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## The Probability of Joseph Smith's Story of the Origin, Translation and Final Disposition of the Plates of the Book of Mormon

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE PROBABILITY OF JOSEPH SMITH'S STORY OF THE ORIGIN, TRANSLATION AND FINAL DISPOSITION OF THE PLATES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

#### I.

#### *The Ministration of Angels is Neither Unscriptural nor Unreasonable.*

By the probability of Joseph Smith's story, I mean, of course, the probability of Moroni revealing the existence of the Book of Mormon to him; of Moroni's delivering to him the plates and the Urim and Thummim; of the Prophet's translating the record by the gift and power of God, by means of the Urim and Thummim; of his returning the plates to Moroni, who to this day, doubtless, has them under his guardianship.

I am aware of the fact that the miraculous is usually regarded with suspicion; that such a thing as the ministration of angels in what are called these "hard and scientific times" is generally scouted by most of those who make any pretensions to science; that a school of writers has arisen whose main slogan in the search of truth is that the miraculous is the impossible, and that all narratives which include the miraculous are to be rigidly rejected, as implying credulity or imposture that even professed believers in the Bible, who accept as historically true the Bible account of the ministration of angels, insist that the age in which such things occurred has long since passed away, and that such

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\*See "Life of Jesus," Renan (E. T.) Introduction; also "New Witnesses," Vol. I., ch. i.

ministrations are not to be expected now. But on this subject the word of God stands sure. According to that word there have been ministrations of angels in times past; and there will be such ministrations to the last day of recorded time. As to the ministration of angels in the past, according to holy scripture, the reader will remember the circumstance of angels, together with the Lord, visiting Abraham at his tent-home in the plains of Mamre, and partaking of his hospitality; of the appearance of angels to direct the flight of Lot from one of the doomed cities of the plain; of Jacob's physical contact with the angel with whom he wrestled until the breaking of the day; of the angel who went before the camp of Israel in their march from bondage; and scores of other instances recorded in the Old Testament where heavenly personages co-operated with men on earth to bring to pass the holy purposes of God.

Of instances in the New Testament, the reader will recall the ministration of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, announcing the future birth of John the Baptist; of the angel who appeared to Mary to make known the high honor bestowed upon her in becoming the mother of our Lord Jesus; of the appearance of Moses and Elias to the Savior and three of his disciples, to whom they ministered; of the angel who rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre, and announced the resurrection of the Savior; of the men in white (angels), who were present at the ascension of Jesus from the midst of his disciples, and announced the fact that the time would come when that same Jesus should come again to the earth in like manner as they had seen him go into heaven; of the angel who delivered Peter from prison, and a dozen other instances where angels co-operated with men in bringing to pass the purposes of God in the dispensation of the meridian of time.

With reference to the angels who in ages future from that in which the apostles lived ministering to men and co-operating to bring to pass future purposes of God, the reader will recall the saying of the Savior concerning the gathering together of the elect in the hour of God's judgment: "and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."<sup>b</sup> He will recall, also, the promise in Malachi concerning the same times: "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 hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."<sup>c</sup> He will recollect the promised coming of the angel to restore the gospel in the hour of God's judgment, concerning whom John says: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him: for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth and the sea, and the fountains of water."<sup>d</sup> Also the angel who will declare the fall of Babylon: "And there followed another angel, saying: Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God."<sup>e</sup> "And after

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<sup>b</sup>Matt. xxiv: 31.

<sup>c</sup>Malachi iv: 5, 6.

<sup>d</sup>Revelation xiv: 6, 7.

<sup>e</sup>Rev. xiv: 8, 9, 10.

these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lighted with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit.”<sup>f</sup> The reader of the scriptures, I say, will readily recall all these ministrations of angels, future from the time in which the sacred writer recorded them, as also the promise of the ministration of many other angels, in bringing to pass the great things of God in the last days, even to the gathering together in one all things in Christ.<sup>g</sup>

It cannot be held to be unscriptural, then, when Joseph Smith claimed that by the ministration of angels he received a revelation from God—a dispensation of the gospel.

But what shall we say to that very large number of people who do not believe the Bible? How shall we so appeal to them as to secure their attention in these matters? Addressing himself to those who questioned at least the likelihood of the resurrection, Paul asked: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” So say I respecting those who do not believe in the Bible, but pride themselves on accepting and believing all those things established by the researches of men—by science. Why should it be thought a thing incredible by them that angels should visit our earth in order to communicate knowledge not otherwise, perhaps, obtainable? Our scientists live in the midst of ascertained facts respecting the universe, that interplanetary communication ought to be looked upon as a thing so rational that to doubt its probability would be esteemed as folly?

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<sup>f</sup>Rev. xviii: 1-3.

<sup>g</sup>Ephesians i:9, 10.

A word as to this proposition: Of the change of view respecting our own earth and its relations in the universe, I have already spoken<sup>h</sup> in some detail. I have considered the transition from the conception of the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, the moon and all the stars brought into existence for its convenience, or beauty, or glory, to the conception of the earth as one of the smaller planets of a group moving regularly about the sun as their centre, and the probability of each fixed star being the center of such a group of planets. The ascertained existence of millions of other suns than ours, evidently the centers of planetary systems, being granted, the view that these planets are the habitation of sentient beings seems a concomitant fact so probable that one is astonished, if not a little provoked, at that conservatism which hesitates to accept a hypothesis so reasonable in itself, and so well sustained by the analogy of the existence of sentient beings on our own planet. The astronomers tell us some of these fixed stars—these suns that are probably the centres of planetary systems—have existed for hundreds of thousands of years, for so distant are they from us in space that it would require that period of time for their light to reach our earth, hence they must have existed all that time. It is evident, then, that some of them may be many times older than our sun; so, too, are the planets that encircle them. From this conclusion to the one that the sentient beings that doubtless dwell upon these planets are far in advance of the inhabitants of our earth, intellectually, morally, spiritually and in everything that makes for higher development, and more perfect civilization, is but a little step, and rests on strong probability. From these conclusions, again, to the conceived likelihood of the presiding Intelligences on some

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<sup>h</sup>New Witnesses, Vol. I., chs. xxviii, xxix, xxx.

of these worlds to which our earth may sustain peculiar relations of order or affinity—having both the power and the inclination to communicate from time to time by personal messengers, or other means, to chosen men of our own race—is another step, not so large as the others, by which we have been led to this point, and one that rests also upon a basis of strong probability. And this is the phenomena of the visitation of angels and revelation testified of in the scriptures. Such phenomena are mistakenly considered supernatural. They are not so really. They are very matter of fact realities; perfectly natural, and in harmony with the intellectual order or economy of a universe where intelligence and goodness govern, and love unites the brotherhood of the universe in bonds of sympathetic interest and kinship.

In view of these reflections, why, I ask, should it be thought a thing incredible with scientific men that there should be such phenomena as the visitation of angels, or other means of interplanetary communication among the many planets and planetary systems which make up the universe? Surely it will not be argued that it is impossible for sentient beings to pass from world to world, because man in his present state is bound to earth by the force of gravitation, and that the same force would doubtless operate upon the inhabitants of other worlds, and bind them to their local habitation as we are bound to ours. The beings whom we call angels, though of the same race and nature with ourselves, may have passed through such physical changes as to render them quite independent of the clogging force called gravitation. We may not, therefore, place the same limitations upon their powers in this kind as upon man's in his present physical state.

As for other means of communication from intelli-

gences of other worlds to our own, they will not be regarded as impossible in the presence of the achievements of men in such matters. By means of magnetic telegraph systems, man has established instant communication with all parts of the world. Not the highest mountain ranges, not deserts, not even ocean's wide expanse, have been sufficient to bar his way. He has made the earth a net-work of his cables and telegraph lines, until nearly every part of the earth is within the radius of instant communication. In 1896, the National Electric Light association celebrated the triumphs of electricity by holding a national electrical exposition in New York City. The occasion was the completion of the electric works at Niagara Falls. For ages, that great cataract had thundered out the evidence of its mighty power to heedless savages and frontiersmen, but modern man looked upon it, and by the expenditure of five million dollars, harnessed it, applied its forces to his contrivances, made it generate electric force which lights the cities, drives the street cars, and turns the wheels of industry for many miles around; and even transmitted its force to New York City, four hundred and sixty miles distant! It was on that occasion that Governor Levi P. Morton, upon the declaration being made that the exposition was open, turned a golden key by which four cannons were instantaneously fired in the four quarters of the republic, one in Augusta, Maine, one in San Francisco, one in front of the public building at St. Paul, and another in the public Park in New Orleans. This discharge of cannon was accomplished by a current of electricity generated at Niagara, and transmitted over the lines of the Postal Telegraph Cable Company. Later, in the course of the exposition, a message was sent all over the world, and returned to New York within fifty minutes. The message read:



God created nature's treasures; science utilizes electric power for the grandeur of the nations and peace of the world.

The reply, also sent over the world, was:

Mighty Niagara, nature's wonder, serving men through the world's electric circuit, proclaims to all people science triumphant and the beneficent Creator.

The distance traversed by each of these messages was about twenty-seven thousand five hundred miles, touching nearly all the great centres of population in the world, and that within the almost incredible time of fifty minutes!

Again, in 1898, on the occasion of California's Golden Jubilee, that is, her semi-centennial celebration of the discovery of gold in the state, William McKinley, then president of the United States, seated in his office at the White House, in Washington, D. C., pressed an electric button which rung a bell in the Mechanic's Pavilion in San Francisco, and formally opened the mining exposition, though the president was distant about three thousand miles! The press dispatches, at the time of the event, gave the following graphic description of it:

By an electric sensation, as indescribable as the thrill of the discoverer's cry of "gold," the president of the nation sent from Washington the signal which announced the opening of the fair. As the bell clanged its clear note, and the Great West was for an instant connected with the distant East, a hush fell on the gathered thousands; then, moved by a common impulse, the vast throng burst into cheers. Close following on the touch which sounded the sweet-toned bell came the greeting of President McKinley, announcing "the marking of a mighty epoch in the history of California." About him, over three thousand miles away, stood the representatives of the state in Congress, their thoughts flying quicker even than telegraphic message to

the people gathered in the great pavilion. And so, united by the material ties of the electric wire, and the subtle powers of thought, the East and the West were held for a few brief moments by a community of good wishes.

Wonderful as all this is, it is now eclipsed by wireless telegraphy—now passed beyond its experimental stages, and rapidly coming into the practical commerce of the nations. Man is no longer dependent upon a network of wires and cables for means of communication. The atmosphere enveloping the world affords sufficient means for conducting vibrations made intelligible by the instrument of man's invention; and today, even across the surface of the broad Atlantic, messages are transmitted by this means as easily as by means of the cable lines. So delicate and perfect are the receiving instruments, that from the roar of our great cities' traffic, the message is picked out of the confusion and faithfully registered.

The argument based on all these facts, is this: If man with his limited intelligence, and his limited experience, has contrived means by which he stands in instant communication with all parts of the world, why should it be thought a thing incredible that God, from the midst of his glory, from the heart of the universe, is within instant means of communication, with all parts of his creations? Especially since it is quite generally conceded, by scientists, that all the fixed stars and all the planetary systems encircling them, float in and are connected by the ether, a substance more subtle and sensitive to vibrations than the atmosphere which surrounds our planet, and suggests the media of communication. To all this, however, I fancy that I hear the reply of the men of science: "We do not deny the possibility or even the probability of communication from superior Intelligences of other planets, we simply say that up

to the present time there is no convincing testimony that such communications have been received." This, however, is a miserable begging of the whole question; and an unwarranted repudiation of the testimony of those who have borne witness to the verity of such communications. The testimony of Moses and the prophets, of Jesus and the apostles, of Joseph Smith and his associates, may not thus be put out of the reckoning. The character of these witnesses, their service to mankind, what they suffered and sacrificed for their testimonies, make them worthy of belief; and, since in the nature of things there is nothing which makes their testimony improbable, but, on the contrary, much that makes it very probable, is it not beneath the dignity of scientists to refuse to accord to their statements a patient investigation and belief?

## II.

*To Believe in Media for Ascertaining Divine Knowledge is Neither Unscriptural nor Unreasonable.*

Whatever the position of unbelievers in the Bible may be with reference to Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon by means of Urim and Thummim, or "Interpreters," as they were called by the Nephites, surely believers in the Bible cannot regard such a claim as impossible or improbable, since it is matter of common knowledge that the High Priest in ancient Israel possessed Urim and Thummim, and by means of them received divine communications. I am not unmindful of the fact that a diversity of opinion obtains respecting Urim and Thummim of the scriptures, of what they consisted, and the exact use of them, but this I think may be set down as ascertained fact; they were precious and

doubtless transparent stones placed in the breast plate of the High Priest, and were a means through which God communicated to him divine knowledge—the divine will.<sup>h</sup>

Josephus' description of Urim and Thummim is as follows:

I will now treat of what I before omitted, the garment of the high priest: for he (Moses) left no room for the evil practices of (false) prophets; but if some of that sort should attempt to abuse the divine authority, he left it to God to be present at his sacrifices when he pleased, and when he pleased to be absent. And he was willing this should be known, not to the Hebrews only, but to those foreigners also who were there. But as to these stones, which we told you before the high priest bore on his shoulders, which were sardonyxs, (and I think it needless to describe their nature, they being known to everybody): the one of them shined out when God was present at their sacrifices; I mean that which was in the nature of a button on his right shoulder, bright rays darting out thence; and being seen even by those that were most remote; which splendor yet was not before natural to the stone. This has appeared a wonderful thing to such as have not so far indulged themselves in philosophy, as to despise divine revelation. Yet will I mention what is still more wonderful than this: for God declared beforehand, by those twelve stones which the high priest bore on his breast, and which were inserted into his breastplate, when they should be victorious in battle; for so great a splendor shone forth from them before the army began to march, that all the people were sensible of God's being present for their assistance. Whence it came to pass that those Greeks who had veneration for our laws, because they could not

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<sup>h</sup>The reader will find the data for the foregoing view concerning Urim and Thummim in the following passages: Exodus xxviii:29, 30; Leviticus viii:8; Numbers, xxvii:21, Deuteronomy xxxiii:8; I Samuel xxviii:6; Ezra ii:63; Nehemiah vii:65. He will also find an excellent article on the subject in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, (Hackett edition), Vol. IV., pp. 3,356-3,363; also in Kitto's Encyclopaedia of Biblical Literature. Vol. II., pp. 900-903.

possibly contradict this, called that breast plate The Oracle. Now this breast plate and this sardonyx left off shining two hundred years before I composed this book, God having been displeased at the transgression of his laws.<sup>i</sup>

Since this kind of *media*, then, was used by prophets in ancient Israel, through which to obtain divine knowledge, it should not be matter of astonishment, much less of ridicule, or regarded as improbable that when a colony of Israelites were led away from the main body of the people, a similar *media* for obtaining the will of the Lord, and for translating records not otherwise translatable, should be found with them. So also respecting Joseph Smith's claim to having found what he called a "Seer Stone," by means of which he could translate. That cannot be regarded as an impossibility or even an improbability by those who believe the Bible; for, in addition to the Hebrew literature giving an account of Urim and Thummim in the breast plate of the high priest, it is well known that other means were used by inspired men of Israel for obtaining the word of the Lord. That most excellent of Bible characters, Joseph, the son of Jacob, blessed in his boyhood with prophetic dreams, and possessed of the divine gift of interpreting dreams, the savior of Israel in a time of famine, and a wise ruler for a time of Egypt's destines, used such *media*. When Joseph's cup was found in the mouth of Benjamin's sack Joseph's steward said to him: "Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby, indeed, he divineth?" Joseph himself said, when his perplexed brethren stood before him, "What deed is this that ye have done? Wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine."<sup>j</sup> The fact of ascertaining the word of the Lord by means of this "divining cup" cannot be explained

<sup>i</sup>Antiquities of the Jews, bk. III., ch. viii.

<sup>j</sup>Genesis xlv:5-15.

away by suggesting that Joseph merely referred to an Egyptian custom of divinity; or that the steward repeated the words which Joseph had spoken to him merely in jest.<sup>k</sup> As remarked by a learned writer on this subject: "We need not think of Joseph, the pure, the heaven-taught, the blameless one, as adopting still less as basely pretending to adopt, the dark arts of a system of imposture."<sup>l</sup> I agree with the view. It is a reality sustained by Bible authority that there exists *media* through which divine revelation may be obtained, and hence to the Bible believers the claim of Joseph Smith concerning "Urim and Thummim," and the "Seer Stone," by means of which, through the inspiration of God, he translated the record of the Nephites, is not impossible nor even improbable.

As in the matter of the visitation of angels, so also in relation to Urim and Thummim and also the "Seer Stone," I may say that our scientific skeptics in such things live in the midst of such achievements of man's ingenuity, and in the daily use of such marvelous instruments invented by men for the ascertainment of truth, that men of science ought not to stumble at accepting, at least as possible, and even as probable, the existence of such *media*. Take for instance the telescope. For ages, men believed that the whole of the universe consisted of sun, moon, earth, and the few fixed stars within the radius of man's unaided vision. Finally, however, a genius converted a handful of sand into a lens, adjusted it in a tube, and turned it to the heavens when, lo! the frontiers of the universe were pushed back to an infinite distance, and millions of suns heretofore never seen by human eyes were brought within the range of man's vision and consciousness.

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<sup>k</sup>Such is the Roman Catholic explanation of the matter. See note on passage, Gen. xlv:5-15, in Douay Bible.

<sup>l</sup>Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, Art. Urim and Thummim.

This first telescope has been improved upon from time to time, until now we have instruments of that kind so large and so perfect that our own planets are brought comparatively near for our inspection, while the number of fixed stars now within the range of our vision, by means of these instruments, is quite generally conceded to be from forty to fifty millions.

While viewing the starry heavens by the aid of the telescope, in search of new facts, astronomers beheld at enormous distances from us hazy patches of light, concerning the nature of which they could form no definite idea. An improved telescope, however, at last resolved some of these mists into groups of separate stars; then it was supposed that all such mists were star groups, and that it only required stronger telescopes to demonstrate the truth of that theory. Meantime, however, another wonderful instrument was invented, the spectroscope, an instrument which forms and analyzes the spectra of the rays emitted by bodies or substances. Meantime Fraunhofer made the discovery that the spectrum of an ignited gaseous body is non-continuous, and has interrupting lines. Later, Professor John William Draper discovered that the spectrum of an ignited solid is continuous with no interrupting lines. With these facts established, the spectroscope was turned upon the distant patches of nebulæ and it was discovered that some of them were positively of a gaseous nature and not congeries of stars. Thus was another great truth concerning the universe discovered by means of an instrument invented by man.

Nor is the end yet. The eye of man, perhaps, is the most wonderful organ known; wonderful in its powers when unaided by instruments of man's invention, but rendered infinitely more powerful and wonderful when aided by telescope and microscope. Indeed, by these instruments new

and unthought of worlds are brought to the consciousness of man, and his knowledge infinitely extended. Yet wonderful as is this organ of man, and great as are its achievements when aided by the instruments of man's invention, man's ingenuity has produced a more powerful eye than man's! One that can look longer and see farther than the human eye, even when aided by the most powerful telescope; and registers upon its retina truths otherwise unattainable by man. This instrument Camille Flammarion, the French astronomer and writer, calls "The Wonderful New Eye of Science." It is merely a lens connected with a photographic apparatus, and of it the writer just named says:

This giant eye is endowed with four considerable advantages over ours; it sees more quickly, farther, longer, and wonderful faculty, it receives and retains the impress of what it sees, It sees more quickly: in the half-thousandth of a second, it photographs the sun, its spots, its vortexes, its fires, its flaming mountains, and on an imperishable document. It sees farther: Directed towards any point of the heavens on the darkest night, it discerns stars in the depths of infinite space—worlds, universes, creations, that our eye could never see by the aid of any telescope. It sees longer: That which we cannot succeed in seeing in a few seconds of observation we shall never see. The photographic eyes has but to look long enough in order to see; at the end of half an hour it distinguishes what was before invisible to it; at the end of an hour it will see better still, and the longer it remains directed towards the unknown object, the better and more distinctly it will see it—and this without fatigue. And it retains on the retinal plate all that it has seen.<sup>m</sup>

This photographic eye, used in what is called the kinegraph, photographs the spokes of the sulky driven at full speed—which cannot be discerned at all by the human eye—

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<sup>m</sup>The Cosmopolitan Magazine for September, 1896.



as if standing still. The bullet discharged from the most powerful gun of modern invention, which the human eye cannot follow in its flight, this instrument seems to arrest in mid-air. The ripple waves on the surface of mercury, which no human eye has ever seen—even when assisted by the most powerful microscopes—it faithfully registers, and by its testimony alone we know of the existence of mercury waves. This instrument registers on sensitized tin foil, birds in their flight, express trains at full speed, moving throngs on crowded streets, athletes at their sports, the restless waves of ocean, the tempest's progress, the lightning's flash—all of which, by means of another instrument called the kinoscope are reproduced to the life, though the actors in the scenes represented may be dead, and rotting in their graves. As these named instruments photograph and reproduce actions, so the phonograph registers the intonations, inflections, and all the peculiarities of voice entrusted to it, and as faithfully reproduces them, once, twice, or a thousand times, so that friends may recognize the intonations and all the peculiarities of inflection and voice, though he who thus speaks has long since been dead or removed to other lands. What more shall I say? Is not enough here presented concerning the instruments of man's invention to justify a reasonable belief in the probability of the existence of *media* that can accomplish all that is ascribed to Urim and Thummim and Seer Stone by Joseph Smith; especially when it is remembered how far the knowledge, skill and wisdom of God surpass the skill and ingenuity of man?

### III.

#### *Of Returning the Plates of the Book of Mormon to Moroni.*

The question is often asked—and it bears upon the probability of Joseph Smith's statements respecting the Book

of Mormon, because the answer that has to be made gives rise to doubts, and sometimes to sneers on the part of those receiving it—the question is often asked, I repeat, “What became of the gold plates from which Joseph Smith claims to have translated the Book of Mormon—can they be seen now? Is the Church in possession of them?” The answer is, “No; the Prophet returned them to the angel Moroni, and he, doubtless, now has possession of them, and is their guardian.”<sup>n</sup> This answer is declared to be unsatisfactory, and often ridiculed; for worldly wisdom fancies that the Prophet had a most direct means of establishing the truth as to the existence and character of the plates, if only he had retained them in his possession, or deposited them in some state or national institution of learning or archæology. Joseph Smith acted under the direction of Moroni in the matter of the plates of the Book of Mormon; why he was not permitted to keep the book of plates, is not, perhaps, positively known. Part of the record was sealed, as the Prophet himself informs us;<sup>o</sup> and as the time had not come for that part of it

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<sup>n</sup>I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible. But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand. 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, being the second day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight. Church History, Vol. I., pp. 18, 19.)

<sup>o</sup>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

to be translated, it may be that that was one reason why it should be still kept in the custody of the angel. Moreover, in this life we are required by divine wisdom to walk by faith, not by sight. It is part of our education that we learn to act with reference to sacred things on probabilities. A veil of oblivion is stretched over our past spirit-existence. The future is hidden largely from our view, and we are required to perform this life's journey from the cradle to the grave in the midst of uncertainties, except as we increase our faith and establish assurance by the development of spiritual strength from within. Why this should be so may not always seem clear to us; but of the fact of it there can be no doubt. Nor can there be any doubt as to the wisdom of it, and the benefit of it to mankind, since our Father-God has so ordered it. Nor is it in "Mormonism" alone that certain direct material evidences are denied to men concerning divine things. Infidels refer to the opportunities which they think the impudent challenges of the persecutors of the Son of God afforded him to demonstrate his divine power, and prove the truth of his mission, when they said, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." \* \* \* "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him."<sup>p</sup> What an opportunity was afforded him here to respond to their challenges and cover them with confusion and fear! But the Son of God heeded them not, and infidels everywhere entertain the opinion that he here missed the opportunity of his career if, indeed,

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running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters of 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. Wentworth Letter, History of the Church, Vol. IV., p. 537.

<sup>p</sup>Matt. xxvii: 40, 42.

he was the Son of God—the Lord of Life—the Master of Death.

Moses gave out the statement that the Law of Israel, the Ten Commandments, were written by the finger of God on tables of stone.<sup>q</sup> These, in his anger, Moses broke to pieces in their presence, when he found that during his brief absence in the Mount, obtaining the law, Israel had turned to the folly of idolatry. But a second set of tables was prepared, and again on these God carved with his own hands the Ten Commandments. Moses placed them in the ark of shittim wood, which, by divine appointment, he provided, and this constituted the “Ark of the Covenant.”<sup>r</sup>

Again, when the children of Israel were disposed to rebel against the priesthood of God’s appointing, under divine direction, Moses called upon each of the twelve princes of the house of Israel to present before the Lord a rod with the name of his tribe upon it. Among these was Aaron’s rod, representing the tribe of Levi. All were placed in the “Tabernacle of Witness” before the Lord. On the morrow, when Moses went into the “Tabernacle of Witness” behold the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had brought forth buds, and yielded almonds, all in a single night! Thus the Lord gave a palpable evidence to Israel of his choosing the house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi to stand before him in the priest’s office; and the Lord said unto Moses, “Bring Aaron’s rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels.”<sup>s</sup>

The unbelieving world to whom Israel’s message was afterwards sent, might demand that the tables of stone and Aaron’s rod that budded and bore fruit should be displayed for their inspection, that faith might take hold of the unbe-

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<sup>q</sup>Deut. ix:8-11.

<sup>r</sup>Deut. x:1-5.

<sup>s</sup>Numbers xvii.

lieving; but there is no record that these sacred things were ever exhibited for such a purpose.<sup>5</sup>

The infidels of our own day frequently remark that the prayer of Dives to Abraham ought to have been graciously granted, and Lazarus sent to bear witness to the relatives of the tortured nobleman that they might escape his sad fate; but Abraham's answer was, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them!" "Nay, Father Abraham," answered Dives, "but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." But Abraham said: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."<sup>6</sup>

Referring again to the Savior: unbelievers marvel that Jesus confined his visitations after his resurrection to a few of his faithful followers only—to those who already believed on him. Why did he not appear in all the majesty of his immortal life, after his resurrection, before the high priests and the Sanhedrin of the Jews? Before the court of Pilate? Before the rabble who had impiously clamored in the streets for his blood to be upon them and upon their children—Why? The only answer to this question exists in the fact apparent from the whole course of God's dealings with the world in relation to sacred things: viz., God has chosen certain witnesses for himself in relation to sacred matters, and demands that his children shall walk by faith on the words which his chosen servants declare unto them. Thus Peter, on the matter of Christ showing himself to the world, says:

Him, God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God,

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<sup>5</sup>The late Robert G. Ingersoll for instance, asks where now the sword is with which the angel guarded "the tree of life" in Paradise; and then sarcastically answers his own question as follows: "Some angel has it in heaven!" Works, Vol. V., 372.

<sup>6</sup>Luke xvi: 13, 31.

even to us who did eat and drink with him after he arose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and dead."

Judas (one of the twelve, not Iscariot, but the brother of James) on one occasion asked the same question that infidels have been asking for many generations, "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things. \* \* \* \* When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning."<sup>v</sup> Such the statement of Peter; such the doctrine of Jesus; and when coupled together one sees that in addition to the special witnesses, the prophets, God has ordained that the Holy Spirit shall be his universal witness for things divine. God, in his wisdom, and for the accomplishment of his own wise purposes with reference to us, has ordained that his children in this world's probation shall walk by faith, not by sight. To produce the faith, he sends forth special chosen servants, prophets, apostles, his own Son, and through them announces the divine will. Then when drawn to God by faith, when love-inspired towards God, the Lord gives the witness of the Holy Spirit, by and

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<sup>u</sup>Acts x: 40-42.

<sup>v</sup>John xv: 26, 27.

through which man may know the truth, for he becomes possessed of the very spirit of divine intelligence and of truth, by which power he is made to know the truth.

These principles obtain in this last dispensation of the gospel. Joseph Smith comes as did Noah, Enoch, Moses, the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles—he comes with a message from God—with a new volume of scripture, whose express purpose is to enlarge the foundations of faith. He and his associates bear witness of its truth, and those who will give heed to that testimony, and will seek to God for further knowledge, are expressly promised in the Book of Mormon itself, that they shall receive a manifestation of its truth by the power of the Holy Ghost; “And by the power of the Holy Ghost,” says this Nephite record, “ye may know the truth of all things.”<sup>w</sup> Throughout, it will be seen that in this matter of the Book of Mormon the divine power is acting in harmony with those great principles which have been operating in the spiritual economy of this world from the beginning; which fact, in reality, is at least an incidental testimony of the truth of the work.

In the light of all these reflections, then, together with the fact that part of the Book of Mormon was sealed, the time not then having arrived for its translation, there is nothing remarkable in the circumstance of the Nephite plates be-

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<sup>w</sup>Behold I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam, even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of them unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni x: 3-5.)

ing returned to the care of the angel-guardian of them. Certainly there is nothing unreasonable in such a procedure, and surely nothing in the circumstance that warrants the ridicule with which that statement had sometimes been received. Moreover, human guardianship of such things is by no means as secure as some may conceive it to be. Take, for example, the fate which befell the Egyptian papyrus from which the Prophet translated the Book of Abraham. It is an item of Church history that in 1835 the Saints in Kirtland purchased, of one Michael H. Chandler, some Egyptian mummies; in the sarcophagus they occupied certain rolls of papyrus were found, beautifully engraved with Egyptian characters. Upon examination, Joseph Smith found the papyrus to be the writings of Abraham and of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt. Portions of these records the Prophet translated into the English language, and the translation was published in the *Times and Seasons*, Vol. III., and subsequently made part of the "Pearl of Great Price." After the death of the Prophet the mummies, together with the records on papyrus, were left in charge of his mother, Lucy Smith. She afterwards parted with them, under what circumstances is not positively known. Finally, the records and mummies found their way into Wood's Museum, in Chicago, where, according to the statement of the editors of the Plano edition of "Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith and his Progenitors," by Lucy Smith, they were destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871.\* Thus the writings of Abraham, after being preserved for many generations in the linen wrappings of Egyptian mummies, were consumed by fire in a modern city, a circumstance which illustrates the uncertainty of human means to preserve

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\*See Plano edition of the above named work, 1880, note on page 91.



important documents, and justifies the angel-guardianship of a record as sacred as are the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated.

## IV.

*On the Loss of one Hundred and Sixteen Pages of Manuscript; Being the Translation of the First Part of Mormon's Abridgment of the Nephite Records.*

Another incident connected with the probability of Joseph Smith's story concerning the Book of Mormon, and which, like the circumstance of the Prophet's returning the plates to the angel, meets with ridicule—is the loss of the 116 pages of manuscript, through the unfaithfulness of Martin Harris, a subject detailed at length in chapter v.

This incident lost to Joseph Smith, for a time, the gift of translation, and also possession of the plates and Urim and Thummim; but through sincere repentance, he was received again into the favor of the Lord, and resumed his work.

On being permitted to resume the translation, however, the Prophet was informed through divine communication that those who had stolen the manuscript from Harris designed to hold it until he should translate again that part which had fallen into their hands. If the Prophet's second translation should be like the first, then it was the intention of the conspirators to change the manuscript in their possession, and claim that the translation was not obtained by divine aid, else the second would be like the first; but since it would by this trick be proved to be different, the claim of divine inspiration in the translation of the book must fall to the ground, and Joseph Smith's pretension to being a Seer

and Prophet of God would fall with it; and thus the work God designed to accomplish through him would be destroyed. The Lord revealed this plot to Joseph Smith, and warned him not to translate again Moroni's abridgment of the Book of Lehi—which comprised so much of the manuscript as had been entrusted to Harris.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, he was commanded to translate what are called in the Book of Mormon the "Smaller Plates of Nephi," and let that stand in the place of the translation of the Book of Lehi which Harris had lost.

A word of explanation here: Two sets of plates were kept for a time by the first Nephi and his successors. One set might be called the secular, the other the sacred record of the Nephite people. They, however, called them the "Smaller" and "Larger" Plates of Nephi. On the former was recorded the ministry of the prophets, the word of the Lord to them, and much of their teaching and preaching; on the latter, the reigns of the kings, their wars and contentions, and the secular affairs of the people generally. Still, even on the "Smaller Plates of Nephi" there was a reasonably succinct account of the principle events of Nephite history, from the time Lehi left Jerusalem until four hundred years had passed away.

When Mormon found among the records delivered into his keeping the "Smaller Plates of Nephi," he was so well pleased with their contents that he placed the whole of them with the abridgment he had made from the larger Nephite records. "And I do this," he informs us, "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

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<sup>9</sup>See preface to first edition of the Book of Mormon.

will."<sup>z</sup> By the addition of the Smaller Plates of Nephi to Mormon's abridgment of the Larger Plates, it will be observed that there was a double line of history for a period of about 400 years. Therefore, when, through carelessness and breaking his agreement with the Prophet, Martin Harris lost the translation of the first part of Mormon's abridgment, and those into whose hands the manuscript had fallen designed to change it and destroy the claims of the Prophet to inspiration in translating it—under divine direction he translated the Smaller Plates of Nephi, and let that translation take the place of the one which had been stolen, and thus the plan of the conspirators against the work was thwarted. This statement of the Prophet, however, comes in for its share of ridicule, and is generally spoken of as a very clever escape for the Prophet out of what is called a rather perplexing dilemma. The Prophet's statement of the incident was published at the time the first edition of the Book of Mormon issued from the press, and, in fact, stands as the preface to the book, which I reproduce here:

#### PREFACE.

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 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

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<sup>z</sup>Words of Mormon, p. 158.

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 saith 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 show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. 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 AUTHOR.

Thus from the beginning the Prophet boldly declared that which the Lord had revealed to him concerning this effort on the part of the conspirators to destroy the work; and there was not one who rose to contradict his statement, at the time, although some anti-“Mormon” writers of later years assert—but without any warrant of proof—that, enraged at the part her husband was taking in bringing forth the Book of Mormon, Mrs. Martin Harris burned the manuscript. This, however, she always denied. The first publication referring to this subject, aside from what the Prophet published in the above preface, is Howe’s “History of Mormonism,” published at Painsville, Ohio, 1834. This is an anti-“Mormon” book, and of the manuscript incident it says: “The facts respecting the lost manuscripts we have not been

able to ascertain. They sometimes charged the wife of Harris with having burnt it, but this is denied by her.”<sup>a</sup>

Meantime, attention is called to the fact that there is nothing improbable in the statement of Joseph Smith; but on the contrary all the conditions obtaining in the neighborhood where he resided while bringing forth the work favor the probability of such a conspiracy as he charges: the unwarranted but repeated efforts made by his enemies to wrest the plates from his possession; the home of his parents repeatedly beset by mobs; the issue of warrants by justices of the peace for searching his wagon for the plates; and subsequently the actions of Mr. Grandin, his printer, who, after entering into contract to print the book was certainly in honor bound to render him all the assistance in his power in getting out the work in the best order possible, and protecting him in his copyrights—the actions, I say, of Mr. Grandin, in permitting Squire Cole<sup>b</sup> the use of his press on nights and Sundays in order to secretly publish his “Dogberry Papers,” in which was to appear a garbled edition of the Book of Mormon in weekly installments; the mass meetings held in Palmyra and vicinity in which resolutions were passed not to purchase the book should it ever issue from the press (which action caused Mr. Grandin to suspend the work of printing until the Prophet could be brought from Harmony, in Pennsylvania, to give renewed assurance of his ability to meet the price of printing); the confession of J. N. Tucker, one of the employes of Grandin’s printing establishment, that after setting up a sheet in type, it was secreted

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<sup>a</sup>I quote from the first (1834) edition of Howe’s work, page 22.

<sup>b</sup>See pp. 77, 78 of part I., Manual for 1903-4. It is unthinkable that this effort to publish a garbled edition of the Book of Mormon was unknown to Grandin and those employed in his establishment.

and the story given out that it was lost, and that manuscript for another sheet would have to be produced, which when done is alleged to have been unlike the first<sup>c</sup>—all these well-attested circumstances establish the fact of a wide-spread and bitter opposition to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and, failing in that, then a determination to prevent its acceptance as revelation from God. All these things make it very easy to believe that such a conspiracy as the Prophet describes existed against the work.

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<sup>c</sup>See chapter viii. Where this incident is treated and the fact pointed out that the Prophet's precautions had protected the work from the effects of such tricks as this described by Tucker.