

By Milton V. Backman, Jr.

One of the most significant religious events in the history of mankind occurred in the spring of 1820 in a beautiful grove located near the Finger Lakes of western New York. While engaged in a fervent quest for religious truth, Joseph Smith beheld a glorious vision that altered his life and inaugurated a new religious era—the dispensation of the fulness of times.

On at least four different occasions, Joseph Smith either wrote or dictated to scribes accounts of his sacred experience of 1820. Possibly he penned or dictated other histories of the First Vision; if so, they have not been located. The four surviving recitals of this theophany were prepared or rendered through different scribes, at different times, from a different perspective, for different purposes and to different audiences.¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that each of them emphasizes different aspects of his experience. When Latter-day Saints today explain this remarkable vision to others, their descriptions often vary

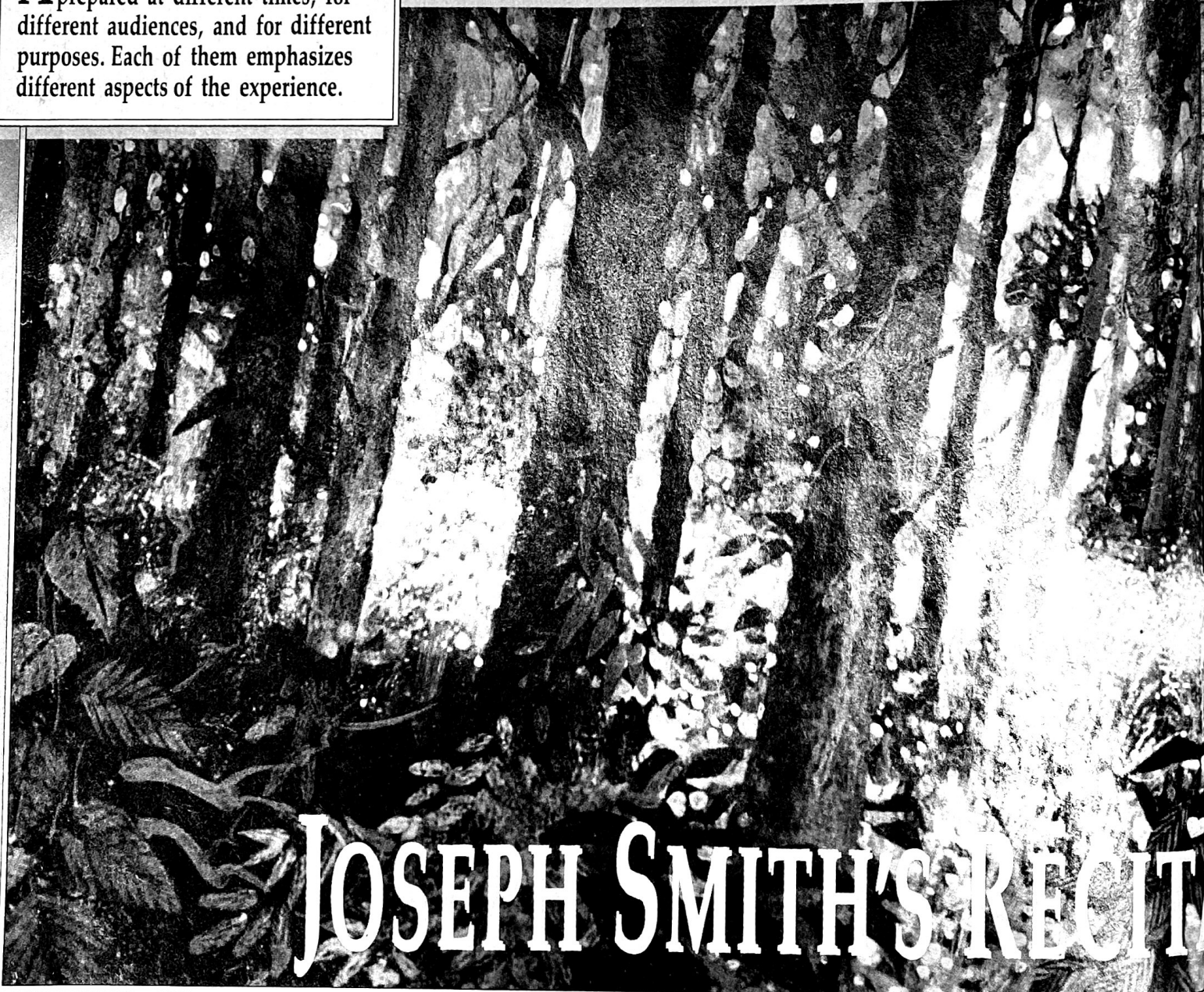
according to the audience or

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circumstances that prompt such reports. If one were relating the incident to a group of high priests, for example, he would undoubtedly tell it somewhat differently than he would to individuals who had never heard of the restoration of the gospel or of Joseph Smith.

In an important way, the existence of these different accounts helps support the integrity of the Latter-day Saint Prophet. It indicates that Joseph did not deliberately create a memorized version which he related to everyone. In the legal profession, attorneys and judges recognize that if a witness repeats an incident by using precisely the same language, the court might challenge the validity of such a statement.

Indeed, there are long-standing precedents for differing accounts of the same spiritual experience. For example, the four Gospels do not correspond exactly concerning the great events at the garden's empty tomb. There are variations as to the number of women and angels who were present and whether the angels were sitting or standing. Although the Prophet Joseph Smith in his inspired translation clarified some of these details (and others cited below), minor disparities remain in the four descriptions of



JOSEPH SMITH'S RECITAL

Painting by Jerry Harston



S OF THE FIRST VISION



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this event (compare Matthew 28 with Mark 18, Luke 24, and John 20). The differences, however, are not important—they may have resulted from incorrect transmissions or translations, or may be the result of recording the event from different perspectives. The glorious fact remains that the tomb was empty because Jesus had risen as the first fruits of the Resurrection.

Accounts of the Savior's appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, related to us in Acts by Luke

and by Paul in his letters, also vary. To cite one example, in Acts 8:7, we read that others traveling with Paul heard a voice but saw no man. In chapter 22, verse 9, we read that others saw the light but did not hear the voice.

A description of an event found in John 12 is similar in some respects to the New Testament account of Paul's vision. According to John, while Jesus was in Jerusalem a "voice" was heard from heaven. While some perceived that the noise was like thunder, others thought that an angel had spoken. (See John 12:28–29.)

It is the great reality that is important, not the somewhat differing perceptions of it. Although the description by Matthew of the death of Judas (Matthew 27:5) is different from that described in Acts (Acts 1:18), and although the gospels differ on the message encribed on the cross and the words that Jesus spoke prior to his death (compare Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:38, 43; and John 19:19–21), we should not become so engrossed with differences that we fail to comprehend the basic message conveyed in the Gospels. Of most importance in the descriptions of the crucifixion is that Jesus, while on the cross, was completing the Atonement.

Like Paul, Joseph Smith did not relate all the details of his profound experience of 1820 at any one time. When Paul found that his Gentile ministry was in question, he recalled (years after his vision) how the Lord had outlined his mission to the non-Jewish nations at the time of his first vision. (See Acts 26:16–18.) Similarly, in the most complete account of the First Vision (one prepared in 1838 as part of a major history of the Church), the Prophet concluded that "many other things did [the Savior] say unto me, which I cannot write at this time." (JS-H 1:20.) As a matter of fact, we do not have a full account today of the First Vision. At no time did the Prophet disclose everything that he learned during his vision near Palmyra. Nevertheless (as with the four Gospels and the three versions of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus), by combining all known accounts of the First Vision written by the Prophet, we may gain a more complete understanding of his theophany of 1820.

We can also better understand why the young Joseph Smith possibly did not write an account of the First Vision until the early 1830s considering the social and literary climate of his times. Many people living in nineteenth century America did not publish autobiographies or histories until many years after the events that shaped their lives had transpired. The possibility of Joseph Smith keeping a diary in 1820 at age 14 seems remote.² Still, as aptly explained by Dean C. Jessee, research historian for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University, the apparent time-lag between the First Vision and its recording is more presumed than real. "Considering the youth of the Prophet, the frontier conditions in which he lived, his

lack of academic training, the absence of any formal directive to motivate him to write, and the antagonistic reception he received upon first relating the experience, it is not strange that he failed to preserve an account of his First Vision during the decade between 1820 and 1830. However, once directed by an 1830 revelation to keep a history, Joseph acted with all dispatch that time-consuming responsibilities and frustrating difficulties would allow.³ The first known recording by Paul of his experience on the road to Damascus was written about twenty-four years following his vision.⁴

Although no published reports of the First Vision appeared during the 1820s and 1830s, the Prophet included descriptions of his sacred experience in the grove in all four accounts of the rise of the restored Church which he wrote or dictated during the ten year span from 1832 to 1842. And when Joseph published for the first time two different versions of the history of the Church (a brief sketch and then a more detailed history) in 1842, he included in both accounts a description of this vision.

While the wording in Joseph's accounts of the First Vision is different, a number of basic truths are disclosed in each of his recitals involving a rich harmony in many details. One can better understand and appreciate the different emphases in these testimonies by examining their individual historical setting, by considering Joseph's efforts to write history, and by noting his attempts to improve the form in which the basic message of the restoration was conveyed to others.

The 1832 Account

The earliest known written account of the First Vision was included in an autobiography Joseph wrote in 1832. The narrative begins with the following introduction⁵:

"A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr. an account of his marvilous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Ch[r]ist the son of the living God . . . and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ."

In this sketch of the Prophet's life there is a reference to his birth in Vermont in 1805, his move to New York when he was about ten, his quest for religious truth, and his experience in the grove. There is also a description in this autobiography of events that led to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

For many years historians were perplexed concerning the date of this manuscript. A few years ago, however, Dean C. Jessee determined that this manuscript, which in part was written by Joseph's scribe, Frederick G. Williams, was prepared between 20 July 1832 and 1 December 1832 (possibly during the month of November). Although Frederick G. Williams penned the introduction of this autobiography as dictated by Joseph Smith, Joseph wrote the

portion dealing with the First Vision. This is the only recounting of Joseph's sacred experience in 1820 which is in his own handwriting.

Since the 1832 history is one of the earliest known manuscripts written by Joseph Smith, this record provides many clues to Joseph's formal education. Joseph admitted that because of the poverty of his large family he was "deprived of the bennifit of an education. Suffice it to say," he continued, "I was nearly instructid in reading writing and the ground rules of Arithmatic which constuted my whole literary acuirements."⁶

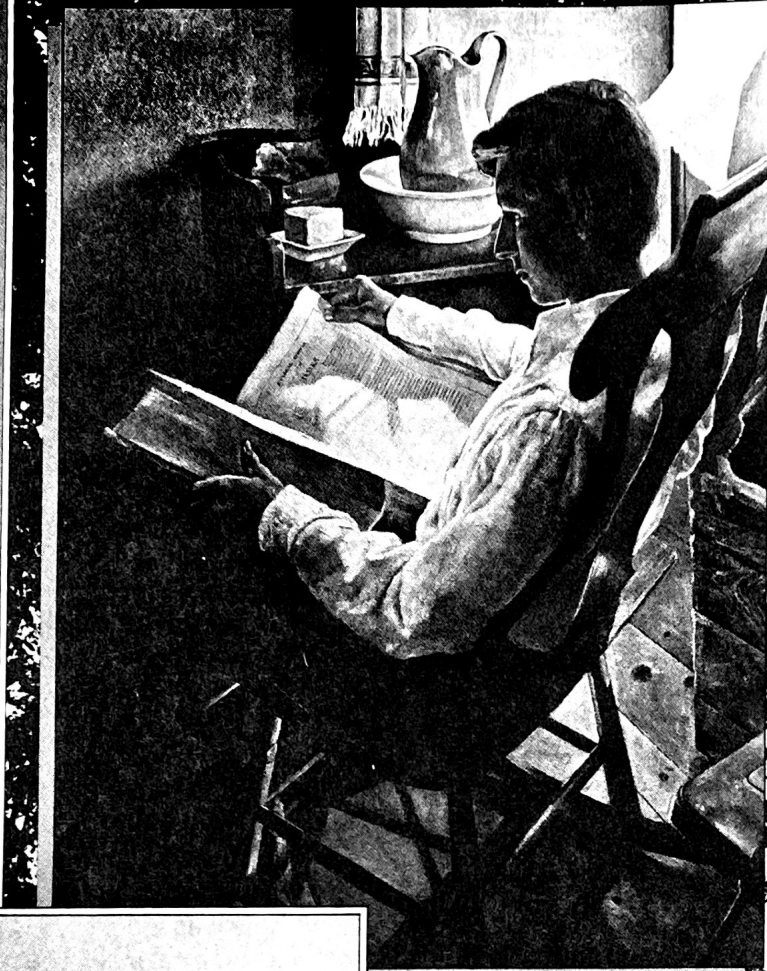
Most children living in the area of Palmyra and Manchester, New York, during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century attended school on an average of seven or eight months each year. Absenteeism in these one-room schools, where children from five to sixteen gathered, was high, and Joseph said that he was among those whose formal education was sometimes neglected. When he listed his educational attainments, he did not mention spelling. A comparison of the spelling in the 1832 account with forms recommended in the popular grammars of the age indicates that by that time Joseph (like most of his contemporaries) had not learned to spell a number of words as prescribed by some secular authorities. Moreover, some of the sentences in that recital were not complete. Others were not in the best literary form, and there was little punctuation in the manuscript. Such natural mistakes, however, take nothing from the powerful, spiritual, and uplifting tone of the 1832 account. In fact, in some ways the 1832 account is the most powerful and convincing of all the accounts.

During the winter of 1832-33, and for several years thereafter, Joseph studied grammar in an attempt to improve his capacity to express himself. His later writings reveal that both his spelling and style improved considerably.

While Joseph was attempting to write history, he was also receiving many revelations. A comparison of the 1832 account with some of the revelations recorded in that same year indicates that Joseph the man did not have the same ability of expression that was evident when Joseph the Prophet unfolded the will of God in the form of latter-day revelations.

Although most experiences recorded by Joseph Smith in his 1832 autobiography were included in later histories which he wrote, some details were omitted in his published works that were recorded in this early manuscript. Most of the themes which were not published in the nineteenth century pertained to personal events or feelings or referred to the work and mission of the Savior which were described in greater detail in ancient and modern scriptures. Similar events in the life of Joseph Smith which were recorded about 1838, such as his operation in New Hampshire while he was a boy and his conversation with his mother following the First Vision, were also excluded from Joseph's initial publication of the

"Joseph Smith Seeks Wisdom in the Bible," by Dale Kilbourne



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The Sacred Grove as it appeared in the spring of 1908. Photography by George Edward Anderson.

"History of the Church."

One example of an event in Joseph's life that was not included in the other accounts of the First Vision written by the Prophet was his extended quest for religious truth. For about three years (from about twelve to fifteen), he was searching for religious truth, especially God's plan of salvation which involves the remitting of sin. During this investigation, he added, there were times when he thought that no society or denomination was built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. The First Vision, therefore, did not occur after a brief quest but took place following a two- or three-year inquiry initiated by Joseph's concern for the welfare of his soul.

Joseph Smith was not satisfied with the programs of redemption taught by the religious leaders in the community where he lived. After investigating the basic beliefs of various denominations, he stated that he "cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom" he could go. While calling upon the Lord, the young man testified, "I was filld with the spirit of God and the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy way walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life."

After learning that Jesus was crucified "for the world," and that all who believed in him would have eternal life, Joseph was instructed that the Savior would return "quickly" in "the cloud clothed in the glory" of the Father. Following this sacred experience, Joseph declared that he rejoiced, and his soul was filled with love for many days.

By way of summary, the 1832 account is the only known recital of the First Vision in which Joseph told of (a) his prolonged quest for religious truth, (b) his earnest desire to secure a forgiveness of sins, (c) his utmost concern because of the sins of mankind, (d) his learning about the nature of the Atonement and the reality of the Second Coming, and (e) his rejoicing following his spiritual experience. Although Joseph also referred to the conflicting doctrines which he encountered, recalled his investigation of the different religious societies, and mentioned that he learned that God's true church was not upon the earth, in this account he concentrated on his personal quest to secure a remission of sins.

Since Joseph was describing an event in 1832 that occurred twelve years earlier, it may have been difficult for him to remember certain details, such as the exact date of this vision. The account was undoubtedly a first draft in which Joseph was attempting to record various impressions. Moreover, Joseph did not revise this account in preparation for publication, nor did he attempt to clarify statements that possibly needed revising. His main interest, as far as time was concerned, was merely to explain that the vision occurred in his teenage years. If in his preliminary

effort to record events in his life he inserted between two lines that the event occurred during his "16th" rather than his 15th year, he just intended to make a correction for a more carefully prepared history that was begun in 1838. (The "16th" is an insertion that is difficult to read. It is possible that the insertion is really "15th," which then would harmonize with his later more carefully prepared drafts.)

A few concepts were included in Joseph's later recitals of the First Vision that were not mentioned in the 1832 autobiography. In all accounts (except the 1842 account) prepared by the Prophet after 1832, for example, Joseph discussed the powerful force of opposition which he encountered prior to his seeing the pillar of light. Moreover, in the other three histories, Joseph specifically referred to the appearance of two personages. This does not mean that in 1832 Joseph said that *only* one personage appeared or in any way disclaimed the appearance of two personages. In fact, Joseph Smith may have referred to the Father in his 1832 account when he declared that he "cried unto the Lord" and the "Lord opened the heavens," even though Joseph was referring to the Son when he wrote that the Lord spoke to him. The Prophet (and other early General Authorities) used the word *God*, meaning the Father, and *Lord* interchangeably, such as in the prayer written in the Liberty Jail. (See D&C 121:1-4.) Nevertheless, in this initial effort to record the spiritual impact of the vision on him, Joseph focused on the message which the Savior unfolded to him. Even though the accounts emphasize different ideas and details, the various versions do not contradict each other regarding this important point.

In 1832 Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon beheld a glorious vision in which they saw Christ on the right hand of the Father and angels worshipping God and the "Lamb." After being commanded during this theophany to write an account of their experience, they did not concentrate on seeing the Father but bore a powerful witness of the Savior and emphasized that which they learned during the remarkable vision. Incidentally, this account was recorded and published less than six months after the event occurred. (D&C 76:14, 20-24, first printed in the *Evening and Morning Star*, Independence, Missouri, July 1832.)

The 1835 Account

On 9 November 1835 Joseph related his early vision to a visiting Jewish minister named Robert Matthews, alias Robert Matthias, who said his priestly name was Joshua. A brief summary of this conversation, which mentioned the First Vision and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, was recorded in Joseph's Kirtland diary by one of his scribes, Warren Cowdery. Later this account was copied from Joseph's journal and placed in the manuscript history which Joseph began in 1838. However, in 1843,

Willard Richards, who had been called by Joseph to edit his history, copied the early portions of the manuscript and omitted that which Joseph had told Matthews concerning his early visions. By that date a more detailed version (the 1838 account) of these events had been written and published.⁷

One concept was mentioned in the 1835 recital which was not included in any other account of the First Vision written or dictated by the prophet. Joseph informed Matthews that he not only saw two personages during this vision but beheld "many angels."

In this November 9th diary account Joseph Smith also declared (if Warren Cowdery recorded correctly this statement) that one personage appeared and then another. There is no contradiction in this statement and the 1838 account in which the Prophet testified that he looked up and beheld two personages. The latter account might have been one in which the time element was reduced.

In a brief reference to the First Vision in this same diary (which because of its brevity is not included as one of the four recitals emphasized in this article), Joseph apparently told a visitor in Kirtland on 14 November 1835 that "he received the first visitation of angels" when he was about fourteen."⁸ Apparently, in his discussions with some nonmembers, the Prophet hesitated to identify the personages who had appeared to him.

Following his sacred experience of 1820 the young prophet was persecuted for telling others that he had seen a vision and was visited by two glorious personages. Recognizing that many would not accept nor appreciate this sacred experience, Joseph Smith was cautious about that which he related to others. Summaries of this event addressed to nonmembers and related before and after the Prophet had identified the personages do not always mention that the Father or the Son appeared.⁹

Moreover, a similar pattern of expression is found in the Old Testament where *God* and *Angel* are used interchangeably. (See Gen. 48:15-16.) In this vein, the Prophet taught others that the resurrected Christ was an angel. One kind of being in heaven, he said, is an angel or personage who is resurrected with a body of flesh and bones.¹⁰ To support this concept, Joseph quoted the Savior when he said to his disciples, "Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." (D&C 129:1-2.) Early Latter-day Saint leaders who knew that Christ had instructed Joseph during his vision of 1820 sometimes declared that an angel told Joseph Smith not to join any of the churches. In their sermons, these same leaders used the term *Lord* to identify the Father and Son and used the words *Lord*, *Christ*, *personage*, *messenger*, and *angel* interchangeably. An examination of twenty-one sermons delivered by six different leaders in early Utah, all who were well acquainted with Joseph Smith and his teachings, reveals that eleven talks mentioning the First Vision

identify the appearance of two personages. In other sermons these same leaders declared in essence that an angel told Joseph not to join any of the churches. In one instance, Orson Pratt, in the same sentence, says that Joseph Smith was visited by an angel from God and by two personages. Obviously, these leaders, like the Prophet himself, sometimes testified that the Father and Son appeared in 1820 and at other times emphasized the basic message that the one personage delivered.¹¹

The 1838 Account

The third known account of the First Vision recorded by the Prophet was included in his "History of the Church." Although Joseph Smith commenced dictating this history in 1838, the earliest known manuscript of this work is in the handwriting of James Mulholland, who was serving as scribe for the Prophet in 1839, thus indicating that the manuscript was probably copied by Mulholland in that year. It is evident that the Prophet intended this narrative to become the basic source for Church literature, and it was carefully prepared with the intention of publishing the information. This account was undoubtedly more carefully considered than either of the first two. It was this version of the First Vision which initially appeared in the 15 March and 1 April 1842 issues of *Times and Seasons* and was republished in the *Millennial Star* in June. Nine years later, Franklin D. Richards published extracts from the *Times and Seasons* account of this history in the first edition of the Pearl of Great Price, and this record, which includes Joseph's testimony concerning the First Vision, was published in subsequent editions of that book.

A comparison of the manuscript in Mulholland's handwriting with the account of the First Vision appearing in the *Times and Seasons* indicates many changes in punctuation and a few changes in spelling. Since Joseph Smith was editor of the *Times and Seasons* in the spring of 1842, he must have been responsible for the changes that occurred when early portions of his manuscript history were initially published. The Prophet introduced this account, which appeared in serial form, by writing: "In the last number I gave a brief history of the rise and progress of the Church. I now enter more particularly into that history, and extract from my journal."¹²

Although nearly all changes in the Prophet's early history were made during his life and while he was editor of the *Times and Seasons*, a few minor alterations in wording and punctuation were made in later publications. After the Pearl of Great Price had been accepted by the Church in 1880 as scripture, Elder James E. Talmage was appointed by the First Presidency to prepare a new edition of that work, which became the 1902 edition. At that time, Elder Talmage modified a few words in Joseph's description

of the historical setting of the First Vision. For example, to improve the style and grammar, the tense of several verbs was changed, an *either* appeared instead of *both*, and *to* replaced an *unto*. *In endeavoring* and *passage of scripture* were also added.

Another change in the 1902 edition (originally in the 1891 edition) of the Pearl of Great Price was the omission of a phrase which had appeared in parentheses in Joseph's manuscript history and early publications of that work. This was the comment concerning Joseph's attitude immediately prior to his entering the sacred grove—"(*for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong.*)" This statement was reinserted in the 1981 edition.

There appears to be a possible discrepancy between a statement recorded in the 1832 account—that Joseph decided by searching the scriptures that no denomination was "built upon the Gospel . . . as recorded in the New Testament"—and a comment in the 1838 account—that "at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong." If there is a contradiction in these accounts, then the 1838 account should be considered as the more reliable history. The young Joseph Smith, like many others then and now, was possibly not precise in his use of all words.

But perhaps the statements are not contradictory. Through a study of the Bible (an intellectual analysis) Joseph Smith may have decided that all the churches he knew of were wrong. At the time he entered the grove, however, and at other times, he may have believed in his heart that God's true church existed somewhere—he just didn't know where. It is often difficult to understand a writer's real intent and the precise meaning of all his phrases, especially if the writer is unskilled and writes during an era earlier than our own.

Additional revisions in the account of the First Vision were made in the 1921 edition of the Pearl of Great Price. Several paragraphs were added that had been included as notes in the manuscript history. This information had been recorded in that work during Joseph's life, as evidenced by a notation in Willard Richards' diary under the date of December 1842. Note B, which appears on pages 133 and 134 of the manuscript history, describes Joseph's conversation with his mother following his sacred experience in the grove.

The 1838 description of the historical setting of the First Vision is nearly twice as long as his 1835 summary. The account of what he learned in the Sacred Grove is about the same length as the 1832 recital, but the emphasis is different, though not contradictory. In 1838 Joseph was writing a history of the Church, rather than an autobiography and brief history, and instead of concentrating on his quest for a remission of sins, he emphasized his search for God's true church.

This concept of Joseph's investigating the various



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faiths, his dilemma concerning which church was right, and his learning that the fullness of the gospel was not upon the earth were discussed in nearly all the accounts. But in the 1838 (and an 1842) history of the Church, Joseph did not mention that Christ informed him that his sins were forgiven. Instead of developing this theme, Joseph in 1838 described in greater detail the instructions of the Savior concerning the churches of his age. For example, in 1832 Joseph wrote that Jesus informed him that the people of the world had turned aside from the gospel, that they were not keeping his commandments, and that they drew near to him with their lips while their hearts were far from him. Six years later Joseph elaborated on this concept by writing:

"I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors were all corrupt, that: 'they draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me, They teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.' He again forbade me to join with any of them and many other things did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time."¹³

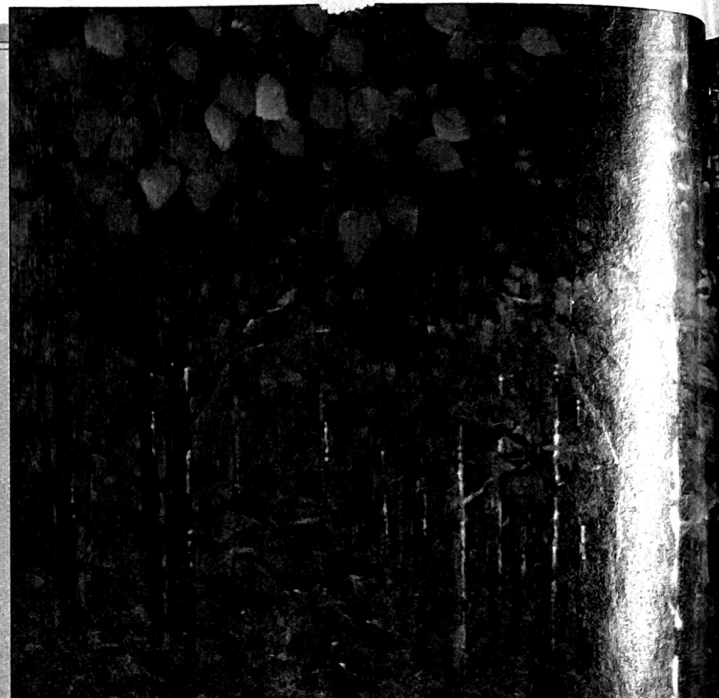
The 1838 account was also the only history written by the Prophet in which he described in some detail the religious excitement and contention which occurred in the place where he lived, the uniting of some members of his family with the Presbyterians, the attraction of others to the Methodist faith, and the joining of great multitudes of different religious parties in that "whole region of country." This was also the only account in which he specified that the event occurred in the spring of 1820.

Moreover, this testimony is the only account prepared by the Prophet in which he specifically identified the Father as one of the two personages who appeared to him. In the two recitals related to non-Mormons (the 1835 and an 1842 account), Joseph described the appearance of two personages without identifying them. Meanwhile, other individuals, members and nonmembers, during the early 1840s wrote accounts of the First Vision based on what they had learned from the latter-day prophet and reported that Joseph testified that during his first vision he beheld the Father and the Son.¹⁴

The 1842 Account

The last known account of the First Vision written by Joseph Smith was included in what is known as the Wentworth Letter. At the request of John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, Joseph Smith was invited to write a history of the Latter-day Saints for one of Wentworth's friends, George Barstow, who was preparing a history of New Hampshire. After writing a brief history of the Church,

"The First Vision," by Ted Henninger



In his initial effort to record the spiritual impact of the vision on him, Joseph focused on the message which the Savior unfolded.

Joseph inserted thirteen unnumbered statements of belief that are known as the Articles of Faith. Although the manuscript of this history has not been located, the account was published in the 1 March 1842 issue of the *Times and Seasons*, the issue that immediately preceded Joseph's publication of his manuscript history in serial form.

One of the noticeable wording differences in the Wentworth Letter from other recitals of the First Vision pertains to what Joseph learned during his communication with Deity. Instead of writing, as Joseph had done in 1838, that Christ informed him that all creeds were an abomination in God's sight, the Prophet declared in his 1842 account that the personages told him that "all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to 'go not after them.'"¹⁵

Joseph concluded this recital with a statement that was implied but not specifically declared in the other three accounts: ". . . at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me."

In conclusion, an examination of the four accounts of the First Vision reveals several important concepts concerning the writing of Church history. Recognizing the importance of preserving that which had transpired, Joseph Smith devoted many hours during the 1830s and early 1840s to recording events



which he had witnessed. While describing his sacred experience of 1820, he sometimes emphasized one theme and at other times concentrated on other major concepts. Although the precise wording of what he learned from the Savior is different in all the accounts, the same basic message was included in all except the 1835 recital—that God's true church was not upon the earth in 1820. Of utmost importance was not the specific language in which the truths were unfolded but the truths themselves.

Since the 1838 recital was included in the Pearl of Great Price, an investigation of the publications of this history helps one better understand principles concerning the formation of scriptures. Joseph Smith was responsible for many changes in punctuation, spelling, and other similar revisions in his manuscript history. After a portion of this history was canonized in the Pearl of Great Price, additional textual refinements were made by editors acting under the authorization of Church leaders. These revisions were apparently made in the interests of grammatical quality, clarification, and consistency. Several short paragraphs were also added that had been included as notes in the manuscript history prior to the Prophet's martyrdom. All these alterations were in harmony with precedents set by Joseph Smith in his textual revisions of latter-day scriptures. In no instance was there a change in the basic message recorded in the manuscript history concerning the historical setting of the First Vision or the truths

unfolded during this remarkable experience. But changes were made in an effort to convey the truths unfolded by God in the latter-days in the best and clearest language that man could fashion.¹⁶ □

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NOTES

1. Accounts of Joseph's recitals of the First Vision (and accounts prepared by Joseph's contemporaries) have been published in the appendix of Milton V. Backman's *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980). Some of these accounts also have been reprinted in Dean C. Jessee's *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), pp. 5-6, 75-76, 199-200, 213. A harmony of the writings of the Prophet on the First Vision appears in Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1983).

2. Why would Joseph have been keeping a diary at a time when other members of his family and nearly all farmers in his economic class in western New York did not? The poverty of his family prevented him from attending school as frequently as other children, and his continual labor in the fields was not conducive to advanced learning, let alone diary-keeping. Social historians have long understood that there are few writings from the childhood and youth of even the most prominent elites who lived before 1900. Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider (*How to Study History*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967, p. 72) have shown that the availability of diaries, journals, and private correspondence is most determined by changes in the level of literacy and education, by technology, and by social and intellectual fashion. It was not until the late nineteenth century that it became a middle class fashion to write detailed letters and keep diaries.

3. Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969):294.

4. Richard L. Anderson, "Parallel Prophets: Paul and Joseph Smith," Brigham Young University Fireside and Devotional Speeches, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1983), pp. 178-79.

5. Joseph Smith History, Letter books, Church Historical Department.

6. Spelling and punctuation of this and other manuscripts cited in this article have been preserved in the form in which the information was originally recorded.

7. Joseph Smith, Kirtland Diary, 9 November 1835, Church Historical Department; Manuscript History, 9 November 1835, Book A-1 and Book B-1, Church Historical Department.

8. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, p. 84.

9. See Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, pp. 158-59, 168-69, 176 for accounts of the First Vision related to nonmembers.

10. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 4:425; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon B. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University: Provo, Utah, 1980), p.77.

11. *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-56), 2:170-71; 2:196-97; 7:220-21; 8:346; 11:1-2; 12:67; 12:302; 12:352-54; 13:65-67; 13:77-78; 14:140-41; 15:180-82; 18:239; 20:167; 21:65; 21:161-65; 22:29; 24:371-73; 25:155-57.

12. *Times and Seasons*, 15 March 1842, p. 726.

13. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, p. 163; the Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), p. 49.

14. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, pp. 170-77.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-69.

16. Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1969), pp. 51-52.