been poured for Elijah, and at the appointed moment in the Seder a child had gone to open the door, so that the prophet Malachi promised might come in.³⁴

That Sunday afternoon in Kirtland, after the sacrament, Joseph and Oliver Cowdery lowered the canvas curtains around the upper pulpits on the west end of the hall and knelt in silent prayer, out of sight of the congregation. What followed is recorded in Joseph's journal, in the handwriting of his scribe, and is now section 110 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened.

We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber.

His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah.³⁵

The Lord accepted the house. “Behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house.”³⁶

Then three more messengers came. Moses “committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north.” Elias “committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed.”³⁷ And then:

After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors.³⁸

Joseph never spoke publicly about this vision, as far as the records show, and it was not published until years after his death.³⁹ Moses, the lawgiver; Elias, bearing the covenant of Abraham; and Elijah, whom Malachi promised: all three are prophets of Israel.



The Melchizedek Priesthood pulpits at the west end of the Kirtland Temple's lower hall, photographed in 1912, with a curtain rolled up overhead. It was behind curtains at these upper pulpits that Joseph and Oliver knelt on April 3, 1836. C. Edward Miller, photograph, copyrighted 1912; Library of Congress. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.



“He Has Come”

This book began, in its first chapter, with the last words of Malachi and with an open door at the Passover table. It is right to come back to them carefully.

Jewish families still pour Elijah’s cup and still open the door. They do it in hope, as their ancestors did through centuries of exile and persecution, and that hope deserves only reverence. No Latter-day Saint has any business telling a Jewish family what their Seder means, and this book does not try to.

What Latter-day Saints can do is say, gently, what they believe happened in Kirtland on the day after the second Seder of 1836. They believe that Elijah came. They believe that he came not to replace Israel’s hope but to fulfill one part of it: to turn the hearts of the fathers and the children toward each other, across every generation, by restoring the authority to bind families together forever. Joseph later taught that this was the power to seal on earth what would be sealed in heaven, uniting parents to children and children to

parents.⁴⁰ In Latter-day Saint temples today, that work is done for the living and for the dead, including, at the request of their families, for countless Jewish ancestors of Latter-day Saints.

They are waiting for Elijah, but he has come. Latter-day Saints say this as testimony, not as triumph. If it is true, it is a gift to Jacob's whole family, and to the Jewish people first of all, whose prophet he was and whose door he was promised.

The temple was not the only gift of that season to the Smith family. More than a year earlier, the Lord had called Joseph Sr. to be the first patriarch of the church, with authority to give the Saints blessings "as Abraham and Jacob had done for their children in the Bible."⁴¹ The man who had once dreamed of a box of wisdom spent his last years laying his hands on the heads of the Saints and promising them blessings. To Lydia Knight, a young convert who had married Newel Knight that winter after years of sorrow, he said: "Thou hast been afflicted much in thy past days, and thy heart has been pained." Then: "But thou shalt be comforted."⁴²



“Fulfilled in Me”

One more homecoming belongs to the spring of 1836.

On May 17, Joseph and Hyrum drove a carriage to Fairport on Lake Erie to meet a passenger who had come all the way from northern New York. She was their grandmother, Mary Duty Smith, the widow of Asael, and she was ninety-two years old, in her ninety-third year. Her son Jesse, an enemy of the new church, had kept her from being baptized. But she had come anyway, to see her children before she died.⁴³

“She ... knew all of us she had ever seen,” Joseph recorded. “She was much pleased at being introduced to her great grand-children, and expressed much pleasure and gratification on seeing me.” Then he added, remembering the old man in Tunbridge who had told his family that something would one day appear to make the true gospel known:

My grandfather, Asael Smith, long ago predicted that there would be a prophet raised up in his family, and my grandmother was fully satisfied that it was fulfilled in me.⁴⁴

The next day more of the family arrived from New York. “My father, three of his brothers, and their mother, met the first time for many years. It was a happy day, for we had long prayed to see our grandmother and uncles in the Church.”⁴⁵ Picture the old woman in a chair in a Kirtland parlor, a great-grandchild on her lap, the temple’s tower outside the window.[†]

Ten days later, on May 27, 1836, “after a few days’ visit with her children, which she enjoyed extremely well,” Joseph wrote, “my grandmother fell asleep without sickness, pain or regret. She breathed her last about sunset.”⁴⁶ She was buried near the temple. Lucy wrote that she “died, firm in the faith of the gospel, although she had never yielded obedience to any of its ordinances.”⁴⁷

Mary Duty Smith had married Asael Smith in 1767, before there was a United States. She lived to see the house of the Lord in Kirtland, and to look into the face of the grandson who had built it. In the temple near her grave, Latter-day Saints believed, Elijah had just restored the power to join generations like hers together. The hearts of the fathers and the children were turning.

For one bright season, Kirtland felt like the beginning of Zion. Within little more than a year, the same temple would ring with angry voices.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 09-sources.md. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy).

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, Journal, 1835–1836, 3 Apr. 1836 (D&C 110 heading); *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21; on the Passover calendar in 1836, see the section “Passover and Easter” below and its notes. The full account follows later in this chapter.

2. Church History Topics, "Joseph and Emma Hale Smith Family," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/joseph-and-emma-hale-smith-family>.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:119; heading of section 88 ("the 'olive leaf'").
4. Church History Topics, "School of the Prophets," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/school-of-the-prophets>.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 76:22–23; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 14, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/14-visions-and-nightmares>.
6. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 14 (from Philo Dibble's recollection).
7. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 14. † The frozen grass, the light and the smell are imagined. The night attack, the meadow, the choking, the beating and the hot tar and feathers are documented.
8. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 14; Church History Topics, "Joseph and Emma Hale Smith Family."
9. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 226, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/234>.
10. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 226.
11. Church History Topics, "Kirtland Temple," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/kirtland-temple>.
12. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 226.
13. Church History Topics, "Kirtland Temple."
14. Church History Topics, "Kirtland Temple"; Elwin C. Robison, *The First Mormon Temple* (BYU Press, 1997), chs. 3, 5; Church historic sites, "A House of the Lord." The temple was not originally white; its stucco was a bluish gray. Stories that the Saints gave up their *fine* china first appear about a century later. Contemporary accounts speak of old glass and crockery. † The children with the basket are imagined. The gathering of shards is documented.
15. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 227, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/235>. Original spelling retained.
16. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 226–27; compare Psalm 132:4–5 (KJV).
17. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 16–17, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/17-thought-the-mob-kill-us>.
18. Church History Topics, "Zion's Camp (Camp of Israel)," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/zions-camp-camp-of-israel>. See **09 - sources .md** on the cholera deaths.
19. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/21-the-spirit-of-god>; Exodus 29:4–7 (KJV).
20. Doctrine and Covenants 137:3, 5–6.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 137:7, 9.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 137:10; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21.
23. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 109:4.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 109:61–64.
26. William W. Phelps, "The Spirit of God," as quoted in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21.

27. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21; Church History Topics, “Kirtland Temple.”
28. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21.
29. Church History Topics, “Dedication of the Holy Land,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/dedication-of-the-holy-land>.
30. Church History Topics, “Dedication of the Holy Land.” See **09 - sources .md** on Hyde’s age and occupation.
31. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21.
32. Leviticus 25:10 (KJV).
33. Hebrew calendar conversion (Hebcal): April 1, 1836 = 14 Nisan 5596 (Erev Pesach); April 2 = 15 Nisan (Pesach I); April 3 = 16 Nisan (Pesach II). Stephen D. Ricks, “The Appearance of Elijah and Moses in the Kirtland Temple and the Jewish Passover,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (1983), first drew Latter-day Saint attention to this timing.
34. See Ch. 1 and its notes on Elijah’s cup and the opening of the door (Chabad.org; My Jewish Learning).
35. Doctrine and Covenants 110:1–3; Visions, 3 April 1836, in *Journal*, 1835–1836, 192, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/visions-3-april-1836/1>.
36. Doctrine and Covenants 110:7.
37. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–12.
38. Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16. The bracket is in the canonized text.
39. See **09 - sources .md**. The vision was first published in the *Deseret News* in 1852 and added to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876.
40. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21; Doctrine and Covenants 128:17–18.
41. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21.
42. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 21. See **09 - sources .md** on Lydia Knight’s circumstances.
43. History of the Church, 2:442 (from Joseph Smith’s manuscript history), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/online-book/history-of-the-church-volume-2/volume-2-chapter-31>.
44. History of the Church, 2:442–43. On Asael’s prediction, see Ch. 2 and Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 173.
45. History of the Church, 2:443.
46. History of the Church, 2:443.
47. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 238, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/246>. Lucy’s “obedience” retained.

The Refiner's Fire

*But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?
for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and
purifier of silver.*

Malachi 3:2–3

A Cellar in Liberty

In March 1839, in a stone jail in Liberty, Missouri, a man of thirty-three sat in the half-dark of a room reached only by a trapdoor. Smoke from the fire hung in the air. Straw lay on the floor. Through a barred window six inches high, a little light came in.^{†1}

He had been there since December. His people had been driven out of the state. His wife had walked across the frozen Mississippi with their children in her arms and at her skirts. Three years earlier he had stood in the house of the Lord in Kirtland while a congregation shouted hosanna. Now he asked the question that believers have always asked in the dark.

How he came to that cellar is the story of this chapter.



Every Snare

It began a year after the glory of the temple, in the hardest stretch of Joseph Smith's life, and it began with money.

In the fall of 1836, Joseph and other church leaders decided to found a bank in Kirtland. Like many small American towns of the day, Kirtland wanted a bank of its own. Most people's wealth was tied up in land, and a local bank could make loans and print its own notes to keep trade moving. For the Saints the hopes ran deeper: a growing town could take in converts, help the Saints driven out of Jackson County, send out missionaries and, in the end, help build Zion. The Kirtland Safety Society was officially

established on November 2, 1836, with Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith as officers.²

It struggled from the start. The Ohio legislature granted no new bank charters that winter, so the society's directors chose to operate without one, as some other institutions did. Then came the Panic of 1837, a national crisis that dragged land values and crop prices down and drove banks, businesses and even many states into bankruptcy over the next few years. By August 1837 the Safety Society had stopped operating. Many Saints lost money. Joseph's losses, the Church's historians write, "were substantial." He and Sidney were also tried and fined under an 1816 Ohio law against circulating such notes, a law that was rarely enforced.³

The money was only part of the trouble. Many Saints had believed the Safety Society would succeed if they were faithful, and when it failed, some decided their prophet had failed too. *Saints* puts it plainly: in the past, revelations had made it easy to believe Joseph was a prophet of God, "But when Joseph's statements about the Safety Society appeared to go unfulfilled, and their investments began to slip away, many Saints became uneasy and critical of Joseph."⁴ To pay church debts Joseph had to mortgage the temple itself. Workmen building his own house were paid in Safety Society notes, which fewer and fewer merchants would take.⁵

Some of the men who turned against him had stood closest to him. A group led by Warren Parrish, who had worked side by side with Joseph for years and served as the Safety Society's secretary, began disrupting meetings in the temple. Three of the Twelve Apostles joined the dissenters, and others wavered. One Sunday that summer, Joseph Sr. stood in the temple to defend his son. Parrish rushed the stand and seized the old patriarch to pull him from the pulpit. Joseph Sr. called out to Oliver Cowdery, who was the local justice of the peace, but Oliver, *Saints* records, "did nothing to help his old friend." William Smith dragged Parrish away, John Boynton drew a sword, and the house that had rung with hosannas a year before emptied in chaos through its doors and windows.⁶

Not everyone fell away. A convert from Canada named John Taylor was in Kirtland that season. When Parley Pratt, then angry with Joseph himself, warned him not to follow the prophet, John reminded Parley of his own

testimony: “If the work was true six months ago, it is true today. If Joseph Smith was then a prophet, he is now a prophet.”⁷ Parley soon repented and came back.⁸

And in the middle of it all, the work spread. One day, sitting with Heber C. Kimball in the temple pulpits, Joseph leaned over and told him the Spirit had whispered: “Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation.” Heber, a potter with little schooling, prayed, “O Lord, I am a man of stammering tongue and altogether unfit for such a work.” He went anyway.⁹ By that summer he was baptizing in the River Ribble.¹⁰ The same season that broke Kirtland opened Britain.



“Move On to the West”

By the new year the dissenters had grown more bitter. There were threats of violence, and debts and lawsuits hounded the prophet. A sheriff was looking for him with a warrant. On January 12, 1838, Joseph sought the Lord and received a revelation: “Let the presidency of my church take their families... and move on to the west as fast as the way is made plain.”¹¹



Monument at Far West, Missouri (photographed 2005), where Joseph moved his family in 1838. Photo: John Hamer, 2005. CC BY-SA 3.0; via Wikimedia Commons.

That night Joseph and Sidney Rigdon got on their horses and rode out of Kirtland. Picture two riders in the January dark, wrapped against the cold,

not looking back at the temple on the bluff.† They rode south until morning, nearly sixty miles, and waited for their families to catch up with the wagons. Neither man expected to see Kirtland again, and Joseph never did.¹²

They went to Far West, Missouri, the town the exiles from Jackson County had built on the open prairie of Caldwell County, a county the legislature had organized for the Saints' settlement. Far West had houses and cabins, a hotel, shops and a bishop's storehouse, with a temple site at its center.¹³ That spring, on April 26, 1838, a revelation gave the church the name it still carries: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "Arise and shine forth," the Lord said, "that thy light may be a standard for the nations."¹⁴

But the dissent had followed Joseph west, and the loss that hurt most came that same April. On April 12, a church council in Far West heard charges against Oliver Cowdery. He had sold his Jackson County land against a revelation, opposed church leaders and accused Joseph of adultery. Oliver did not come to the hearing. He sent a letter defending his right to sell his land and resigning his membership. Joseph stood and spoke of how much he had once trusted Oliver, and he answered the accusation about his relationship with Fanny Alger. After a long day, the council made what *Saints* calls "the painful decision" to remove Oliver from the church.¹⁵ David Whitmer was excommunicated soon after.¹⁶

It is one of the heartbreaks of the story. The schoolteacher who had written the Book of Mormon as Joseph spoke it, who had knelt with him on the banks of the Susquehanna, was gone. Oliver's story did not end there, though. Years later, after Joseph's death, he came to a conference of the Saints in Iowa, pledged his support to the Twelve and was rebaptized by Orson Hyde. He was planning to join the Saints in the West when he died in 1850.¹⁷ He never denied his witness of the Book of Mormon.



"We Will Infringe on the Rights of No People"

On July 4, 1838, the Saints in Far West laid the cornerstones of a new temple. They marched in a parade, raised the American flag on a tall pole and

gathered around the excavated foundation. Then Sidney Rigdon climbed a stand and gave the kind of fiery Independence Day speech Americans of the time loved. The Saints, he said, would not be driven again. If mobs came against them, “it shall be between us and them a war of extermination.” In the same speech he promised, “We will infringe on the rights of no people; but shall stand for our own until death.”¹⁸ Joseph had the speech printed as a pamphlet.¹⁹ The words were meant as defiance. Their neighbors heard them as a threat.

This part of the story has to be told honestly, because the Church’s own historians tell it honestly. That summer some Latter-day Saint men at Far West organized a band known as the Danites. They meant to defend the community against dissenters and hostile Missourians. They intimidated church dissenters, and they warned Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and others to leave the county. Within days those men fled. The Church’s history today says historians “generally concur that Joseph Smith approved of the Danites but that he probably was not briefed on all their plans and likely did not sanction the full range of their activities.” The Danites lasted only about five months, from June through October 1838, but legends about them lasted much longer.²⁰

Trouble came quickly. On Election Day in August, men in Daviess County tried to keep Latter-day Saints from voting, and a fight broke out at the polls in Gallatin. Mobs gathered and drove the Saints out of De Witt, in Carroll County. When the Saints asked the governor, Lilburn W. Boggs, for help, he answered that they and the Missourians must fight their own battles. As reports came in of Saints’ homes being burned, they decided to fight back.²¹

In mid-October, Latter-day Saint forces raided Gallatin and Millport, two towns they saw as centers of hostility. They burned homes and stores and carried off goods for refugee Saints. These were wrongs, and the Church’s histories call them what they were.²² Days later, before dawn at the Crooked River, a company of Saints riding to rescue prisoners clashed with a unit of the state militia that they took for a mob. Among those killed was David W. Patten, one of the original Twelve Apostles, shot through the abdomen as he charged.²³ Rumor turned the skirmish into a massacre. Some reports

reaching the governor claimed the Saints had killed fifty Missourians, others sixty.²⁴



“Exterminated or Driven”

On October 27, 1838, Governor Boggs issued an executive order. He wrote that the Saints had “made war upon the people of this State” and directed that they be “exterminated or driven from the State if necessary.”²⁵ In the language of the day, “extermination” could mean forced removal rather than killing. For the Saints, the difference hardly mattered.²⁶

Three days later, on the crisp, pleasant afternoon of October 30, children were playing along Shoal Creek at a small settlement called Hawn’s Mill. Women were washing clothes. Amanda Barnes Smith sat in her tent while her two daughters played nearby. Her husband, Warren, was at the blacksmith shop with their three young sons, Willard, Sardius and Alma. The family was only passing through on the way from Kirtland.²⁷

Then the riders came. A company of armed men, vigilantes rather than the state militia, attacked the settlement. Women and children ran for the woods. Men and boys took shelter in the blacksmith shop, and the attackers fired through the gaps between its logs. Seventeen Latter-day Saints were killed and twelve to fifteen more were wounded. Warren Smith was among the dead. Ten-year-old Sardius, found hiding under the bellows, was dragged outside and shot. Young Alma, six or seven years old, hiding beside him, was shot in the hip, a gaping wound.²⁸ There is no evidence the attackers knew of the governor’s order.²⁹

That night Amanda knelt with her surviving children around her wounded boy. She asked Alma whether he believed the Lord could make him a new hip, and he answered that he did if she thought so. Then she prayed: “Oh, my Heavenly Father, Thou seest my poor wounded boy and knowest my inexperience. Oh, Heavenly Father, direct me what to do.” She felt she was told what to do. She mixed the ashes of the cooking fire with water to make lye and washed the wound again and again until it was clean. She sent Willard for the roots of an elm tree and made a poultice from them. “Now

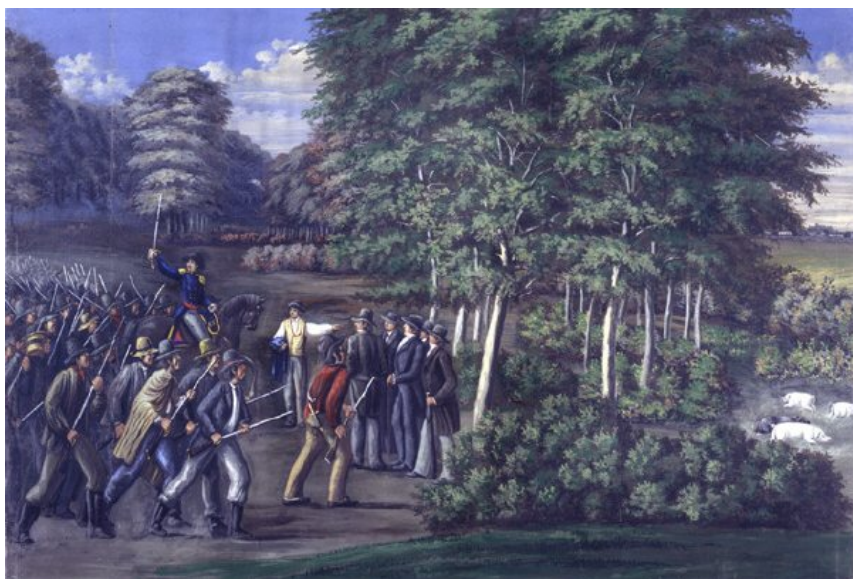
you lie like that, and don't move," she told her son, "and the Lord will make you another hip." When the children were asleep, she stepped outside and wept.³⁰

We will come back to Alma. His mother's faith had only begun to be tested.



"These Are the Prisoners"

On October 31, the Saints' militia commander at Far West, George Hinkle, told Joseph that General Lucas, the Missourians' commander, wanted to talk about ending the conflict. Joseph agreed to meet them under a flag of truce. As Joseph, Sidney, Parley Pratt and others rode out, General Samuel D. Lucas met them with soldiers and a cannon. Hinkle stepped forward and said, "These are the prisoners I agreed to deliver up." Lucas drew his sword. "Gentlemen," he said, "you are my prisoners."³¹ The next day Far West surrendered its arms. Soldiers went through the town looting houses. Some assaulted women. Hyrum, who was sick, was driven from his home at bayonet point and added to the prisoners.³²



Far West, Missouri, October 31, 1838: Joseph and other leaders taken prisoner under a flag of truce, as Christensen painted it. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), The Arrest of Mormon Leaders, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

That night Lucas held a hasty court-martial without the prisoners present and sentenced them to be shot for treason. He ordered General Alexander Doniphan to march Joseph and the others into the Far West square at nine the next morning and execute them in front of their people. Doniphan, a lawyer who had once given the Saints legal help, refused. “It is cold-blooded murder,” he sent word to Lucas. “I will not obey your order.” If Lucas carried out the executions, Doniphan warned, “I will hold you responsible before an earthly tribunal, so help me God!” By morning Doniphan and his troops had gone.³³ Latter-day Saints have long seen the Lord’s hand in that refusal. One man’s conscience stood between the prophet and a firing squad.

Instead of shooting the prisoners, Lucas took them to Jackson County. On the way out of Far West, Joseph was allowed to stop at his house under guard to gather some belongings. Emma and the children clung to him. The guards drew swords and pulled them apart. Five-year-old Joseph III held on to his father and sobbed, “Why can’t you stay with us?” A guard thrust his sword at the boy.³⁴

Lucy Mack Smith heard that if she wanted to see her sons alive she must come at once. Joseph Sr. was unable to go, so Lucy went with her daughter Lucy. A crowd of soldiers stood between them and the wagon. "I am the mother of the prophet," she called out. "Is there not a gentleman here, who will assist me to that wagon, that I may take a last look at my children, and speak to them once more." One man cleared a way. The wagon's cover was "of strong cloth, and nailed down so close" that Hyrum could barely get his hand out to her. At the back of the wagon, Joseph pushed his hand out between the cover and the wagon bed, and his mother and sister held it. He did not speak. Lucy begged, "Joseph do speak to your poor mother once more — I cannot bear to go till I hear you voice." He sobbed, "God bless you mother." Then the wagon pulled away, just as young Lucy was pressing his hand to her lips.³⁵

Lucy wrote that the house was filled "with mourning, lamentation, and woe." Then, she said, comfort came, and with it a prophecy: "Let your heart be comforted concerning your children; they shall not harmed by their enemies."³⁶ She told the family, and they were consoled.



Across the Ice

After hearings in Richmond, Joseph, Hyrum and four other men were locked in the jail at Liberty, in Clay County, on December 1, 1838, to wait for trial in the spring.³⁷ The Saints in Missouri had to leave the state, Mobs rode through Far West warning that anyone still there at the end of February would be killed.³⁸



Winter 1838–39: Latter-day Saint families leave Missouri for Illinois. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Leaving Missouri, about 1878. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

David Patten was dead and Thomas Marsh had left the church, so the leadership of the Twelve fell to Brigham Young, who was thirty-seven years old. Some Saints with the means to leave got out quickly and left the poor behind. On January 29, 1839, Brigham called on those in Far West to covenant to help one another out of the state. “We will never desert the poor,” he told them, “till they shall be out of the reach of the exterminating order.” A committee gathered donations and supplies, assessed every family’s needs and scouted roads east toward the Mississippi, 160 miles away.³⁹

In early February, Emma left Far West with her four children: Julia, nearly eight; Joseph III, six; Frederick, two; and the baby, Alexander. She carried Joseph’s papers with her. They crossed Missouri’s frozen ground for more than a week, and one of their horses died on the way. At the Mississippi they found the river frozen over. No ferry could run, but the ice was just thick enough to cross on foot. With Frederick and Alexander in her arms, Emma stepped onto the ice. Little Joseph held one side of her skirt and Julia the other, and the four children and their mother walked across until they reached the Illinois shore.⁴⁰

The people of Quincy, Illinois, were kinder than she had expected. They helped the Saints across the river and gave them food, clothing, shelter and work.⁴¹ Soon after she arrived, Emma wrote to her husband: "I still live and am yet willing to suffer more, if it is the will of kind heaven that I should, for your sake." She did not pretend it was easy. "No one but God knows the reflections of my mind and the feelings of my heart," she wrote, "when I left our house and home and almost all of everything that we possessed, excepting our little children, and took my journey out of the state of Missouri, leaving you shut up in that lonesome prison."⁴²

Back at Hawn's Mill, Amanda Smith still could not leave, because Alma could not travel. Once he asked her, "Do you think that the Lord can, Mother?" She answered, "Yes, my son. He has showed it all to me in a vision." When the mob set a deadline for the Saints to be gone, Alma's wound was still raw, and Amanda refused to go. Afraid to pray aloud, she hid in a pile of cornstalks to pray. When she finished, she heard a voice repeat a line from a hymn she knew:

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!

Not long afterward, she was at the stream fetching water when she heard her children screaming in the house. She ran to the door and found Alma running around the room. "I'm well, Ma, I'm well!" he cried. Flexible cartilage had grown where his hip had been. Amanda packed up her family, took back the horse a Missourian had stolen from her, and set out for Illinois.⁴³



"O God, Where Art Thou?"

The jail at Liberty was a two-story stone building only fourteen by fourteen and a half feet. Its walls were rough limestone outside and oak inside, with loose rock packed in between. The prisoners were kept on the lower floor, reached only through a trapdoor in the jailer's floor above. Two barred windows, each two feet wide and six inches high, let in a little air.⁴⁴ Joseph

described it in a letter: “We are kept under a strong guard, night and day, ... our food is scant, uniform, and coarse; we have not the privilege of cooking for ourselves, we have been compelled to sleep on the floor with straw, and not blankets sufficient to keep us warm; and when we have a fire, we are obliged to have almost a constant smoke.”⁴⁵ The food sometimes made the men vomit. Hecklers looked in through the windows to shout at them.⁴⁶



The jail at Liberty, Missouri, where Joseph and his companions were held through the winter of 1838–39, in Christensen's painting. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Liberty Jail, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Family visits brought some relief. Emma came three times, once bringing young Joseph.⁴⁷ In February, Hyrum's wife, Mary Fielding Smith, still weak from childbirth and a severe cold, came with her sister Mercy and her newborn son, Joseph F. Smith. It was the first time Hyrum had seen the baby. The jailer locked the women into the dungeon with the prisoners for the night. Few of them slept.⁴⁸



The jail at Liberty in 1888, half in ruins. Andrew Jenson sits on the roof; Edward Stevenson and Joseph S. Black stand beside it. Photograph, 1888; Church History Library. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

By March the visits had almost stopped, because nearly all the Saints were gone from Missouri. Joseph had watched the church thrive and now seemed to see it near collapse. Zion in Jackson County was lost, Kirtland was divided and its temple was in the hands of creditors, and the Saints were scattered as refugees along the Mississippi. In the Old Testament the Lord had rescued His people with a strong arm, so why had He not done it now?⁴⁹ Out of that darkness came a prayer that Latter-day Saints now read as scripture:

O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?

How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?⁵⁰

It is an old question. Long before, a psalmist had asked, “How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?”⁵¹ Jewish readers will know how often their people have asked it, from exile and from places far darker than a Missouri jail. Joseph asked it in his turn.

On the evening of March 19, letters arrived from Emma, from Joseph’s brother Don Carlos and from Bishop Edward Partridge. The next day Joseph began dictating a long letter to the church. Perhaps the scribe sat close under one of those narrow windows to catch the light.[†] In the letter, Joseph described how the letters from home had affected him:

those who have not been inclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little ideah how sweat sweet the voice of a friend is⁵²

That friendly voice, he wrote, softened him until all “enmity malice and hatred and past diferances misunderstandings and mis managements lie slain victoms at the feet of hope.” And then, “when the hart is sufficiently contrite then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers”:⁵³

My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.

Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands.

Thou art not yet as Job; thy friends do not contend against thee, neither charge thee with transgression, as they did Job.⁵⁴

In the same letter came a warning, and he aimed it at the Saints themselves as much as at their enemies. It was the nature of almost all men, the revelation said, “as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose,” to “begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.”⁵⁵ Joseph had just watched men in the church do exactly that, and so had Missouri. The answer was a different kind of power:

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—⁵⁶

He also warned against shallow, overheated religion: “A fanciful and flowely and heated immagination be aware of because the things of God Are of deep import and time and expeariance and careful and pondurous and solom thoughts can only find them out.”⁵⁷

The Lord’s words to him grew more personal still:

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?⁵⁸

Joseph had already been cast into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death had already been passed on him once at Far West. The revelation did not promise that it would not happen again. It promised that he was not alone, that the Savior had gone lower still, and that “thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.”⁵⁹



The Furnace of Affliction

After the Lord spoke peace to him, *Saints* says, Joseph no longer feared that God had forsaken him or the church. “Hell may pour forth its rage like the burning lava of Mount Vesuvius,” he wrote to the Saints, “yet shall Mormonism stand.”⁶⁰ When Heber Kimball came to Liberty to report that the state supreme court would not act on the case, the guards would not let him in, so he called down through the window. Joseph called back, “Be of good cheer, and get all the Saints away as fast as possible.”⁶¹

Before leaving the jail for another hearing, Joseph wrote to Emma: “I want to see little Frederick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander. Tell them Father loves them with a perfect love, and he is doing all he can to get away from the mob to come to them.”⁶² The prisoners won a change of venue. On April 6, 1839, nine years to the day after the church was organized, an armed guard took them from the jail at Liberty. On the road to Boone County the guards let them escape, and they made their way to Illinois.⁶³

Later Latter-day Saints came to speak of Liberty Jail as both a prison and a temple.⁶⁴ Malachi had written that the Lord “shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.” Isaiah heard the Lord say to Israel, “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”⁶⁵ Neither prophet suggests the furnace is pleasant or the suffering deserved. What they promise is that it is not meaningless, and that the One who sits by the fire is watching the silver.

By the spring of 1839, the Saints had lost Kirtland and all of Missouri. They were scattered along the eastern bank of the Mississippi with almost nothing. Their prophet came across the river to meet them. Upstream, on a bend of that same river, was a muddy, malarial stretch of land with a few houses called Commerce. Joseph would give it a Hebrew name.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 10-sources.md. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy). Joseph Smith's 20 March 1839 letter is quoted from the JSP transcription with its original spelling.

Notes

1. Church History Topics, “Liberty Jail” (trapdoor, barred windows 2 ft × 6 in, limestone outside); Joseph Smith and others to the Church, 20 Mar. 1839 (smoke, straw, cold), quoted later in this chapter. † The half-dark and the light through the window are imagined. Joseph was born Dec. 23, 1805, and so was thirty-three; Emma’s crossing (Feb. 1839) and the Kirtland hosannas (Mar. 1836) are documented in this chapter and in Ch. 9.
2. Church History Topics (CHT), “Kirtland Safety Society,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/kirtland-safety-society>.

3. CHT, "Kirtland Safety Society." See also JSP, Documents, vol. 5 (2017), 285–440.
4. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 23.
5. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 24.
6. *Saints*, vol. 1, chs. 23–25.
7. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 24.
8. CHT, "Kirtland Safety Society" ("Others, like Apostle Parley P. Pratt, expressed feelings of betrayal and disappointment in the short term but soon returned to fellowship").
9. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 24.
10. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 25 (Jennetta Richards's baptism, August 1837).
11. Revelation, 12 January 1838–C, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-12-january-1838-c/1> (spelling standardized as in *Saints*); *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 25.
12. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 25. The riders' appearance is imagined (†).
13. *Saints*, vol. 1, chs. 24–25; CHT, "Mormon-Missouri War of 1838."
14. Doctrine and Covenants 115:4–5 (Revelation, 26 April 1838); *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 26.
15. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 26; Minutes, 12 April 1838, in JSP, Documents, vol. 6, 83–94 (as cited in *Saints*).
16. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 27.
17. CHT, "Oliver Cowdery," <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/oliver-cowdery>. See **10-sources.md** on the date.
18. CHT, "Mormon-Missouri War of 1838"; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 27.
19. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 27.
20. CHT, "Danites"; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 27.
21. CHT, "Mormon-Missouri War of 1838"; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 28.
22. CHT, "Mormon-Missouri War of 1838" and "Danites"; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 29.
23. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 29; CHT, "Mormon-Missouri War of 1838." Casualty counts differ between CHT articles; see **10-sources.md**.
24. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 29.
25. CHT, "Extermination Order."
26. CHT, "Extermination Order."
27. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 30.
28. CHT, "Hawn's Mill Massacre"; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 30.
29. CHT, "Extermination Order" and "Hawn's Mill Massacre."
30. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 30, drawing on Amanda Barnes Smith's own accounts.
31. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 30.
32. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 31.
33. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 31; CHT, "Extermination Order."
34. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 31.
35. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 280–81, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/289>. Lucy's spelling and punctuation retained ("hear you voice").

36. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 281, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/290>. “They shall not harmed” is as written.
37. CHT, “Liberty Jail,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/liberty-jail>.
38. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32.
39. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32.
40. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32.
41. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32.
42. Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 7 March 1839, as quoted in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32.
43. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32.
44. CHT, “Liberty Jail.”
45. CHT, “Liberty Jail.”
46. *Saints*, vol. 1, chs. 32–33.
47. CHT, “Liberty Jail.”
48. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 32; CHT, “Liberty Jail.”
49. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 33.
50. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–2.
51. Psalm 13:1 (KJV).
52. Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, 7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839/7>.
53. Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, 7–8, JSP.
54. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–10.
55. Doctrine and Covenants 121:39.
56. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42.
57. Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, 12, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839/12>.
58. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7–8.
59. Doctrine and Covenants 122:9.
60. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 33, quoting Joseph’s March 1839 letters.
61. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 33.
62. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839, as quoted in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 33.
63. CHT, “Liberty Jail”; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 33.
64. CHT, “Liberty Jail.”
65. Malachi 3:3; Isaiah 48:10 (KJV).

A City Beautiful

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,
that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation;
that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!*

Isaiah 52:7

“Brother Woodruff, Follow Me”

By midsummer 1839 the mosquitoes had risen from the marshes along the Mississippi, and malaria had spread through the camps, with deadly fevers and shaking chills. Most of the Twelve, who were supposed to be leaving on a mission to Britain, were too sick to go.¹

On the morning of Monday, July 22, 1839, Wilford Woodruff heard Joseph’s voice outside his door in Montrose, across the river in Iowa Territory: “Brother Woodruff, follow me.” Joseph and a group of men had been going from house to house and tent to tent since morning, taking the sick by the hand and healing them. They had blessed the Saints in Commerce and then crossed by ferry to Montrose. Wilford followed them to the home of his friend Elijah Fordham. Elijah’s eyes were sunken and his skin was gray. His wife, Anna, was weeping as she got his burial clothes ready.²

Joseph took Elijah by the hand. “Brother Fordham, have you not faith to be healed?”

“I am afraid it is too late.”

“Do you not believe that Jesus is the Christ?”

“I do, Brother Joseph.”

“Elijah, I command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to arise and be made whole.”³

Elijah got up from his bed. He dressed, asked for something to eat and followed Joseph outside to help minister to others. That evening Phebe Woodruff visited and found him talking about working in his garden.⁴ Not everyone was healed. The sickness went on, and some Saints died.⁵

Picture the heat of that July morning on the river, the whine of insects over the tents, and a man of thirty-three going from bed to bed with his hand held out.^{†6}

How Joseph Smith came to that riverbank, and what he built there, is the story of this chapter.



“Build Up a City”

It had begun three months earlier. In late April 1839, days after reaching his people in Illinois, Joseph rode north about fifty miles from Quincy to look at land church leaders wanted to buy near a little river town called Commerce. For the first time in more than six months he was traveling without armed guards. He found a marshy floodplain rising gently to a wooded bluff over a wide bend of the Mississippi, with a few houses scattered about. It was not the best land he had ever seen. But the river ran all the way to the ocean, which made it a good place to gather converts from abroad, and the country was thinly settled.⁷

Gathering again was a risk. If the church grew, as Joseph hoped it would, its neighbors might turn against it as they had in Missouri. Some church leaders wondered whether the Saints should scatter into small communities instead, so they would never again alarm their neighbors as they had in Missouri. Joseph prayed: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” The answer was “Build up a city, and call my Saints to this place.”⁸ Thousands came. They pitched tents, lived in wagons, cleared farmland and began building houses on both sides of the river.⁹ Then summer came, and with it the sickness that opens this chapter.



A Beautiful Situation

Joseph did not like the name Commerce. Almost as soon as he arrived, he renamed the place Nauvoo. “The name of our city,” he explained in a First

Presidency proclamation, “is of Hebrew origin and signifies a beautiful situation or place, carrying with it also the idea of rest.”¹⁰



Nauvoo about 1846, with the temple on the bluff in the distance. One of the earliest photographs of the city. Lucien R. Foster, daguerreotype, about 1846. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Joseph had some right to choose a Hebrew word. In the winter of 1836, as the Kirtland Temple was being finished, he and many others had studied Hebrew for seven weeks, usually in a room on the temple’s third floor. Their teacher was Joshua Seixas, a respected Hebraist born into a Jewish family. His father was Gershom Mendez Seixas, and Joshua himself had become a Christian. “My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original,” Joseph wrote in his journal that February.¹¹ At the end of the course, Seixas certified that Joseph had been “indefatigable in acquiring the principles of the sacred language of the Old Testament Scriptures in their original tongue,” and he thanked him for “his marked kindness towards me.”¹² The Hebrew

word Joseph chose for his city appears in Isaiah's line about the beautiful feet of the messenger who brings good tidings.¹³

Nauvoo began to live up to its name. The Saints dug ditches to drain the swamps, laid out streets and planted gardens. By June 1840 about 250 new homes stood where there had been almost none.¹⁴ Before long it was one of the largest cities in Illinois, with nearly 10,000 people at its height.¹⁵

Rest also meant mending what Missouri had broken. W. W. Phelps, an early convert and the church's printer, had turned against Joseph in Missouri and testified against him in court. Now he wrote from Ohio: "I know my situation, you know it, and God knows it, and I want to be saved if my friends will help me." Joseph wrote back: "It is true that we have suffered much in consequence of your behavior. However, the cup has been drunk, the will of our Heavenly Father has been done, and we are yet alive." He closed with a couplet: "Come on, dear brother, since the war is past, for friends at first are friends again at last."¹⁶ Phelps came back and went to work for the church again. Few things in the record show Joseph's heart more clearly. The man who had testified against him was welcomed home with a rhyme.



"Act for Their Friends"

In the summer of 1840, sickness was still taking lives in Nauvoo. On August 15, Joseph spoke at the funeral of his friend Seymour Brunson. Thousands came. In the crowd Joseph noticed Jane Neyman, whose teenage son Cyrus had died before he could be baptized, and he knew she was afraid for his soul.¹⁷

Joseph opened the Bible to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?"¹⁸ Paul's words, he explained, showed that a living person could be baptized on behalf of someone who had died. God's plan, he said, was "calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God," including the countless people who had

died without ever hearing of Christ. The Saints “could now act for their friends who had departed this life.”¹⁹

Soon afterward, Jane Neyman waded into the Mississippi River and was baptized for Cyrus by an elder named Harvey Olmstead. Vienna Jacques rode her horse into the river to hear the words of the prayer and serve as a witness.²⁰ It was the first recorded baptism for the dead in the restored church. At the general conference that October, between sessions, Saints rushed to the river, where elders stood waist-deep in the water to baptize them for grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters and children.

For the Smith family the doctrine came just in time. Joseph Sr. had left Missouri in poor health, and Nauvoo’s summer made him weaker. In September he began vomiting blood, and Lucy sent for the children. Joseph sat with his father and told him about baptism for the dead, and the old man begged him to do it for Alvin.²¹

Then, one by one, Joseph Sr. blessed his children. To Hyrum he promised, “you shall be as firm as the pillars of Heaven unto the end of your days.” To Joseph he said, “hold out faithful and you shall be blessed, and your children after you— you shall even live to finish your work.” Joseph cried out, weeping, “Oh my father will I”, and his father answered, “Yes,” “you shall live to lay out the plan of all the work which, which God has given you to do.”²²

Then he turned to his wife. “Mother; do you not know that you are one of the most singular women in the world?”

“No,” she said, “I do not.”

“Well I do,” he went on. “You have brought up my children; and could always comfort them when I could not— we have often wished, that we might both die at the same time; but you must not desire to die when I do; for you must stay to comfort the children when I am gone.”²³

After a long pause he said, surprised, that he could see and hear as well as he ever could. After another pause he said, “I see Alvin.” Then he folded his hands, and in about eight minutes, Lucy wrote, “his breath stopped, without a struggle or a sigh.” He died in September 1840.²⁴ Seventeen years earlier, Alvin’s last words to his family had included a charge to Joseph to get the plates. Now his father had seen him again. Soon after the October conference, Hyrum was baptized for his brother Alvin.²⁵



A Temple on the Bluff

That July, Joseph had pointed to a spot high on the bluff above the city. “I obligate myself to build as great a temple as ever Solomon did, if the church will back me up,” he said. Then he added something that sounded almost like a farewell: “If it should be the will of God that I might live to behold that temple complete, I will say, ‘Oh, Lord, it is enough. Lord, let thy servant depart in peace.’”²⁶ Those words echo old Simeon in the temple at Jerusalem, holding the infant Jesus: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.”²⁷



The Nauvoo Temple on the bluff above the city, as Christensen painted it. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Nauvoo Temple*, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

A revelation in January 1841 commanded the Saints to build the temple and said that baptism for the dead “belongeth to my house.”²⁸ The temple was built mostly by consecrated labor and tithing. Men in each of Nauvoo’s ten wards gave one day in ten to quarrying and hauling stone. Women contributed through a penny fund. In the basement the Saints placed a

baptismal font resting on the backs of twelve carved wooden oxen, like the “molten sea” that stood on twelve oxen in Solomon’s temple.²⁹ By November 1841 the font was finished and dedicated under a temporary roof, while the walls were still rising around it.³⁰ On the outside, the builders carved stones with suns, moons and stars.³¹



Before Sunrise on the Mount of Olives

Orson Hyde had wanted to go to Jerusalem ever since his baptism in 1831. In 1840, after a dream that showed him the route, he proposed the mission. Joseph commissioned him to represent the church to “the priests, rulers and Elders of the Jews.”³² Five years earlier, when Hyde was ordained an apostle, Joseph had told the Twelve that they held the authority to unlock the doors of the nations for the gathering of Israel.³³ Now one of them would go.



Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, drawn on April 8, 1839, two and a half years before Orson Hyde prayed there. David Roberts (1796–1864), drawing; Louis Haghe, lithographer, The Holy Land, 1842; Library of Congress. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

He went alone across England and Europe, writing to leaders of Jewish communities on the way, then to Constantinople and by steamship to Jaffa. When he first saw Jerusalem from its western gate, he wept.³⁴ For several days he walked its streets. When he saw people doing the ordinary work Jesus described in His parables, he felt carried back to the time of the Savior. In the garden of Gethsemane he picked a twig from an olive tree.³⁵

On Sunday, October 24, 1841, Hyde later wrote, “a good while before day, I arose from sleep, and went out of the city as soon as the gates were opened, crossed the brook Cedron, and went upon the Mount of Olives.”³⁶ Picture the city behind him still dark, perhaps a last few stars over the Kidron Valley.† There, “in solemn silence, with pen, ink, and paper,” he wrote out a prayer. He dedicated the land “for the gathering together of Judah’s scattered remnants, according to the predictions of the holy prophets.”³⁷ He recalled the covenant God made with “Abraham, thy friend,” renewed with Isaac and confirmed with Jacob, and he prayed for the land itself:

Let the vine and the olive produce in their strength, and the fig tree bloom and flourish.³⁸

He asked God to “incline them to gather in upon this land according to thy word. Let them come like clouds and like doves to their windows,” borrowing Isaiah’s words.³⁹ Then he piled up a heap of stones on the Mount of Olives, “according to the ancient custom,” and another on Mount Zion.⁴⁰

It was an American Christian’s prayer, written in the language of 1841, and it included hopes that belonged to his own faith. What stands out is how plainly it treated the return of the Jewish people to their land as God’s own work and promise. The Church’s historians note that Hyde “understood that this dedication would set in motion the gathering of God’s ancient covenant people, the Jews, and would be a work that the Jewish people themselves would then carry out.”⁴¹ In the letter that carried the prayer home, he wrote, “The idea of the Jews being restored to Palestine is gaining ground in Europe almost every day.”⁴² Neither Hyde nor anyone who heard his prayer read in Nauvoo lived to see the State of Israel founded in 1948.

More than a century later, in 1979, as the Church was preparing a memorial garden for Orson Hyde on the Mount of Olives, Elder Howard W.

Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve added something Hyde had not said. “It is not because we favor one people over another,” he explained. “Jerusalem is sacred to the Jews, but it is also sacred to the Arabs.” And: “Both the Jews and the Arabs are children of our Father. They are both children of promise, and as a church we do not take sides. We have love for and an interest in each.”⁴³



“Something Extraordinary”

Early in 1842, a seamstress named Margaret Cook noticed that the men working on the temple needed shirts. She and her employer, Sarah Kimball, decided to start a ladies’ sewing society, and they asked Eliza R. Snow to write a constitution for it. When Eliza showed it to Joseph, he said it was the best he had seen. But the Lord, he said, had “something better” in mind for the women. He wanted to organize them “after the pattern, or order, of the priesthood.”⁴⁴



Joseph Smith's red brick store in Nauvoo, photographed in 1885 after it had fallen into disrepair. The Relief Society was organized in its upper room. Photograph, 1885, attributed to B. H. Roberts. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons

On March 17, 1842, twenty women met with Joseph, John Taylor and Willard Richards in the large room above Joseph's red brick store. They opened by singing "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," the hymn from the Kirtland Temple dedication.⁴⁵ At Joseph's suggestion the women elected a president. They chose Emma Smith, and she chose Sarah M. Cleveland and Elizabeth Ann Whitney as her counselors. Joseph then read the revelation given to Emma in 1830, which had called her "an elect lady."⁴⁶

Then they debated the name. John Taylor proposed calling it a "Benevolent" society. Emma objected that the word was attached to corrupt institutions of the day. When others worried that "Relief" suggested only great calamities, she answered, "we are going to do something extraordinary — when a boat is stuck on the rapids with a multitude of Mormons on board we shall consider that a loud call for relief— we expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls." Taylor conceded: "your arguments are so potent I cannot stand before them." Joseph agreed: "all I shall have to give to the poor, I shall give to this Society." Eliza Snow proposed the final wording: The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.⁴⁷ Joseph put in a five-dollar gold piece to start the society's fund.⁴⁸

On April 28 he told the women, "I now turn the key to you in the name of God, and this Society shall rejoice and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time." The society's purpose, he taught, was "not only to relieve the poor, but to save souls."⁴⁹ By March 1844 more than 1,300 women had joined.⁵⁰ Today's Relief Society grew from that meeting above the store.⁵¹



"Let Them Worship How, Where, or What They May"

That same March, the *Times and Seasons* published a letter Joseph had written for John Wentworth, the editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, who wanted a sketch of the Latter-day Saints for a friend writing a history of New Hampshire.⁵² In a few pages Joseph told the story this book has told: the boy in the grove, the angel, the plates, the persecutions. He also gave a confident forecast. "Persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame," he wrote, "but the truth of God will go forth boldly,

nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear.”⁵³

He closed with thirteen short statements of belief, which Latter-day Saints now know as the Articles of Faith. One of them reads: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”⁵⁴ Another, coming from a people just driven out of Missouri at gunpoint, is remarkably generous:

We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our conscience, and allow all men the same privilege let them worship how, where, or what they may.⁵⁵

For Jewish readers, and for anyone whose faith has been a minority’s faith, that sentence may be the most important one Joseph ever wrote. It does not ask anyone to worship the way the Saints did. It says *how, where, or what they may*.



“Undaunted, Firm and Unwavering”

Nauvoo was also where the hardest part of Joseph’s life began in earnest, and any honest account must touch it, even briefly.

The Church teaches today that monogamy, the marriage of one man and one woman, is the Lord’s standing law of marriage. It also teaches that in biblical times the Lord sometimes commanded plural marriage, as with Abraham, Jacob and others, and that through Joseph Smith He commanded some early Latter-day Saints to practice it. The revelation was not written down until 1843, but people close to Joseph said that he first learned the principle around 1831 while studying the Old Testament.⁵⁶ Joseph told associates that an angel appeared to him three times between 1834 and 1842 commanding him to go forward when he hesitated.⁵⁷ The first plural marriage in Nauvoo, to Louisa Beaman, took place in April 1841, and Joseph married many additional wives. It was done in secret, and later public

statements denied “spiritual wifery” and polygamy while staying silent about what Joseph considered a divinely commanded practice.⁵⁸

The Church’s own essay on the subject calls it “among the most challenging aspects of the Restoration—for Joseph personally and for other Church members.” Brigham Young said that when he first learned of it, “it was the first time in my life that I had desired the grave.” Heber C. Kimball said, “I wept days.”⁵⁹ For Emma, the essay says, it was “an excruciating ordeal.” She left no firsthand account. At times she accepted plural marriage and even chose wives for Joseph herself, and at other times she rejected it completely. She likely did not know about all of Joseph’s sealings, and some were made without her knowledge.⁶⁰ *Saints* says simply that the writings of those close to them “make clear that it was a source of anguish for both of them.”⁶¹

What can be said with certainty is that Joseph and Emma loved each other. In August 1842, while he was hiding from officers trying to take him back to Missouri, Emma came by boat at night to meet him on an island in the Mississippi. Afterward he poured out his feelings in his journal for his “beloved Emma.” He called her “undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affectionate Emma.”⁶² In May 1843 they were sealed to each other for eternity.⁶³ After his death, Emma wore a lock of his hair in a locket around her neck.⁶⁴

Many questions remain. The Church’s essay admits that “many aspects of their story remain known only to the two of them,” and that “Some ambiguity will always accompany our knowledge about this issue.” It quotes Paul: we “see through a glass, darkly.”⁶⁵ That is not an easy place to leave it. It is the honest one.



“Before It Was Too Late”

In Liberty Jail the Lord had told Joseph that his days were known. In Nauvoo, *Saints* records, he confided to friends that he did not think he would live to be forty.⁶⁶ He began to teach as if racing a clock: sermons about the dead, about the eternal nature of families, about the temple. In May 1842, in

the room above the store, he introduced a small group of trusted men to a new temple ordinance called the endowment, with washings and anointings like those of the ancient Hebrew tabernacle and the Kirtland Temple.⁶⁷ In September 1843 Emma became the first woman to receive it, and she then helped administer it to other women.⁶⁸



"The Great Mormon Temple at Nauvoo," a lithograph of about 1848. Lithograph, artist unknown, about 1848; Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Library. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

His father's blessing had promised that he would live to lay out the plan of all the work God had given him to do. By the fall of 1843 he was nearly finished. He was thirty-seven years old, and he had less than a year to live.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 11-sources.md. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair

copy). *Relief Society minutes are quoted from the JSP transcription with original spelling.*

Notes

1. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34.
2. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34, drawing on Wilford Woodruff's journal and recollections.
3. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34.
4. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34.
5. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34; CHT, "Healing."
6. † The heat, the insects and the image are imagined. The date, the malaria and Joseph's going from house to house and tent to tent are documented (*Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34). Joseph was born Dec. 23, 1805.
7. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34.
8. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34.
9. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 34.
10. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35, quoting "Proclamation, to the Saints Scattered Abroad," *Times and Seasons* 2 (15 Jan. 1841): 273–74.
11. Joseph Smith, Journal, 17 Feb. 1836, as quoted in Historical Introduction to Certificate from Joshua Seixas, 30 March 1836, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/certificate-from-joshua-seixas-30-march-1836/1>; JSP glossary, "Hebrew School"; JSP biography, "Joshua Seixas," <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/joshua-seixas>. See **11-sources.md**.
12. Certificate from Joshua Seixas, 30 March 1836, JSP (D5:214–16).
13. Isaiah 52:7 (KJV). The Hebrew *na'vu* ("are beautiful") in this verse is the usual explanation of the name. See **11-sources.md**.
14. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
15. CHT, "Nauvoo (Commerce), Illinois."
16. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
17. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35; CHT, "Baptism for the Dead."
18. 1 Corinthians 15:29 (KJV).
19. CHT, "Baptism for the Dead"; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
20. CHT, "Baptism for the Dead."
21. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
22. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 297–98, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/307>. Lucy's punctuation retained, including the doubled "which."
23. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 301, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/310>. "Chidren" as written.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 301; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35. The day is commonly given as Sept. 14, 1840; see **11-sources.md**.

25. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
26. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
27. Luke 2:29 (KJV).
28. Doctrine and Covenants 124:30–31 (Revelation, 19 January 1841); *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35, notes; CHT, “Baptism for the Dead.”
29. CHT, “Nauvoo Temple”; 1 Kings 7:23–25 (KJV).
30. CHT, “Baptism for the Dead.”
31. CHT, “Nauvoo Temple.”
32. CHT, “Dedication of the Holy Land,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/dedication-of-the-holy-land>.
33. CHT, “Dedication of the Holy Land.”
34. CHT, “Dedication of the Holy Land”; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 36.
35. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 36.
36. Orson Hyde to Parley P. Pratt, Alexandria, Egypt, 22 Nov. 1841, in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (1 April 1842): 738.
37. *Times and Seasons* 3:738–39.
38. *Times and Seasons* 3:739.
39. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 36, quoting the prayer; compare Isaiah 60:8 (KJV).
40. *Times and Seasons* 3:740.
41. CHT, “Dedication of the Holy Land.”
42. *Times and Seasons* 3:740.
43. Howard W. Hunter, “All Are Alike unto God,” BYU fireside, 4 Feb. 1979; *Ensign*, June 1979. Quoted in CHT, “Dedication of the Holy Land.”
44. CHT, “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.”
45. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 6, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/29>; CHT, “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.”
46. CHT, “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo”; Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 8–9; Doctrine and Covenants 25:3.
47. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 12–13, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/35>.
48. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 13.
49. CHT, “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo,” quoting the Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book (28 April 1842 and a later meeting).
50. CHT, “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.”
51. CHT, “Relief Society.”
52. “Church History,” 1 March 1842, 706, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/1>.
53. “Church History,” 1 March 1842, 709, JSP.
54. “Church History,” 1 March 1842, 709–10; Articles of Faith 1:9.
55. “Church History,” 1 March 1842, 710, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/5>; Articles of Faith 1:11.

56. Gospel Topics Essays, “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo>.
57. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo.”
58. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo.”
59. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo.”
60. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 40.
61. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 36.
62. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 39 (the island meeting). See **11 - sources .md** on the journal date.
63. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 40.
64. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo.”
65. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”; 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV).
66. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 35.
67. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 37; CHT, “Nauvoo Temple.”
68. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 42.

Carthage, and the Work Rolls On

For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Psalm 30:5

A Hymn Sung Twice

On the afternoon of June 27, 1844, four men waited in the jail at Carthage, Illinois. It was hot. They had taken off their coats and opened the windows. One of them sang a hymn about a poor stranger who turns out to be the Savior. When he finished, another asked him to sing it again.¹

The man who asked was Hyrum Smith. Beside him sat his younger brother Joseph, who as a feverish boy in Lebanon had lain in pain while Hyrum sat beside him day and night, holding the diseased leg between his hands.

Before the day was out, both brothers would be dead. How they came to that room is the last part of Joseph's story, and it began that spring, when he gave the keys away.



“Round Up Your Shoulders”

By the spring of 1844, Joseph seemed weighed down in his meetings with church leaders. He believed something important was about to happen. “It may be that my enemies will kill me,” he told the Twelve, “and in case they should, and the keys and power which rest on me not be imparted to you, they will be lost from the earth.”²

So he gave the keys away. He conferred on the Twelve Apostles every priesthood key they would need to carry on without him, including the sealing power that Elijah had restored in the Kirtland Temple eight years before. “Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading

this church henceforth rest until you shall appoint others to succeed you,” he said. He warned them that the road would be hard. “If you are called to lay down your lives, die like men. After they have killed you, they can harm you no more. Should you have to walk right into danger and the jaws of death, fear no evil. Jesus Christ has died for you.”³

Then, *Saints* records, he said something that his apostles would repeat for the rest of their lives: “I roll the burden and responsibility of leading this church off from my shoulders and onto yours. Now round up your shoulders and stand under it like men, for the Lord is going to let me rest a while.” The heaviness lifted from him. “I feel as light as a cork—I feel that I am free,” he said. “I thank my God for this deliverance.”⁴

His father had promised him on his deathbed that he would live to lay out the plan of all the work God had given him. Now, it seemed, he had. Latter-day Saints see the Lord’s hand in the timing. The keys were safe on other shoulders before anyone rode to Carthage.



“What Kind of a Being Is God?”

On April 7, 1844, the second day of the church’s general conference, a strong wind blew through the congregation. “It will be hardly possible for me to make you all hear unless there is profound attention,” Joseph called out over the weather. He had been asked to speak about his friend King Follett, who had recently died in an accident, and he wanted to comfort everyone who had lost someone.⁵ No complete record of the sermon exists, but several people took notes, so it is one of his best-recorded discourses.⁶

“What kind of a being is God?” he asked. “Does any man or woman know? Have any of you seen Him, heard Him, communed with Him?” He taught that “if men do not comprehend the character of God they do not comprehend themselves,” and that God’s children have the capacity to grow, “from grace to grace,” until they become like Him.⁷ The sermon challenged a long Christian tradition that treated God as wholly different from humanity, and many Christians then and since have found it startling. For Latter-day

Saints it opened a window on the purpose of everything Joseph had restored, from baptism to the temple.

He ended with comfort. “How consoling to the mourner,” he said, “to know that although the earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, they shall rise in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die anymore.” He spoke of family and friends who had died: “They are only absent for a moment. They are in the spirit, and when we depart we shall hail our mothers, fathers, friends, and all whom we love.” He promised mothers who had lost infants that they would have their children again.⁸

Saints gives a reflection on that day that is worth repeating. Joseph “was no longer the rough, unschooled farm boy who had sought wisdom in a grove of trees. Day by day, year by year, the Lord had polished him like a stone.”⁹



A Public Nuisance

The trouble that ended Joseph’s life began inside the church. William Law, a counselor in the First Presidency, had turned against plural marriage and against Joseph, and he had been removed from his office. Joseph heard that Law and several others were plotting to kill him and his family.¹⁰

On June 7, 1844, Law and the other dissenters published the first and only issue of a newspaper called the *Nauvoo Expositor*. It attacked plural marriage, Joseph’s teachings on the nature of God and his mixing of religious and civic power in Nauvoo, and it called on the county to “sweep the influence of tyrants and miscreants from the face of the land.”¹¹ Many of the Saints’ neighbors were already hostile. Joseph feared the paper would bring the mobs. “It is not safe that such things should exist,” he told the city council, “on account of the mob spirit which they tend to produce.”¹² Hyrum reminded the council of Missouri.

After two days of debate, the council declared the newspaper a public nuisance. On the evening of Monday, June 10, at Joseph’s order as mayor, the city marshal and about a hundred men removed the press, scattered the type and burned the remaining copies.¹³

The council believed it was acting legally. In 1844 the First Amendment restrained only the federal government, and Joseph cited legal authorities on public nuisances. Scholars have since concluded that the council could lawfully destroy copies of the paper but “may have exceeded its authority by destroying the press itself.”¹⁴ Whatever the law allowed, the decision was a serious mistake. The governor of Illinois, Thomas Ford, wrote to Joseph that it was “a very gross outrage upon the laws and the liberties of the people. It may have been full of libels, but this did not authorize you to destroy it.”¹⁵ In Warsaw, the editor Thomas Sharp called the county to arms. Within days, three hundred armed men had gathered in Carthage, the county seat.¹⁶

On June 18, in full uniform as commander of the Nauvoo Legion, Joseph spoke to the militia from a platform near his house. “I love you with all my heart,” he told them. “You have stood by me in the hour of trouble, and I am willing to sacrifice my life for your preservation.”¹⁷ It was his last public address.



Joseph Smith with the Nauvoo Legion, in Christensen's painting. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Joseph Mustering the Nauvoo Legion, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.



“Like a Lamb to the Slaughter”

Governor Ford insisted that Joseph and the city council come to Carthage to answer a charge of riot. Joseph did not believe he would survive there. On the night of June 22, he said goodbye to his family and crossed the Mississippi into Iowa in a leaky skiff with Hyrum, Willard Richards and Porter Rockwell, bailing water with their boots. He sent a letter back to Emma: “Do not despair. If God opens a door that is possible for me, I will see you again.”¹⁸

The next morning messengers from Nauvoo brought letters, Emma’s among them, begging him to come back. The governor, they said, would occupy the city with troops until the brothers gave themselves up. Some of the men called Joseph a coward for leaving. “If my life is of no value to my friends, it is of none to myself,” he answered. He asked Hyrum what they should do. “Let us go back and give ourselves up, and see the thing out,” Hyrum said. “If you go back, I shall go with you,” Joseph said, “but we shall be butchered.” Hyrum answered, “If we live or have to die, we will be reconciled to our fate.”¹⁹

That evening Joseph gathered his children and blessed them. Early the next morning, June 24, he kissed each of them goodbye. “You are coming back,” Emma said through her tears.²⁰ On the road he told the men riding with him, “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer’s morning; I have a conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men.”²¹ At the top of the hill he stopped by the unfinished temple and looked out over the city in the early sunlight. “This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens,” he said. “Little do they know the trials that await them.”²²

He came back once more that day, to make sure the Legion’s state-issued arms were surrendered peacefully. He asked Emma whether she would come with him, but she knew she had to stay with the children. She asked him for a blessing, and since there was no time, he asked her to write down the blessing she wanted so he could sign it when he returned. She wrote: “I desire with all my heart to honor and respect my husband.” She closed: “I desire that whatever may be my lot through life, I may be enabled to

acknowledge the hand of God in all things.”²³ He never signed it. He never came back.



Carthage

Joseph and Hyrum reached Carthage a little before midnight, to the sound of jeering. They were charged with riot and then with treason, and were held in the county jail to await trial.²⁴ Governor Ford had promised them protection. On June 27 he left for Nauvoo, taking most of the troops with him and leaving only a small group of the Carthage Greys, a local militia company, to guard the jail.²⁵



*The jail at Carthage, engraved for a French travel magazine in 1862. François Fortuné Antoine Ferogio, engraving in *Le Tour du monde*, 1862. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.*

That day Emma received a letter in Willard Richards’s handwriting, to which Joseph had added a postscript in his own hand: “I am very much resigned to my lot, knowing I am justified and have done the best that could be done.” He sent his love to the children. “God bless you all,” he wrote.²⁶

This was the afternoon that opens this chapter. To pass the time, John Taylor sang a hymn that had become popular with the Saints:

Then in a moment to my view, The stranger darted from disguise; The
tokens in his hands I knew, My Savior stood before mine eyes.²⁷

When he finished, Hyrum asked him to sing it again. Picture the late sun through those open windows, and two brothers who had shared everything since boyhood in Vermont, listening to the song twice.[†]

A little after five o'clock, the men heard shots and a rush of feet on the stairs. A mob of about a hundred men with faces blackened by mud and gunpowder had stormed the jail.²⁸ Willard Richards later wrote down what followed in an account he titled "Two Minutes in Jail": "Possibly the following events, occupied near three minutes, but I think about two." A ball came through the door and struck Hyrum in the face. "As he struck the floor he exclaimed emphatically; 'I'm a dead man.' Joseph looked towards him, and responded, 'O dear! Brother Hyrum!'"²⁹ Joseph fired a six-shooter through the doorway, and John Taylor beat down the gun barrels with a cane until he was shot several times. He rolled under a bed. The ball that would have killed him struck his pocket watch.³⁰

Then, Richards wrote, "Joseph attempted as the last resort to leap the same window from whence Mr. Taylor fell, when two balls pierced him from the door, and one entered his right breast from without, and he fell outward exclaiming, 'O Lord my God!'" Richards leaned out the window as the balls whistled around him, "determined to see the end of him I loved." Joseph lay on his left side beside a well and did not move.³¹



Carthage Jail, June 27, 1844, as Christensen painted it decades later, with a shaft of light at the window where Joseph fell. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Exterior of Carthage Jail, 19th century. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

Richards himself was barely scratched. He dragged the wounded Taylor into the inner cell and covered him with a bed. “If your wounds are not fatal,” he told him, “I want you to live to tell the story.”³² John Taylor did live. Within months, a testimony generally attributed to him was added to the Doctrine and Covenants:

To seal the testimony of this book and the Book of Mormon, we announce the martyrdom of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and Hyrum Smith the Patriarch. They were shot in Carthage jail, on the 27th of June, 1844, about five o’clock p.m., by an armed mob—painted black—of from 150 to 200 persons.³³

Joseph was thirty-eight years old. Hyrum was forty-four.³⁴



“Why Am I a Widow?”

Before sunrise on June 28, Emma opened her door to her nephew, who was covered in dust from the road. Soon Porter Rockwell was riding through the streets of Nauvoo shouting the news. Emma, who was pregnant, sat alone for a long time. Then she buried her face in her hands and cried, “Why am I a widow and my children orphans?” When the city marshal tried to comfort her by saying her affliction would be a crown of life to her, she answered, “My husband was my crown.”³⁵

That afternoon Willard Richards and Samuel Smith brought the bodies home in wagons, covered with brush against the summer sun. Nearly all of Nauvoo walked behind them past the temple and down to the Smiths’ house. About ten thousand people gathered. Many were angry, and some wanted revenge. Richards climbed the platform where Joseph had last spoken to the Legion. “Trust in the law for redress,” he pleaded. “Leave vengeance to the Lord.”³⁶ The Saints did not retaliate.

Lucy Mack Smith had already buried her husband, her firstborn, Alvin, and her youngest son, Don Carlos, who died in 1841.³⁷ She wrote about this day with the same plainness as all the others. “I had for a long time braced every nerve, roused every energy of my soul, and called upon God to strengthen me; but when I entered the room, and saw my murdered sons, extended both at once before my eyes; and heard the sobs and groans of my family— the cries of ‘Father! Husband! Brothers!’ from the lips of their wives, children, brother and sisters, it was too much— I sunk back crying to the Lord in the agony of my soul, My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken this family? A voice replied, I have taken them to myself that they might have rest.”³⁸

Eleven-year-old Joseph III knelt by his father’s body, laid his cheek against his father’s and kissed him. “Oh, my father! my father!!” he cried.³⁹ As Lucy looked at her sons’ faces, she wrote, she “seemed to almost hear them say: mother, weep not for us; we have overcome the world by love; we carried to them the gospel, that their souls might be saved— they slew us for our testimony, and thus placed us beyond their power— their ascendancy is for a moment— ours is an eternal triumph.” She remembered the promise she had received in Missouri, when her sons had been carried off in a covered

wagon, that within five years Joseph would have power over all his enemies. “The time had elapsed,” she wrote, “and the promise was fulfilled.”⁴⁰

There was one more grief. Samuel had been chased for more than two hours by the mob as he rode toward Carthage. “Mother,” he told her soon after the funeral, “I have had a dreadful distress in my side ever since I was chased by the mob, and I think I have received some injury which is going to make me sick.” He lingered until July 30, when, in Lucy’s words, “his spirit forsook its earthly tabernacle, and went to join his brothers, and the ancient martyrs in the Paradise of God.”⁴¹ Samuel had been one of the church’s first missionaries, carrying a knapsack of Books of Mormon from town to town. Of the Smith sons who had grown to manhood, only William was still living.



The Work Rolls On

The newspapers expected the church to fall apart. The *New York Herald* predicted that Joseph’s death would “seal the fate of Mormonism. They cannot get another Joe Smith.”⁴² They were half right. There would never be another Joseph Smith. But Joseph had already rolled the burden onto other shoulders. Brigham Young, who was away in the East when the news came, later said his head felt as if it would crack, until the thought came to him that the keys of the kingdom remained with the Apostles.⁴³ “The death of one or a dozen,” he taught, “could not destroy the priesthood, nor hinder the work of the Lord from spreading throughout all nations.”⁴⁴ He and four other apostles reached Nauvoo on August 6, 1844. Two days later, at a meeting in a grove below the temple, the Saints voted overwhelmingly to sustain the Twelve as the church’s leaders. Many who were there said it seemed as if Joseph’s mantle had fallen on Brigham.⁴⁵ Not everyone followed. Over the next few years Sidney Rigdon, James J. Strang and others started movements of their own, and each drew some members away. Most of the Saints, though, stayed with the Twelve and kept building the temple.



The Saints leave Nauvoo across the frozen Mississippi in February 1846, with the city and temple behind them. C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912), Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice, about 1878. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.

The Saints went back to work on the temple. They had little money, the mobs were again threatening them, and before long they knew they would have to leave Illinois. Brigham prayed about what to do and felt the answer was simple: stay and finish the temple.⁴⁶ By December 1845 the attic was ready. With curtains, plants, paintings and a marble clock, the apostles turned it into rooms for the endowment, the ordinance Joseph had first given to a few in the room above his store. That winter the Saints came in the thousands. By early February 1846 more than six thousand had received the endowment in the house Joseph had promised would be “as great a temple as ever Solomon did.”⁴⁷

On February 4, 1846, the first wagons rolled out of Nauvoo toward the West. That same day, five hundred more Saints received their endowment before they left.⁴⁸ Then they ferried their wagons across the Mississippi, the same river Emma had crossed on the ice seven years before. In May the temple was formally dedicated, though most of those who built it had already gone.⁴⁹ They took with them the keys Joseph had given the Twelve, the

ordinances he had restored, and the promise, sealed in a temple, that families need not end at a grave.



The finished Nauvoo Temple, in a daguerreotype dated from its details to about 1847, after most of the Saints had gone west. Louis R. Chaffin (attributed), daguerreotype, about 1847. Public domain; via Wikimedia Commons.



Come and See

The story of this book began with a famine, not of bread, “nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD,”⁵⁰ and with a boy who read a single verse in James and believed it. It ends twenty-four years after that spring morning in the grove, in a jail at Carthage. In that short span, as Joseph’s friends wrote in his memorial, he brought forth the Book of Mormon, sent the gospel “to the four quarters of the earth,” gathered “many thousands” of Latter-day Saints and “founded a great city.”⁵¹



The Sacred Grove near Palmyra, New York (photographed 2021). Photo: Ashleywood3, 2021. CC BY-SA 4.0; via Wikimedia Commons.

Latter-day Saints have never believed it ended there. The ninth article of faith, the one Joseph wrote for John Wentworth, makes a promise that is still open: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”⁵² The restoration was not a finished event in 1844. It was a beginning. The keys passed to the Twelve did not stop with them. Today the Church counts its temples, its members and its missionaries by numbers Joseph’s first followers could hardly have imagined, and it still speaks of the restoration as ongoing.

For Jewish readers who have come this far, one thread of the story deserves a last word. Malachi, the last of the prophets in the Christian Old Testament, promised that Elijah would come “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD,” to “turn the heart of the fathers to the

children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.”⁵³ Every Passover, Jewish families still pour a cup for Elijah and open the door. Joseph Smith testified that on a Passover weekend in 1836, Elijah came to a temple in Ohio. Latter-day Saints believe that. They do not believe it closes the door any Jewish family opens at the Seder. If anything, the turning of hearts that Malachi foretold is something both peoples are still waiting to see completed. The hearts of fathers and children are still turning, in temples, at Seder tables, and wherever a family remembers its dead with love.

When Nathanael doubted that anything good could come out of Nazareth, Philip did not argue with him. He said only, “Come and see.”⁵⁴ That has always been the invitation of the restoration: not a demand but an invitation to read the book, to ask God as a fourteen-year-old boy once did, and to judge the fruit. Joseph’s own story ended in Carthage. The work he began did not. The first chapter of this book began with a promise the Lord made to Abraham: “my hand shall be over thee.”⁵⁵ Latter-day Saints believe that hand was over a cold cell in Vilvoorde, a sickroom in Randolph, a grove in New York and a jail in Carthage, and that it has not been lifted since. In the words of the psalm, weeping may endure for a night, “but joy cometh in the morning.”⁵⁶

Come and see.



Key: † marks imagined connective detail. Full citations and verification status are in 12-sources.md. Lucy Mack Smith is quoted from her 1845 history (JSP fair copy). Willard Richards is quoted from “Two Minutes in Jail,” Times and Seasons, 1 Aug. 1844.

Notes

1. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44; told in full, with the stanza, later in this chapter, in the section “Carthage.” The brothers’ boyhood bond, including Hyrum holding Joseph’s diseased leg “for days and nights,” is in Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845 (see Ch. 4, note 14).
2. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 42.
3. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 42.

4. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 42; compare CHT, “Succession of Church Leadership” (“I roll the burthen and responsibility of leading this church off from my shoulders on to yours”), which notes these words come from later testimonies of several apostles.
5. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43; CHT, “King Follett Discourse.”
6. CHT, “King Follett Discourse.”
7. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43; CHT, “King Follett Discourse.”
8. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43.
9. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43.
10. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43.
11. CHT, “Nauvoo Expositor”; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43.
12. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 43.
13. CHT, “Nauvoo Expositor.”
14. CHT, “Nauvoo Expositor.”
15. Thomas Ford to Joseph Smith, June 1844, as quoted in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
16. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44; CHT, “Nauvoo Expositor.”
17. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
18. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
19. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
20. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 135:4; see also *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
22. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
23. Emma Smith, blessing, June 1844, as quoted in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
24. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44; CHT, “Deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.” See **12-sources.md**.
25. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
26. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
27. “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” stanza as quoted in *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
28. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44.
29. Willard Richards, “Two Minutes in Jail,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 14 (1 Aug. 1844): 597–98.
30. Richards, “Two Minutes in Jail,” 598; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 44. See **12-sources.md** on the watch.
31. Richards, “Two Minutes in Jail,” 598.
32. Richards, “Two Minutes in Jail,” 598; *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 45.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 135:1. On authorship, see **12-sources.md**.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 135:6.
35. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 45.
36. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 45.
37. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 303–4, 330.
38. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 312–13, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/321>. Quotation marks around the family’s cries have been completed; Lucy opens but does not close them.

39. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 313, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/322>.
40. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 313; see Ch. 10 and Lucy, 281.
41. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 313–14, JSP.
42. CHT, “Succession of Church Leadership.”
43. CHT, “Succession of Church Leadership.”
44. CHT, “Succession of Church Leadership.”
45. CHT, “Succession of Church Leadership.” See `12-sources.md`.
46. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 46.
47. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 46; CHT, “Nauvoo Temple.”
48. *Saints*, vol. 1, ch. 46.
49. CHT, “Nauvoo Temple” (dedicated May 1, 1846).
50. Amos 8:11 (KJV). See Ch. 1.
51. Doctrine and Covenants 135:3.
52. Articles of Faith 1:9; “Church History,” 1 March 1842, 709–10, JSP.
53. Malachi 4:5–6 (KJV).
54. John 1:46 (KJV).
55. Abraham 2:8 (Pearl of Great Price); see Chapter 1, note 6, and Robert D. Hales, “Preparations for the Restoration and the Second Coming: ‘My Hand Shall Be over Thee,’” October 2005 general conference.
56. Psalm 30:5 (KJV).