



Type: Magazine Article

The Book of Mormon—Joseph Smith's Contacts with the Angel Moroni

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Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 9 (September 1931), pp. 529–532

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: No abstract available.

Lesson Department

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in November)

BOOK OF MORMON—JOSEPH SMITH'S CONTACTS WITH THE ANGEL MORONI

Select Readings: Read First Nephi, chapters 11 to 14, inclusive. Make notes of the ideas revealed to Nephi respecting the future.

Before we begin our study of the teachings of the *Book of Mormon*, however, and the things about it that would be difficult for a boy of Joseph Smith's age, education, and experience to put into a book, we must know just how we got this interesting volume.

It used to be claimed by non-"Mormon" critics of the Nephite record that Sidney Rigdon either stole or borrowed a manuscript written by a Mr. Solomon Spaulding, that he touched it up a bit, adding the atmosphere of religion, and then that he gave the revamped manuscript to Joseph Smith, who published it under his own name. This theory is not now accepted by anyone who has gone to the trouble of looking up the facts in the case. There are too many loopholes in the argument to commend it to a well informed student of "Mormonism." And so we may dismiss this "explanation" without any further attention.

Modern critics of the *Book of Mormon* have come to the conclusion that the work originated with the Prophet somehow. Only, they do not believe that the Lord had anything to do with it, as the Saints claim. Here is Joseph Smith's own story of its origin:

"On the evening of September 21, 1823, I retired to my bed for the night. I betook myself to prayer and supplication to God 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. For I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had done.

"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.

"He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person.

"When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me. He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all

nations, kindreds, and tongues. He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; also, that there were two stones in silver bows—the urim and thummim—deposited with the plates; that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.

“He told me that when I got those plates—for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled—I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the urim and thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded; if I did I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it.

“After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so, until the room was again left dark, except just around him, when instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended until he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance.

“I lay musing on the singularity of the scene and marveling greatly at what had been told to me by this extraordinary messenger, when, in the midst of my meditation, I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted. In

an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again at my bedside.

“He commenced, and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit, without the least variation; which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things, he again ascended as he had done before.

“By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard. But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; adding a caution to me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building up his kingdom. Otherwise I could not get them.

“After this third visit, he again ascended into heaven as before, and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced. Almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me 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.

“I shortly after arose from my bed and, as usual, went to the neces-

sary labors of the day. But in attempting to work as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as to render me entirely unable. My father, who was laboring along with me, discovered something to be wrong with me, and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house; but, in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me, and I fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything.

"The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name. I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before.

"He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him the vision and commandments which I had received. I obeyed. I returned to my father in the field, and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited.

"Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the urim and thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger.

"I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the mes-

senger. I was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time. But he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates.

"Accordingly, I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.

"At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates, the urim and thummim, and the breastplate.

"On the twenty-second day of September, 1827, 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 should call for them, they should be protected.

"In April, 1828, Martin Harris commenced writing for me, while I translated from the plates. This continued until the fourteenth of June, by which time he had written one hundred sixteen pages of manuscript, on foolscap paper. With my permission, reluctantly given, he took this manuscript to show some of his relatives. Meantime, I went on a visit to my father's family in Manchester. For, persecution having become intolerable there, I had been under the necessity of going with my wife to Harmony, Penn-

sylvania, where the translation was done.

"Immediately after my return home, I was walking out a little distance, when the former heavenly messenger appeared and handed me the urim and thummim again—for it had been taken from me in consequence of my having wearied the Lord in asking for the privilege of letting Martin Harris take the writings, which he lost by transgression.

"After I had obtained a revelation from the Lord through the urim and thummim, both the plates and the urim and thummim were taken from me again. But in a few days they were returned to me.

"By the wisdom of God the plates remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required. When, according to arrangements, the messenger called for them. I delivered them up to him; and he has them in his charge until this day (May 2, 1838)."

If we take the trouble to count the number of contacts Joseph Smith had with Moroni, we shall find that they are seventeen, counting only those the prophet himself enumerates. They are: September, 1823, five; in the same months of the years 1824, 1825, 1826, 1827, four; in June, 1828, three; in June, 1829, four; and once, the last time presumably, when he delivered the plates to the messenger. It is highly

probable, however, from the narrative of the Prophet's mother that there were other occasions when he saw and conversed with the angel.

As to the fact of Moroni's having been raised from the dead, we have the Prophet's own statement to that effect in his *Autobiography*. It was not a spirit that appeared to Joseph Smith, but a man who had been raised from the dead, one who had been immortalized.

Questions

1. Tell briefly the story of how we got the *Book of Mormon*.

2. Note these things about the Prophet's narration of the event: Its simplicity, its directness, its neglect of such details as would merely appeal to curiosity, its air of telling what actually happened, the complete absence of anything that savors of self assertiveness.

3. How many contacts did Joseph have with the messenger? How far apart were they? How long were some of the "interviews?" What do you suppose they talked about?

4. Is it probable that heavenly beings visit anyone here except when there is something of great importance to communicate? If, then, anyone tells you that an angel, or one of the three Nephites, visited him or her, what test would you apply?

Work and Business

(This topic is to be given at the special visiting Teachers' Training meeting.)

TEACHER'S TOPIC FOR NOVEMBER

Watchword: "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house."—Luke 10:5.

Text: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."—Matthew 6:33.

When asked the meaning of the kingdom of God, Jesus answered saying, "My kingdom is not of this

world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered