

“O send out thy light and thy truth.” (Psalms 43:3)

“And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten.” (Moses 7:62)

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the latter days is a fulfillment of the ancient promises that the Lord would send forth his truth across the earth. Its story is one of the most marvelous to be told involving both miracles and obstacles. The Book of Mormon now stands as a token of the new covenant that the Lord has established upon the earth in these latter days.

The years following the first vision (1820-1823), the teenage Joseph Smith returned to the normal routine of life, but not without trouble. We learn from the Prophet’s own record that along with unrelenting persecution he often fell into foibles of human nature.

“I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision...and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends...I was left to all kinds of temptation...I frequently fell into many foolish errors.” (JS—H 1:25, 28). It was under these circumstances that the young Joseph sought the Lord in earnest prayer that he might know of his standing before the Lord. Joseph explained, “I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.” (JS—H 1:29). In response to his great faith the angel Moroni appeared unto the boy prophet and instructed him concerning the marvelous truths that would soon be revealed to the world through the Book of Mormon that lay buried not far from Joseph’s home. Moroni explained to Joseph that he would be responsible to obtain these records, guard them safely and to translate them by means of the Urim and Thummim. Warnings, prophecies and the explanation of ancient scriptures accompanied this divine instruction. Joseph’s interaction with the angel Moroni lasted throughout the night and included another visit the next day.

This angelic visitation took place on the 21st – 22nd of September 1823. Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that at the same time Moroni was instructing the Prophet the Jews were celebrating the autumn pilgrimage Festival of Ingathering. This festival celebrated the beginning of the harvest season. In Hebrew this festival is called *hag ha’asiph* (the holy day of gathering). It is noteworthy that the word *asiph* and the name Joseph come from similar Hebrew words. Joseph means “he who adds / he who increases” in Hebrew. So just as the ancient Joseph increased the gathering of grain from the harvest and added to the Pharaoh’s storehouse so also the Prophet Joseph stood at the beginning of a new season of ingathering and through his instrumentality in bringing forth truth and light he increased the gathering of God’s children.

We learn from Joseph’s own history that four years elapsed between the time that Moroni first commissioned him with the task of bringing forth the Book of Mormon and the time when Joseph was able to retrieve it. During those years Joseph continued to have annual visits with the angel Moroni at the spot where the plates lay buried. Finally, on September 22, 1827 Joseph Smith retrieved the ancient record that had lain buried for over 1400 years.

Because of the threat of persecution Joseph, together with his wife Emma, left Palmyra for Harmony, Pennsylvania and there began the translation process. The Urim and Thummim, which in Hebrew translates as “lights and perfections,” aided him in his work. But this was not the only form of help the Lord gave to Joseph so that he could complete this mighty task. Soon thereafter a friend named Martin Harris came to Harmony and acted as scribe for Joseph. By June of 1828, 116 manuscript pages were completed.

At this time Martin Harris repeatedly asked Joseph to allow him to show the manuscript to his wife and family, apparently to appease their disbelief. The Lord instructed Joseph to decline the request but after further persistence by both Martin and Joseph the Lord relented. However, the Lord established strict stipulations about how the manuscript was to be handled. Joseph and Martin entered into a covenant with the Lord to abide by those stipulations. ((The urge to please our fellow man is a long-standing human weakness. Joseph’s situation has some resemblance to that of the early Israelites. During the final days of Israelite Judges, the people importuned the Lord repeatedly through the prophet Samuel to give them a king that they might be like all the other nations of the earth

(1 Samuel 8). God sought to dissuade the people. He described all of the troubles and problems that kings would bring to the people. God even foretold the suffering and punishment that would follow if the people eventually rejected the true king (God) because of the bad examples of human kings. The core narrative of the Old Testament (1-2 Samuel & 1-2 Kings) was written to describe the consequences the people of Israel suffered because they repeatedly rejected the true king (God) even though he had told them repeatedly to trust him and have him as their king.)

Nearly one month later Joseph learned to his horror that Martin Harris had lost the manuscript. Joseph feared for his soul because the oath that he had made with the Lord was now broken. This transgression led the Lord to rebuke both Joseph and Martin, recorded in D&C 3. In this section the Lord chastised Joseph for fearing man more than God (vs. 7) and treating lightly the most sacred of covenants (vs. 5, 6, 13-14). However, God used the experience as an opportunity to teach mercy and the fulfillment of ancient prophecy:

The words, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught...thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord...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. (D&C 3:1, 9-10)

As a consequence of his mistake the Lord took away the Urim and Thummim and the plates. Joseph's gift to translate was gone.

Later that summer after much suffering and penitence Joseph received the revelation contained in D&C 10. In this revelation God restored the gift of translation to Joseph and encouraged him to:

Not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate; but be diligent unto the end. Pray always, that you may come off conqueror; yea, that you may conquer Satan, and that you may escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work. (D&C 10:4-5)

Additionally, the Lord counseled the young Prophet to not retranslate the lost manuscript because wicked people would alter the first translation and then claim that he had no ability to translate if he attempted to publish a second version of the 116 pages. This plan was a manifestation of Satan's desire to overthrow the work of God. We learn from the Book of Mormon that God had foreseen this evil scheme many centuries prior. Nephi explains that the Lord had inspired him to create a second set of records:

I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people. Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people; wherefore these plates are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people. Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not. But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. (1 Nephi 9:3-5)

Furthermore, the Lord inspired Mormon to include these plates of Nephi in the larger abridgement that Mormon had created:

I shall take these plates, which contain these prophesyings and revelations, and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren. And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will. (Words of Mormon 1:6-7)

The next spring (April 1829) a schoolteacher by the name of Oliver Cowdery arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Oliver had boarded with Joseph’s parents in Palmyra, New York, and had learned from them of the marvelous events that were taking place. Desirous to meet Joseph in person and to assist in the work, Oliver sought out Joseph. Soon after his arrival to Harmony Oliver and Joseph recommenced the divinely commissioned translation of the Book of Mormon. Oliver acted as scribe while Joseph translated using the Urim and Thummim.

It was the Lord’s desire that Joseph not stand alone as a witness to the truth of the Book of Mormon for “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1). Doubtless the prophecies of Nephi echoed in the souls of those who assisted Joseph in this divine work:

Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken, the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered; and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein. (2 Nephi 27:12)

Accordingly, three individuals “Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris were moved upon by an inspired desire to be the three special witnesses” (D&C 17 Section Heading) and the Lord confirmed their request with the counsel:

Behold, I say unto you, that you must rely upon my word, which if you do with full purpose of heart, you shall have a view of the plates...and it is by your faith that you shall obtain a view of them, even by that faith which was had by the prophets of old. And after that you have obtained faith, and have seen them with your eyes, you shall testify of them, by the power of God. (D&C 17:1-3)

Seeking a divine manifestation of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith retired to the woods to pray with the three special witnesses. After much fervent prayer Martin Harris decided to withdraw from the group, believing that he was unworthy. David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery continued to pray with Joseph and presently received an answer to their prayers. They saw an angel display the plates to their view and command them to go forth and testify of what they had both seen and heard. Later Joseph found Martin Harris alone in the woods praying. Together the two of them prayed and Martin was blessed with a manifestation not unlike what David and Oliver had experienced. These three men faithfully fulfilled the commission to testify of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and today their testimony appears in each copy of the Book of Mormon for the entire world to see.

An additional eight witnesses to whom Joseph showed the plates supported these three witnesses. Nephi had also prophesied of these additional witnesses, “and there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word unto the children of men; for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead” (2 Nephi 27:13). Their testimony is published unto the world along side that of the three witnesses. In all there were twelve witnesses (a full quorum) of the reality of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon was finally published to the world and available for sale in March 1830. This remarkable witness of Jesus Christ stirred many souls to repentance and brought hundreds into the fold of the Church.

Unfortunately as the months went by the Book of Mormon did not fully achieve the role that God had destined for it. Accordingly, two and a half years after the Book of Mormon was published (September 1832), the Lord chastised Joseph Smith and the entire Church:

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. *And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon* and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written. (D&C 84:54-57; emphasis added)

Thankfully this condemnation can be lifted as we live according to the commandments found in the Book of Mormon and fulfill the call to go “into all the world; and unto whatsoever place ye cannot go ye shall send, that the testimony may go from you into all the world unto every creature” (D&C 84:62).

May we keep the new covenant by remembering the Book of Mormon. And may we treasure the eternal truths revealed by the Book of Mormon that bear testimony of the Only Begotten of the Father, even Jesus Christ our Savior (Moses 7:62).