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A few things should be noted concerning Joseph Fielding Smith's statement. He says that the information concerning the use of the stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon is "hearsay." In making this statement Mr. Smith seems to overlook the fact that not only Joseph Smith's wife and brother testified that a stone was used, but also David Whitmer and Martin Harris, who were witnesses to the Book of Mormon. These people were all eye witnesses to the translation. Joseph Fielding Smith claims that "there is no authentic statement in the history of the Church which states that the use of such a stone was made in that translation." While it is true that Joseph Smith suppressed this in his own *History of the Church*, still the *Comprehensive History of the Church*, by B. H. Roberts, very definitely states that a stone was used in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

The fact that Joseph Fielding Smith is embarrassed over the use of the stone is evident from his statement that "It hardly seems reasonable to suppose that the Prophet would substitute something evidently **inferior** under these circumstances." Perhaps President Smith is reluctant to admit that a stone was used because of the criticism of anti-Mormon writers.

M. T. Lamb made this observation concerning the use of the stone:

Finally, according to the testimony of Martin Harris, Mr. Smith often used the "seer stone" in place of the Urim and Thummim, even while the later remained in his possession—using it as a mere matter of convenience.

It seems almost too bad that he should thus inadvertently give the whole thing away. You must understand that the Urim and Thummim spoken of, and called throughout the Book of Mormon "the Interpreters," had been provided with great care over 2500 years ago by God himself, for the express purpose of translating these plates. They are often mentioned in the Book of Mormon as exceedingly important. They were preserved with the greatest care, handed down from one generation to another with the plates, and buried with them in the hill Cumorah over 1400 years ago; as sacred as the plates themselves. So sacred that only one man was allowed to handle or use them, the highly favored prophet, Joseph Smith himself. But now, alas! after all this trouble and pains and care on the part of God, and on the part of so many holy men of old this "Urim and Thummim" is found at last to be *altogether superfluous; not needed at all*. This "peep stone" found in a neighbor's well will do the work *just as well*—and is *even more convenient*, "for convenience he used the seer stone." So we are left to infer that when he used the Urim and Thummim at all, it was at *some inconvenience*. And probably he only did it out of regard to the feelings of his God, who had spent so much time and anxiety in preparing it so long ago, and preserving it to the present day for his special use! (*The Golden Bible*, by M. T. Lamb, 1887, pp. 250-51)

Joseph Fielding Smith, confronted with so much evidence that a stone was used in the translation of the Book of Mormon, finally has to admit, "**It may have been so**, but it is so easy for a story of this kind to be circulated due to the fact that **the Prophet did possess a seer stone**, which he may have used for some other purposes." President Smith does not explain what "other purposes" the stone might have been used for.

In an unpublished manuscript on the Book of Mormon, La Mar Petersen states:

Today the Church is silent regarding the stone. It seems somehow beneath the dignity of a Prophet to have ever placed one in his hat. Little or no information can be obtained as to the present whereabouts of the stone. [A.] William Lund, assistant Church historian says: "I have been here in the Library more than forty years and I have never seen it." Yet there are at least three definite statements in responsible Church organs that it does, or did, repose there.

On page 225 of his book, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 3, Joseph Fielding Smith stated:

The Urim and Thummim so spoken of, however, was the **seer stone** which was in the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith in early days. This **seer stone** is **now** in the possession of the Church.

David C. Martin presents some evidence to show that President Smith keeps the "seer stone" locked in a safe:

As an added note, Dean Hooper, Rockford, Illinois, in a conversation with Joseph Anderson, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve of the "Utah" Church, at a Chicago Stake Conference, January, 1971, quotes Anderson as saying that the "Seer" Stone that Joseph Smith used in the early days of the church is in the possession of the church and is kept in a safe in Joseph Fielding Smith's office. Anderson has seen it a number of times there. Slightly smaller than a chicken egg, oval, chocolate in color. (*Restoration Reporter*, vol. 1, no. 2, June, 1971, p. 8)

Relationship to Book of Mormon

A careful examination of the whole story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and even the text of the book itself reveals that it originated in the mind of someone who was familiar with the practice of money-digging. To begin with, the "seer stone" used in "translating" the book seems to have been nothing but a common "peep stone." Many people in Joseph Smith's area were using these stones to search for buried treasures. Mormon scholars admit that Joseph Smith found the stone while digging a well, and the testimony given in the 1826 trial shows that he used his stone to search for treasures. Even Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, admitted that the money-diggers "took Joseph to look in the stone for them, and he did so for a while, . . ." (*Tiffany's Monthly*, 1859, p. 164). On page 169 of the same publication Martin Harris claimed that Joseph "had before this described the manner of his finding the plates. He found them by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing." Henry Harris also stated that Joseph Smith told him he saw the plates in the hill Cumorah by means of the stone: "He said he had a revelation from God that told him they were hid in a certain hill and he **looked in his stone** and saw them in the place of deposit; . . ." (Affidavit of Henry Harris, as quoted in *A New Witness For Christ In America*, vol. 1, p. 133). Hosea Stout also claimed that Joseph Smith used the stone to find the Book of Mormon plates: "President Young exhibited the **seer's stone with which the prophet discovered the plates** of the Book of Mormon, to the Regents this evening" (*On The Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout*, vol. 2, p. 593).

Evidence also shows that in "translating" the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith placed the stone in a hat in the same manner "as when he looked for the money-diggers." According to witnesses, the plates didn't even have to be present when Joseph Smith was "translating." The Mormon writer Arch S. Reynolds gives this information:

At another time David Whitmer gave a description of the procedure:

Joseph Smith did **not see the plates** in translation, but would hold the interpreters (Urim and Thummim) to his eyes and cover his face with a hat, excluding all light, and before him would appear what seemed to be parchment on which would appear the characters of the plates on a line at the top, and immediately below would appear the translation in English, . . . (*Kansas City Journal*, June 5, 1881.)

(*How Did Joseph Smith Translate?* p. 6)

The evidence proves that the plates were not always before Joseph during the translation. His wife and mother state that the plates were on the table wrapped in a cloth while Joseph translated with his eyes **hid in a hat** with the **seer stone** or the Urim and Thummim. David Whitmer, Martin Harris and others state that Joseph hid the

plates **in the woods** and other places while he was translating. Also if Joseph hid his face in a hat while translating what good would the plates have been to him in helping him read the characters? Where it was dark he could not have seen the characters anyway, and the plates were too large to be hidden in a hat. (*Ibid.*, p. 21)

As we examine the Book of Mormon story in the light of the money-digging activities of the 1820's, we notice that the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was "translated" were supposed to have been a very valuable treasure. In fact, when the "first published consecutive account of the origin of the Church" appeared in 1834 and 1835 it stated that Joseph Smith desired to have the Book of Mormon plates to make himself wealthy. This account was republished in the *Times and Seasons* as follows:

... I have said that two invisible powers were operating upon his mind during his walk from his residence to Cumorah, and that the one urging the certainty of **wealth** and ease in this life, has so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great object so carefully and impressively named by the angel, had entirely gone from his recollection, that only a fixed determination to obtain now urged him forward, ... No sooner did he behold this sacred **treasure** than his hopes were renewed, ... he thought, perhaps, there might be something more equally as valuable, ... which could he secure, would still add to his store of **wealth**. These, in short, were his reflections, without once thinking of the solemn instruction of the heavenly messenger, that all must be done with an express view of glorifying God.

On attempting to take possession of the record a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him, in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before. What was the occasion of this he knew not—there was the pure unsullied record, as had been described—he had heard of the power of **enchantment**, and a thousand like stories, which **held the hidden treasures** of the earth, and supposed that physical exertion and personal strength was only necessary to enable him to yet obtain the object of his wish. He therefore made the third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditating he exclaimed: "Why can I not obtain this book?"

"Because you have **not** kept the commandments of the Lord," answered a voice, within a seeming short distance.

He looked, and to his astonishment, there stood the angel who had previously given him the directions concerning this matter. (*Times and Seasons*, vol. 2, pp. 392-393)

In Joseph Smith's *History* as published in the *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith 2:53, he does not mention the fact that the angel rebuked him for attempting to obtain the plates to become wealthy:

I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the messenger, and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time; ...

Fortunately, Paul R. Cheesman has brought to light a document written by Joseph Smith which the church suppressed for 130 years. In this manuscript Joseph Smith stated:

... I immediately went to the place and found where the plates was deposited ... and straightway made three attempts to get them ... I cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul why can I not obtain them behold the the [sic] angel appeared unto me again and said unto me you have **not** kept the commandments of the Lord which I gave unto you therefore you cannot now obtain them for the time is not yet fulfilled ... I had been tempted of the advisary and sought the Plates to **obtain riches** and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye singled to the glory of God therefore I was chastened and sought diligently to obtain the plates and obtained them not until I was twenty one years of age ... ("An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Visions," Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965, pp. 130-131)

Even Joseph Smith's mother seems to have had an interest in the value of the treasures found in the hill Cumorah. Speaking of the breastplate which was found with the Book of Mormon plates, she said: "The whole plate was **worth at least five hundred dollars**: ..." (*Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, London, 1853, p. 107). In later printings of Mrs. Smith's book, these words have been completely deleted without any indication (see photograph in our *Case*, vol. 1, p. 61). The Mormon leaders have also deleted her description of the Urim and Thummim. In this description Joseph's mother claimed that the Urim and Thummim "consisted of two smooth three-cornered **diamonds** set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as old fashioned spectacles" (*Ibid.*, p. 101).

In an affidavit given December 8, 1833, William Stafford told of the great interest which the Smith family had in money-digging:

... I first became acquainted with Joseph, Sen., and his family in the year 1820. ... They would say, for instance, that in such a place, in such a hill, on a certain man's farm, there were deposited kegs, barrels and hogsheds of coined silver and gold-bars of gold, golden images, brass kettles filled with gold and silver—gold candlesticks, swords, &c &c. They would say, also, that nearly all the hills in this part of New York, were thrown up by human hands, and in them were large caves, which Joseph, Jr., could see, by placing a stone of singular appearance in his hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light; at which time they pretended he could see all things within and under the earth,—that he could see within the above mentioned caves, **large gold bars and silver plates**—that he could also discover the spirits in whose charge these treasures were clothed in ancient dress. (*Mormonism Unveiled*, Painesville, Ohio, 1834, pp. 237-238)

It is very interesting to compare Stafford's statement about the caves with a statement by Brigham Young which we have previously quoted:

Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a **cave**, in which there was a large and spacious room. ... They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room **more plates than probably many wagon loads**; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the **gold plates**; ... (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 19, p. 38)

Heber C. Kimball, who was a member of the First Presidency, also spoke of "the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a **cave** in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry? There were books piled up on tables, book upon book" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 4, p. 105).

The Mormon writer Edward Stevenson made these interesting statements about the cave:

It was likewise stated to me by David Whitmer in the year 1877 that Oliver Cowdery told him that the Prophet Joseph and himself had seen this room and that it was filled with **treasure**, ... as well as the portion of **gold plates** not yet translated, ... no Rochester adventurers shall ever see them or the treasures, although science and mineral rods testify that they are there. At the proper time when greed, selfishness and corruption shall cease to reign in the hearts of the people, these vast hoards of hidden **treasure** shall be brought forth to be used for the cause and kingdom of Jesus Christ. (*Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet*, Salt Lake City, 1893, pp. 14-15)

The Book of Mormon makes these statements concerning hidden treasures:

And behold, if a man hide up a **treasure** in the earth, and the Lord shall say—Let it be accursed, because of

the iniquity of him who hath hid it up—behold, it shall be accursed.

And if the Lord shall say—Be thou accursed, that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever—behold, no man getteth it henceforth and forever. (Book of Mormon, Helaman 12:18-19)

... whoso shall hide up **treasures** in the earth shall find them again no more, because of the great curse of the land, save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord.

For I will, saith the Lord, that they shall hide up their treasures unto me; and cursed be they who hide not up their treasures unto me; for none hideth up their treasures unto me save it be the righteous; and he that hideth not up his treasures unto me, cursed is he, and also the treasure, and none shall redeem it because of the curse of the land. (Book of Mormon, Helaman 13:18-19)

The reader will remember that Brigham Young told of a “chest of money” that moved by itself “into the bank,” and that Martin Harris told of a “stone box” which “slipped back into the hill.” In Joseph Smith’s 1826 trial, Jonathan Thompson testified that “on account of an enchantment the trunk kept settling away from under them when digging; . . .” This idea of treasures slipping into the earth seems to be reflected in the Book of Mormon:

Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle.

Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have **slipped** away from us, because of the curse of the land.

O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become **slippery**, and we cannot hold them. (Book of Mormon, Helaman 13:34-36)

In Mormon 1:18 we read that the people “began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became **slippery**, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again.”

From the evidence we have presented it becomes clear that the Book of Mormon had its origin among a people who believed in “seer stones” and money-digging.

Working with the Rod

One of the most important changes Joseph Smith made in his revelations was an obvious attempt to cover up the fact that he had endorsed the idea that Oliver Cowdery had a gift from God to work with a divining rod. Below is a comparison of the way this revelation was first published in the *Book of Commandments* and the way it has been changed to read in recent editions of the *Doctrine and Covenants* (see photograph on p. 19, Change F).

Book of Commandments: “Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the gift of **working with the rod**: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this **rod of nature**, to work in your hands, . . .” (Chapter 7:3)

Doctrine and Covenants: “Now this is not all thy gift, for you have another gift, which is the **gift of Aaron**; behold, it has told you many things;

“Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this **gift of Aaron** to be with you.” (Section 8:6-7)

The reader will notice that the words “*working with the rod*” and “*rod of nature*” have been entirely deleted from this revelation.

In the *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* we find some information that would seem to show that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery derived their interest in working with the rod from their parents:

About 1800, occurred the “Wood scrape.” . . . It was a religious delusion, . . . the cause of great excitement here, and of a good deal of notoriety in this part of the State. . . .

Before 1860, I had conversed with more than 30 old men and women who were living here in 1800, . . . the substance of which was that the Woods **dug for money** . . . they used **hazel-rods** which they pretended would lead them to places where money, had been buried, . . . His [Nathaniel Wood’s] peculiar religious doctrines will appear as we proceed. . . . he regarded himself and his followers as modern Israelites or Jews, under the special care of Providence; . . .

A man by the name of Winchell, as he called himself when he came here, was the first man who used the **hazel-rod**. . . . He was a fugitive from justice from Orange county, Vermont, where he had been engaged in counterfeiting. He first went to a Mr. Cowdry’s, in Wells, who then lived in that town, near the line between Wells and Middletown, . . . Cowdry was the father of **Oliver Cowdery**, the noted Mormon, who claimed to have . . . written the book of Mormon, as it was deciphered by Smith from the golden plates. . . . Winchell staid at Cowdry’s some little time, keeping himself concealed, . . .

Winchell next turns up in Middletown, . . . and here he began to use the **hazel-rod** (whether he had before used it at Cowdry’s, in wells, I cannot say). . . .

Before we proceed further, we should, perhaps, say a word about this **rod**, . . . The best description we can give of it is this: It was a **stick** of what has been known as **witch-hazel**—a small bush or shrub very common in this vicinity. It was cut with two prongs, in the form of a fork, and the person using it would take the two prongs, **one in each hand**, and the other end from the body. From the use of this stick Winchell an[d] [t]he Woods pretended to **divine** all sorts of things to suit their purpose. . . . The men, under Winchell, . . . commenced digging . . . becoming weary, their enthusiasm began to cool, . . . Winchell held up his rod, got some motion from it, and told them the money was in an iron chest and covered with a large stone, and that they would soon come to it. . . . He impressed it upon them, that the occasion was one of “awful moment,” that there was a “**divinity**” **guarding** the treasure, and that if there was any lack of faith in any one of the party, or any should utter a word while removing the stone and taking out the chest, that this divinity would put the money forever beyond their reach, . . . Some one of the party stepped on the foot of another, the latter crying out in pain. “Get off from my toes.” Winchell exclaimed with a loud voice, “The money is gone, flee for your lives!” Every man of the party dropped his bar or lever, and ran as though it was for life. . . .

The Woods then commenced using the **hazel rod** and **digging for money**, which was in the Spring or early summer of 1800, and continued in this until late in the Fall, . . . Jacob Wood, known as Capt. Wood, one of the sons of Nathaniel, was the leader in the use of the **rod**. “Priest Wood” his father, seemed to throw his whole soul into the rod delusion, but his use of the rod was mostly as a medium of revelation. It was “St. John’s rod” he said, and undoubtedly was very convenient for him, as he was much more fruitful in his prophecies than before—. . . all the Woods and their followers, had each a rod, which was used whenever they desired any information. If any one was sick, they sought the rod to know whether they would live or die, and to know what medicine to administer to them. In all their business matters, they followed, as they said, the direction of the rod, . . . Many of the old people have told me, that almost every day during that season, Capt. Wood, or some other one, could be seen with the two prongs of the rod twisted around his hands, in search for **buried treasures**. . . .

Mr. Clark in his letter says: “By what I have heard of them (the Woods,) I have no doubt that the movement gave origin to the Mormons.” . . .

That the system of religion promulgated by Nathaniel Wood, and adopted by his followers in 1800, was the same, or “much the same,” as the Mormons adopted on the start, is beyond question. . . . The Woods were very fruitful in prophecies, especially after the **hazel rod** came to their use, so were the Mormons in the beginning of their creed,