

the characters and thus the Prophecy of Isaiaah was fulfilled which is written in the 29 chapter concerning the book.³²

At a time when Joseph's prophetic identity was jelling, a reference in the Bible was far more important than a verification of the translation. The Anthon incident brought Joseph into the biblical narrative, connecting him to the primary source of his creative energy. The Bible had prophesied his life.

When Martin Harris told his wife he planned to help translate the plates, she insisted on going with him. This time Lucy Harris was determined to see the plates and settle the question of their existence. She searched every possible hiding place in the Smiths' house and then the ground outside. Frustrated and angry at her failure, Lucy Harris took lodging nearby and told people that Joseph intended to cheat her husband of his farm. When the Harrises returned to Palmyra after two weeks, Lucy vainly attempted to persuade Martin to give up the translation. After he left for Harmony again, she hid the movable articles in the house to put them out of reach of Joseph's supposed design.³³

Martin Harris was back in Harmony by mid-April 1828, and the translation began in earnest. For two months, from about April 12 to June 14, 1828, Joseph and Harris were hard at work. Joseph translated using the interpreters (also called the Urim and Thummim, crystals mounted on a breast plate), and Harris wrote down the text as it was dictated. A curtain divided the men to prevent Harris from seeing the plates.³⁴ By mid-June 1828, they had covered 116 pages of foolscap with text. Yet uncertainty still beset Harris. The ever-lengthening manuscript and the tests to which he put Joseph did not quiet his doubts. He could not forget his wife's skepticism or the hostile queries of Palmyra's tavern crowd. Was Joseph making a fool of him? Was he the classic dupe, to be cheated of his money and farm when the fraud was complete? Lucy Smith said that Harris asked Joseph for a look at the plates, for "a further witness of their actual existance and that he might be better able to give a reason for the hope that was within him." When that request was denied, he asked about the manuscript. Could he at least take it home to reassure his wife? Joseph asked through the interpreters and was told no. Harris pressed again and received the same answer. Still he was not satisfied. Finally, Joseph later reported, "After much solicitation, I again enquired of the Lord, and permission was granted him to have the writings" on the condition that Harris show the pages only to five people: his wife, his brother Preserved, and his father, mother, and wife's sister. Uneasy about the whole proceeding, Joseph required Harris before he set off to bind himself in a solemn covenant to comply.³⁵

That decision began a sorrowful season. Soon after Harris left, Emma

gave birth to a son after an exhausting labor. Whatever happiness the child brought was short-lived. The baby, named Alvin after Joseph's older brother, died that very day, June 15, and was buried near Emma's grandparents in sight of the house. Emma came close to death herself, and Joseph attended her night and day. After two weeks, as she began to mend, Joseph's mind turned back to the manuscript. Sensing his anxiety, Emma suggested that he go to Manchester to check up on Martin Harris. Mrs. Hale agreed to care for Emma, and Joseph caught the first stagecoach north.³⁶

As soon as he got home, the Smith family sent for Harris, expecting him at eight for breakfast. The morning hours dragged by, and he did not come. At half past twelve, Lucy reported, "we saw him walking with a slow and measured tread towards the house, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground. On coming to the gate, he stopped instead of passing through and got upon the fence, and sat there some time with his hat drawn over his eyes." When he finally came in and sat down for the long-delayed breakfast, Harris "took up his knife and fork as if he were going to use them, but immediately dropped them." He "pressed his hands upon his temples, and cried out, in a tone of deep anguish, 'Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!'" Joseph sprang up and demanded to know about the manuscript. "Have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head, as well as your own?" "Yes, it is gone," replied Martin, "and I know not where."³⁷

Lucy Smith said that seeing the manuscript had placated Mrs. Harris, as Martin had hoped. She was so pleased that she let him lock the papers in her bureau, from which the manuscript was retrieved from time to time to show the relatives named in the covenant. Martin Harris's first mistake came when he wished to show the pages to a close friend. His wife was away and, having no key, he picked the lock, marring the bureau. Having broken his promise once, he showed the manuscript to any friend who came along. Lucy Harris castigated him when she returned and found her bureau damaged, but that was not the worst. By the time the Smiths sent for Martin, the manuscript had disappeared. He had spent the morning searching without success. Joseph demanded that he go back and look again, but Harris said further search was useless: "I have ripped open beds and pillows; and I know it is not there." Lucy Smith surmised that Mrs. Harris stole the manuscript with the intention of altering it. The discrepancies between the second translation and the first would make the whole appear a fraud. Whatever the reason, the manuscript was gone, never to be recovered.³⁸

"O, my God!" moaned Joseph, clenching his hands. "All is lost! all is lost! What shall I do?" He blamed himself for the calamity. "It is I who tempted the wrath of God. I should have been satisfied with the first answer." What would Emma think? "Then must I . . . return to my wife with such a tale as

this? I dare not do it, lest I should kill her at once." No one could comfort him, his mother said; everyone felt his despair: "Sobs and groans, and the most bitter lamentations filled the house." "I well remember that day of darkness," Lucy Smith recalled, "both within and without. To us, at least, the heavens seemed clothed with blackness, and the earth shrouded with gloom." Joseph paced the floor, weeping and grieving, until sunset when he finally consented to eat.³⁹

Joseph went back to Harmony in July 1828, suffering, as he later wrote, much "affliction of soul." As he later told the story, the angel appeared and returned the interpreters, which had been taken from him when Harris went off with the manuscript. Through them Joseph received his chastisement:

For God doth not walk in crooked paths; neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said: Therefore his paths are strait, and his course is one eternal round. Remember, remember, that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men.

The revelation was inexorable. Joseph was at fault for yielding to Harris, but the revelation made it sound like a larger problem: "behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men." He had listened to Harris, whose friendship and aid he needed, rather than to God. "For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God, although men set at nought the counsels of God, and despise his words, yet you should have been faithful." The voice was adamant. "Behold thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall."⁴⁰

The words were hard for a young man who had just lost his firstborn son and nearly lost his wife, and whose chief error was to trust a friend, but there was comfort in the revelation: "Remember God is merciful: Therefore, repent of that which thou hast done, and he will only cause thee to be afflicted for a season, and thou art still chosen, and wilt again be called to the work." Lucy said Joseph was put on probation. If he showed proper penitence, the interpreters would be returned on September 22, the day of his annual interview with Moroni for the past four years.⁴¹

The revelation printed as section 3 of the current *Doctrine and Covenants* holds a significant place in Mormon history. So far as can be told, it is the first revelation written by the Prophet. He and others remembered earlier revelations, but they were written later. The current section 3 appeared as section 2 in the first printed edition of revelations, immediately following

the introduction revealed in 1831. The revelation gave the first inkling of how Joseph would speak in his prophetic voice. The speaker stands above and outside Joseph, sharply separated emotionally and intellectually. The rebuke of Joseph is as forthright as the denunciation of Martin Harris. There is no effort to conceal or rationalize, no sign of Joseph justifying himself to prospective followers. The words flow directly from the messenger to Joseph and have the single purpose of setting Joseph straight. "For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet, if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at nought the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will, and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him." At twenty-two, Joseph was speaking prophetically.⁴²

Eighteen twenty-eight was a turning point in Joseph Smith's development. It was the year when he found his prophetic voice. Not two years earlier, he was entangled with the money-diggers and struggling to scrape together rent money for his family. In 1828, he dictated 116 pages of the *Book of Mormon* and received a revelation spoken in God's voice. By this time, the treasure-seeking language has disappeared. Neither the lore nor the greed of the money-diggers enters the picture. The plates are being translated, the revelation said, that God's people might "rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name." The language was biblical rather than occult.⁴³

With Joseph's realization of himself as a prophet, the rearrangement of memory began. When Joseph tells his history from 1828 on, his search for treasure as a boy became an irrelevant diversion of his youth. Treasure-seeking did not lead to the person he had become. His true history began with his search for a church and his plea for forgiveness. These led to the revelation of the Father and the Son and the visit of Moroni, the cardinal events of his boyhood. After 1828, Joseph could no longer see that magic might have prepared him to believe in a revelation of gold plates and translation with a stone. It did not occur to him that without magic his family might have scoffed at his story of Moroni, as did the minister who rejected the First Vision. Magic had played its part and now could be cast aside.⁴⁴

OLIVER COWDERY

Sometime in this dark period, Joseph attended Methodist meetings with Emma, probably to placate her family. One of Emma's uncles preached as a Methodist lay minister, and a brother-in-law was class leader in Harmony. Joseph was later said to have asked to be enrolled in the class. Joseph Lewis, a cousin of Emma's, rose in wrath when he found Joseph's name. Lewis objected to the inclusion of a "practicing necromancer" on the Methodist