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Lesson VI - Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: Reviews the obtaining and the translation of the gold plates by Joseph Smith, the Anthon incident and the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Lesson Department

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in March)

COMING FORTH OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

LESSON VI

1. *Obtaining the Plates.* For some time prior to September 22, 1827—the date upon which the Prophet received the Nephite plates from the Angel Moroni—it was necessary for the male members of the Smith family to obtain occasional work away from their farm, that they might sustain themselves and meet the annual payments on their land. For this purpose, in October of 1825, Joseph had employed himself to a Mr. Josiah Stool, of Bainbridge, New York, who at the time was engaged in opening a supposedly Spanish mine, long since abandoned. While engaged in this work Joseph boarded at the home of Mr. Isaac Hale, who lived at Harmony, Pennsylvania, a short distance from the scene of Mr. Stool's operations.

2. It was here that Joseph first met Miss Emma Hale, whom he subsequently married, January 18, 1827. Shortly after their marriage, Joseph and his wife went to the Smith home at Manchester, where Joseph assisted his father on the farm during the following summer.

3. In the early morning of September 22, 1827, Joseph received the plates from the Angel Moroni, and a few days later brought them to the home of his father, where he and Emma were still living. (For a full account of the manner in which the Prophet received the plates, the reader is referred to *Joseph Smith the Prophet*, by his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, pp. 99-106.) Joseph records that no sooner had he re-

ceived the plates than the most strenuous efforts were made to wrest them from him. With the passing of time persecution rapidly became more bitter, and eventually, at the invitation of Mr. Hale, Joseph and his wife decided to move to Harmony, Pennsylvania.

4. *Move to Harmony.* It should be said that Joseph was in humble financial circumstances and was not well prepared to make the journey. Shortly before the date set for leaving, however, a friendly neighbor came to his support with a gift of fifty dollars—this was Martin Harris, a respectable and prosperous farmer of Palmyra. Alvah Hale, a brother of Joseph's wife, came from Harmony with team and wagon and conveyed them to that place. They arrived at Harmony in the month of December, 1827, and established themselves in a house located on Mr. Hale's farm.

5. *The Anthon Incident.* Immediately after establishing himself at this place, Joseph began to transcribe characters from the plates. His own account of this very important matter is tersely recorded as follows: "I commenced copying the characters off the plates. I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 19.) Some time in February of the following year, 1828, Martin Harris came to Harmony, and therewith conveyed the characters to New York City, where

they were submitted to Professor Charles Anthon—a gentleman of outstanding literary attainment—for his study and opinion. (For an account of the outcome of this visit the reader is referred to the *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 20; and the *Comprehensive History of the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 99-109.)

6. *Loss of the Manuscript.* After returning from New York, Martin Harris went to his home in Palmyra and a little later came back to Harmony (April 12, 1828) where for some two months thereafter he acted as scribe while Joseph translated the plates. By the early part of the following June, sufficient of the record had been translated to cover one hundred sixteen pages of foolscap paper.

7. Prompted by a desire to convince his wife and friends that Joseph's claims were genuine, Martin Harris repeatedly requested the Prophet to allow him the privilege of taking the manuscript home. Finally Joseph reluctantly granted Martin's request, with the distinct understanding and agreement that the manuscript was to be shown only to Martin's wife and a few others. Martin however disregarded this bounden promise, and the manuscript was lost. Because of Joseph's lack of wisdom in this connection, the Lord temporarily deprived him of the gift of translation and otherwise gave evidence of his displeasure. The revelation contained in Section three (which read) shows forth the will of the Lord in this matter.

8. *The Lord's Provision.* Now, it so happened in the wisdom of the Lord that when the Nephite historian Mormon was about to deliver his abridgment of the Nephite record to his son Moroni, in the fourth century of the Christian era, he discovered a set of plates, known

as the plates of Nephi, which so pleased him that he decided to preserve them with his abridgment. His reason for doing so he did not know, except, as he says, he was so prompted by the Spirit of the Lord. (See Words of Mormon, verses 3-10.) In consequence of the preservation of these plates, the record delivered to Joseph Smith by the angel Moroni contained a double account from the beginning of Nephite history down to the reign of King Benjamin. But now let us return to the narrative.

9. A short time after the loss of the manuscript, the Lord made it known unto the Prophet that his adversaries, into whose hands the manuscript had fallen, had already changed it for the purpose of showing, if he attempted a second translation, that he could not translate twice alike and therefore that he had no gift from God. To avoid such a snare, the Lord instructed the Prophet to make his second translation from the plates of Nephi. (Read Doc. and Cov. 10:38-46.) It is interesting to observe that provision for just such a necessity was made by the Nephite historian more than fourteen hundred years earlier.

10. Even though Martin Harris had broken his covenant and promise, which resulted in the loss of the manuscript, yet the Lord promised him, by revelation through the Prophet Joseph, that if proved worthy, he would later be permitted to see the plates and act as a witness of their truth to the world. (Ibid. 5:1-15.)

11. *Translation of the Plates.* Throughout the winter and early spring of 1828-29, Oliver Cowdery, a young man of about Joseph's age, was teaching school in the vicinity of the Smith home at Manchester. In harmony with the custom of those days, the teachers usually "boarded

round" with the patrons of the school. Accordingly, while at the Smith home, Oliver Cowdery became greatly interested in the story of Joseph's heavenly manifestations, and decided that as soon as his school closed in the springtime he would visit Joseph at Harmony and obtain first-hand information for himself. In the meantime Oliver had declared his purpose to one of his acquaintances, David Whitmer, and promised that after visiting with Joseph he would write him his impressions. Oliver Cowdery reached Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 5, 1829, and two days later (April 7th) Joseph began the work of translation, with Oliver acting as his scribe. A revelation soon followed, in which the Lord commended Oliver for his willingness to serve, and promised him inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, provided he continue faithful. (Ibid. 6:14-37.)

12. *Movement to Fayette.* The work of translation continued without serious interruption until early in the month of June (same year), when Joseph found it inadvisable to remain longer at Harmony. It appears that not only many of the people of the neighborhood were unsympathetic with him but also his wife's father, Mr. Hale. In the meantime Oliver Cowdery had been in communication with David Whitmer at Fayette. He now wrote him again at the Prophet's suggestion, requesting that he come down to Harmony and convey them to the Whitmer home. This request found David in the midst of his spring work, in the completion of which he claims to have received superhuman aid. A short time later, therefore, David Whitmer went to Harmony and conveyed the Prophet and Oliver back to the home of his father, Peter Whitmer, in the township of Fayette, New York, some

twenty-five miles southerly from the Smith home in Manchester. Here the work of translation was soon completed.

13. *The Three Witnesses.* In course of the work of translation it was learned from the statement of Moroni (Ether 5:1-4) that the Lord intended to show the plates to three witnesses, by whose testimony the truth of the Book of Mormon would be established. Almost immediately after this statement had been discovered, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris requested the Prophet to inquire of the Lord if they might act as these especial witnesses. Joseph complied with their request and received as an answer the revelation designated as Section seventeen in the *Doctrine and Covenants* (which read): Shortly thereafter, these three men, with Joseph, repaired to a section of the woods "convenient to" the Whitmer home, where they saw the plates and heard a voice from heaven declaring: "These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear." (For a further account see *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 54, 55.) The fidelity of the witnesses to this trust is a matter of history.

14. *Publication of the Book of Mormon.* After the Book of Mormon was translated, difficulty was encountered in obtaining a publisher. Finally, however, an agreement was made with Mr. Egbert B. Grandin, of Palmyra, whereby he was to print an edition of five thousand copies for the sum of three thousand dollars, Martin Harris acting as surety for the payment of this amount. In this connection it is well to remember that Martin Harris had already

shown his willingness in various ways to assist the Prophet. Indeed, it was he who first came to the Prophet's aid and furnished him with fifty dollars with which to move from Manchester to Harmony. Shortly later than this the Lord gave a revelation to Joseph Smith in which he counseled Martin to be free in the use of his money when the time should come for publishing the Book of Mormon. (Doc. and Cov. 19:36.) His readiness to comply with the commandment is thus fully attested. It is interesting to note that his farm was subsequently sold to satisfy this agreement with the printer. Little wonder that Deity is willing to bless an individual of such outstanding integrity!

15. As a precaution against any possible loss or alteration of the manuscript, Oliver Cowdery transcribed it in its entirety and kept a guard constantly on watch, day and

night, about the house. The completed book came from the press in the early part of 1830.

Questions for Discussion and Review

1. Relate the circumstances under which Joseph became acquainted with Miss Emma Hale—later his wife.

2. What reasons prompted Joseph to leave Manchester and go to the home of his wife's father at Harmony, Pennsylvania?

3. In what way was Martin Harris responsible for the loss of the one hundred sixteen pages of manuscript?

4. How had the Lord made provision for this loss?

5. Discuss Oliver Cowdery's connection with the translation.

6. Relate incidents connected with the publishing of the Book of Mormon.

Teachers' Topic

THE BEATITUDES

Aim: To enable us to more fully appreciate the Beatitudes, and apply their beautiful truths to our daily lives.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matt. 5: 8.)

A man's heart is pure when it loves only the good, when all its motives are right, and when all its aspirations are after the noble and true. Purity and excellence of character are of greater worth than any amount of grace, wealth, genius or power. Without a solid, sterling basis of individual goodness, all the grace, elegance and art in the world fail to save or elevate a people.

The New Testament insists on personal purity as the beginning of all training and all knowledge. Such men as Paul and Peter and the

others who changed the world, insisted on personal purity. They meant that a man's body should be so pure as to be a fit temple for the Spirit of God.

The 15th Psalm has sung the purification of life and humility of heart which might fit him who should sojourn in God's tabernacle. Since the 24th and 25th Psalms also describe purity as preparation for God's house, the conclusion here is natural, they shall see God.

Those who cleanse their hearts understand God in proportion to their purity, and, when they are cleansed from all sin, will see Him face to face. (Heb. 12:14; John