

## Joseph Smith's Negotiations to Publish the Book of Mormon

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In the summer of 1829, Joseph Smith's years-long odyssey to obtain and translate the gold plates into English as the Book of Mormon was finally nearing an end. Almost six years had passed since Joseph had experienced his first startling visitation from an angel calling himself Moroni. During that time he had experienced numerous setbacks and disappointments, both personal and spiritual.

He had failed to obtain the plates immediately after that first night of angelic visitations in 1823, later explaining that he had not been able to get them at first because he had "saught the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the Glory of God."<sup>1</sup> After four more years of repentance, preparation, and heavenly instruction, Joseph finally obtained the plates in 1827. Rebuffed by worldly scholars who averred that they could not translate the characters copied from the plates, Joseph had proceeded to use specially prepared seer stones to miraculously render the characters into English words that he dictated to various scribes including his wife Emma and Martin Harris. But triple tragedy struck the

Smith home in the spring and summer of 1828, starting with Joseph's loss of the gold plates and the seer stones, often referred to as spectacles, which he found with the plates.

After Joseph repeatedly requested permission to allow Martin Harris to take the translated pages constituting the Book of Lehi to show his family, the angel returned and confiscated the plates and the spectacles. Shortly thereafter, Emma delivered the couple's first child, but the male baby was either stillborn or died immediately after birth, dealing a shattering blow to their young family. Worse still, Emma nearly died as a result of the difficult delivery and Joseph spent weeks nursing her back to health. As Emma began to recover, Joseph set out for Palmyra to learn why Harris had not yet returned with the manuscript pages he had taken, only to learn that Harris had lost them; nearly all of the translation work that had been accomplished over the previous months was now gone. Devastated by the loss of the pages, in mourning for the loss of his son, and in dire economic straits, Joseph "cried unto the Lord that he would provide for me to accomplish the work whereunto he had commanded me."<sup>2</sup>

At this time of desperation and demoralization, Oliver Cowdery fortuitously appeared on the scene. Unbeknownst to Joseph and Emma, Cowdery had been boarding at Joseph Smith Sr.'s home in Manchester. Though Joseph Sr. had initially been hesitant to share many details on his son's visions and mission, he had finally opened up to Cowdery about the gold plates and the visitation of angels, likely the result of a revelation Joseph Jr. had given his father (D&C 4) which instructed Joseph Sr. to share the gospel. As he contemplated and prayed about the astonishing things Joseph Sr. had told him, Cowdery had his own remarkable vision in which the Lord appeared and showed "unto him the plates in a vision and also the truth of the work and what the Lord was about to do."<sup>3</sup> The two men, though hampered at times with insufficient means to buy paper or even food, quickly recommenced the translation work with a vigor.

Through a spring and summer that brought more than a dozen new revelations, more angelic visitations, and an increase in the number of people that followed the new teachings revealed by Joseph, the project of translation was finally nearing completion. But producing the hundreds of pages of translated manuscript was only part of the difficulty in bringing forth the Book of Mormon. Now Joseph and his friends were faced with perhaps

an even more daunting prospect: finding a willing publisher and paying the staggering sum it would cost to get the Book of Mormon printed.

The men first went to the largest print shop in town, owned by a friend of Martin Harris, Egbert B. Grandin. Grandin was the publisher of the *Wayne Sentinel*, a local newspaper, and had a business agreement with Luther Howard to bind books printed on his press. It is not certain when the initial negotiations began, but in the June 16, 1829, issue of Grandin's paper, the newspaperman published the title page of the forthcoming Book of Mormon, one of the requirements Joseph Smith needed to fulfill in order to secure a copyright for the book.<sup>4</sup> At this early point, though, Grandin seemed completely disdainful of the entire project. Alongside the published title page of the forthcoming Book of Mormon, Grandin added his own derisive commentary that it was "pretended that it will be published as soon as the translation is completed."<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising then that Grandin rejected the initial offer of Joseph Smith and Martin Harris to publish the book. Grandin had his reputation as an editor and community leader to think of, and he knew only too well concerning the translation of the gold plates that "most people entertain an idea that the whole matter is the result of a gross imposition, and a grosser superstition."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, at least according to some accounts, Grandin was apparently concerned about the welfare of Martin Harris and his family. While many printers were content to publish books and then share the proceeds of the expected sales with the author, this arrangement was predicated upon the printer's belief that the book would sell well enough to recoup the costs of production. Grandin was adamant that the Book of Mormon would not sell, and refused to consider such an arrangement. When Harris proposed to sell his farm in order to pay for the publication himself, Grandin "at once advised them against the supposed folly of the enterprise" and was indefatigable in his opposition to the entire plan. Grandin apparently even tried to rally community support against the proposed publication. He went to Harris's prominent friends and enlisted their aid to try to talk Harris into abandoning his support of Joseph Smith and to "desist and withdraw" his pledge to pay for the book. Harris doggedly "resisted with determination" the entreaties of Grandin and his other friends, remaining determined to pay for the publication of the Book of Mormon. But Grandin would not be budged either. Although Joseph Smith and Martin Harris reportedly met

with Grandin multiple times attempting to negotiate a deal, Grandin flatly refused “to give it further consideration.”<sup>7</sup>

Having failed to secure Grandin’s press for the publication, Joseph Smith and Martin Harris next turned to another printer in Palmyra, Jonathan A. Hadley. Hadley was the editor and proprietor of the *Palmyra Freeman*, an anti-Masonic newspaper that had since 1828 sent repeated salvos of blistering rhetorical attack crashing against the breastworks of freemasonry’s image in the public mind. Hadley was a fiery young man, only twenty years old, but already had risen in the print ranks from an apprentice to become the editor of his own publication. Like Thurlow Weed, the master printer he had apprenticed under in Rochester, Hadley published a paper that concentrated on political news with a biting editorial sarcasm that never wasted a moment to demonize the institution of freemasonry. For instance, when another paper reported the proposed idea to form an “Anti-eating-too-much-society,” Hadley sardonically scoffed, “It ought to be an Anti-use-too-little-exercise-society. . . . We suspect there are few cases known of laboring men eating too copiously.” In a parting shot to the masons he opined, “We should prefer an anti-murder-and-treason-not-excepted-society, to either of the above.”<sup>8</sup>

Hadley had repeatedly advertised his printing abilities in his paper, claiming he could perform “all kinds of Job Printing . . . as expeditiously and reasonable as at any office . . . west of the Capital.”<sup>9</sup> As the immense cost of publishing the Book of Mormon had been at the heart of Grandin’s refusal to print the book, Joseph may have hoped that he could find a more willing associate in Grandin’s competitor, and perhaps one willing to perform the work more inexpensively. While it is difficult to determine what their negotiations and interactions were like, Hadley later claimed that Martin Harris had often talked to him about the gold plates and tried to convince him to embrace Joseph Smith’s visions. At some point in the summer of 1829, at least Martin Harris, if not Joseph as well, approached Hadley about publishing the Book of Mormon. In an account written years later and at the height of national anti-Mormon agitation Hadley claimed, “I was so sceptical as to utterly refuse to have any ‘part or lot’ in the imposition, telling him at the same time, that if he proceeded with the publication, I should feel it my duty, as the conductor of a faithful public journal, to expose him and the whole Mormon gang.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite this later claim to have rejected the Book of Mormon out of disgust for its contents, Hadley apparently refused to publish the book for practical rather than moral reasons. Although "Harris owned a good farm in that town, and offered to mortgage it to secure the expense of printing," Hadley did not have the means to undertake a project so large as the publication of five thousand copies of a nearly six-hundred-page book.<sup>11</sup> The actions of Joseph Smith and Martin Harris after their interview with Hadley do not bespeak an outright rejection at Hadley's hand. Instead, the pair journeyed the nearly twenty-five miles to the city of Rochester, forgoing much closer towns such as Canandaigua which had several printing establishments at least the size of Grandin's. Why did they then travel to Rochester, at least a good day's journey away? The most logical explanation for such a journey is that while Hadley did not have the facilities to publish the Book of Mormon himself, he referred them to the master printer he had apprenticed under in Rochester, Thurlow Weed.

Thurlow Weed was already renowned throughout western New York, but not for his book printing prowess. Rather, the fiery writer was known for the militant position he had staked out in opposition to freemasonry. Having previously served in the New York State legislature, Weed used his newspaper, the *Anti-Masonic Enquirer*, and his political connections to foment a statewide revolt against the power and positions of freemasons in American society. He led the charge to form a new political organization of anti-Masons throughout the state.<sup>12</sup> His political acumen would later make him one of the leading organizers of the Whig and then Republican Parties.

It is difficult to determine just how Weed reacted to Joseph Smith's initial visit and explanation of both the Book of Mormon and his desire for Weed to publish it. The only accounts of their negotiations are late reminiscences of Thurlow Weed himself, and in each case Weed publishes his story about negotiating with Joseph Smith during a time of heightened anti-Mormon furor in the nation. As a savvy newspaperman and politician, he was careful to portray his involvement in the foundation of the Mormon faith as antagonistically and derisively as possible.

In addition, by the time Weed published his accounts, he was clearly influenced by other antagonists' claims against Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon; for instance, Weed appropriated the arguments made by Doctor Philastus Hurlbut and Eber D. Howe and told his readers that

before the Book of Mormon was ever produced, Smith “went a vagabonding off into Western Pennsylvania, where, nobody knows how, he got possession of the manuscript of a half-deranged Clergyman, with which he returned to Palmyra.” After espousing Howe’s claim that the Book of Mormon originated from a manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding, Weed further claimed that Joseph Smith attempted to deceive people by claiming to have found a stone that produced the words of the book. He told readers that Joseph had reportedly obtained a stone and it was from this stone or “inspired ‘slate,’ which he used to place in his hat, [that] he read to the ‘gaping few’ new and strange revelations; and finally, he produced the ‘Book of Mormon,’ as the creed and faith of a People of whom he was designed by Providence to be the Prophet and Ruler.” After dutifully slandering and distorting the origins of the faith, Weed proceeded to explain his role in the Book of Mormon negotiations: “The Prophet and his Convert [Smith and Harris] came to Rochester and offered us the honor of being their Printer . . . but as we were only in the newspaper line, we contented ourselves with reading a chapter of what seemed such wretched and incoherent stupidity, that we wondered how ‘Joe’ had contrived to make the first fool with it.”<sup>13</sup> To Weed in 1845, belief in Mormonism was a “mental [disease].”

Nearly a decade later, following an article that decried Mormonism and its attendant polygamous marriage practices, Weed again portrayed the negotiations in a negative light:

Twenty-eight years ago, “JOE SMITH,” the founder of this sect, and “HARRIS,” his first convert, applied to the senior editor of The Journal, then residing at Rochester, to print his “Book of Mormon,” then just transcribed from the “Golden Bible” which Jo. had found in the cleft of a rock to which he had been guided by a vision. We attempted to read the first chapter, but it seemed such unintelligible jargon that it was thrown aside. Jo. was a tavern-idler in the village of Palmyra. Harris, who offered to pay for the printing, was a substantial farmer. Disgusted with what we deemed a “weak invention” of an impostor, and not caring to strip Harris of his hard earnings, the proposition was declined. The manuscript was then taken to another Printing-office across the street, whence, in due time, the original “Mormon Bible” made its advent.<sup>14</sup>

Playing to the anti-Mormon mood of his readers, Weed argued that his decision to reject the manuscript was one of moral and civic duty, laced with an altruism that prevented him from accepting the job because Harris would have been financially ruined. Gone was his earliest explanation that his office was simply not set up to publish books at that time.

As Weed's political fortunes continued to rise throughout the 1850s along with his ally William Seward's, he once again published an article that addressed his early negotiations with Joseph Smith. This 1858 article, however, was written in a climate in which President James Buchanan had ordered the US army out to Utah Territory after declaring it to be in a state of rebellion and promising that the inhabitants should "expect no further lenity, but look to be rigorously dealt with."<sup>15</sup> Though Weed lamented how "mortifying" it was that "Mormonism seeks and finds Believers among those who have enjoyed the advantages of civilization, and by whom the Truths of Revelation have been rejected," his purpose in writing was to decry the anticipated violence that was to be directed at the so-called rebellious Mormons in Utah. Weed urged the government to "RESCUE rather than DESTROY" the deluded Mormons in Utah, as he hoped the army would "achieve a moral conquest over Mormons, far more humane and enduring than Victories won by bullets and baptized in blood."<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps in an effort to burnish his bona fides in a discussion about the way the government should deal with the present Mormon situation, Weed once again recounted the 1829 visit from Joseph Smith and Martin Harris. Weed explained how Smith came to his office "with the manuscript of his Mormon Bible, to be printed . . . but after reading a few chapters, it seemed such a jumble of unintelligible absurdities, that we refused the work, advising Harris not to mortgage his Farm and beggar his family."<sup>17</sup>

Although Weed often made his negotiations with Joseph Smith seem as if they were just a brief, single encounter, his final explanation of the episode in his autobiography described a multiday interview, and this account includes details missing from all of his previous renditions. In this account, Weed describes Joseph Smith coming to his office in Rochester alone. Joseph Smith told Weed that "he wanted a book printed, and added that he had been directed in a vision to a place in the woods near Palmyra, where he resided, and that he found a 'golden Bible,' from which he was directed to copy the book which he wanted published." Weed's reaction must have

been so skeptical that Joseph Smith attempted to prove the divine nature of the book to him in (if Weed's account is true) an unprecedented display of Joseph's power to translate. Weed recounted that Smith placed a stone in his hat "from which he read a chapter of the 'Book of Mormon.'" This display of the divine origin of the book failed to convince Weed, however, and Joseph left that day without an agreement with him. Nevertheless, Joseph returned the next day, this time with Martin Harris. That Joseph returned with Martin the next day suggests that despite Weed's self-serving protestations to the contrary, he had not rejected the work out of hand because of his own moral compass; rather, economics drove his decision. Harris insisted to Weed that if the latter would print the book he would "become security for the expense of printing." Weed was either not convinced that Harris could raise the funds or, as he claimed much later, the words of the Book of Mormon "seemed so senseless that I thought the man [Joseph Smith] either crazed or a very shallow imposter, and therefore declined to become a publisher."<sup>18</sup>

Met with this disappointment, and having already traveled the substantial distance to Rochester, Joseph and Martin turned elsewhere, this time to one of Weed's ardent critics and competitors, Elihu F. Marshall, the editor of the *Rochester Album*. An accomplished printer, Marshall had written and published a spelling book in 1819 that received accolades from the likes of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall. This very successful book was still being sold in Palmyra in 1829 and was likely one used by Oliver Cowdery in his own teaching.<sup>19</sup> By June of 1829, Marshall had expanded operations and was actively seeking books to publish and sell in his Rochester shop.<sup>20</sup>

It is not known whether Joseph Smith went to negotiate with Elihu Marshall by chance, as a result of Marshall's advertisements, because Weed suggested him, or because some of Marshall's public statements impressed him.<sup>21</sup> Only a few months before Joseph Smith and Martin Harris called upon Marshall in his shop to solicit his aid in publishing the Book of Mormon, Marshall had himself been involved in a very public religious dispute. Ostracized from the main body of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) for accepting the teachings of radical Quaker theologian Elias Hicks<sup>22</sup> Marshall had coauthored a pamphlet that delivered a stinging rebuke not only to the Quakers but to any religious group that did not allow for "private judgment." Instead, Marshall argued, God accepted individual



men based upon the life they lived, the Protestant obsession with creeds and confessionals notwithstanding. Adherence to "speculative religion or abstract theology," Marshall argued, was not a legitimate reason to reject someone that was trying to live the gospel of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

If Joseph Smith were aware of Marshall's religious sentiments, these public pronouncements in support of religious tolerance would have been a welcome reprieve from the incessant attacks he withstood on the subject of his own perceived heresy. Joseph later recorded that he and Oliver Cowdery had been visited in Fayette by many people who had attacked their beliefs and had asked them many "hard questions, trying to confound" them. Among those seeking to refute Smith's claims to revelation were "several learned priests who generally came for the purpose of disputation."<sup>24</sup> Joseph Smith's own willingness later in life to defend the religious beliefs of others was something that was often recognized by others. For instance, in 1843, English utopian John Finch visited Nauvoo and was astonished at the lack of religious pretention emanating from Joseph Smith. Not only had Joseph Smith invited him to address the people in Nauvoo on two separate occasions, the astonished Finch explained how general this practice seemed. He wrote, "Joe Smith was in the practice of inviting strangers, who visited Nauvoo, of every shade of politics or religion, to lecture to his people. A Unitarian minister, from Boston, was to lecture them the following Sunday. He said that he allowed liberty of conscience to all, and was not afraid of any party drawing his people away from him."<sup>25</sup>

Whether actuated by common sentiments of tolerance or not, Elihu Marshall was the first publisher to meet with Joseph Smith and give him a positive response. Unfortunately, no records of their negotiations exist, so the terms agreed upon cannot be known. What is known is that Joseph Smith and Martin Harris still preferred to publish the Book of Mormon in Palmyra if at all possible. Likely fearing another disaster such as the debacle that ensued when Harris had the manuscript portion known as the 116 pages taken from him, Joseph intended to do two things to protect the text. First, he instructed Oliver Cowdery to make a copy of the manuscript. The intention was to take these copied pages to the print shop rather than the original manuscript itself. Second, instead of taking the entirety of the manuscript to the printer at once, Joseph intended to have only a few pages brought at a time, thus mitigating the possibility that the text could

be lost or misappropriated and eliminating the possibility that the entire text could be stolen. While these safeguards were judicious given the previous loss of the Book of Lehi manuscript, they also required a much more hands-on approach to the publication process than was generally the case. Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Hyrum Smith would all need to be in close proximity to the printing work, a fact that made a Rochester rather than Palmyra print shop present a whole host of expensive, logistical challenges. Were the book to be published in Rochester, these men would need to secure room and board for months in an unfamiliar city. If there were any problems with the printing that required Joseph's intervention, Rochester was another day further away from his home in Harmony, Pennsylvania.

Returning to Palmyra with Marshall's agreement already assured, Joseph Smith and Martin Harris once again sought an audience with Egbert Grandin, the publisher of the *Wayne Sentinel*, who had so thoroughly rebuffed them in the first place. Explaining to Grandin that if he continued to refuse to perform the work "that the printing was to be done at any rate," Grandin finally relented and "entered into a contract for the desired printing and binding."<sup>26</sup>

Although Grandin had reportedly hesitated to accept the job out of deference for Harris, not wanting to deprive Harris of his fortune to pay for the book, by the time the two returned to Grandin's shop from Rochester, Grandin's altruism had entirely faded. Rather than grant liberal terms in order to soften the blow upon Harris's property, Grandin, likely sensing the profit to be made from the seemingly desperate men, imposed harsh terms for his services indeed. First, Grandin demanded that the payment for the printing be made entirely up front. No halfway measures or partial payments would suffice. Second, he placed the cost of publishing the five thousand copies of the Book of Mormon at three thousand dollars, an exorbitant sum that seemed to greatly eclipse the usual profit margin made by printers during that time period.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the cost, Smith and Harris struck the deal with Grandin and agreed to the demanded price. The weeks-long effort to find a willing publisher had finally come to an end. The men had met disappointment on numerous occasions, faced harsh ridicule and incredulity, but through perseverance finally obtained their original objective: persuading Egbert Grandin to publish the Book of Mormon in Palmyra. While it is uncertain

precisely when this agreement was reached, it apparently occurred sometime before August 11, 1829.<sup>28</sup>

While Joseph Smith must have been elated that their search for a publisher had ultimately ended in Palmyra, Jonathan Hadley, the publisher of the *Palmyra Freeman* that had sent the pair to Rochester, was thoroughly outraged. Not only was Smith not going to publish the book with his ally and mentor, Thurlow Weed, he was planning to have Hadley's political and economic in-town rival, Grandin, publish it. Hadley's anger resulted in his printing of a detailed diatribe against the anticipated publication of the Book of Mormon, providing the earliest known published account of the visitation of an angel to Joseph Smith, the finding of the plates and the seer stones, and the mechanics by which Joseph translated the plates.

Hadley's philippic inveighed against the entirety of Joseph Smith's claims to divine revelation. Calling the "Gold Bible" the "greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within the sphere of our knowledge," Hadley proceeded to relate the details surrounding the discovery and translation of the gold plates that he had received from Joseph Smith and Martin Harris during their publication negotiations earlier in the summer. Though Hadley was certainly an antagonist, like several other early opponents of Mormonism Hadley seemed to relay the claims of Joseph Smith with relative accuracy. He claimed that Smith's claims to angelic visitations, miraculous translations, and gold plates containing the writings of ancient prophets were so unbelievable that there was no need to attack Smith personally or provide alternate explanations for the creation of the Book of Mormon text. Hadley concluded that the claims of Joseph Smith would be viewed as fantastical and farcical by his readers that he did not have to take the effort to refute the story categorically.

He wrote of the "Gold Bible":

Its proselytes give the following account of it: In the fall of 1827, a person by the name of *Joseph Smith*, of Manchester, Ontario County, reported that he had been visited in a dream by the spirit of the Almighty, and informed that in a certain hill in that town, was deposited this Golden Bible, contains an ancient record of divine nature and origin. After having been thrice thus visited, as he states, he proceeded to the spot, and . . . the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of Spectacles!"

After mocking the fact that Joseph Smith had been told not to show the plates to anyone, Hadley proceeded to provide details that were simply unavailable to anyone that had not had a direct conversation with Joseph Smith. He told his readers that “It was said that the *leaves* of the Bible were *plates* of gold, about eight inches long, six wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved characters or hieroglyphics. By placing the Spectacles in a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least,) interpret these characters.”<sup>29</sup> This description of the dimensions of the plates was the same that would be repeated in Joseph Smith’s famous Wentworth letter well over a decade later.<sup>30</sup> That Joseph Smith performed the translation by placing the seer stones into a hat to block out the ambient light was later attested to by close associates and scribes such as David Whitmer, Joseph Knight, and even Emma Smith herself.

Hadley’s skeptical and critical accounting of the events did not stop with the discovery and translation of the plates. Rather, Hadley began to inform his readers in detail that while the story “was almost invariably treated as it should have been— with *contempt*”—Martin Harris, “an honest and industrious farmer of this town,” had come to wholeheartedly believe. In fact, “So blindly enthusiastic was Harris, that he took some of the characters interpreted by Smith, and went in search of some one, besides the interpreter, who was learned enough to *English* them; but all to whom he applied (among the number was Professor Mitchell, of New-York,) happened not to be possessed of sufficient knowledge to give satisfaction! Harris returned, and set Smith to work at interpreting the Bible.” Then, informing Palmyra residents that their name would soon be forever attached to the Book of Mormon, Hadley wrote with a mixture of emotion and incredulity, “The work is soon to be put to press in this village!”<sup>31</sup>

Hadley’s accurate but dismissive account of the plates and the translation no doubt served to further antagonize a Palmyra public that had already rejected Joseph Smith’s claims to miraculous experiences. Yet the rising tide of public sentiment against the Book of Mormon was not Joseph Smith’s immediate problem at the time Hadley published his scathing criticism. Instead, Joseph fought an unexpected headwind from a storm he neither anticipated nor knew how to react to.

Having struck the deal with Grandin, the sheer magnitude of the financial resources necessary to publish the book came into full view. Three

thousand dollars was not just a great sum of money, the cost to publish the book was fifteen times more expensive than the fourteen-acre farm Joseph owned in Harmony, and that included a small house. Digging wells or serving as a day laborer, Joseph could have hoped to earn little more than one dollar per day. Even if he had no living expenses or mortgage to pay or family considerations, it would have taken Joseph Smith nearly a decade to earn enough money to pay Grandin to publish the book. The fate of the publication did not rest with the nearly penniless and debt-ridden Joseph, or his equally indigent and impoverished family. All hopes for publication were pinned, where they always had been, squarely on the chest of Martin Harris.

Martin Harris had professed many times that he would be the means of paying for the Book of Mormon. As early as his 1828 visit to Charles Anthon, Harris had reportedly "intended selling his farm and handing over the amount received to those who wished to publish the plates."<sup>32</sup> Harris had offered to pay for the printing during their initial negotiations with Grandin; he had again asserted he would pay the entire cost of printing to the skeptical Thurlow Weed. He likely had made the same selfless offer to Jonathan Hadley. But now, having finally struck the deal with Grandin to print the book, Harris apparently balked at the required sum. As Weed and Grandin had told him, the cost of printing the book would financially ruin Harris. Charles Anthon reported that Harris had initially believed that copies of the Book of Mormon would sell well because the book "would produce an entire change in the world and save it from ruin."<sup>33</sup> But learned professors, friends and family members, and experts in the printing and bookselling trade had with unanimity maintained that such a book would not sell at all, and certainly not five thousand copies. Men like Weed and Grandin and Anthon called upon their worldly experience to deliver the matter-of-fact news to Harris that he was facing certain financial ruin if he indeed paid for the book.

The enormous cost of the endeavor combined with the unmitigated negativity with which the project was received by experts apparently gave Harris pause. Though they had struck the deal with Grandin to print the books likely in late July or early August, weeks went by without Grandin beginning the undertaking. Paying for the entire printing up front would require nearly all of Harris's substantial assets. As Grandin's son-in-law later recalled, "Harris became for a time in some degree staggered in his

confidence; but nothing could be done in the way of printing without his aid.”<sup>34</sup> And so the days and then weeks began to pass by without the printing work commencing as Grandin, who had despised the project from the outset, utterly refused to set the first line of type before he received his payment up front.<sup>35</sup>

This time a frustrated Joseph Smith was presented with a supernatural rather than temporal solution to his dilemma. Sometime during the impasse with Martin Harris over the payment of the printing during the summer of 1829, Joseph Smith received one of his most well-known revelations, directed at the suddenly recalcitrant Harris. The text of the revelation spoke to Harris in the voice of Jesus Christ: “Wherefore, I command you by my name, and by my Almighty power, that you repent: repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore: How sore you know not! How exquisite you know not! Yea, how hard to bear you know not!”<sup>36</sup>

After calling Harris to repent and vividly describing the abject suffering of Christ during his Atonement for the sins of the world, the revelation then declared, “I command you, that thou shalt not covet thine own property but impart it freely to the printing of the book of Mormon which contains . . . the word of God.” Not only did the revelation command Harris to impart his property to pay for the printing, the revelation then proceeded to explain to Harris precisely what such an imparting meant: “Impart a portion of thy property; yea, even a part of thy lands and all save the support of thy family. Pay the Printers debt. Release thyself from bondage.” The lines just preceding those instructions reminded Harris that “misery thou shalt receive, if thou wilt slight these councils; Yea, even destruction of thyself and property.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite his obvious reservations and the growing cacophony of voices that derided such a decision, Harris heeded the words of the revelation and took the courageous step of fronting the entire cost of the publication of the Book of Mormon. As the revelation had directed him, he mortgaged most of his property to Egbert Grandin for the promised three thousand dollars on August 25, 1829, placing himself in peril of almost total financial ruin.<sup>38</sup> His profits ensured, Grandin immediately set out for New York City to purchase the needed type and commence work on the project.

With Harris's mortgage, Joseph Smith's difficult odyssey to find a willing printer of the book had finally come to an end. Although Joseph apparently anticipated that the book would be finished by February 1, 1830, it was not until late March that copies were finally available for sale. And while the secular prognosticators were right in asserting that the general public would eschew the book and there would be no brisk sales, they were wrong in asserting that there would be no sales at all. Over the course of the next decade, the stockpile of five thousand copies of the original printing was eventually exhausted, and plans to reprint the Book of Mormon were already under way as early as 1833. And though cynics like Weed and Grandin were certain Harris would lose everything and Harris did indeed lose most of his Palmyra property as a result of his difficult decision to follow through on his commitment and pay for the publication, Harris was eventually repaid as the books were sold. He later told an interviewer, "I never lost one cent. Mr. Smith . . . paid me all that I advanced, and more too."<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately Joseph Smith and Martin Harris made great sacrifices to translate and publish the Book of Mormon because they believed what detractors scoffed at, that the work derived from "an ancient record of divine nature and origin" and that it would indeed, as Charles Anthon so blithely dismissed, "produce an entire change in the world and save it from ruin."<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

1. Joseph Smith, 1832 History, in Joseph Smith Letterbook, MS 155, box 2, folder 2, 5, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. The full text of this account can also be found in Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Joseph Smith Histories 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 14, and at [www.josephsmithpapers.org](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org).
2. Joseph Smith, 1832 History, 16.
3. Joseph Smith, 1832 History, 16.
4. For more information on the efforts to obtain a copyright to the Book of Mormon, see Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 76–80.

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5. *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, NY), June 26, 1829.
6. *Wayne Sentinel*, June 26, 1829.
7. "Mormonism and Joe Smith—The Book of Mormon or Golden Bible," *Wayne Democratic Press* (Lyons, NY), May 26, 1858.
8. "New Societies," *Palmyra Freeman* (Palmyra, NY), July 28, 1829.
9. "Job Printing," *Palmyra Freeman*, July 14, 1829.
10. Jonathan Hadley to the *Lowell Journal* (Lowell, MA), July 14, 1842, published under the heading "Origin of Mormonism," in the *Wayne County Whig* (Lyons, NY), 14 September 1842.
11. Jonathan Hadley to the *Lowell Journal*, July 14, 1842.
12. "Morgan," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), October 27, 1827; "Morgan, Morgan, Morgan," *Olive Branch* (New York), September 15, 1827; "Highly Important," *Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, PA), October 27, 1827; *Louisville Public Advertiser* (Louisville, KY), October 11, 1828, reprinted from the *New York American*; Thurlow Weed and Harriet Weed, *Life of Thurlow Weed, Including His Autobiography and A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883), 341–42.
13. "A Letter From Joe Smith's Widow," *Albany Evening Journal* (Albany, NY), December 10, 1845.
14. "Recent Progress of the Mormons," *Albany Evening Journal*, July 31, 1854.
15. House Executive Document 2, 35th Congress, 2nd Session 72.
16. "Prospect of Peace With Utah," *Albany Evening Journal*, May 19, 1858.
17. "Prospect of Peace With Utah."
18. Thurlow Weed and Harriet Weed, *Life of Thurlow Weed*, 358–59. In one final account published in *Scribner's Monthly*, Weed made many of the same claims from his autobiography, but reaffirmed as he had in his earliest account: that while he considered the Book of Mormon to be "incomprehensible jargon" the primary reason he gave Joseph Smith for his refusal to publish the book was Weed "was only publishing a newspaper, and that he would have to go to a book publisher." Ellen E. Dickinson, Affidavit of Thurlow Weed in "The Book of Mormon," *Scribner's Monthly* (New York), August 1880, 614.
19. "Marshall's and Webster's Spelling Books," *Palmyra Freeman*, August 18, 1829.
20. *Directory for the Village of Rochester: Containing the Names, Residence and Occupations of All Male Inhabitants over Fifteen Years of Age, in Said Village, on the First of January, 1827. To Which Is Added, A Sketch of the History of the Village, from 1812 to 1827* (Rochester, NY: Elisha Ely, 1827), 96; "Book and Job Printing," *Craftsman* (Rochester, NY), March 3, 1829.
21. In the affidavit published in 1880 by Ellen Dickinson, Weed alleged that after he told Joseph Smith that he was not a book publisher he had suggested "a friend who was in that business." It is doubtful that Weed would have suggested Marshall, however, as the anti-Masonic Weed regularly clashed with pro-Masonic editors such as Marshall. Ellen E. Dickinson, Affidavit of Thurlow Weed.
22. Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 40.



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23. Elihu Marshall, *The Inquisition and Orthodoxy: Contrasted with Christianity and Religious Liberty* (Lockport, NY: L. A. Spalding and Others, 1829), 3–4.
24. Joseph Smith History, vol. A-1, 20, Church History Library.
25. “Notes of Travel in the United States,” *New Moral World and the Gazette of the Rational Society* (London), October 5, 1844.
26. Pomeroy Tucker, “Mormonism and Joe Smith,” *Wayne Democratic Press*, May 26, 1858.
27. For an analysis of the costs likely incurred to print the Book of Mormon and profit margin Grandin likely enjoyed, see Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 175.
28. Jonathan Hadley's paper, the *Palmyra Freeman*, reported on August 11, 1829, that the book was soon to be put to press in Palmyra, rather than Rochester.
29. “Golden Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829.
30. The 1842 letter to John Wentworth gives this description of the plates: “These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold, each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin.” Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842.
31. “Golden Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829.
32. Charles Anthon to Eber D. Howe, February 17, 1834, published in Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, 271.
33. Charles Anthon to Eber D. Howe, 271.
34. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 51.
35. John Gilbert, the typesetter employed by Grandin to print the Book of Mormon, later explained that “before the work was commenced” Martin Harris “had given security for the full amount agreed upon for printing.” Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1967), 10:294.
36. *A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion, MO: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833), 40.
37. *Book of Commandments*.
38. Martin Harris to Egbert B. Grandin, Indenture, August 25, 1829, Wayne Co., NY, Mortgage Records, 3:325–26, Family History Library.
39. David B. Dille, “Additional Testimony of Martin Harris,” *Millennial Star*, August 20, 1859, 545.
40. Charles Anthon to Eber D. Howe, 271.