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More Modern Miracles

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Abstract: Three lesson outlines for Relief Society that focus on the prophecies concerning the Book of Mormon, its guardian messenger and his mission, the Urim and Thummim, and the method of translation.

Guide Lessons for April

LESSON I

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in April)

THE DISPENSATION OF THE FULNESS OF TIMES

More Modern Miracles

A miracle is an event which cannot be brought about by man or by mortal means. It is an occurrence in which the super-mortal takes part.

The "opening event," or first vision work, was a miracle in which two super-mortal and one mortal being took part. The discovery and securing possession of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated was a miracle in which one mortal and one super-mortal being operated. Neither of these events could have started without divine sanction, divine agency, and divine power, and any one of them would have been stopped short of completion by the withdrawal of divine support.

Gifts from God through the forces of earth, nature, or through the laws of sociological evolution or mechanical inventions, are not miracles in a theological sense.

"Mormonism" so called, as a religion, is a miracle, not an ecclesiastical evolution, but a revelation, a direct gift from God, the gospel restored by its author.

The first great miracle was of short duration. The second was first an all-night event, with but momentary interests, then parts of a day, and then four periods with intervals of a year between. And now we come to the consideration of a miracle that extended into months of activity in which at least two super-mortal and several mortal agents took part.

The Translation of the Plates.

The Translator: Joseph Smith, the Seer.

1. The fact that he was chosen for the work marked him as one of the "noble spirits"—his standing among men marked him as a leader—and though his philosophy was a revelation rather than the result of meditation, his acceptance of the great truths, and his ability to apply them, give proof of his high grade mentality.

2. *He was honest.* A religious imposter might receive a revelation of rebuke, but he would hardly publish it to the world as Joseph Smith did. (See Doc. and Cov. section 3.)

3. *He was inspired.* When inspiration ceased the translation stopped. That Joseph was more than man during the work of the translation is evident. His power to translate was supplemental to the man, it was a gift from God, just as the instruments of translation were a loan from the angel who was the permanent custodian of them and the plates. (See Doc. and Cov 3:11-14; 10:1, 2, 3.)

The Instrument of Translation

The Urim and Thummim. "A curious instrument which the ancients called Urim and Thummim which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow, fastened to a breast plate." Joseph Smith in a letter (see *History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 535.)

The words "Urim and Thummim" are said to mean light and perfection. The home of God is a Urim and Thummim, the earth will become a Urim and Thummim, and one of the blessings of the celestial glory is an individual Urim and Thummim. (See Doc. and Cov. 130:7-11.)

The Urim and Thummim was evidently in use before the Abrahamic dispensation, as the Brother of Jared had one given to him. (Ether 3:22.) This instrument of interpretation was used by the Nephites (see Ether 4:5.) But the instrument used by Joseph the Seer was the one used by the Brother of Jared in fulfilment of a prophecy recorded in Ether 3:24. The Urim and Thummim was an instrument by which the mind and the will of the Lord was sought in ancient Israel. (See I Samuel 28: 3-7.)

The interpreter used by Joseph was returned to Moroni. (See *History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 18.)

The translation was begun by the Seer alone, then Martin Harris became scribe for the Prophet and wrote one hundred and sixteen pages of manuscript, which, in the opinion of Elder Sjodahl, would equal not more than fifty printed pages, or the untranslated contents of four of the plates. These one hundred and sixteen pages of manuscript fell into the hands of enemies, and because of this error the angel Moroni took the plates and the instrument of interpretation into his own custody for a brief period and then restored them to Joseph. (See *History of the Church*, vol. 1, pages 21-23.)

This ended the *first* period of the work of translation.

The second period begins with Joseph fully reinstated before the Lord and with a new scribe, Oliver Cowdery, and new instructions concerning what to translate.

Instead of retranslating that part of the abridgment made by Mormon, contained in the lost manuscript, he made a translation direct from the plates of Nephi which Mormon had abridged. This direct translation covered the history of the Nephites from

the time they left Jerusalem up until the time of King Benjamin, and so we have in the Book of Mormon a more detailed history of that period than we should have had, if the manuscript had not been lost. Instead of the 45 or 50 pages of matter contained in the lost manuscript of 116 pages, we have 132 pages of printed matter. The translation with Oliver Cowdery as scribe began April 7, 1829, and was completed July 1, 1829—eighty-five days—a miracle of months, a work that could not have been done by human agency alone. (*Church History*, vol. 1, page 32; *Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, by J. M. Sjodahl, page 24.)

There have been fifteen translations of the Book of Mormon that were not miracles and yet each contributed to the making of the Book fill its prophetic destiny as a message to all “nations, kindred, tongues and peoples.”

These translations or versions are the Danish, French, Italian, German, Welsh, Hawaiian, Swedish, Spanish, Maori, Dutch, Samoan, Tahitian, Turkish, Japanese, Hebrew.

Questions and Problems

1. What is the one outstanding characteristic of a miracle?
2. Why is the radio not a miracle theologically?
3. Wherein was the first vision a miracle?
4. Over how much time did the miracle of translation of the plates extend?
5. Discuss the proposition: The acceptance and application of revealed truth is a mark of high intelligence.
6. What instance in the translation gives proof of the honesty and courage of Joseph Smith?
7. What books in the Book of Mormon are not a translation of the Book of Mormon plates or the plates containing Mormon's abridgement?
8. How many pages longer is the Book of Mormon than it would have been if the Harris manuscript had not been lost?
9. How many days were occupied in the divinely directed translation?
10. Why cannot the translation of the Book of Mormon into other languages be called miracles?
11. Name the languages into which the Book of Mormon has been translated.
12. Where did Abraham get the Urim and Thummim, and what did he see through the instrument. (Pearl of Great Price, Book of Abraham, chapter 3.)