

JOSEPH SMITH'S STATEMENTS ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

1830—*Preface to the First Edition*

TO THE READER—

As many false reports have been circulated respecting the following work, and also many unlawful measures taken by evil designing persons to destroy me, and also the work, I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again—and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and if I should bring forth the same words again, or, in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work: but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have translated, which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered My words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy My work; yea, I will shew unto them that My wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil.¹ Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through His grace and mercy, accomplished that which He hath commanded me respecting this thing. I would also inform you that the plates of which hath been spoken, were found in the township of Manchester, Ontario county, New-York.

THE AUTHOR²

1831—*Church Conference*

Br. Hyrum Smith said that he thought best that the information of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon be related by Joseph himself to the Elders present that all might know for themselves. Br. Joseph Smith jr. said that it was not intended to tell the world all the

[Note that in several of the excerpts in this section and the next, the spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been slightly modernized.] ¹ See D&C 10:38–43. ² *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, 1830), iii–iv. As with the title page, Joseph Smith here identifies himself as the “author” in order to comply with US copyright law, but he never deviated from his assertion that he was the translator rather than the originator of the Book of Mormon, as may be seen in the language above where he speaks of translating “by the gift and power of God” and finding the gold plates near his home in New York.

particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things, etc.³

1833—*Letter to Noah C. Saxton,*
editor of the American Revivalist and Rochester Observer

The Book of Mormon is a record of the forefathers of our western tribes of Indians, having been found through the ministration of an holy angel, translated into our own language by the gift and power of God, after having been hid up in the earth for the last fourteen hundred years, containing the word of God, which was delivered unto them. By it we learn that our western tribes of Indians are descendants from that Joseph that was sold in Egypt, and that the land of America is a promised land unto them, and unto it all the tribes of Israel will come, with as many of the Gentiles as shall comply with the requisitions of the new covenant. But the tribe of Judah will return to old Jerusalem. The city of Zion, spoken of by David in the 102nd Psalm, will be built upon the land of America, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to it with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and then they will be delivered from the overflowing scourge that shall pass through the land. But Judah shall obtain deliverance at Jerusalem (see Joel 2.32; Isa 26.20–21; Jer 31.12; Psalm 50.5; Ezek 34.11–13). These are testimonies that the Good Shepherd will put forth His own sheep and lead them out from all nations where they have been scattered in a cloudy and dark day, to Zion and to Jerusalem, besides many more testimonies which might be brought.⁴

1834—*Church Conference*

He [Joseph Smith] then gave a relation of obtaining and translating the Book of Mormon, the revelation of the priesthood of Aaron, the organization of the Church in the year 1830, the revelation of the high priesthood, and the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church, etc. Take away the Book of Mormon, and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none; for without a Zion and a place of deliverance, we must fall, because the time is near when the sun will be darkened, the moon turn to blood, the stars fall from heaven and the earth reel to and fro. Then if this is the case, if we are not sanctified and gathered to the places where God has appointed, [despite] our former professions⁵ and our great love for the Bible, we must fall, we cannot stand, we cannot be saved; for God will gather out his saints from the Gentiles and then comes desolation or destruction and none can escape except the pure in heart who are gathered, etc.⁶

³ Minutes from a Church conference in Orange, Ohio, October 25, 1831, in Minute Book 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter CHL), p. 13. ⁴ Joseph Smith (Kirtland, OH) to Noah C. Saxton (Rochester, NY), January 4, 1833, "Letter Book A," 1832–1835, Joseph Smith Collection, CHL, p. 17.

⁵ That is, declarations of belief ⁶ Minutes from a Church conference in Norton, Ohio, April 21, 1834, in Minute Book 1, CHL, p. 44.

1835—*Letter to the Elders of the Church*

And again, another parable put [the Savior] forth unto them, having an allusion to the kingdom which should be set up, just previous or at the time of the harvest, which reads as follows: “The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” [Mt 13.31–32]. Now we can discover plainly, that this figure is given to represent the Church as it shall come forth in the last days. Behold, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto it. Now, what is like unto it?

Let us take the Book of Mormon, which a man took and hid in his field; securing it by his faith, to spring up in the last days, or in due time: let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth; yea, even towering, with lofty branches, and God-like majesty, until it [like the mustard seed] becomes the greatest of all herbs: and it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth; and righteousness begins to look down from heaven [Ps 85.11]; and God is sending down His powers, gifts and angels, to lodge in the branches thereof.⁷

1838—*Editorial in the Elders' Journal*

Question 4th. How, and where did you obtain the Book of Mormon?

Answer. Moroni, the person who deposited the plates from whence the Book of Mormon was translated, in a hill in Manchester, Ontario County New York, being dead, and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were, and gave me directions how to obtain them. I obtained them, and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which I translated the plates; and thus came the Book of Mormon.⁸

1838—*History*

See the excerpt at the beginning of this volume, which eventually became canonized as “Joseph Smith—History” in the Pearl of Great Price; more details can be found in the original document.⁹

1841—*Meeting of the Twelve*

I spent the day in Council with the Twelve Apostles at the house of President [Brigham] Young conversing with them upon a variety of subjects. Bro Joseph Fielding was present, having been absent four years on a mission to England. I told the brethren that the Book

⁷ *Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, OH), December 1835, 227.

⁸ *Elders' Journal* (Far West, MO), July 1838,

42–43. ⁹ Joseph Smith, *History*, 1838–1856, volume A-1 (23 December 1805–30 August 1834), 5–8, josephsmithpapers.org.

of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.¹⁰

1842—Letter to John Wentworth, editor of the Chicago Democrat newspaper

On the evening of the 21st of September, A. D. 1823, while I was praying unto God and endeavoring to exercise faith in the precious promises of scripture, on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness, burst into the room; indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire; the appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body; in a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory yet greater than that with which I was already surrounded. This messenger proclaimed himself to be an angel of God sent to bring the joyful tidings, that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the gospel in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign.

I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of His purposes in this glorious dispensation.

I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people was made known unto me: I was also told where there was deposited some plates on which were engraven an abridgment of the records of the ancient prophets that had existed on this continent. The angel appeared to me three times the same night and unfolded the same things. After having received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty, and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of the 22nd of September A. D. 1827, the angel of the Lord delivered the records into my hands.

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. They were filled with engravings in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction and much skill in the art of engraving. With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called "Urim and Thummim," which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift, and power of God.

¹⁰ Joseph Smith, *History*, 1838–1856, volume C-1 (2 November 1838–31 July 1842), 1255, Sunday, November 28, 1841, josephsmithpapers.org. The information appears to have been copied from Wilford Woodruff's journal for the same date.

In this important and interesting book the history of ancient America is unfolded, from its first settlement by a colony that came from the tower of Babel, at the confusion of languages to the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era. We are informed by these records that America in ancient times has been inhabited by two distinct races of people. The first were called Jaredites and came directly from the tower of Babel. The second race came directly from the city of Jerusalem, about six hundred years before Christ. They were principally Israelites, of the descendants of Joseph. The Jaredites were destroyed about the time that the Israelites came from Jerusalem, who succeeded them in the inheritance of the country. The principal nation of the second race fell in battle towards the close of the fourth century. The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit this country. This book also tells us that our Savior made His appearance upon this continent after His resurrection, that He planted the gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing; that they had apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists; the same order, the same priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessing, as was enjoyed on the eastern continent, that the people were cut off in consequence of their transgressions, that the last of their prophets who existed among them was commanded to write an abridgment of their prophecies, history, etc., and to hide it up in the earth, and that it should come forth and be united with the Bible for the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the last days. For a more particular account I would refer to the Book of Mormon, which can be purchased at Nauvoo [Illinois], or from any of our travelling elders.¹¹

1843—*Letter to James Arlington Bennet*

The boldness of my plans and measures can readily be tested by the touch-stone of all schemes, systems, projects, and adventures—*truth*, for truth is a matter of fact—and the fact is, that by the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics; the knowledge of which was lost to the world. In which wonderful event, I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation which (if they would receive it, the everlasting gospel) would open the eyes of more than eight hundred millions of people, and make plain the “old paths,” wherein if a man walk in all the ordinances of God blameless, he shall inherit eternal life.¹²

¹¹ The letter was reprinted in Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, IL), March 1, 1842, 707–8. ¹² Joseph Smith (Nauvoo, IL) to James Arlington Bennet (Flatbush, NY), November 13, 1843, josephsmithpapers.org.