The Messages of the Restoration: A Study of the Doctrinal Development of the Missionary Message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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THE MESSAGES OF THE RESTORATION:

A Study of the Doctrinal Development of the Missionary Messages of
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1820-1833.

by

Sheldon Nixon

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

Religious Education

Brigham Young University

August 2010
To Wendy, Hunter, Levi, Brigham and Kajsa
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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ABSTRACT


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Religious Education

Masters of Arts

Proselyting has always been an important part of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in recent history the proselyting message has remained primarily the same. But that was not the case in the earliest days of the Church. When Joseph Smith received his First Vision and started to share that experience to others, the proselyting message of the Church was born. But that message, the message of the Restoration, did not linger on that event for too long. In fact the message of the Restoration underwent a series of evolutions and modifications as the Lord continued to reveal His will to the Church. At times these changes were small and seemed to be the next natural step in the development of the Church and its teaching, and at other times the change was slightly more dramatic. But with every new addition to the message the Lord was directing the work and had a purpose for the change. The members of the Church did not always understand the reason for the change, but God did and because of His careful crafting of the messages of the Restoration, the Church and its message grew in strength and number.

Keywords: Missionary Message, Message of the Restoration, Missions, Missionary, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith, Mormon
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CHAPTER 1
THE MESSAGE OF THE RESTORATION

In 2004, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints changed the way its missionary discussions were taught when it introduced the book *Preach My Gospel*. This change immediately altered the way the missionary work was performed all over the world. While this was a momentous change in how the work was done, it did not change the doctrine being taught.¹ Change is not new to the Church’s missionary program, and that was especially true in the earliest days of the Church. In the years leading up to and following the organization of the Church in April 1830, the changes to the missionary work were not so much with how missionary work was done but rather what doctrine the missionaries were teaching.

In the early years of the Restoration of the Church, the proselyting message of the Restoration evolved quickly. As the Church grew and its needs increased, the Lord added to the message. As revelation was received, the message was amended. When the Church experienced hardship and difficulties and its doctrine was challenged, the Lord widened the Saints’ understanding.² In short, the proselyting message of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints underwent many changes in the first 13 years of the Restoration. Many of the changes were dramatic and just like a child’s growth, though rapid, were almost unnoticed by the casual observer.

¹ For a more in-depth look at the change from the six memorized discussions to the *Preach my Gospel* system in the missionary program see Benjamin H. White “How Preach My Gospel Came to Be.” (Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo, 2010), unpublished.  
² The word “Saint” is used to describe a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.
Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to examine the progression and development in the proselyting message of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint during the period from 1820 to 1833. This thesis will identify what messages those first “missionaries” taught, and will seek to identify what developments caused the message to change. This thesis will therefore act as a “growth chart” to measure the changes to the message of the Restoration.

This thesis is written by an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with a faithful perspective that will be evident and obvious throughout this entire work. It is not my purpose to argue or apologize for the events which will be recorded here, only to record with a faithful LDS perspective the historical changes of the message of the Restoration. With this faithful perspective I believe that Joseph Smith received many revelations from the Lord starting in 1820 and continuing to the end of his life. I will comment on these revelations in this thesis with that belief.

Scope

Before more is written, it is necessary to define the phrase, “message of the Restoration” as it will be used frequently in this thesis. The phrase could be defined as “the message or news the Church wanted taught and delivered to the world at a given time.”

The message of the Restoration precedes “called and set apart” or commissioned missionaries. Because of that fact, the scope of this thesis will look at what the message was and will not try to qualify nor classify who was doing the actual teaching. In the early history of the Church, it is sometimes hard to separate “called and set apart” missionaries from the average member who was preaching the gospel to his neighbors. This was especially true in the earliest
days of the Church when the message of the Restoration was being taught primarily by ordinary
members of the Church who did not have had an official call to serve a mission. Despite the lack
of an official call, many members felt the desire to “warn their neighbor” (see D&C 88:81) and
did so whenever possible.³ It is therefore unnecessary to classify who is teaching the message
because the message was the same. It was the message of the Restoration.

This thesis will examine the proselyting message of the Restoration during four separate
time periods. The first period is between 1820 and 1827 when the message of the Restoration
was Joseph Smith’s First Vision. It was also during this time period that a few other people were
told about the visit of the angel Moroni and the gold plates. The second period covers from
September 1827 to June 1829. During this period the message of the Restoration moved away
from the First Vision towards news of the angel Moroni, the discovery of the gold plates and the
testimony of the 11 witnesses. The next time period is from June 1829 to the end of 1830. By
this time the gold plates had been translated and the message of the Restoration could now
include what was actually written on the gold plates. The message was also about the re-
establishment of the “authorized” Church as found in the New Testament together with an
invitation to pray to God to know if the message was true. The last time period will include the
years of 1831 to 1833 when the message changed dramatically. It was during that time that the
message was founded upon the idea that the Second Coming was close at hand, that destruction
would precede that event, and only people who had gathered to Zion would escape that
destruction.

³ Although this commission from the Lord to “warn your neighbor” came in December of
1832, it is clear by reading the histories of the Church that many of the members already felt the
need to share the gospel with their neighbors.
Method and Literature Review:

Primary Sources:

Probably the most important helps in discovering the message of the Restoration were the revelations the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith. By looking at these revelations, which are recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, it is possible to clearly see the messages the Lord wanted delivered. However, the missionaries did not always change their message as quickly as the Lord did. There were times when the Lord revealed a new doctrine so marvelous to the missionaries that they would teach it almost immediately without needing to be instructed specifically to do so. But at other times it would take months before the missionaries started to record the change in their journals. Both of these examples will be examined more closely in this thesis in later chapters.

Another invaluable source for this thesis were the letters of instruction written by Joseph Smith and other Church leaders to the elders who were out proclaiming the gospel message. These letters, some of which were distributed through the Church’s newspapers, are especially helpful in identifying the message that the Prophet desired the elders to emphasize.

But perhaps the most helpful source for identifying the proselyting message of the Restoration is to examine the writings of those who were actually spreading the word. While the revelations clearly identify what the Lord wanted taught, it is the journals that help us see if it was actually being taught. Those journals will comprise the majority of the primary sources used for this thesis. Most all of those journals were dated between 1830 to 1833 and while it is not

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The word elder is used to describe a priesthood office in the Church and can also refer to men who are serving a mission for the Church.
practical to look at all of the journals from this time period, enough of them were researched that
trends could be seen with respect to what the main message was at any given time.

Although the missionary journals were extremely valuable in understanding what the
message was at different times, they did offer some unique challenges. For example, they do not
always clearly identify the messages that their authors were teaching. Most of the journals
contained information which the author thought would be important to record. Therefore, most
of the entries contain mundane details such as who the elders taught, who they healed, who they
baptized, who they ordained, who “kicked” them out of their houses, where they slept at night,
who fed them, how many meetings they held and even how many miles they traveled in a day.

The following excerpt from Orson Pratt, while serving with Lyman E. Johnson in the
spring of 1832 effectively illustrates this point. Even though the proselyting message at this time
was primarily on gathering to Zion, the actual entries focus on the everyday details of the
missionary work rather than what message was being taught.

May 14. We traveled north, and came to the town of Charleston in Vermont; tarried ten
days; preached seven times in this region, baptized fourteen, among whom were Winslow
Farr, William Snow and Zerubbabel Snow. In these parts the Lord wrought by our hands
many miracles of healing.

May 25. We went about thirty miles northwest to the town of Troy; tarried nineteen days;
held sixteen meetings in these regions; baptized eighteen in the town of Jay, and then
started back to Charleston.

June 15. Arrived among our brethren in Charleston; tarried eleven days, held six
meetings; baptized eleven, one of whom was John Badger. Then went south a few miles
and held eleven meetings; here the Lord healed a lame woman whom we baptized.

July 4. Again visited Bath; tarried three days; preached twice; baptized four; ordained
Hazen Aldrich an elder.

July 9. Started again for Charleston; tarried six days, attended three meetings; baptized
one, ordained John Badger an elder, William Snow a priest, and Winslow Farr a teacher
and then traveled to the town of Jay, and held two meetings; we next returned to Bath, held two meetings, and ordained John Duncan a teacher.

July 30. We departed from Bath and went to the town of Benson, about five days' journey; we tarried in this region about twenty-five days, held fourteen meetings in various towns and villages; baptized two, and attended a conference.  

While such information would be important in reconstructing the history of a mission area or the travels of the elders, that same information was not helpful in uncovering the message the missionaries were actually teaching. So the paradox remains. The journals which were mostly silent on this topic were still very useful to see what the elders were teaching because every so often a journal would give a clear picture of what the messages entailed.

At times a journal would record the message the elders were teaching, but the details were ambiguous. When the journals failed to paint a clear picture of what the missionaries were teaching, other contemporary sources were used to help fill in the gaps. A good example of a journal entry that would be confusing without contemporary supporting material to fill in the gaps is one from Orson Hyde’s mission journal dated March 27th 1832.

On this date, Orson Hyde and Samuel Smith were on a mission traveling towards Rochester, New York. While on route they met two other members of the Church, Brothers Earl and Seth Johnson who had just come from Amherst, Ohio. Orson Hyde explained in his journal that he was happy to see additional Church members and then, while writing about this experience, he wrote, “Had the vision read to us.”

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6 Orson Hyde, “Journal of Orson Hyde: While Absent on a Mission in Company with Samuel H. Smith, From February 1, 1832 to December 22nd 1832, arriving at Kirtland Ohio, being absent about eleven months,” 7, Mor m 279 m 82 v.11, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
Orson Hyde never identified what “the vision,” that Johnson brothers read to him was, and therefore it could refer to any number of visions, but it is clear that Orson wrote “the vision” and not “a vision.” Other contemporary sources help identify the vision to which Orson was referring. As mentioned earlier, Orson Hyde’s missionary companion was the Prophet Joseph Smith’s younger brother, Samuel Smith, who was also keeping a journal during this mission. Where Orson’s journal entry was a little vague as to what “the vision” could be Samuel’s journal shed more light on the subject.

Samuel Smith’s missionary journal six days previous to Orson’s March 27th entry mentioned that he and Orson met a man by the name of Haskins who had just been baptized and was now an elder in the Church. “He told us that he had seen Joseph and Sidney and that they had had a vision and that they had seen great and marvelous things and that they had got along wonderfully well on translating [the Bible].”7 Because Orson Hyde had been previously told about a new vision the prophet received we can understand why he only referred to it as “the vision” six days later. But it still does not identify what vision he is talking about.

Samuel’s entry explained that Joseph and Sidney had received the vision while they were still translating the Bible. Then six days later, March 27, 1832, the same date on which his companion Orson Hyde first mentioned hearing the vision, Samuel gave us more insight to what “the vision” was. “Brother Seth and Joel Johnson [came from] Amherst and they told us that they stayed all night at my father’s in Kirtland. We rejoiced to hear from our brethren to the West.

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7 Samuel Smith “Diary 1832 Feb. – 1833 May,” 4, Typescript, ms. 4213, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
They had the vision with them which Joseph and Sidney had seen and we had the privilege of reading it.”

This last piece of the mystery tells us that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon both “had seen” this vision. When corroborated with the dates of the revelations contained in The Doctrine and Covenants and with other contemporary clues, it is clear that “the vision” is Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This vision of the Plan of Salvation and the three degrees of glory – commonly referred to solely as “The Vision” in early Church writings – was received only five weeks earlier, February 16, 1832. Five weeks after this vision was received by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, some elders were already taking it with them to preach and were reading it with other members and missionaries.

These primary sources mentioned above; missionary journals, correspondences, letters published in Church newspapers and the revelations from the Lord were invaluable for this research. Most of these primary sources were housed either at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library at Brigham Young University, or the Church History Library in Salt Lake City. While most of the works housed there have been transcribed, microfilmed or even digitized, some were not, and the original handwritten pieces contained the faint smell of history.

When dealing with handwritten literature from any time period there are some difficulties that should be expected. Two of the most common difficulties encountered while researching the

8 Ibid. While Orson Hyde’s Journal identifies the Elders as Earl and Seth Johnson, Samuel Smith identifies them as Joel and Seth Johnson. Research done with the Church’s family search website identified that Seth Johnson who is mentioned in both journals, died in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835 and had an older Brother named Joel Hills Johnson who later lived and died in Johnson, Utah. Therefore, if the two Elder Johnsons were brothers, it would stand to reason that they are Brothers Joel and Seth Johnson as mentioned in Samuel Smith’s journal.

9 More will be stated in Chapter 5 about the importance the “The Vision” had on the message of the Restoration.
handwritten primary sources were: first, they were sometimes difficult to decipher (especially those pieces that were a scan or microfilm of the original), and second they contained a plethora of seemingly misspelled words. It was very common to encounter misspelled words or a correct, but alternate, spelling that is no longer accepted. While adhering to the original spelling (even when misspelled or an alternate spelling is used) is vital in some cases, it is not so in this thesis. Therefore to make this thesis easier to read, misspelled words from the primary sources have been corrected and alternate spellings have been modernized. This was primarily done to eliminate the need to insert “[sic]” each time a misspelled word was encountered.10

Secondary Sources:

Many books, theses and studies have been written on missionary work in the early days of the Church, but the majority of them do not focus on the gospel message. A few works deal with the techniques the missionaries used throughout the history of the Church. There are also a variety of secondary works that deal with the history of a certain mission or a certain time period, all of which are valuable to the entire repository of literary work on the subject. These secondary sources focus on the historical events of the time, for example the first missionary in a town, who he baptized and who followed in his wake to continue the work. 11

10 [sic] is used to identify a misspelled word identified in the original document the quote was taken from. It is to let the readers know the misspelling was done on purpose to more accurately portray the original, yet somewhat unaccepted, spelling.

With the work that has been written on the historical aspect of the missionary work, surprisingly little has focused on the actual message the missionaries were teaching at the time. In fact, it was purposely avoided in some previous academic research. In the thesis “Proselyting Techniques of Mormon Missionaries” the author stated the purpose and scope of the thesis as such: “The primary objective of this study is to consider the different proselyting methods and techniques used by full-time missionaries beginning with efforts in the 1830’s and continuing to the present. The focus will be more on what the missionary does rather than on the doctrinal content of his message.” My thesis takes the opposite position and will look at what the message is and not focus on how it is taught. This thesis will contain enough history in order to put the message of the Restoration in context but it is not a historical study of any mission or missions in general. It will focus primarily on the message of the Restoration between the years 1820 to 1833 and seek to identify why the message evolved like it did.

Since little has been written previously on this topic, most of the secondary sources used were mainly helpful in understanding the history at the time. Their ability to paint the history in a very clear and understandable way was most helpful to put the other sources into context.

While reading the other secondary sources it became apparent that there is a real need for this research. What was apparent was that sometimes others would assume the missionaries or Church leaders were teaching a doctrine of the Restoration at a particular time when in fact the message was something entirely different. For example, to assume the missionary message in 1831 and 1832 emphasized Joseph Smith seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ would be inaccurate. Although it is true this message was taught both before and after 1831-1832, it


definitely was not the main message the missionaries and other Church leaders were stressing during 1831 and 1832. To incorrectly assume a message of the Restoration was taught at the time does not necessarily have disastrous implications, but it is inaccurate and does give a false view of the history and message of the Church during the lifetime of its first modern prophet.

It is understandable though why this could happen. The message of the Restoration evolved so quickly that if an author assumed the message was the same as it had been only a few months previously or the same as it would be in only a few months without researching the point, an erroneous view of the message of the Restoration could be given. While this was observed infrequently in the secondary sources, it does show a definite need for a thesis such as this one.

Many times these errors did not amount to anything more than small inaccuracies. However there was an instance when the discrepancy was more serious because it not only painted the message of the Restoration inaccurately, but it also portrayed Joseph Smith to be something he was not. In his book “Joseph Smith and the Restoration,” Ivan J. Barrett, wrote in great details about the pains, questions and doubts which Joseph Smith experienced as a youth and which ultimately led to his First Vision. To illustrate the confusion Joseph experienced prior to receiving his First Vision, Mr. Barrett used two quotes from Joseph and attributed him as saying both before his miraculous vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Although Mr. Barrett quoted Joseph correctly, it should be pointed out that there was a four years gap between the two quotes. And only one of them was given before the First Vision. Ivan Barrett wrote that

[Joseph Smith] attended the different Churches in the community and investigated their dogmas without finding satisfaction. He describes his plight “This was a grief to my soul. Thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen, I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind, the contentions and divisions, the wickedness and abominations, and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind. My mind became exceedingly distressed, for I became convicted of my sins.” Then
Joseph stopped attending Church meetings for awhile, telling his mother, “I can take my Bible, and go into the woods and learn more in two hours, than you can learn at meeting in two years.”\(^\text{13}\)

Joseph did in fact tell his mother that he could learn more in two hours in the woods with his scriptures than going to an organized Church. But Joseph was only able to state this truth to his mother after seeing God the Father, and Jesus Christ in the spring of 1820 when they instructed him that he “must join none of them, for they were all wrong” (Joseph Smith History 1:19).

To attribute Joseph Smith as saying that he could go “into the woods and learn more in two hours than she could learn at meeting in two years” prior to his First Vision may give the wrong impression of Joseph as being arrogant and disrespectful toward his mother.\(^\text{14}\) Such was not the case with Joseph.

**Summary**

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he admitted, “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it]” (1 Corinthians 3:2). The Lord, the prophets and the missionaries in this dispensation followed that same process when it came to proclaiming the message of the Restoration. As the Church grew, so did the message of the Restoration. The message was very simple in the beginning. What started out as one young boy proclaiming he had seen a vision grew into hundreds of missionaries teaching about the gathering of the Saints, the doctrine of eternal progression, and that of baptism for the dead. The message of the


Restoration grew as fast as the Church and because of the swiftness of the growth the message could (and sometimes did) change impressively in only a few years.

A faithful view of this change asserts that to keep the message of the Restoration pure, the Lord directed the work by revealing to the Prophet Joseph Smith what He wanted Joseph and the rest of the Church to teach and what not to teach. It was always “milk before meat.” Years later when Heber C. Kimball took the gospel to England in 1837, and when the Twelve Apostles followed, the missionaries in the United States were teaching meatier doctrines such as the three kingdoms of glory, and the gathering of the Saints, while the missionaries in England were directed to simplify the message to what it had been seven years prior. The exhortation to teach milk before meat was imperative for the message and Church to grow correctly. When the message grew with the Church, people received it with gladness. When too much was taught too quickly the people rejected it.15 This thesis will document that growth.

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CHAPTER 2

I WAS HATED AND PERSECUTED FOR SAYING THAT I HAD SEEN A VISION

Timeline of important events in this chapter:

It has been said in reference to the Restoration that “the exact point in this dispensation at which active proselyting began with the object of restoring a formal religious society, the Church of Jesus Christ, is difficult to determine.” While it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact time

in this dispensation when man started to proselyte the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not
hard to identify when God himself began to proselyte by revealing the first message of the
Restoration.

The First Message of the Restoration: Joseph Smith’s First Vision.

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this thesis is to identify the message of the
Restoration - what was being taught about the Restoration - during a given time period. It will
include a broader view of proselyting and look beyond what only formally “called” and ordained
missionaries were teaching. Therefore, the visit of God the Father and his son Jesus Christ and
their subsequent message to Joseph Smith in 1820 would classify as the first message of the
Restoration when “active proselyting began with the object of restoring a formal religious
society.”

When Joseph Smith was in his early teens a religious revival spread throughout the
United States which eventually made its way to upstate New York. Joseph’s mother, Lucy; his
sister, Sophronia; and his two brothers, Hyrum and Samuel joined the Presbyterian faith, but
young Joseph remained confused about which religion to join. One of the concerns for Joseph
Smith was he felt overwhelmed by the different interpretations of scriptures in those days. “[He]

knew not who was right or who was wrong and [considered] it of the first importance that [he]
should be right, in matters that involve eternal consequences.”

---

*Joseph Smith,* ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co.,
1988), 73.

17 Ibid

18 *Joseph Smith, Journals,* The Joseph Smith Papers, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-
To help to “be right in matters that involve eternal consequences” Joseph attended the meetings of the different religions in the area hoping to discover which one was the true Church. He also continued to read and search the Bible in hopes of receiving the answers he sought. He “was one day reading the epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Joseph Smith History 1:9-11).

This scripture came with such power into his heart that he could not stop thinking about it. He pondered about it over and over again; he knew he was in need of wisdom and he believed God was able to answer him. But even then, Joseph did not immediately ask God the question of his heart. It took him time to realize he would be unable to figure out the truth of the matter by himself. Therefore he came to the conclusion that he “must either remain in darkness and confusion or else [he] must do as James” instructed and ask God. But even then, after knowing the way to get his answer it still took Joseph some time to decide which to do, remain in darkness or ask God. He “at length came to the determination to ‘ask of God’” specifically about which Church he should join.19

In the spring of 1820, Joseph Smith walked into a silent grove of trees near his home which was... the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so... I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other-This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him (Joseph Smith History 1:15-17)!
Joseph wanted to know which Church to join and hoping to receive an answer to that question beckoned him into the woods that spring morning. Upon seeing God and his son, Joseph literally “asked God” the question of his heart.

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. (Joseph Smith History 1:19)

The first message of the Restoration to man in this dispensation pointed towards the need for a Restoration. The message God delivered to Joseph Smith was to inform him that the existing Churches of the day were “all wrong” (Joseph Smith History 1:19 [hereafter cited as JSH]). and because of that, a Restoration was necessary. Whether Joseph realized it at such an early age or not, Jesus’ message introduced the concept that a worldwide apostasy had occurred and a need for a Restoration of His Church was necessary.

Orson Pratt reported that during this vision, Joseph “was expressly commanded to go not after [the religions of the time]; and he received a promise that the true doctrine – the fullness of the gospel, should, at some future time, be made known to him.”20

There are not many accounts about what happened in the days immediately after the First Vision so it is difficult to know how soon Joseph spread the first message of the Restoration to others. Joseph recorded in his own history that he went home after his miraculous vision, but whether or not he told his parents about the whole ordeal at that time is uncertain. All Joseph wrote about it was that he told his mother he had learned that Presbyterianism was not true (see

JSH 1:20). However, we do not know if Lucy Mack Smith pressed the issue and asked how he knew such was the case. It is probable Joseph told his parents about the vision within a few days because he later shared the first message of the Restoration with someone outside of his family. Once he did that, the message was unstoppable.

The first recorded instance when Joseph personally spread the message of his First Vision was to a Methodist preacher who was an acquaintance of his. Joseph “took occasion to give him an account of the vision which [he] had had” (JSH 1:21). His mother later recorded this understatement, “The results were not what Joseph could have hoped for.” Joseph said he was “greatly surprised at [the preacher’s] behavior, he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the Apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.” This is when the persecution and rejection of the message, and of Joseph personally, began, and it did not stop for Joseph until his martyrdom.

The story of Joseph Smith’s First Vision spread around the community. Whether it was Joseph spreading the message, or if it traveled by third person accounts, it traveled all the same. The disbelief and persecution that followed such an unbelievable story tainted Joseph’s reputation as well as his family’s. Years later, Joseph’s brother, William, noted that after Joseph told the story of his vision and it started to spread throughout the community the family also felt persecuted.

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21 Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 119-120.
22 Smith, History of the Church, 1:6-7.
The reported discrimination was primarily perpetuated among the religious leaders from the other sects who targeted Joseph and his claim. Joseph felt overwhelmed with the persecution he experienced and felt “how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling.”

Joseph attracted attention and persecution wherever he went. Some of the local Church leaders used their religious influence and visited the families who occasionally employed Joseph as a day laborer. They tried to sour Joseph’s reputation in the eyes of his employers, hoping that people would stop hiring him and his brothers. But whatever they did to sour Joseph’s reputation, it did not stop the actual message from spreading, in fact in some cases it only helped. The first message of the Restoration was being spread throughout the town, and it was being perpetuated primarily by religious leaders who did not believe in Joseph’s claims and therefore preached against him and his assertions.

Three years later, in 1823, Joseph Smith’s persecutors were more than just the religious leaders from other sects; he was now “suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because [he] continued to affirm that [he] had seen a vision.” Whether he was the initiator of the news or not, the news of the vision still spread and

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24 Smith, History of the Church, 1:7.
26 Smith, History of the Church, 1:9.
when he was asked about it he always declared it to be true. He never denied the point; so the persecution continued.27

I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation.28

The first message of the Restoration was delivered by God the Father and Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith. They told him they were not pleased with the churches currently on the earth and he was not supposed to join any of them.

We are not sure how many people Joseph told about the vision, but once he started to tell his story, the message seemed to spread itself. Joseph did not need to continually spread the story because the story became the gossip of the area and everyone was familiar with it. But when asked about his vision, Joseph always confirmed the fact and never denied what he had previously said. For three years Joseph Smith and his family suffered persecution because he would not deny what he had said. Then on the night of September 21, 1823, Joseph experienced a different vision and a new message of the Restoration was revealed to him.

27 See James B. Allen, “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought.” Journal of Mormon History, 7, (1980): 43-61. Allen’s article shows how little informed the first Saints really were about Joseph Smith’s First Vision. Some scholars in their writings have hinted that the First Vision was completely avoided by Joseph at all times, but when I take into account his personal history and that of his mothers, I see the possibility that he did tell people about the First Vision and it had such a negative effect upon the work and stirred up such the persecution that he eventually stopped talking about it.

28 Smith, History of the Church, 1:7-8.
The Second Message of the Restoration: a Book Deposited, Written Upon Gold Plates

The first message of the Restoration came as a divine message from God to Joseph Smith informing him that an apostasy had occurred and that God’s true Church was not upon the earth. The second message was no less magnificent and came with almost equal fanfare.

From the time he was fourteen, Joseph knew there was no Church on the earth authorized to baptize him or perform the sacrament, two important ordinances in the repentance process. For Joseph this meant that for three years, from 1820-1823, he knew that every time he failed to obey one of God’s commandments, there was not an authorized Church on the earth to help him repent. Those feelings of anxiety over the welfare of his soul reached a climax on the night of September 21, 1823 when Joseph decided he would once again call upon God as he had previously done and ask for a remission of his sins. 29

Joseph fully expected God to once again answer his prayers in one way or another. As Joseph knelt in prayer and called upon God, he noticed a light in his room “which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday.”30 When Joseph looked towards the source of the light he saw an angel who called himself Moroni. The angel said he was sent from God to assure Joseph of his “state and standing” before Him and to deliver to Joseph a message. That message, regarded “a book deposited, written on gold plates” which became the second proselyting message of the Restoration.31 Although this was the second message of the restoration, this message stayed primarily within the family circle until 1827.

29 See Smith, History of the Church, 1:9-11.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. 1:12.
With all of the persecution Joseph experienced after telling people about his First Vision he must have known it would only become worse if news of this new vision surfaced. In fact, the first night the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph he told him about the persecution Joseph would receive once news of his second vision broke. Moroni warned him it would be more severe than he had previously experienced. This could not have been comforting news for the young teenager to hear. So to prepare him for the future persecution, Moroni told Joseph that his name would “be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.” 32 At only seventeen years of age, Joseph could not have imagined the degree to which the persecution would eventually extend.

Moroni proceeded to tell Joseph about an ancient book of scripture “written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants.” 33 Moroni next told Joseph that God had prepared a way for him to translate this record and then he showed Joseph, in vision, where the plates were buried. After delivering the message of the gold plates, Moroni delivered another message of the Restoration, but one that Joseph would not fully understand until near the end of his life.

He first quoted part of . . Malachi. . .For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble; for they that come shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . .Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. . .And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall

32 Ibid. 1:11-12
33 Ibid. 1:12
turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.34

The message of how the earth could avoid being “utterly wasted” at the Second Coming was a message of the Restoration that would take shape and develop over the next 20 years.

Joseph did not get much sleep that night because the angel Moroni returned and repeated the message two additional times, and when the third and final visit of the night was completed, Joseph heard the cock crow. Lucy, his mother, reports as Moroni left for the last time that night he commanded Joseph to do one more thing; to tell his father about the vision. Joseph was called to deliver a specific missionary message of the Restoration to his father.35

Joseph, however, did not fulfill the mission in the time period that Moroni had given him. The next day Joseph had ample opportunities to talk with his father as the two of them worked side by side in the family field, but as they worked, Joseph remained silent on the topic. As the morning progressed, Joseph, because he had spent the entire night communicating with Moroni instead of sleeping, found it difficult to work. His brother, Alvin, and father both noticed. Believing his son to be sick, Joseph Sr. sent Joseph home to his mother, but on the way home his strength completely failed him and he collapsed.36

When he regained consciousness he found Moroni standing above him. He had returned. “The first thing he said was, ‘Why did you not tell your father that which I commanded you to tell him?’” Joseph responded that he did not tell his father about the vision because of the fear that his father would not believe him. Moroni told Joseph his father would believe every word. Joseph returned to the field where his father was still working and “related to him all that had

34 Ibid.
36 See Smith, History of the Church, 1:14-15 and also Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 129.
passed between him and the angel the previous night and that morning. Having heard this account, his father charged him not to fail in attending strictly to the instruction he had received from this heavenly messenger." 37 The message of the gold plates had begun to be preached by mortals! 38

On September 22, 1823, when Joseph first went to the Hill Cumorah where the plates were hidden, the message of the Restoration was relatively simple. When he ascended the Hill Cumorah and unearthed the gold plates and saw them with his own eyes the message of the Restoration grew.

Joseph possibly thought he would be able to retrieve the gold plates on that first visit, but as he tried to take them from their resting place he was prohibited from doing so by the angel Moroni. Joseph was not even allowed to touch the gold plates. Moroni instructed Joseph to return to the hill in one year to receive the additional training he would need before he could take charge of the plates. In the end it took four years and multiple lessons from Moroni before Joseph was finally ready and able to retrieve the plates. 39

However, it did not take four years for Joseph to share the new message of the Restoration with his family. He had already told his father about the vision before he went to the

37 Ibid.
38 In Joseph Smiths account of this experience he does not mention if Moroni told him to share this message with his father the first night they talk. But it does say that the next morning, after Joseph has passed out and regained consciousness that he gets the command to go and tell his father, which he does. Lucy’s account states that Joseph was first commanded to tell his father the night before and did not until the next morning after Joseph was again told to tell his father. Whether Joseph was commanded to tell his father about The Vision the first night or the next morning, he did obey and delivered the message.
39 See Cameron J. Packer, “A Study of the Hill Cumorah: A Significant Latter-day Saint Landmark in Western New York,” (Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo, 2002) for an in depth study of what Joseph was taught, and learned during these annual trips to the Hill Cumorah.
Hill Cumorah, and when he returned home from the hill he told the rest of his family. That evening, once the family had assembled together, Joseph shared with them “all that he had communicated to his father in the field, and also of his finding the record, as well as what passed between him and the angel while he was at the place where the plates were deposited.”40 The new message was slowly forming and being shared with those whom Joseph trusted. This new message of the Restoration would take the spotlight away from Joseph’s First Vision of God and Jesus Christ and move it to the angel Moroni’s visit and the gold plates.

The scene of Joseph teaching his family what he had learned from Moroni was repeated again and again during those four years. Joseph would occasionally receive additional information from the Lord and then gather the family around in the evening to relate to them all he was learning. “He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.”41 Even though Joseph had not yet obtained the gold plates, Moroni had been instructing Joseph about the inhabitants who wrote them. Thus from the very beginning, this new message of the Restoration was much more complex and included much more than just teaching about the plates, it actually comprised teaching information that would later be translated from the plates.

While not much is known about how or when Joseph received this advanced information of the inhabitants who wrote on the gold plates, Orson Pratt did give some clues to this. He wrote that Moroni started to instruct Joseph about the inhabitants from the Book of Mormon on the

41 Ibid, 1:134.
night of their first meeting, telling him that the American Indians “were a remnant of Israel; that when they first emigrated to America, they were an enlightened people, possessing a knowledge of the true God, enjoying his favor and peculiar blessings from his hand; that the prophets, and inspired writers among them were required to keep a sacred history of the most important events transpiring among them; which history was handed down for many generations.”

Hence from the very first meeting between the two, Moroni instructed Joseph about the writers of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph was cautious with whom he shared this message, but he did share it with more than just his immediate family members. Feeling that his extended family would also believe the message, Joseph and his father began to write letters to them. Joseph’s father wrote a letter to his own father informing him about “some of the visions the youthful Prophet had received.” Sometime after the letter to Asael, Joseph Smith Jr. followed suit and sent a letter to his uncle, John Smith, father of George A. Smith, and related the same information to that family.

Through these letters the first news of the Restoration was taken to the extended Smith family. After the Book of Mormon was published most of them read it and were baptized.

While Joseph shared the new message of the Restoration with his family, he did not share it with his neighbors and acquaintances yet. Joseph remembered the reaction and the persecution which followed when he told at least one person outside of his family about the First Vision. He knew from sad experience to be careful with whom he shared the message.

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On the same day when Joseph told the rest of the family about Moroni and the gold plates, he also told them what Moroni had warned him would happen if others heard about the gold plates.

‘Now,’ said he, ‘Father and Mother, the angel of the Lord says that we must be careful not to proclaim these things or to mention them abroad, for we do not–any of us–know the wickedness of the world, which is so sinful.’ Before proceeding, he charged us not to mention out of the family that which he was about to say to us, as the world was so wicked that when they came to a knowledge of these things they would try to take our lives; and that when we should obtain the plates they will want to kill us for the sake of the gold if they know we have them and our names would be cast out as evil by all people. Hence, the necessity of suppressing these things as much as possible until the time should come for them to go forth to the world . . . After giving us this charge, he proceeded to relate further particulars concerning the work which he was appointed to do, and we received them joyfully, never mentioning them except among ourselves, agreeable to the instructions which we had received for him.\(^{44}\)

Moroni had also warned Joseph that Satan would tempt him to take the plates and use them to help his family monetarily (see JSH 1:46). If Satan would try to tempt Joseph to sell the gold for money, surely he would tempt others to try and get them for the same reason. Because of this forewarning Joseph told his family to keep this message to themselves. The new message of the Restoration which entailed information about the angel Moroni and the gold plates was a message specifically for the Smith family, at first.

In 1825, five years after his First Vision, two years after Moroni’s visit and following three annual visits to the Hill Cumorah, Joseph moved to Pennsylvania to work for Josiah

\(^{44}\) Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 132-133. It is of interest to here note that one month after Joseph Smith saw the plates for his first time that his oldest brother, Alvin, died. Alvin’s final words to Joseph show that other family members not only knew about Moroni’s visit to Joseph, but they also knew about the plates. Alvin’s final words were to exhort Joseph to do everything in his power to obtain the record.
It was there while employed by Mr. Stoal and boarding with a neighbor, Joseph met Emma Hale for the first time.

Joseph and Emma fell in love and two years later were married against the wishes of Emma’s parents. Her parents were against the relationship because they had heard about Joseph’s story of seeing God and Jesus Christ. When they asked Joseph about it he continued to assert he had seen the vision (see JSH 1:58). Joseph recalled that because of his assertions “persecution still followed me, and my wife’s father’s family were very much opposed to our being married. I was, therefore, under the necessity of taking her elsewhere.” If Joseph would have stopped confirming he had seen God and Jesus Christ, his life may have been easier, especially with his future father-in-law. But he would not stop asserting what he saw. So Joseph and Emma eloped together on January 18, 1827.

What is interesting about Joseph Smith’s 1838 history is that Joseph said the persecution followed him because of him having had “a vision.” However by that time Joseph had had many visions, but he mentioned only a singular vision. The news of Joseph seeing the angel Moroni and that of the gold plates had not yet spread beyond the bounds of the Smith family when he was courting Emma and Joseph was not anxious to increase the opposition by telling people he had had another vision.

By September 22, 1827, the time had arrived for Joseph, who was now sufficiently trained, to take responsibility for the plates. A few days before the predetermined night, a couple of gentlemen, Mr. Stoal whom Joseph used to work for and Mr. Joseph Knight, a family

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acquaintance, came to stay with the Smith family for a few days. Some scholars have asserted that the arrival of Mr. Stoal and Mr. Knight to the Smith house a few days before Joseph retrieved the plates was “fortuitous timing” and that “these two men’s visit at this specific time was most likely because Joseph had related to them that the time for him to receive the plates had come” 47 but neither Joseph’s nor his mother’s account of the events support this assumption.48

The fact is that the night Joseph and Emma went to retrieve the plates from Cumorah, they used Mr. Knight’s horse and wagon to make the journey, but he had no idea they had borrowed his property. The next morning Joseph still had not returned from Cumorah when Mr. Knight was ready to leave the Smith residence. When Mr. Knight searched the property for his horse and could not find it he worried that someone had stolen it. As he continued to search the farm for his horse he also discovered his wagon was missing. Now he was convinced someone had run off with his possessions and he told his worries to Joseph’s mother, Lucy. But Lucy knew it was Joseph and Emma who had commandeered Mr. Knight’s horse and wagon both for the purpose of getting the plates. Therefore, it was only at her insistence to stop worrying about his horse and wagon that Mr. Knight ceased looking for them. When it came time for Mr. Knight


48 Stand by My Servant Joseph, is a book written about the Joseph Knight family and records information relevant to this point. In it, the author, William Hartley wrote “If Father Knight’s recollection is correct, Joseph told him about the early 1827 interview and the fall delivery date (28). However, Joseph Knight also stated that Joseph Smith told him about the plates and the Urim and Thummim on the morning when the Prophet returned from Cumorah with the borrowed Horse and buggy. On this point, William Hartley noted that “It is more likely, however, that this conversation took place after Joseph had locked the plates in the chest and then, some three of four days later, felt free to talk to family and friends about the experience” (33).
to finally leave, Joseph had just barely arrived home and had returned the horse and buggy which were then brought to Mr. Knight.\textsuperscript{49}

If Mr. Knight already knew about the gold plates and had come to the Smith house because he knew Joseph was going to retrieve them, Lucy could have reminded him of this fact and told him that Joseph had used both horse and wagon to get the plates. But Mother Smith’s prevarication about the whereabouts of Mr. Knight’s horse and wagon illustrate that Mr. Knight was not yet aware of the second message of the Restoration.

When Joseph met Moroni at Cumorah the night he received the gold plates, Moroni instructed him saying, “that [Joseph] should be responsible for them; that if [he] should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of [his], he should be cut off; but that if [he] would use all [his] endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.”\textsuperscript{50} Such a strong warning to protect and preserve the plates might have seemed a little strange to Joseph because at this time the news of the gold plates had not made its way to the forefront of local human conscience. According to Joseph’s mother, Lucy, Joseph had not spread the news of his visions of the Angel Moroni to anyone. So no one knew about the plates however Moroni warned him just the same. \textsuperscript{51}

Joseph soon realized why Moroni had warned him so strongly.

I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe

\textsuperscript{50} Smith, \textit{History of the Church}, 1:18.
\textsuperscript{51} See, Smith, \textit{History of Joseph Smith}, 164-165.
than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible.  

If Joseph Smith did not tell anyone outside of his family about the gold plates, then how did these other people know about them? Who told them about the plates? Did one of the few people who were told in confidence about the gold plates let the information slip? Lucy answered these questions in her memoirs of the events.

When Joseph received the plates he needed a safe place to secure them. As a temporary location, Joseph deposited the plates in a hollowed out tree trunk a few miles from his house, but before he brought them home he wanted to have a chest in which he could secure them. Because the Smith family did not own such a chest, they ordered one. After the construction began on the chest, Joseph was called away to dig a well for a woman who had asked for him specifically. Joseph did not know how this woman knew about him as he had not met her previously, but for Joseph this timely job would supply him with enough money to pay for the chest.  

As Joseph was away digging the well, his father learned that the news of the gold plates was out. Lucy explained that...

The next day after [Joseph] left home, one of the neighbors asked Mr. Smith [Sr.] many questions concerning the plates. I will here observe that no one ever heard anything from us respecting them, except a confidential friend [Martin Harris] to whom my husband had spoken about them some two or three years previous. It appeared that Satan had now stirred up the hearts of those who had gotten a hint of the matter from our friend to search into it and make every possible more towards thwarting the purposes of the Almighty.

Joseph Smith Sr. had related the message of the Restoration to Martin Harris and from there the word must have spread. Once the word was out, Joseph felt the strenuous exertions from people who wanted the plates for their monetary value. Joseph Smith Sr. first overheard a

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52 Smith, History of the Church, 1:18.
53 Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 1:164.
54 Ibid.
group of people talk about their plans to find the plates, and became so worried about their safety that he contacted his son who was still digging the well and asked him to come home.

Joseph returned home and at night brought the gold plates home from their hiding place in the woods. That night he saw how serious his persecutors were about stealing the plates. As he retrieved the plates and started home he was physically assaulted on three separate occasions by people trying to get the plates from him. Truly he felt that the “multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from [him] if possible” (JSH 1:60).

But the persecutors did not stop in their efforts to get the plates despite failing in their first attempts. They only increased their efforts.

Mobs prowled around the Smith home repeatedly and ransacked the premises; and as a result, Joseph was forced to change the hiding place of the plates from time to time. Having learned that a mob was being formed, the Prophet hurried home to protect the plates. Alvah Beaman, a trusted friend from the village of Livonia, came for a visit about this time, and the two men hastily took up the hearthstone in the Smith home and placed the box containing the plates under it. They had scarcely finished when the mob arrived. Later Joseph hid the plates across the road in a cooper's shop. Of the reason why they were removed from under the hearthstone, Martin Harris said: “. . . the wall [of the house] being partly down, it was feared that certain ones, who were trying to get possession of the plates, would get under the house and dig them out.”

Fortunately, the mob never succeeded in obtaining the plates, but it took the combined effort of Joseph, his family and some trusted friends to keep the plates safe. Although Joseph’s enemies could not find the plates, they did make his life miserable. The persecution was relentless. Joseph’s enemies were so obsessed with stealing the plates that he moved to

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55 Smith, History of the Church, 1:18.
56 Hyrum L. Andrus, God, Man, and the Universe (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 76-77.
Pennsylvania to thwart their plans. But the second message of the Restoration—news of an angel named Moroni and gold plates buried in the earth—would follow him there.  

Summary

In the spring of 1820, Heavenly Father and his son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith and delivered the first message of the Restoration. The message was there was no Church on the earth which Christ claimed as His own because they had all gone astray. When Joseph shared this message of the Restoration with a Methodist preacher he could not have realized the degree of persecution that would soon follow. For the next seven years, in the midst of persecution and scorn, Joseph Smith continued to assert that he had seen a vision. Whether it was Joseph or his persecutors who circulated the news of the First Vision, the message was disseminated all the same and when asked about it Joseph continued to testify that it was true. He never denied what he said he had seen.

I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, Why persecuted me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it.  

Three years later Joseph Smith received another vision, but this time it was from an angel named Moroni. The angel told him there was a record engraved upon gold plates which contained the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ as delivered to the ancient inhabitants of the American continent. This message would evolve into the new message of the Restoration which

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57 For additional information about how the mobs tried to steal the plates even while traveling to Pennsylvania see Andrus, 74-77.
58 Smith, History of the Church, 1:8.
would supplant the story of Joseph’s First Vision. For the time being, however, Joseph only told his family about Moroni and the gold plates. He had already experienced enough persecution by unbelievers who heard about his First Vision. He did not want the news of gold plates to make things worse for him and his family.

Only after he had the plates safely in his possession did the word about them reach the ears of his worst enemies, and true to the warning from Moroni, they tried to steal the plates. A whole new round of persecution began which continued in Palmyra until it forced Joseph to move to Pennsylvania.

The next chapter will look more closely at the second message of the Restoration, the gold plates, and show what happened as that message of the Restoration continued to grow. The new message would be taught by Joseph, by those who believed him, and by those who did not and it would eventually evolve into a new message; a message of a book entitled *The Book of Mormon*. 
CHAPTER 3

COMPLETELY ABSORED IN THE SUBJECT OF THE RECORD

Timeline of important events in this chapter:

Life was never the same for Joseph after he saw God, the Father, and Jesus Christ. Persecution and opposition increased as word spread of his miraculous vision. This increasing resistance to the message forced him to move a number of times before the gold plates were even translated. This pattern would repeat itself for the next 20 years until eventually Joseph was martyred for the message he preached.
The previous chapter showed the first “message of the Restoration” and the persecution that accompanied that message. Then in the midst of all that persecution, Joseph had another vision. This time an angel, who called himself Moroni, came from the presence of God to instruct Joseph. His message was about the ancient inhabitants of the American continent and God’s dealings with them which was written on gold plates and encased in a nearby hill.

When this second vision occurred, it did not receive the same attention or resistance as did the news of the First Vision mainly because Joseph was careful with whom he shared it. But four years later, when Joseph actually took possession of the record the news of gold plates caused such a stir that it became difficult for Joseph to keep the record safe, let alone find time to translate it. As the translation process slowly began, Joseph had a new message to share with the world. The next addition to the message of the Restoration included news of the gold plates, their translation and subsequent publishing as the Book of Mormon.

This appendage to the message of the Restoration spread the same way the news of the First Vision had. It became the talk of the town as it was circulated by Joseph and those few people who believed him, by those who totally opposed him, and also by those who did not know what to think of the gossip. The local residents could still remembered Joseph’s earlier claim of seeing God and Jesus Christ, but the news of the “gold bible” was so astonishing that it eventually overshadowed the original message of Joseph’s First Vision. The first message of the Restoration was all but forgotten by almost everyone except the Prophet and his immediate family. By 1830, the fact that Joseph had seen heavenly messengers previous to the angel Moroni was not even taught directly to the believing members of the Church. The message’s focus was on Moroni’s visit and the stories that surrounded the gold plates. Even in the revelations recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, the shift in the message was apparent. In
Doctrine and Covenants Section 20, a revelation copied repeatedly for the different branches of the Church, the First Vision was only mentioned in passing, while the news of the angel Moroni and the gold plates took a more central role.

After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world. But after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lighting, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness: and gave unto him commandments which inspired him; and gave him power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon (Doctrine and Covenants 20:5-8. Hereafter cited as D&C).

The first sentence referenced the First Vision without saying anything specifically about who Joseph saw or even that he had a vision. Those familiar with the original message knew that when Joseph first saw God and Jesus Christ in the spring of 1820 that they manifested to him “that he had received a remission of his sins.” But those who were not familiar with the First Vision were not given any additional details to the event. The focus was on the visit of the angel Moroni and the discovery of the gold plates.

The rest of the Smith family followed suit and also stopped talking about Joseph’s First Vision to people outside their own family. They too had been persecuted in consequence of Joseph’s claims and they must have been relieved when the news of that First Vision slowly faded. Even five years later they were still reluctant to retell that sacred event to people who were curious.


60 see Allen, “Emergence of a Fundamental.” James Allen also showed the news of the First Vision had not completely disappeared by 1831, but was still only hinted at indirectly when he said, “There are many such oblique references in contemporary sources, including an anti-Mormon statement in the Palmyra Reflector in 1831 that Joseph Smith ‘had seen God frequently and personally.’” (Allen, 45).
In 1832, Samuel Smith was on a mission with Orson Hyde when he had an opportunity to talk about his brother’s First Vision. While in Westlake, N.Y., the two elders were preaching to an audience when a man stood up and “requested that a brief history of Joseph Smith be given to the people previous to his finding the plates.” Whether this man already knew about the First Vision and was trying to persuade the elders to talk about it is unclear, but what is very clear is that Samuel was not going to do it.

Orson was honest and told the audience he was unable to give them a history of Joseph Smith before he found the plates because he was unacquainted with the events. But then he suggested that perhaps Samuel could “favor them with an account of the early life of his brother.” Samuel remembered the previous persecution which had accompanied the news of the First Vision and he was determined to not revive it. “Samuel arose and said, that as it was the early history of his own brother that they required, it might be thought that, in consequence of his near kin, his statements might not be free from partiality, and respectfully declined the task. So, but little of the history of Joseph Smith was given at that meeting.”

In 1827, the glorious message of the First Vision began to be deemphasized as the news of the plates became the primary focus of the proselyting message of the Restoration. It would be eight years before the prophet would again teach the First Vision as a message of the Restoration and then, only to a limited audience.

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62 ibid.
63 See Smith, Journals, 1:87-95. It is possible that the First Vision continued to be taught as a message of the Restoration during this time. However, while researching for this thesis, this author found only one mention of the First Vision in any of the journals or other primary documents from 1827 to 1835. If it was continually taught as a proselyting message, it was not
During this time, the message of the Restoration could evolve as quickly as the plates were translated. The new message was only about the plates themselves, but once the translation process began, the message could evolve. Attempts were made to show what the plates contained before they were completely translated and the consequences ranged from disastrous to highly effective. But once the plates were completely translated, the proselyting message was changed from news about the plates, to what messages were contained on the plates.

The New Message of the Restoration: Reports About the Gold Plates

Before the Book of Mormon even began to be translated, the missionary process was slowly proceeding. The night Joseph brought the plates home from where he had concealed them he was attacked three different times by men trying to steal the plates. When he finally arrived at his parent’s home he recounted to everyone in the house what had happened. But there were recorded. There is an 1832 account of the First Vision that Joseph Smith, in an attempt to keep a record of the history of the church recited to his scribe, Frederick G. Williams. This 1832 account was never published by the Prophet and therefore would not be considered as a proselyting message of the Restoration in 1832. (see Bachman, Joseph Smith’s First Vision, 124 and Appendix A). However, it does show that Joseph mentioned the First Vision at that time and could support the idea that the First Vision was still mentioned by those who knew about it. The next time Joseph gave a written account of the First Vision was in 1835. On November 9, 1835, a Robert Matthias came to visit with Joseph under the guise of “Joshua the Jewish minister.” “Joshua” spent a few days talking with Joseph about religion and during these talks, recorded by Warren Cowdery, Joseph gave “Joshua” an account of the First Vision. Joseph then spent some time listening to some of the unique religious views held by “Joshua.” After two days, Joseph identified “Joshua” as the notorious Robert Mattias and possibly a murderer. Joseph then ended the visit, “I told him, that my God told me that his God is the Devil and I could not keep him any longer, and he must depart.” (see Smith, Journals, 87-95) This account demonstrates that Joseph used the First Vision as a message of the Restoration in 1835 and possibly at other times not recorded. The first time Joseph’s sacred experience was published as a missionary tool was when Orson Pratt published An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the late Discovery of Ancient American Records in 1840. (see Milton V. Bachman, jr, Joseph Smith’s First Vision, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980], 170).
more people present than just his immediate family members who listened to what had just happened to him.

When the chest came, Joseph locked up the record, then threw himself upon the bed and, after resting a little so that he could converse freely, he arose and went into the kitchen, where he related his recent adventure to his father, Mr. Knight and Mr. Stoal, besides many others who had by this time collected with the view of hearing something in regards to the strange circumstances which had taken place. . . He related to our guests the whole history of the record, which interested them very much, and they listened and believed all that was told them up to the time when he took it out of the stone box in the Hill Cumorah, which took place the morning that Mr. Knight missed his horse and wagon. 64

Even though Joseph had not yet begun to translate any portion of the plates, he was now able to begin to spread the new message of the Restoration. This new message was information about the vision of the angel Moroni, the history of the plates and how he obtained them. This new message, even in its primitive form, was enough for those in attendance to begin to believe.

Joseph Knight was one of those people who believed the message that night. Thereafter he assisted in the translation process by giving material aid to Joseph Smith which enabled him to translate with fewer interruptions. Later, after the translation of the plates was completed and the Church of Jesus Christ65 was reestablished, Joseph Knight was able to read the translated book published as the Book of Mormon and was baptized in June of 1830.66

The new message of the Restoration was enough for some people like Joseph Knight to accept, but Martin Harris still had some concerns. By 1827, Martin had already heard about the

64 Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 170.
65 When the Church was organized in 1830 its official name was “The Church of Christ.” In 1838 the Lord changed the name to “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” However, for this thesis I will use the term “Church of Jesus Christ” regardless of the time period to avoid any confusion with the present day “Church of Christ” which is not affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
gold plates from Joseph Smith Sr.. However, Martin still did not completely accept it. But Martin was to play a very crucial role once the translation was completed. Therefore, for Martin, and Martin only, the message of the Restoration was modified a little to help him. So Joseph did more for Martin; he supplied him with “proof” from the gold plates.

The proof Joseph provided to Martin was a handwritten copy of some of the characters taken from the plates. With this in his possession, Martin went to New York City. His purpose in going there was to obtain a certificate of authenticity which he could show the citizens of Palmyra, including his own disbelieving wife proving that Joseph indeed had the gold plates. In his own words Martin stated what occurred on that trip.

I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaid, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said to me, “Let me see that certificate.” I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, “I cannot read a sealed book.”

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67 Joseph Smith needed Martin Harris to mortgage a portion of his farm to pay for a part of the printing of the Book of Mormon.

68 Smith, History of the Church, 1:21.
While his time in New York did not produce any physical proof, it did solidify Martin’s resolve to help with the translation. “Martin returned from his trip east satisfied that ‘Joseph’ was a ‘little smarter than professor Anthon.’”

By June of 1828, Martin Harris had scribed 116 pages of manuscript. The translation process was well underway. With such a start, Martin Harris was once again excited to share the newly evolving message of the Restoration, the message on the plates, to some of his acquaintances including his incredulous wife and other family members. The fact that Martin believed wholly in the message of the Restoration and his wife did not was a strain on their relationship. Mrs. Harris had undoubtedly heard about the angel Moroni’s visit, the gold plates and maybe even the First Vision, but she did not believe any of it. She did not believe Joseph had seen any visions nor did she believe he had gold plates. Because of this disbelief, she was concerned about her husband’s involvement with the work and thought he was being “conned” out of his farm to support nonsense. Martin desired that she be able to see what he saw.

Thus, on Martin’s insistence, Joseph Smith asked the Lord if Martin could take the translated 116 pages of manuscript to show his skeptical wife and family members. The Lord said no! While this answer was sufficient for Joseph, it was not for Martin who persuaded Joseph to ask again. After asking twice and receiving two negative responses, Joseph, on the insistence of Martin, asked the Lord a third time. The Lord finally gave permission for Martin to take the manuscript to show to his “brother, Preserved Harris, his own wife, his father and his mother,

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and a Mrs. Cobb, a sister to his wife.”70 Delighted with this final approval, Martin took the only copy of the translated work and returned home.

Since Martin had been further converted after seeing visual proof of the work he must have thought the same method would work in converting his wife; he wanted to prove the message to her. He knew of the messages contained on the plates because he had just spent months scribing while Joseph translated them. He was excited to show the work. However, the problem with his desire was that it was not yet time for this message of the Restoration to be preached.

Martin took the manuscript home anyway and showed it to his wife and selected family members just as he had promised. However, a few days later, a close friend of Martin visited the Harris farm. As their conversation moved to religion, Martin shared with this friend the appropriate message of the Restoration. He informed him about Joseph Smith, the angel Moroni and the gold plates along with the information that he was helping in the translation process. The excitement over the message and the fact that he had proof of it was too much for Martin to resist. He broke his covenant and showed the proof of the message: the 116 pages of manuscript to his friend. “Having once made a sacrifice of his conscience, Mr. Harris no longer regarded its scruples; so he continued to exhibit the writings . . . to anyone whom he regarded as prudent enough to keep the secret.”71 The news that Martin had the record and showed it to a number of people reached the ears of Joseph’s parents who lived nearby. Joseph mother, Lucy, later wrote

70 Smith, History of the Church, 1:21.
71 Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 198-199.
that the 116 pages were shown to almost anyone “except our family. . . . we were not allowed to set our eyes upon them.” 72

Even though Martin’s intentions were good and he wanted to prove the message of the Restoration it was not time for such a change. Because Martin had broken his covenant and showed the manuscript to others he eventually lost it. Those who opposed the work “by stratagem . . . got them away from him.” 73 Martin’s efforts to alter the message too soon came from his anxiety to prove that it was true. The result was the loss of the 116 pages.

After this blunder, Martin Harris remained faithful to the message, but he never again served as scribe in the translation process. For about 10 months the work of translation and the growth of the message progressed slowly until, as an answer to prayer, Oliver Cowdery came to visit. 74

Oliver Cowdery was the local school teacher in Palmyra, N.Y. who shortly after his arrival in town started to hear sporadic information about the gold plates that Joseph, who was now living in Pennsylvania, allegedly had in his possession. Oliver, coincidently, was staying with the Smith family in Palmyra and had ample opportunities to petition them for additional information on the subject. Understandably, the Smiths were reluctant to share the message with unbelievers, but once Oliver gained their confidence they gave him “a sketch of the facts relative

72 Ibid.
73 Smith, History of the Church, 1:21.
74 For a time the translation process literally stopped. The reason was because Joseph literally lost the privilege to the plates. They were taken from him by Moroni who later returned them to Joseph. When Joseph once again started to translate the record he was without a full-time scribe until Oliver came to visit.
While Oliver finally heard about the plates from the Smith family, he first heard about it from others in the town.

Amid all of the persecution, there were others in Palmyra who had heard about the plates and had a favorable impression of them. The news was still the big talk of the small town.

Whether the people believed Joseph had the plates or not, they still talked. Surely everyone who lived in the town had heard at least something about the plates and were willing to talk to anyone who would listen. This phenomenon was illustrated with Oliver’s introduction to the message first by those who did not necessarily believe in the message and was also demonstrated by the way David Whitmer first heard about them.

While visiting Palmyra in 1828, David Whitmer heard about the gold plates from some people who were actively conniving to steal them from Joseph. Some of these would-be thieves had previously worked for Mr. Stoal as money diggers at the same time Joseph had and they felt Joseph was obligated to split the “loot” with them. They told David “that Joseph Smith certainly had gold plates and that before he had attained them he had promised to share with them [the profit], but had not done so and they were very much incensed by him.”

David Whitmer did not know what to think of such an account but he was interested to learn more about these mysterious plates.

David Whitmer, and possibly Oliver Cowdery, first heard about the plates from those who did not believe in the work. Both men, however, did not discount the news but kept an open mind to the possibility that Joseph had the plates. While in Palmyra, these two gentlemen met

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76 Andrus, *God, Man, and the Universe*, 76.
each other and conversed about the news of the town – the plates. In a very short time both men would be converted to the message and even become eyewitnesses to the gold plates.

It was while Oliver boarded with the Smith Family that he became more acquainted with the stories of Joseph Smith, the angel Moroni and the gold plates. When Oliver heard about the record and that Joseph needed a scribe he could not, “for a moment get [them] out of [his] mind.” He felt like it was his calling to go and help in the translation process. When he confided his feelings to Joseph Smith Sr., he invited Oliver to enquire of the Lord as to whether he should go or not. Once Oliver felt it was the will of God for him to help in the work, “Oliver [became] so completely absorbed in the subject of the record that it seemed impossible for him to think or converse about anything else.”

Oliver ended his employment as the local school teacher and traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where the Prophet resided. On route, Oliver stopped by the Whitmer residence to once again talk to his acquaintance, David Whitmer, whom he had previously met in Palmyra. Oliver told David Whitmer that he was on his way to meet Joseph Smith and “that after visiting the Prophet he would write [to] him his impressions as to the truth or untruth of Joseph Smith having an ancient record.”

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78 Joseph Smith Sr. obviously remembered the experiences of his son, that if “any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God” (James 1:5) and therefore told Oliver to do the same. He is not referring to the promise contained in Moroni chapter 10 because this part of The Book of Mormon, had not been translated yet.
When Oliver arrived where Joseph Smith was staying and met him, Joseph delivered to Oliver a personalized revelation which he had received. Oliver believed the revelation and was ready to commit to the work. The two men started together in the translation process.

As the translation process got under way the message of the Restoration evolved slightly to include the messages from the plates. Oliver, like Martin Harris before him, was excited to share some of the translated work with those he knew. But this time Joseph was not going to let the manuscript out of his possession, therefore Oliver would have to share the message in some other way. Oliver, true to his word, wrote David Whitmer and informed him that Joseph did indeed have the gold plates as suspected.

A short time later, after more of the plates had been translated, another letter was written to David, and this time Oliver actually transcribed some of the lines from the translation of the gold plates. David read these letters and then shared them with his family. This was a very early proselyting effort by Oliver Cowdery to share the message of the Restoration with his friend, David Whitmer. 81

Joseph Smith’s younger brother, Samuel, was also converted and baptized at about this same time. The message that helped convert him was the same one Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and others had heard. It was of the angel Moroni, the gold plates and their translation. One obvious difference though was Samuel had heard these things for years from Joseph himself.

81 see Kansas City Journal, June 5, 1881 in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Co., 1991), 61. The letters from Oliver to David are not extant. Knowledge of them comes from an interview David Whitmer had with a reporter from the Kansas City Journal, dated 5 June 1881.
Samuel Smith came to visit Joseph in Harmony, Pennsylvania, around May of 1829.82 Samuel, who had grown up hearing about the plates from Joseph, was not totally convinced the work was true. Therefore, during Samuel’s visit, Oliver and Joseph opened up the Bible and reason with Samuel concerning certain points of doctrine. Oliver and Joseph also “showed him that part of the work which [they] had translated.”83

It was not until he was shown a part of the translation that Samuel decided to find out if it was all true. “After much inquiry and explanation he retired to the woods, in order that by secret and fervent prayer he might obtain of a merciful God, wisdom to enable him to judge for himself. The result was that he obtained revelation for himself sufficient to convince him of the truth of [the] assertions to him and on the twenty-fifth day of that same month in which [Joseph and Oliver] had been baptized [May 1829] and ordained, Oliver Cowdery baptized him.”84

Before Oliver Cowdery came to help the message of the Restoration revolved around the angel Moroni and the gold plates. But now that the translation was well under way, the message started to include what was on the plates. 85 As the work progressed in Harmony, so did the

82 History of the Church says that Samuel came to visit the Prophet and Oliver about a few days after Joseph and Oliver had received the Aaronic Priesthood, May 15, 1829. However Lucy’s account states that Samuel took Oliver to Joseph in Harmony Pennsylvania and therefore was already at the house by May 15, 1829.

83 Smith, History of the Church, 1:44. During those four years while Joseph was being taught by Moroni, prior to him receiving the plates he would come home and tell his family about the record and his experience with the angel. It would make sense then that Samuel would have heard from a very early age about the plates and possibly more. Samuel is three years younger than Joseph so when Joseph is 17 and he has The Vision of the angel Moroni and first hears of the plates, Samuel was probably around 14 years of age. Samuel would have grown up most of his life hearing about Joseph’s visions and about the record, but it isn’t until the record is being translated that he receives his testimony of the work.

84 Smith, History of the Church, 1:44.

85 It is also around this time that it was recorded more frequently that those listening to the message also prayed to know if it was true. In the case of Oliver Cowdery the invitation to pray was given by Joseph Smith Sr. And while it is uncertain if Samuel was invited to pray or if
opposition. Eventually the persecution against Joseph and Oliver became so great in Pennsylvania that they needed to move in order to keep the record safe and the translation progressing. But Joseph had nowhere to go. His parents still lived in Palmyra, New York, but he could not return there because the persecution in that town was still very great. He was already living near his father-in-law and could not stay there. Without knowing what else to do, another letter was written to David Whitmer, who previously had only heard about the plates, to ask him to transport the small group back to the Whitmer residence where they could finish the translation process.

David received the letter and consented to bring them back to his father’s house. David quickly left for Pennsylvania and “when he arrived, he was under the necessity of introducing himself to Joseph, as this was the first time that they had ever met.”

Joseph moved to the Whitmer Farm in Fayette, New York, but the message of the Restoration had preceded him there. Many of the local people were anxious to finally meet the man who claimed to possess gold plates which contained the record of the indigenous inhabitants of the American continents. Joseph and Oliver were glad to be where the Whitmer family and some of the surrounding neighbors wanted to hear about the work.

We found the people of Seneca County in general friendly and disposed to enquire into the truth of these strange matters which now began to be noised abroad. Many opened their houses to us, in order that we might have an opportunity of meeting with our friends for the purpose of instruction and explanation. We met with many from time to time who were willing to hear us, and who desired to find out the truth as it is in Christ Jesus and apparently willing to obey the Gospel . . . From this time forth many became believers,

he came to that decision on his own it seems certain that prayer started to play a more visible role in the message of the Restoration.

and some were baptized whilst we continued to instruct and persuade as many as applied for information.  

As the message continued to be preached and more people came to the knowledge of the truth, God prepared for additional eye witnesses to the plates. These additional witnesses would be able to testify to the world along with Joseph Smith on the veracity of the gold plates.

**The New Addition to the Message: Additional Witnesses**

In February of 1829, just four months before the translation process was completed, Joseph Smith received a revelation from God directed to Joseph Smith Senior. Presently this revelation is Section 4 in the Doctrine and Covenants and while it is widely recognized as the “missionary section,” it was not given to a formally called and set apart missionary. It was not even given to a member of the Church because the Church would not be restored for about another year.

In this revelation the Lord stated that a marvelous work was about to come forth among the children of men (see D&C 4:1). A principal part of the “marvelous work” was the translation of the gold plates which would be finished in only a few months.  

87 Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:50. Notice the wording which suggests that prayer was a part of the message by this time.

Harris, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer all had a desire to serve God. They had all already sacrificed for the work to go forth, and they were all therefore called of God for another purpose.

While translating the gold plates, Joseph became aware of additional witnesses who would see the plates and therefore testify to the world they were true (see D&C 5:11-12). Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and David Whitmer volunteered to be these witnesses and the Lord chose them. In addition to those three witnesses, the Lord selected an additional eight witnesses to the plates. These eleven brethren were called to be eye witnesses to the gold plates, testify of their translation, and declare the truthfulness of the work. Their testimonies have been printed with the Book of Mormon from its first printing to the present and are contained below.

Three Witnesses: Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen. 89

89 Smith, History of the Church, 1:56-57. In the early days of the Church the Native Americans were referred to as Lamanites, a term coming from The Book of Mormon. The Lamanites were a group of people living on the American continent who arrived about 600 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. They usually did not believe in the words of Christ because of the tradition of their parents. The Book of Mormon contains a promise that once the book has come forth that it will go forth unto the Lamanites. See. Enos 1:15-18
Eight Witnesses: Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.90

Joseph was overjoyed with the addition of eleven other eyewitnesses because he no longer stood alone. These additional witnesses were thrilled to be selected to view the plates and testify to the world what they saw.91 The addition of these other witnesses did not change what was being taught as the message of the Restoration, but it did change the number of people who could testify that they knew it was true because they had seen the plates with their own eyes.

By the beginning of the summer of 1829, there were at least 12 eye witnesses to the gold plates and many more people who believed the message of the Restoration. As the completion of the translation neared, more and more people who heard the message came to see for themselves what it was all about. Joseph and Oliver “continued to translate, at intervals, when not under the necessity of attending to the numerous inquirers who now began to visit [them] – some for the sake of finding the truth others for the purpose of putting hard questions, and trying to confound

90 Ibid., 57-58. The names of the eight witnesses are: Christian Whitmer; Jacob Whitmer; Peter Whitmer, Jr.; John Whitmer; Hiram Page; Joseph Smith, Sr.; Hyrum Smith; Samuel H. Smith.

91 Martin Harris’ response after seeing the plates is a great example of the joyful feeling that they all felt and it shows the excitement to testify to the world of the plates. “I have now seen an angel from heaven, who has of a surety testified of the truth of all that I have heard concerning the record, and my eyes have beheld him. I have also looked upon the plates and handled them with my hands, and can testify of the same to the whole world. But I have received for myself a witness that words cannot express, that no tongue can describe; and I bless God in the sincerity of my soul that he has condescended to make me- even me- a witness of the greatness of his work and designs in behalf of the children of men” (Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 228).
Even amid all of the interruptions, by the first part of June 1829, the translation process was finished and on the 11th of the same month Joseph obtained the copyright. 93

During the summer of 1829, Joseph and the additional eleven witnesses continued to spread the message of the Restoration to the world. They were obeying the commandment they had been given to “testify to the truth of the book and the things therein” (2 Nephi 27:12). Their proselyting efforts even caught the attention of the local newspaper, the Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph, which in the August 31, 1829 edition printed the following piece.

The greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within our knowledge, now occupies the attention of a few individuals of this quarter. It is generally known and spoken of as the ‘Golden Bible.’ Its proselytes give the following account of it: - In the fall of 1827 a person by the name of Joseph Smith, of Manchester Ontario County, reported that he had been visited in a dream by the Spirit of the Almighty and informed him that in a certain hill in that town, was deposited a Golden Bible, containing the ancient record of a divine nature and origin. After having been thrice visited, as he states, he proceeded to the spot and after penetrating ‘mother earth’ a short distance, the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of spectacles. 94

By the summer of 1829, Joseph, the eleven other witnesses, those who believed in the work, those who did not, and now even the local newspaper, were all spreading the message of the Restoration – the news of the gold plates and their translation. The message was being propagated on all sides.

Summary

When Joseph Smith received the gold plates, it was such news, spread by both unbelievers and believers alike that the knowledge of his First Vision slowly faded out of the

92 Ibid., 59.
93 see. The Book of Mormon, 1830 edition, copyright page.
94 Packer “A Study of the Hill Cumorah,” 42. Notice that the paper says that this information is from the proselytes and that they also mention the Urim and Thummin which was another thing the eleven witnesses saw.
conscience of the community. The reports of the plates were so astounding that even those who
did not believe Joseph’s account of seeing the angel still did not know for sure whether or not he
had gold plates. Because of the monetary value of gold plates, even those who did not believe
Joseph had them did not pass up the chance to try and steal them.

The news about the plates quickly became the talk of the town. Once the translation
process was started, the actual manuscript pages were used to convince people of the truthfulness
of the record. Sometimes using the manuscript had disastrous consequences such as in the case
of Martin Harris and the 116 pages of manuscript and at other times it had positive results such
as when Joseph showed his brother Samuel what had been translated to that point.

Eventually, the number of those who could testify of the message with conviction and
certainty increased and once the translation was completed, additional witnesses were obtained,
and the book was prepared for publication the message of the Restoration evolved and grew
again.
By the middle of June, 1929, the translation process was finished and it became Joseph’s job to find a printer who would publish the fruits of his work. The translation process was completed, but that did not mean the opposition to the work was over. In fact, now that the plates were completely translated Joseph was particularly careful with the manuscript. He had already lost 116 pages and he was determined not to lose any more.
After the translation was finished, and before the Book of Mormon was printed, Oliver overheard a plan by those who were opposed to the work to destroy the manuscript. Their plan was relatively simple. It consisted of going to Lucy Smith’s residence to ask her to read to them a section from the manuscript. When she finished reading from the manuscript, they intended to notice where she put it for safekeeping. Once they knew where the manuscript was kept, two people were supposed to distract Lucy while the third person’s job was to grab the manuscript and immediately burn it. The success of this plan depended upon Lucy reading to the three gentlemen from the sole manuscript.95

However, Lucy was apprised of the plan. When the gentlemen finally came, they asked her about this “gold bible” her son claimed to have found, but Lucy corrected them by stating that Joseph did not have any such thing but did have a translation of some gold plates. But, at this point, instead of reading to them from the manuscript, she “proceeded to relate the substance of what [was] contained in the Book of Mormon, dwelling particularly upon the principles of religion therein. . . [endeavoring] to show them the similarity between these principles and the simplicity of the gospel taught by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.”96 While the plan to destroy the work failed, this account does illustrate how the message of the Restoration had changed. Like a few others, Lucy knew what the manuscript said! Because the translation process was finished some of the most trusted believers had the opportunity to look at and read parts of the manuscript. They were now able to testify to the world what the manuscript actually contained and not just tell about how the plates were found. Those who read from the manuscript at this early date quickly saw how the Book of Mormon contained the gospel of Christ just as the

95 The success of the plan also hinged on the belief that Joseph still only had one copy of the manuscript, but to insure its safety, Joseph had asked Oliver to make a copy of the original to keep is safe. Apparently this fact was unbeknownst to the persecutors.  
New Testament and the message of the Restoration now started to include that fact. The correlation between the gospel of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and in the Book of Mormon was a key message that continued to evolve more fully once the Church was restored.  

The Manuscript and Proof Sheets as Instruments in Spreading the Message of the Restoration

While Lucy did not read from the manuscript to those three men, there were excerpts from the manuscript that some people were using to show the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Christian Whitmer was one of the eight witnesses to the gold plates. He knew they in fact existed because he had seen them and handled them. He was so excited to share that message that he did not want to wait for the book to be published. To help spread the news contained on the plates as soon as possible, Christian “copied from the manuscript the teachings and the doctrine of Christ, being the things which [he was] commanded to preach” and shared those excerpts with those he trusted. So while Lucy did not read from the original manuscript to the three men who were trying to destroy it, there were other copies already being used.

Because the translation process was competed, the individuals who already believed the message were now able to peruse those handwritten pages. As they read, they inevitably discovered a promise contained in the book which invites those who read it to enquire of God if it was true.

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97 This correlation is recorded numerous times in the journals of the missionaries and also those heard and accepted the message.

98 Porter, “The Field Is White Already to Harvest,” 79. It is somewhat difficult to know what Christian Whitmer was “commanded to preach.” While his family members did have sections of the Doctrine and Covenants addressed to them and what they were to teach, none of the revelations were given to Christian. It is therefore assumed that what he was commanded to preach was the same thing that all of the eight witnesses were commanded to preach.
Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things (Moroni 10:3-5).

Before this time, Oliver Cowdery had been invited to pray to God to receive an answer if the work was true, including the gold plates and the translation process, but now that the Book of Mormon was finished, the invitation to ask God centered upon if the book was true.99

This reliance on God to reveal the truthfulness of the work, even before the book was printed, was also apparent in Hyrum Smith’s conversation with a local deacon. Deacon Beckwith was one of the three men who previously had tried to get the manuscript from Lucy to destroy it. Once he failed at that attempt he next tried to coerce Hyrum Smith, one of the eight witnesses to the gold plates, to admit that Joseph Smith had made the whole thing up.

Deacon Beckwith “Mr. Smith, do you not think that you may be deceived about that record which your brother pretends to have found?”

Hyrum: “No, sir, I do not.”

Deacon Beckwith: “Well now, Mr. Smith, if you find that you are deceived and that he has not got the record, will you confess the fact to me?”

Hyrum: “Will you, Deacon Beckwith, take one of the books, when they are printed, and read it, asking God to give you an evidence that you may know whether it is true?”

99 In Moroni 10:3-5 The Book of Mormon. contains a challenge and a promise for all who read it to find out from God if the book is true or not. Now that the translation process was completed, and some of those who believed Joseph had had the opportunity to read at least parts of the manuscript, it seems like they would know about this promise. But it is not certain because while some seemed to know about the challenge and the promise, they did not specify at so early a time that the promise was contained in the Book itself.
Deacon Beckwith: “I think it beneath me to take so much trouble; however, if you will promise that you will confess to me that Joseph never had the plates, I will ask for a witness whether the book is true.”

Hyrum: “I will tell you what I will do, Mr. Beckwith. If you do get a testimony from God that the book is not true, I will confess to you that it is not true.”

Hyrum was testifying of what he knew to be true. Hyrum knew that if Deacon Beckwith would read the Book of Mormon once it was published and sincerely ask God if it was true or not, God would answer him. The Book of Mormon and praying to God to find out if it was true was quickly becoming the new focus in the message of the Restoration.

With the message dealing primarily with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon there came a small, but important, issue to overcome; the book was still not published. That fact, however, did not slow down the message from spreading. As the book was being published, the message continued to be taught. Joseph Smith remembered that “while the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer we still continued to bear testimony and give information, as far as we had opportunity.” The news of the book attracted people to Palmyra, and Joseph, along with the other believers did not wait for the publication process to be completed before they started to show the actual printed work.

Thomas B. Marsh

Thomas Baldwin Marsh, who later would be the first President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was initially introduced to the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ through proof sheets from the Book of Mormon. Thomas was living near Boston, Massachusetts and had

102 Proof sheets were the first printed pages from the press which were then compared with the original handwritten manuscript and checked for errors and other discrepancies before the pages were printed in mass.
previously withdrawn from all organized religion because he was waiting for the organization of a Church which contained all of the principles of the gospel as contained in the New Testament. While waiting for the return of the true religion upon the earth, he “was moved by the spirit to make a journey west.” As he journeyed west, he stopped to visit an acquaintance of his who was living in Lyonstown, New York. While there the “lady of the house asked whether he had heard of the ‘Golden Bible’ found by a youth name Joseph Smith.” Thomas had not previously heard anything about any such events, but upon hearing this news he desired to learn more.

Thomas made his way to Palmyra, New York, to find more about this “gold bible.” He arrived at the town and upon inquiring about where the book was being printed he promptly went to the E.B Grandin bookshop. There he met Martin Harris who, coincidentally, was in the printing office at that time. After conversing about the Book of Mormon with Thomas B. Marsh, Martin Harris showed the evidence of the work by giving him a set of “proof sheets of the first sixteen pages.”

Martin then invited Thomas to accompany him back to the Smith farm. There Thomas met Oliver Cowdery for the first time and for two days these two gentlemen conversed about the Book of Mormon. During that time Thomas received from Oliver “full information as to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.” When Thomas returned to his home in Massachusetts

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103 Smith, History of the Church, 117.
104 In Porter, “The Field Is White Already to Harvest”, the town is called Lyonstown, New York. Presently there is not a Lyonstown, New York, but there is a town 15 miles to the east called Lyons, New York. It is probable that this is where Thomas B. Marsh was at the time he first heard of The Book of Mormon.
106 Smith, History of the Church, 1:117.
107 Ibid.
he carried with him the knowledge of the history about the Book of Mormon, but he also had an actual set of proof sheets from the Book of Mormon to read. He shared all these with his wife and she too believed the message of the Restoration. The messages from the Book of Mormon were going forth to the world even before the book was completely published!

**Solomon Chamberlain**

Solomon Chamberlain was another early convert to the Church of Jesus Christ whose conversion story mirrors that of Thomas B. Marsh’s. Solomon was a pious man who was waiting for God to reestablish His Church on the earth. He knew that God’s Church was not found on the earth because an Angel of God had visited him and after showing him many glorious visions instructed him that the true Church of God was not on the earth. Solomon was told that God would soon “raise up a Church, that it would be after the Apostolic order, that there would be in it the same powers and gifts that were in the days of Christ and that [he] should live to see that day.” The angel also told him, “that there would [be] a book come forth, like unto the Bible, and the people would be guided by it as well as the Bible.”

For more than 12 years, Solomon searched for the Church and the additional book the angel had informed him of. In the early part of 1830, while the Book of Mormon was still being published, Solomon was traveling to Canada by ferry when he disembarked prematurely at Lockport, New York, near Palmyra. Solomon did not know why he disembarked early, but he felt like he should. After traveling on foot for a while he came to a farm less than a mile from the Hill Cumorah where he spent the night. The next morning Solomon was conversing with his host.

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108 Solomon Chamberlain, “Life Sketch of Solomon Chamberlain,” 1, mss sc 1748, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Solomon also stated in his journal that the glorious things the angel showed to him was that God had three degrees of glory to award to people after this life.
and was asked if he had heard of the gold bible. The news of a gold bible instantly caught Solomon’s attention. “When they said ‘gold Bible’ there was a power like electricity [that] went from the top of my head to the end of my toes.” Solomon remembered the angelic message he had received more than a decade earlier and was excited to hear more. After asking for additional information about this book, he was directed to the Smith farm where he met Joseph’s brother, Hyrum.

Solomon told Hyrum and the rest of the Smith family his religious views and they in turn told him about the history and coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Here I stayed two days and they instructed me, in the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, after I had been here two days, I went with Hyrum and some others to [the] Palmyra printing office where they began to print the Book of Mormon, and as soon as they had printed 64 pages, I took them with their leave, and pursued my journey to Canada, and I preached all that I knew concerning Mormonism to all.

On his way back from Canada, Solomon stopped again at Palmyra and this time he was able to buy a few copies of the newly published Book of Mormon. He took his books and then went on a short trip to share them with anyone who would listen. During his trip, which lasted only eight days, he sold one copy of the Book of Mormon. In April 1830, the same month the Church was officially organized; Solomon Chamberlain was baptized in Seneca Lake.

Solomon did not stop preaching about the Book of Mormon and sharing the messages of the Restoration once he was baptized. He attended his previous religion’s conferences in order to share with them the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. While at an annual conference of Reformed Methodist, Solomon told a man named Phineas Young “he had come to offer the

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109 Ibid., 2.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 3.
112 Ibid.
conference the Book of Mormon saying that if they reject it, they would all go to destruction.”

The conference was not receptive to such a message. They rejected both Solomon and the Book of Mormon and then evicted him from the conference.\textsuperscript{113}

\textit{Warren Cowdery and Heman Hyde}

Oliver Cowdery frequently used the proof sheets of the Book of Mormon to share the message of the Restoration with his family members. When Oliver would show his older brother, Warren, the proof sheets of the Book of Mormon, Warren would peruse them and then spread the message himself by talking to his neighbors about what he had read.\textsuperscript{114}

One of Warren’s neighbors, who heard the message and had the chance to read the proof sheets, was Heman Hyde.\textsuperscript{115} Heman’s son, William, later recalled how the proof sheets were used to share the message with his family.

In the year 1830 [Heman] began to hear something concerning the Book of Mormon, and the setting up of the Kingdom of God on the earth in the last days. The little information that we gained upon this subject, until the elders came preaching was through Warren A. Cowdery whose farm joined with our farm. Warren A. [Cowdery] obtained from his brother, Oliver, at an early date some of the proof sheets to the Book of Mormon, some of which we had the privilege of perusing, and we did not peruse any faster than we believed.\textsuperscript{116}

Heman Hyde’s entire family was first introduced to the message of the Restoration, which was the Book of Mormon, before the printing process was completed by reading proof

\textsuperscript{113} Loras B. Tangren, “Solomon Chamberlain,” 6-7, ms 4960, fd 1, Church Archives.


\textsuperscript{115} It is worth noting that Heman’s oldest son, Heman T. Hyde and Orson Hyde were both members of Zion’s camp but beyond that no family relation could be found that connects the two families. It is possible that they are cousins, but the historical family records do not prove this hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
sheets. A few years later, when elders of the Church reached the town and preached in the area the whole family was baptized.

These four examples, Thomas B. Marsh, Solomon Chamberlain, Warren A. Cowdery and Heman Hyde, are the best examples of when and how the proof sheets were used to help spread the message of the Restoration in a positive way before the Book of Moron was completely published. There was one other time when the proof sheets were used to spread the message of the Restoration, but it was not to further the message, but rather to destroy it and the sale of the Book of Mormon once it was finally finished.

Abner Cole

Abner Cole was a former justice of the peace who published a weekly newspaper from the same press on which the Book of Mormon was being published. Abner, working under the pseudonym Obadiah Dogberry, published *The Reflector* on Sundays when the Grandin press was vacant. As he was working in the shop on the weekends, Abner was able to see the first printed pages of the Book of Mormon. He assumed it would increase the circulation of his own paper if he could print those pages first in *The Reflector*. Abner only printed a few issues containing excerpts of the Book of Mormon before Joseph Smith showed up at the E.B Grandin press on a Sunday and told Mr. Cole that if he did not stop printing the Book of Mormon Joseph would sue him for copyright infringement. This stopped Abner from printing more excerpts of the Book of Mormon in his paper and stopped the message of the Restoration being spread by unfaithful means.\(^{117}\)

Because *The Reflector* printed parts of the Book of Mormon and also talked about Joseph Smith in such a negative light, Martin Harris was worried the book would not sell. The printer also had the same concerns and considered stopping the publication entirely. Joseph promised the printer his bill would be paid in full and the printing resumed, but Joseph needed Martin Harris to mortgage more than 100 acres of his farm in order to pay for that note.

Understandably, this was a major sacrifice for Martin Harris, who, before he agreed to it, desired a revelation from God through Joseph Smith on the whole matter. In this revelation the Lord assured Martin that selling his farm to pay the debt was the right thing to do and then he commanded Martin to preach the message of the Restoration (see D&C 19:35-37).

**The Message of the Restoration: The Book of Mormon, Published.**

On March 26th 1830, the Book of Mormon went on sale. Joseph stated that “no small stir was created by its appearance. Great opposition and much persecution followed the believers of its authenticity. But it had now come to pass that truth had sprung out of the earth, and righteousness had looked down from heaven, so we feared not our opponents, knowing that we had both truth and righteousness on our side”\(^\text{118}\). With the Book of Mormon on sale, it was finally available for anyone to read. Along with the arrival of the Book of Mormon, the message of the Restoration changed ever so slightly. The message would now include information about the visit of the angel Moroni, the gold plates, and the message contained on the plates, however, the small band of believers still needed to sell the Book of Mormon, literally.

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\(^{118}\) Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:84.
One of the first missionaries called to sell the Book of Mormon after the Church was restored was the Prophet’s own brother, Samuel Smith. Joseph Smith was responsible for paying half of the printing bill and he intended to pay it from the money he would get by selling copies of the Book of Mormon. Samuel’s mission objective therefore, was to sell copies of the Book of Mormon in order to raise the funds necessary to pay the bill. And while his first mission did not meet with much success in the terms of monetary value, his efforts did reap success in other ways.

On the final day of June 1830, Samuel began his mission to Livonia, New York. On his first day he traveled 25 miles and “stopped at a number of places in order to sell his books, but was turned out of doors as soon as he declared his principles.”119 On that first night after being unsuccessful in selling a book, he stopped at an inn and inquired if the innkeeper was interested in buying a Book of Mormon.

On going in, Samuel inquired of him if he did not wish to purchase a history of the origin of the Indians.

“‘I do not know,’ Relied the host. ‘How did you get hold of it?’

“‘It was translated,’ rejoined Samuel, ‘by my brother from some gold plates that he found buried in the earth.’”

Samuel did not succeed in selling his book, but he did give a glimpse of the message he was teaching. He taught that the Book of Mormon was a history of the origin of the Indians, and it was translated from the gold plates.

The next day Samuel continued his journey towards Livonia, New York and tried to sell the Book of Mormon to anyone who would listen. When he became hungry he stopped at a house of a widow and asked her for some food. Even though she was poor, she prepared some

119 Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 252-253.
food for him to eat, and when he finished eating he proceeded to tell her about the Book of Mormon and its history. The widow believed the message, but because of her poverty she was unable to buy one of the books. Samuel understood that the message of the Restoration was more important than actually selling every copy, so he gave her one of his books and continued on his journey.

While traveling through Bloomington, New York, Samuel met a preacher, John P. Greene, who was preparing to leave on his own preaching mission. When Samuel told Mr. Greene about the Book of Mormon Mr. Greene said he did not think it was worth his time to read a “nonsensical fable,” but he did offer to take a subscription paper with him on his own preaching mission in hopes of selling the book for Samuel. Samuel gladly agreed, left him a copy of the book, and continued on his own journey. Samuel returned to the Greene house a couple of weeks later to see if Mr. Greene had sold any subscriptions to the book but was informed he “had made no sale of the books.”

On Samuel’s third visit to the Greene family he was given the same news. Mr. Greene still had not sold any copies. As Samuel was getting ready to take back the copy of the Book of Mormon he had loaned the Greene family, he felt like he should leave it with them a little longer. Mr. Greene’s wife had read some of the book and had enjoyed it so much that Samuel felt bad about taking it back. As Samuel returned it again to the family he “explained to her the most

\[120\] Lucy Smith identified the town as Bloomington, but this town is not between Palmyra and Livonia but is about 100 miles to the east. So it would appear that this is NOT on Samuel’s first mission to Livonia but is during another one of his missions to sell The Book of Mormon.

\[121\] Ibid., 253-254.
profitable manner of reading the book. . .which was to ask God, when she read it for a testimony of the truth of what she had read.”\textsuperscript{122}

Mrs. Green continued reading the book. When she prayed about it she felt like it was true and then, she too proclaimed the message of the Restoration by persuading her husband to do as she had done. He refused at first, but he finally decided to read the book and pray about it. Once he did, he too felt that it was true. Mr. and Mrs. Greene were baptized shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{123}

The Greene family was not the only success that Samuel was having in spreading the message of the Restoration. Two months before he left on his first mission, Samuel sold at least one copy of the Book of Mormon to a man he met at an Inn near Lima, New York. Samuel had walked up to a man named Phineas Young and presented to him a Book of Mormon. Samuel explained it was a revelation from God and then told Phineas, “If you will read this book with a prayerful heart and ask God to give you a witness you will know of the truth of this work.”\textsuperscript{124} The man bought the Book of Mormon, took it to his house, read it, and was convinced that it did come from God.

In August of that year, Phineas Young along with his brother, Joseph, went to Canada to preach the Methodist faith.\textsuperscript{125} While in Canada, Phineas found it hard for him to preach the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] Ibid., 276. Samuel had finally found out about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon after he prayed to know if it was true. While on his mission he is going to share that method to everyone who will listen.
\item[123] Ibid
\item[124] “History of Brigham Young,” The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star 25, no. 23 (June 6 1863): 360-361.
\item[125] While Phineas Young was convinced of the truthfulness of The Book of Mormon, he still had a hard time leaving his old Church, the Methodists. He later recorded that he tried for over a year to connect Mormonism with Methodism but in the end could not and realized that he would have to leave one or the other. He was shortly thereafter baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ. (See “History of Brigham Young” 374-376).
\end{footnotes}
Methodist faith and decided to return home rather than stay with his brother Joseph. While returning home he coincidently met an old acquaintance of his, Solomon Chamberlain, who had recently been convinced of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon after reading the proof sheets. At the time they met, Solomon was preaching the history of the Book of Mormon to his old religious acquaintances. The two men talked briefly about the Book of Mormon before parting ways. When Phineas returned home his brother-in-law, John P. Greene had already heard about the Book of Mormon because Samuel Smith had left them his copy. By this time, John, along with Phineas, felt that it was true.

This is when the news of the Book of Mormon traveled quickly through the Young family from all sides. Phineas Young was the first member of the family to hear of the Book of Mormon from Samuel Smith, but while Phineas was in Canada, Samuel Smith had also left a copy with Mr. John P. Greene, Phineas Young’s brother-in-law.

After Mr. and Mrs. Greene read the Book of Mormon and felt it was true they started to share the message with their extended family at about the same time that Phineas was talking with Solomon Chamberlain. Mrs. Greene also shared her copy of the Book of Mormon with her Brother, Brigham Young, who would later become the Church’s second President and Prophet. After Brigham came to know that the book was true, he preached it to his sister, “Mrs. Murray. . .who is also the mother of Heber C. Kimball’s wife.”126 By the time Phineas had finally returned home he discovered that the Book of Mormon had already been shared with most of his brothers and sisters; except for Joseph Young who was still in Canada. As Phineas was returning home

126 See Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 276. See also “History of Brigham Young” The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star 25, no. 24 (June 13 1863): 374-376.
from Canada, Brigham was making preparations to travel to Canada to share the message of the Restoration with his brother, Joseph.

While it took a couple of years before all the members of the Young, Green, and Kimball families were converted to the Church of Jesus Christ, the message and the tool that converted them was the same; the Book of Mormon and praying to know if it came from God. The message of the Restoration no longer was to inform people about the Book of Mormon, but it was to have them read from it and then ask God in prayer if it was true.

There are many additional examples which show that the message of the Restoration at this time included an invitation to read from the Book of Mormon and pray to know if it was true. There are also many examples of people who first heard about the message from people who did not know for themselves it was true. Arguably, the most well-known example of the message being shared with positive results by someone who did not actually believe the message is the story of Parley P. Pratt and his initial encounter with the Book of Mormon.

Parley was a member of the Baptist faith who, after hearing Sidney Rigdon preach, began to follow the Campbellite movement. Parley was convinced the Campbellites had a better understanding of the scriptures than his previous religion and he liked how gospel principles were taught in simplicity and plainness within the Campbellite faith.

Upon joining Sidney Rigdon’s followers, Parley and his wife left their home and started on a mission. The first mission was to visit some old friends of theirs, but on the ferry ride back to their home town, Parley felt impressed to disembark from the boat and preach in the nearby neighborhoods. Parley’s wife continued on her journey as he got off the boat and headed towards the nearest town to preach; Rochester, New York.
After walking 10 miles into the region, Parley made an appointment to preach the Campbellite faith and while spreading the news of this appointment he met a local Baptist minister who told Parley about a Book he had in his possession.

After hearing of our appointment for evening, [the Baptist deacon] began to tell of a book, a strange book, a very strange book! in his possession, which had been just published. This book, he said, purported to have been originally written on plates either of gold or brass, by a branch of the tribes of Israel; and to have been discovered and translated by a young man near Palmyra, in the State of New York, by the aid of visions, or the ministry of angels. I inquired of him how or where the book was to be obtained. He promised me the perusal of it, at his house the next day, if I would call. I felt a strange interest in the book. . . Next morning I called at his house, where, for the first time, my eyes beheld the "BOOK OF MORMON." . . . I opened it with eagerness, and read its title page. I then read the testimony of several witnesses in relation to the manner of its being found and translated. After this I commenced its contents by course. I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.127

Soon thereafter Parley was converted to the Church of Jesus Christ.

It was also in the summer of 1830 when the message of the Restoration was again preached to the extended family of Joseph Smith Sr.128 As mentioned in the previous chapter, Joseph Smith and his father had written a few letters to their family in the East and now that the book was published, Don Carlos and Joseph Smith Sr. went to visit these families and share with them the Book of Mormon. During this trip Don Carlos and Joseph Sr. spoke to John Smith, Jesse Smith, Asael Smith Jr., Asael Smith Sr., Silas Smith, their sister Susan and a sister-in-law, Fanny, all of whom believed the message they presented except for Jesse Smith who, when he overheard the message of the Restoration told his brother, Joseph, in no uncertain terms, that he was not interested in hearing the message. Enraged, Jesse exclaimed, “If you say another word

128 See chapter 2 for when the message was first taken to the Smith family.
about that Book of Mormon, you shall not stay a minute longer in my house, and if I can’t get you out any other way, I will hew you down with my broad axe.”\(^{129}\) Obviously, from that point on, father Smith was careful about who was within earshot when he talked about the Book of Mormon, but he did not stop preaching about it to his other brothers and sisters. In time, many of them accepted the message of the Book of Mormon and the Restoration and were baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ.

By the beginning of the fall of that year, more missionaries were called to go teach the message of the Restoration. The most well-known four missionaries from this time were perhaps Ziba Peterson, Parley. P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer Jr. who were called to preach the message of the Restoration to the Lamanites (Native Americans) who lived beyond the Missouri boarder. As these four missionaries traveled towards Missouri they passed through Ohio and taught the message of the Restoration to the citizens in Kirtland and the surrounding areas.

While in Ohio, Parley remembered that Sidney Rigdon, a Campbellite preacher and friend of his, was near the town of Kirtland. Parley P. Pratt talked to his friend Sidney and presented to him “a Book of Mormon and related to him the history of the same.”\(^{130}\) Sidney promised to peruse the book and after he read from the book he was convinced of its truthfulness. Shortly thereafter he was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ.

The news of the Book of Mormon spread in Kirtland like a wildfire and in just a few weeks 126 people had listened to the message, read from the book, and were baptized. This


\(^{130}\) Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, November 1830, Church Archives.
number of converts doubled the membership of the Church at that time and it was the message of the Restoration; the Book of Mormon, that contributed to the number of people baptized. Those four missionaries had such success and converted so many people in Ohio that Kirtland became a gathering place for the Saints for the next 8 years. The conversion story of two of these converts, Levi Hancock and John Murdock mirror those of many others.

Levi was born in 1803 and in the fall of 1830 he was visiting his brother Alvah in the town of Chagrine, Ohio. While visiting, he heard about four men in town who were preaching from a book which was described as a “history and a record of the people that once inhabited this land.” Alvah and Levi did not know what to make of this account and were about to disregard it until Alvah thought to go and hear of the message first. The two men went to town in order to attend the meeting and there they heard the message of the Restoration explained more fully to them by the Elders. Levi was converted to the message delivered by these missionaries.131

John Murdock was a Campbellite follower whose conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ happened very quickly.132 John had read from a Book of Mormon in his possession, but did not have the opportunity to listen to the missionaries who were in town. He tried a few times to attend where the elders preached, but was not successful in this endeavor. His persistence to hear the message of the Restoration was further frustrated one night while he lodged in the same house as the missionaries. He felt like this was his perfect opportunity to listen to their message,

131 Levi Hancock, “The Levi Hancock Journal,” 24, Bx.8670.1.h194h 1983, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The four elders mentioned here were Ziba Peterson, Parley. P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer Jr. The date, state, and number of missionaries support this hypothesis.
132 John Murdock is probably best known as the man who gave his two newborn twins to Joseph and Emma Smith to raise as their own after he lost his wife in the childbirth of his own twins, and shortly after Joseph and Emma had lost their own twins.
but when he tried to attend their meeting he was instructed to go back to bed. Frustrated, John went back to his room, but did not give up hope of hearing the message.\textsuperscript{133}

Finally, John got the opportunity he was waiting for and was able to listen to the missionaries preach about the Book of Mormon. He had already read from the Book of Mormon, but when he heard more of the message of the Restoration he was determined to join the Church. John Murdock was baptized on November 5, 1830 and two days later, he returned to his house, now an ordained elder in the Church, to tell his wife what he had done.

John recorded what happened next, “I endeavored to bear testimony to my neighbors, who I met by the way, but they would not believe. My family, however, received my word gladly, thank the Lord; and my wife and [Brother] Covey both believed that the Book of Mormon was true, for I brought a copy of the book with me home and read extracts from it to them, being filled with the spirit as I read.”\textsuperscript{134}

John had been a member of the Church for three days, and an elder for only one, but notwithstanding this short amount of time, he knew the message to teach. It was the same message that had converted him. It was the message of the Book of Mormon.

John Murdock’s mission experiences were not uncommon. The Church was growing as fast as the news of the Restoration went from neighbor to neighbor and city to city. The message had already crossed international boundaries when it was taught in Canada. And in 1830, when Ziba Peterson, Parley P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer junior arrived at Missouri,

\textsuperscript{133} John Murdock, “A Brief Synopsis of the Life of John Murdock. Taken from an abridged record of his journals, written by himself. An Account of his travels, missions, experiences, conversion, callings, preachings, ordinations, blessings, joys and sorrows, etc. Also a Glimpse of the Strange and Sad Life of Little Julia Murdock Smith,” 8, mss 928, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
which at the time was the western boarder of the United States, the message of the Book of Mormon was taught to the “Lamanites.”

Parley P. Pratt recorded in his journal the message they taught while amongst the Native Americans. His journal illustrated that the message of the Restoration they were teaching to the Native Americans was really the same message of the Restoration of the time that everyone else was hearing, but it was adapted slightly for their new audience.

Thousands of moons ago, when the red men's forefathers dwelt in peace and possessed this whole land, the Great Spirit talked with them, and revealed His law and His will, and much knowledge to their wise men and prophets. This they wrote in a Book, together with their history and the things which should befall their children in the latter days.

This Book was written on plates of gold and handed down from father to son for many ages and generations.

It was then that the people prospered and were strong and mighty; they cultivated the earth, built buildings and cities and abounded in all good things, as the pale faces now do.

But they became wicked; they killed one another and shed much blood; they killed their prophets and wise men, and sought to destroy the Book. The Great Spirit became angry and would speak to them no more; they had no more good and wise dreams; no more visions, no more angels sent among them by the Great Spirit; and the Lord commanded Mormon and Moroni, their last wise men and prophets to hide the Book in the earth, that it might be preserved in safety and be found and made known in the latter-day to the pale faces who should possess the land, that they might again make it known to the red men, in order to restore them to the knowledge of the will of the Great Spirit and to His favor. . . .

This Book, which contained these things, was hid in the earth by Moroni, in a hill called by him Cumorah, which hill is now in the state of New York, near the village of Palmyra, in Ontario County.

In that neighborhood there lived a young man named Joseph Smith, who prayed to the Great Spirit much, in order that he might know the truth, and the Great Spirit sent an angel to him and told him where this Book was hid by Moroni, and commanded him to go and get it. He accordingly went to the place and dug in the earth and found the Book written on gold plates.

But it was written in the language of the forefathers of the red men; therefore this young man, being a pale face, could not understand it; but the angel told him and showed
him and gave him knowledge of the language and how to interpret the Book. So he interpreted it into the language of the pale faces, and wrote it on paper and caused it to be printed, and published thousands of copies of it among them, and then sent us to the red men to bring some copies of it to them, and to tell them this news. So we have now come from him, and here is a copy of the Book, which we now present to our red friend, the Chief of the Delawares, which we hope he will cause to be read and known among his tribe; it will do them good.135

Summary

All those involved with the translation of the plates were anxious to share the message they contained. Once the translation process began, Martin Harris wanted to show the manuscript to his wife. He tried to advance the message of the Restoration too quickly. The time was not right. The results were catastrophic for the young prophet and scribe. But in time the translation process resumed and Joseph was able to show some of the translation to his family and a few other trusted confidants like Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris. Seeing the manuscript was a privilege that only a few select people could claim.

As the translation process went on, it was interrupted a number of times over situations ranging from mob violence to the necessity of relocating, but once the translation was completed and the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the publisher the message of the Restoration gained momentum. Previously the message had simply revolved around the angel Moroni and the gold plates, but now Joseph Smith finally had something he could actually show believers and nonbelievers alike. He had the published translation of the plates, the Book of Mormon.

135 Smith, History of the Church, 1:183-184. The words “Great Spirit” may have been used here because that might have been the Native American term for God, or Oliver might have used it here because in The Book of Mormon, there was another missionary who taught a Lamanite king about the gospel and he used the words “Great Spirit”, because the Lamanites did not use the word God.
Once the Church of Jesus Christ was restored on April 6, 1830, the message of the Restoration included information about the Book of Mormon, and also the fact that the Lord had established his Church as he had done in New Testament times. With the establishment of the Church, it was no longer just the news of the plates that spread so rapidly. The number of those who read from the book and believed the message also increased, exponentially. There were literally hundreds of people joining the Church at a tremendous rate.

Another reason the message was so inviting and converts were so willing to unite with the Church through the waters of baptism was due to the promise contained in the last pages of the Book of Mormon which invited the reader to ask God if it was true. Many early members of the Church who shared the message with friends and family knew the book was true because they had followed this challenge. They read the book and asked God if it was true. It was not only the Book of Mormon that was exciting for those early members to share, but it was the results of their prayers that inspired them to share the message with their friends and family.

The message of the Restoration was well formed and the news of the Book of Mormon had even reached across the United States and into Canada, resulting in hundreds of people being baptized. Once that had happened, the Lord would modify the focal point of the proselyting message of the Restoration again. This time the addition was so major that in just a few months the entire message would be significantly different from what it had been previously.
By the end of 1830 the Restoration of the Church of Christ was well under way. Hundreds of people had listened to the messages of the Restoration and many had been baptized into the Church. Then in September 1830, the Lord began to mention a theme in a revelation that would greatly modify the entire message of the Restoration and would forever change the Church.
This new message was first introduced in March 1829, more than a year before the Church was restored but at the time it did not become a part of the message of the Restoration. This message was that “a desolating scourge shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away and utterly destroyed by the brightness of [His] coming” (D&C 5:19). The great and dreadful message was the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the destruction that would precede it.

In April 1829, another new phrase started to appear in the revelations from God: “establish the cause of Zion” (D&C 6:6). The word, Zion, was not unfamiliar to the young Church. It is used frequently in the Old Testament and is also often mentioned in the Book of Mormon. But for the members of the Church this new message was somewhat abstract because the Lord did not elaborate on how Zion could be established. Nevertheless, those seeking to know the will of God in 1829 were told to establish Zion.136

For the next 18 months the Lord continued to mention the concept of establishing Zion but He did not elaborate on what that meant nor did He say where it should be established. Then in the closing months of 1830, the Lord again mentioned Zion and hinted that in the latter days it would be established “on the borders by the Lamanites” (D&C 28:9). Shortly thereafter the Lord combined the doctrines of gathering to Zion and his Second Coming into the same message.

And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts; Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked. For the hour is nigh and the day soon at hand when the earth

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136 Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Joseph Knight, and David Whitmer were all told to “establish Zion” in a three month period in 1829. See D&C 6:6; 11:6; 12:6; 14:6
is ripe; and all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn
them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that wickedness shall not be upon the earth; For the
hour is nigh, and that which was spoken by mine apostles must be fulfilled; for as they
spoke so shall it come to pass; For I will reveal myself from heaven with power and great
glory, with all the hosts thereof, and dwell in righteousness with men on earth a thousand
years, and the wicked shall not stand (D&C 29:7-11, emphasis added).

By the end of September 1830, God had warned the Church to escape the destruction
which would precede His Second Coming by gathering to Zion. But the Church still did not
know where Zion would be located. The only thing the Lord had revealed about its location was
what He had told Oliver Cowdery when He said, “no man knoweth where the city Zion shall be
build, but it shall be given hereafter. Behold, I say unto you that it shall be on the borders by the
Lamanites” (D&C 28:9).137 Then less than one month later, the Lord revealed to the young
Church a little more information about the timing of His Second Coming when he said, “for
behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly” (D&C 33:18).

During the month of November 1830, the Lord reiterated the importance of gathering to
escape the destruction which would precede the Second Coming. Then in the last revelation
given in 1830, He told Joseph the gathering was to start immediately. “A commandment I give
unto the Church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C
37:3). When 1831 began, there was an excitement to learn more about “Zion” and the “Second
Coming.”

1831

137 In hindsight it is easy to see that “on the borders by the Lamanites” clearly meant on
the western border of the United States, near where the Lamanites (or Native Americans) were
settled. But at the time this revelation was given, there were “Lamanite” settlements in many
areas of the United States. In fact Oliver Cowdery, while on his mission to the “Lamanites”
taught a group of Seneca Indians who were living near Buffalo, New York.
When 1831 began, the Lord had already started to change the emphasis in the message of the Restoration to focus on Zion and the Second Coming, but before that transition was complete, He also changed the way the missionary work was done.

*The End to “Freelance” Missionaries*

In his dissertation, “A History of Mormon Missions in the United States and Canada, 1830-1860,” S. George Ellsworth coined the phrase, “freelance missionary” to describe the early Church converts who, after their baptism into the Church, went out and taught the gospel without being called to do so. Such missionary efforts were very effective because the newly converted member was excited to share the gospel with his friends and family. In fact, in two revelations which were given before the Restoration of the Church, the Lord supported the idea of freelance missionary service when he said that those who thrust in their sickles and reap were henceforth called of God and again when he stated that those who merely had a desire to serve God were called to the work (see D&C 4:3; 6:4). The recent converts who had the desire to share their newfound faith by “thrusting in their sickles” were henceforth called to do that work.

But by the beginning of 1831, the time for freelance missionary service was nearing its end. Freelance missionary service was not orderly, therefore, less than one year after the formal organization of the Church the Lord said, “it shall not be given to anyone to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my Church, except he be ordained by someone who has authority, and it is known to the Church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the Church” (D&C 42:11).

This change in the missionary program did not affect the message of the Restoration of the time. But it did bring under central control the way the message of the Restoration was
disseminated and make it more likely the message the missionaries shared was the approved one. From this time forth the Lord added more structure to the missionary program as seen in the revelations given to Joseph Smith. God directed who should go on a mission, where they should travel, who their companion should be and what message they should preach.

This “hands-on” approach was seen during the June 1831 conference in Kirtland, Ohio. The Lord revealed that the next conference of the Church should be held in Missouri and, after giving this instruction, He dictated almost every aspect of the missionary work.

Wherefore, verily I say unto you, let my servants Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon take their journey as soon as preparations can be made to leave their homes, and journey to the land of Missouri. . . . And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Lyman Wight and my servant John Corrill take their journey speedily; And also my servant John Murdock, and my servant Hyrum Smith, take their journey unto the same place by the way of Detroit. And let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith. Let them go two by two, and thus let them preach by the way in every congregation, baptizing by water, and the laying on of the hands by the water’s side (D&C 52:3, 7-10).

During the same conference the Lord called many other elders to go to Missouri and even assigned them their traveling companion.

That same month, the Lord called two other missionaries to serve a mission and He clarified what message He wanted them to preach. To Sidney Gilbert he said “Preach faith and repentance and remission of sins according to my word, and the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Laying on of hands” (D&C 53:3). To William W. Phelps He gave the same message, “preach repentance and remission of sins by the way of baptism. . .[and] you shall have power to give the Holy Spirit” (D&C 55:2-3). The Lord not only called the missionaries now, but told them what He wanted them to preach.
In November 1831, the Lord again directed the missionary message as given through a revelation to Joseph Smith.

Send forth the elders of my Church unto the nations which are afar off; unto the islands of the sea; send forth unto foreign lands; call upon all nations, first upon the Gentiles, and then upon the Jews. And behold, and lo, this shall be their cry, and the voice of the Lord unto all people: Go ye forth unto the land of Zion, that the borders of my people may be enlarged, and that her stakes may be strengthened, and that Zion may go forth unto the regions round about. Yea, let the cry go forth among all people: Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom; behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour. Let them, therefore, who are among the Gentiles flee unto Zion. And let them who be of Judah flee unto Jerusalem, unto the mountains of the Lord’s house. Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon (D&C 133:8-15).

With these revelations came the end to “freelance missionaries.” Of course the newly converted member would still be able to share the gospel with his friends and family, but before he went on a more formal mission he needed to be called by God, and set apart. This way, the Lord and Church leaders could have more control over the message that was going forth as the message of the Restoration. And the new message that was beginning to take shape in 1831 was to gather to Zion in preparation for His Second Coming.

*The Second Coming is Near; Gather to Zion to Escape the Destruction*

As seen in the example above from Doctrine and Covenants 133, by November 1831 the message the Lord mentioned in many of the revelations revolved heavily around the idea of Zion and the Second Coming. That change to the proselyting message of the Restoration did not come suddenly. In fact, the Lord had taught the members of the Church about these two principles for almost a full year before the missionaries began to record in their journals that they were teaching this new message.
By January 1831, the revelations were frequently mentioning His Second Coming, but the Lord was not just mentioning it, He was telling people to do something before it happened. To James Covill, who was not a member of the Church, the message about the Second Coming was clear. “Go forth, crying with a loud voice, saying: The kingdom of heaven is at hand; crying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God. . . [prepare] the way before my face for the time of my coming; For the time is at hand. . .” (D&C 39:19-21). In this revelation the change to the message of the Restoration was declared: The Second Coming is close at hand.

The frequency that the Lord mentioned His Second Coming supports the fact that this was the new message he wanted delivered. In January 1831, during a conference of the Church, the Lord continued to reveal additional information about the imminence of His coming and the gathering to Zion. The Church had recently been given the command to gather to Ohio and during the conference the Lord hinted at why He wanted them to do that. “The enemy is combined” (D&C 38:12). He then told the Saints about their land of inheritance awaiting them saying that it was a land of milk and honey (which was the same language used in the Old Testament to talk about the Israelites Promised Land) where there “shall be no curse when the Lord cometh” (D&C 38:18). But the Lord did not specifically designate Ohio as Zion. He did not even specify if the land of “milk and honey” was Ohio, He only said he had a land for them. At this time, the Church did not know if Ohio was Zion or not, they only knew they were supposed to gather there.

Before James Covill received this message, in October 1830 the Lord gave a similar message to Ezra Thayre when he said, “Yea, open your mouths and they shall be filled, saying: Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (D&C 33:10). While this message is similar to the one he delivered to James Covill, the Lord stopped short of mentioning to Ezra Thayre that His Second Coming was at hand.
However, the Lord did give at least one additional reason why He wanted the Saints to gather to Ohio. He first reminded them of this truth. “Ye hear of wars in far countries, and you say that there will soon be great wars in far countries, but ye know not the hearts of men in your own land” (D&C 38:29). Then came one of the reasons He wanted the Saints to gather to Ohio. “And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless – Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:31-32).

The Saints believed the destruction preceding the Second Coming would be horrible, and the only place of safety would be to gather where the Lord had instructed them. Armed with this knowledge Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon went out on a small mission to preach this new message of the Restoration.

From this time until the 8th or 10th of January, 1831, myself and Elder Rigdon continued to preach in Shalersville, Ravenna, and other places, setting forth the truth, vindicating the cause of our Redeemer; showing that the day of vengeance was coming upon this generation like a thief in the night; that prejudice, blindness and darkness filled the minds of many, and caused them to persecute the true Church.\(^{139}\)

By February 4, 1831, Joseph Smith had already moved with his family to Ohio and a call was made to the available Elders to attend a conference there. Five days later, Joseph met with twelve elders and on that occasion received another revelation from God about the missionary program. In the revelation, expressly given to the “elders of my Church” the Lord gave them permission to travel “two by two. . .into the regions westward and. . .build up [the] Church” (D&C 42:6-8). However, this was only until the location of the New Jerusalem (Zion) would be revealed. For those members of the Church that might have thought Ohio would be their final

destination (the New Jerusalem or Zion) the revelation was clear. The city of Zion was not Kirtland, Ohio; the location still had not been revealed.

The Saint’s excitement over the Second Coming still permeated their teachings amid all the talk about Zion. According to John Whitmer’s history of the Church, during the fourth General Conference of the Church held in June 1831 Joseph Smith ordained Lyman Wight to be a High Priest. After his ordination, Lyman spoke to the congregation and claimed he saw the Savior, and that some of the people present would live to see the Second Coming. This teaching contributed to the Saint’s anxiety about the imminence the Second Coming and their need to know the location of Zion.

After Lyman’s prophecy, Lord instructed Joseph and Sydney to “take their journey as soon as preparations [could] be made to leave their homes, and journey to the land of Missouri” (D&C 52:3).

Missouri fit the descriptions the Lord had given about the location of Zion. It was west of Ohio and it was on the “borders by the Lamanites” (D&C 28:9). If there were any questions as to why the Lord wanted them to go to Missouri, He removed all speculation when He said, “And it shall also, inasmuch as they are faithful, be made known unto them the land of your inheritance”

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140 Even though Lyman Wight taught that some people at the conference would live to see the Second Coming it is doubtful that this would be the case unless the Lord gave someone at the conference a promise they would remain on the earth until the Second Coming. This promise was given to three Nephites (see 3 Nephi 28) and so the statement could be true if one of these three Nephites were present at the conference. John the Beloved was also given this same promise (see 3 Nephi 28:6-7) but the statement could not have been referring to him though because at this conference Joseph Smith taught that John was preaching and teaching to the ten tribes that were lost. (see History of the Church vol. 1, 176 footnote †.) Another possibility as to why Lyman made such a statement could be that he was incorrect in his statement. D&C 52 was given right after Lyman Wight’s declaration. In this revelation the Lord mentioned almost thirty priesthood holders in the Church but he only warned one of them, Lyman. “Let my servant Lyman Wight beware, for Satan desireth to sift him as chaff” (D&C 52:12).
During that same revelation the Lord then called an additional 26 elders to travel to Missouri, to the same location as Joseph and Sydney. To all of them He gave this counsel, 

“And thus, even as I have said, if ye are faithful ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies. But, behold, I, the Lord, will hasten the city in its time, and will crown the faithful with joy and with rejoicing” (D&C 52:42-43).

As the elders traveled to Missouri for the next conference they knew Missouri had been dedicated as a place of safety where the Saints could gather, but they still did not know the exact location where the city of Zion would be established. On July 20, 1831 the elders assembled in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, as per the Lord’s instructions. During that conference the Lord revealed to them the exact location where Zion would be build. “Wherefore, this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion. And thus saith the Lord your God, if you will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place [of Zion]; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse (D&C 57:2-3).

Now that the location of Zion had been revealed the message of the Restoration could start to include the call to gather there. Up until this time, even though so much was said about Zion and the Second Coming, the shift in the message of the Restoration had not yet happened. When the elders were traveling to Missouri they knew a good deal about the Second Coming and the importance of gathering to Zion, but even though they had this information, the message of the Restoration was basically the same it had been in the past.
One of the clearest evidences the message had not changed much by this time is in the missionary journal of John Murdock. John Murdock was called to travel to Missouri with the Prophet’s brother, Hyrum, by way of Detroit. These two missionaries did not make it to Independence, Missouri in time for the conference or the revelation which declared Independence as Zion because they were constantly stopping to preach the message of the Restoration. John Murdock kept a journal as he traveled which details where they traveled, where they preached and even the message of the Restoration he was teaching.

We preached at 9 o'clock and as we had the evening before shown the first principles of the gospel--repentance and baptism for the remission of sins and the laying on of the hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We set forth the promises of the Savior to the Apostles. Then alleged that the same promises were to all who believed, and showed the same blessings were obtained by the same obedience, for the gospel of salvation is the same in all generations. And then bore testimony that all must repent, both professor and nonprofessor, both priests and people, and we had great liberty by the spirit.\(^{141}\)

When Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon and Oliver Cowdery returned to Kirtland the excitement over Zion was palpable. Joseph later wrote that “in these infant days of the Church, there was a great anxiety to obtain the word of the Lord upon every subject that in any way concerned our salvation; and as the land of Zion was now the most important temporal object in view, I enquired of the Lord for further information upon the gathering of the Saints.”\(^{142}\)

During the revelation that followed Joseph’s enquiry, the Lord again stressed the importance of gathering to Zion to escape the destruction at His Second Coming.

And now, behold, this is the will of the Lord your God concerning his Saints, that they should assemble themselves together unto the land of Zion. . .I the Lord, am angry with the wicked; . .I have sworn in my wrath, and decreed wars upon the face of the earth, and the wicked shall slay the wicked, and fear shall come upon every man; And the Saints also shall hardly escape; nevertheless, I, the Lord, am with them, and will come down in

\(^{141}\) John Murdock, “Journal,” 10, mss928, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

\(^{142}\) Smith, History of the Church, 1:207-211.
heaven from the presence of my Father and consume the wicked with unquenchable fire. . . Wherefore, seeing that I, the Lord, have decreed all these things upon the face of the earth, I will that my Saints should be assembled upon the land of Zion (D&C 63:24, 32-36)

Then after stressing the point, the Lord instructed the Church that this was to be the message He wanted preached to the rest of the world. “Every man should. . .lift a warning voice unto the inhabitants of the earth; and declare both by word and by flight that desolation shall come upon the wicked” (D&C 63:37).143

The Message Contained in a Book of Commandments

By the end of the year the message of the Second Coming was securely attached to the doctrine to gather to Zion. This message was repeated multiple times in the revelations for the rest of the year and by the end of 1831 the Church had accumulated quite the number of revelations on the topic.144 Because these revelations contained the word of God to the Church many of the missionaries wanted to take copies of the revelations with them on their missions. However, the problem was that they were not yet compiled into a book. Therefore, if an elder wanted to take a certain revelation with him while on his mission, he would have to acquire his own personal, and usually handwritten, copy. To alleviate this, the early Church leaders decided to compile and print the revelations into a book called A Book of Commandments.

143 It is worth noting that the Lord promised the Saints that they would escape the destruction that was coming if they gathered to Zion. In a later revelation the “destruction” he mentioned was in reference to the Civil War of the United States. What is interesting to note is that the Saints by that time had gathered to Salt Lake City, Utah and really “escaped” the destruction of the Civil War.

144 “Zion” is mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants 18 times in the revelations spanning from September 1823 to March 1831 (D&C sections 2-49). Once the location was designated in July 1831 (section 57), “Zion” was mentioned 54 times in only five months.
Before the Church leaders moved forward with this decision though, Joseph inquired of the Lord for His blessing and instruction in the endeavor. The Lord gave His consent and even gave Joseph a revelation which was intended to be the preface to the new book. This preface contained a clear theme, the Second Coming.

Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my preface unto the book of my commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth. Wherefore, fear and tremble, O ye people, for what I the Lord have decreed in them shall be fulfilled. And verily I say unto you, that they who go forth, bearing these tidings unto the inhabitants of the earth, to them is power given to seal both on earth and in heaven, the unbelieving and rebellious; Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure— Unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man. Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear: Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh. . . For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hours is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion. And also the Lord shall have power over his Saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world (D&C 1:6-12, 35-36).

The Lord gave Joseph the permission to compile and print the revelations by giving him a preface known as Section 1 in the Doctrine and Covenants, and the preface sent a clear message. The Second Coming was nigh at hand and peace would be taken from the earth. The way to escape this destruction was contained in the revelations, and the revelations spoke plainly and frequently about gathering to Zion.

As 1831 ended, gathering to Zion to escape the Second Coming had become the principle message the Lord wanted taught. And as 1832 began, this message of the Restoration started to...
appear as the message more frequently in the letters from Church Leader and in the missionary journals.

The Evening and Morning Star

The Prophet Joseph Smith knew that a printing press would help further the gospel work by facilitating the distribution of news and the messages of the Restoration to the Saints who were living away from the rest of the Church. Therefore, the Church began to print its first newspaper, The Evening and Morning Star. In June of 1832, the first edition of The Star came off the press and the very first edition dealt mainly with the doctrines of gathering and the Second Coming. The article, “To Man” was written to the Saints to inform them why the Church was publishing a newspaper. The article mentioned that The Star was “to bring good tidings of great joy to all people, but more especially the house of Israel scattered abroad, that the day of their redemption is near, for the Lord hath set his hand again the second time to restore them to the lands of their inheritance; ready to receive the Savior in the clouds of heaven. . .[The Star] comes to open the way for Zion to arise and put on her beautiful garments and become the glory of the earth.”145 The Saints were expecting the Second Coming at any time and they wanted to be ready for it. The newspaper could help with that preparation.

Appearing in the first edition of The Star, and continuing throughout its entire publication, was a section dedicated to World News. But the news that made it into this section was chosen because it supported a specific idea. For the Saints who were expecting destruction before the Second Coming, the section on world news provided the “proof” that they were living in the last days. The vast majority of the world news recorded in The Star dealt with the wars in

145 “To Man,” The Evening and Morning Star 1, no. 1 (June 1832): 7.
foreign lands and cataclysmic events that were transpiring around the world. The troubles in Portugal, Ireland and France were mentioned in the first edition and the news ranged from fighting in Portugal over who the new king would be, to dead people lying in the streets of Ireland and finally to an “organized band in Paris, who poison the wine, the milk and the water.”

Along with the wars and rumors of wars, the Second Coming was to come during a time when famine and plague would devastate the earth killing thousands and tens of thousands (see D&C 29:14-21). The Star therefore reported on such things in the section on world news.

It is with no ordinary feelings, that we select an item or two, in relation to the Cholera Morbus. Its ravages, for the past year, on the Eastern Continent, have been great, so that, if ever the pestilence walked in darkness, or destruction wasted at noon day, now is the time, but the Lord hath declared that it should be so before he came in his glory, and we have only to rely on him for deliverance, when he sweeps the earth with the besom of destruction.-[Ed. Eve. & Morn. Star]

According to late accounts from the frontiers of Persia, the plague and cholera had hardly begun to subside in that country. In some provinces those formidable diseases had carried off more than [2/3] of the population... Out of a population of 300,000 only 60,000 men and 44,000 Women and children remained.

In the East the Cholera frequently falls upon a community like a shower of grape shot. It was decided in the King of Siam's council, on a visitation of this kind, that it might be caused by a monster, who might be scared from the coast by making a terrific noise. His Majesty, in consequence, moved out against the invisible enemy, at the head of 30,000 subjects, all on the stretch to produce sounds of horror. He lost 5,000 in one day; and returned vanquished. A Persian writer says; "We were apprized [apprised] that the cholera was at Shiraz, by finding one morning when we awoke, that it had carried off two thousand inhabitants during the night." [London Medical Journal].

The Cholera is in Ireland and England. The amount of deaths by it, in London, for the last week of March, was towards 1000. 147

From the very first edition it was clear that the Second Coming and the destruction which would precede it would be a major topic discussed in The Evening and Morning Star and the

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147 “Cholera Morbus,” The Evening and Morning Star 1, no. 1 (June 1832): 6.
Saints were beginning to understand that to escape this destruction they would have to gather to Zion.

The first edition of *The Star* also hinted at how well the message to “Gather to Zion” was being received. Although it did not specifically say it, it is apparent the Saints had taken the message to gather to heart and were gathering quite quickly; almost too quickly. Edward Partridge was called as a bishop in February 1831 and in the first edition of *The Star* he wrote a letter to the Saints who were contemplating gathering to Zion. He realized that not all the Saints coming to Zion had been sufficiently instructed in regards to the correct way and order to gather. In his letter to the Saints scattered abroad he informed them about the need to gather in an orderly manner to reduce confusion, pestilence and disarray. He then added excerpts from previous received revelations which showed the correct way to gather.  

The second edition of *The Star* also contained articles dealing with the Second Coming and gathering to Zion to escape the approaching devastation. “The Elders in the Land of Zion to the Church of Christ Scattered Abroad” was written specifically for the purpose of getting information to the elders on their missions and the rest of the Church about the current state of the gathering to Zion. This article was reminiscent of the letter from Edward Partridge one month earlier in that it hinted that the eagerness of the Saints in coming to Zion was almost too much for the city to physically handle.

The article admitted that “the work of the gathering will be accomplished. . ., in a speedy manner” but then it quickly reminded the readers that the “Lord has commanded that it shall not be done in haste.” The article mentioned the need for prudence and patience. In time, Zion

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148 See “To the Saints Scattered Abroad,” *The Evening and Morning Star* 1, no. 1 (June 1832): 15.
would be like the Garden of Eden, but at the present time it was still the wilderness. The city of Zion was not able to accommodate all who would want to gather without proper preparations being made first. One of the proper preparations was to first receive a recommend to gather either from the bishop or from three separate elders.

At first glance, it might seem like the articles in *The Star* would not be considered proselyting messages of the Restoration because the primary readers of the newspaper were already members of the Church. However this newspaper was more than just a way to communicate with members living in outlying areas. *The Star* was the Church’s forum by which the leaders of the Church could disseminate to the elders in the mission field the messages they wanted emphasized. By stressing the topic of the Second Coming and the proper way to gather to Zion, the leaders of the Church were informing the missionaries what they should be teaching to the investigators and members alike.

“To the Elders who Preach Good Tidings to the World” was just such an article, geared especially towards helping the elders remember what their mission and purpose was and to remind them of the appropriate message of the Restoration. The article stated, “Brethren. . . you are to enlighten the world; you are to prepare the way for the people to come up to Zion; you are to instruct men how to receive the fullness of the gospel and the everlasting covenants, even them that were from the beginning. . .” The emphasis of the message of the Restoration at the time the elders were given their priorities was “to prepare the way for the people to come up to

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149 “Elders in the Land of Zion to the Church of Christ Scattered Abroad,” *The Evening and Morning Star* 1, no. 2 (July 1832): 12.
Zion.” It virtually eclipsed the elders duty to “instruct men how to receive the fullness of the gospel.”

The elders understood their duty and many Saints were obeying the command to gather. However, the great number of people who were gathering to Zion caused unnecessary hardships to come upon the inhabitants of the city. The city itself was not able to support so many settlers so quickly. Therefore, in this same article, the leaders of the Church made it very clear the elders were not supposed to “scare” anyone to Zion.

The elders were not to paint “the calamities of six thousand years. . .upon the curtain of these last days, to scare mankind to repentance.”\textsuperscript{151} So while the article could seem contradictory, it was not. The message was to inform the elders to stress the importance of gathering to Zion, but to not sensationalize it in such a way that would manipulate people into gathering. Zion needed its builders to be faithful and dedicated, not fanatical and frightened.

However, that exhortation was understandably hard to follow when so much of the literature coming from the Church dealt with the Second Coming, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of Zion as a safe haven. The emphasis on the Second Coming as a major part of the message of the Restoration was heightened when the August 1832 edition of The Star ran an article entitled “Present Age of the World.” The article’s author wanted to show the readers how long they had until the millennium would happen. With the math used, taken from the recorded periods of time in the Bible, it was shown that the millennium would happen in only nine years, 1841.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} “Present Age of the World,” \textit{The Evening and Morning Star} 1, no. 3 (August 1832): 38-39. In the same edition of the newspaper there was another article entitled “The Book of
This article coupled with Lyman Wight’s exclamation only a year earlier about some people living to see the Second Coming of the Savior fueled the “flee to Zion” fire. Then, in October 1832, The Star dedicated an entire article to reprinting extracts from some of the revelations that would later be in the Doctrine and Covenants. All of the extracts were about gathering to Zion because “the great day of the Lord” was fast approaching and the Saints were called to “lift up your voiced and spare not, [to] call upon the nations to repent.”\(^{153}\) The apocalyptic tone of the articles continued for quite some time and the newspaper’s subscribers continued to be influenced by them.

In The Star’s November 1832 edition, the leaders of the Church published a revelation from God which had been previously received in March which dealt with the Second Coming. This time however, the tone was noticeably different from the other articles on the same topic. Instead of preaching about the destructions that were at the door, the Lord told His Saints what needed to happen before that great and dreadful day. He reminded His Saints that Zion would first need to flourish in the wilderness and the American Indians (Lamanites) would also need to blossom as a rose. Then, in case some people were still expecting all those things to transpire in the short nine year period previously mentioned in The Star, the Lord said that the time was close, but the hour and the day was not known by anyone, not even angels.\(^{154}\)

The very next month, December 1832, the Lord gave another revelation that suggested the Second Coming was not going to happen as quickly as some of the Saints had surmised. In

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\(^{153}\) “Extracts Given,” The Evening and Morning Star 1, no. 5 (October 1832): 74.

\(^{154}\) “Revelation,” The Evening and Morning Star 1, no. 6 (November 1832): 93-94.
Doctrine and Covenants section 86, the Lord gave the interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares.

But behold, in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word, and the blade is springing up and is yet tender- Behold, verily I say unto you, the angels are crying unto the Lord day and night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields; but the Lord saith unto them, pluck not up the tares while the blade is yet tender (for verily your faith is weak), lest you destroy the wheat also (D&C 86:4-6).

The Lord had only begun to bring forth the word, and it was not yet time for Him to send down His angels in preparation for the Second Coming. The Saints were living in the time when the wheat was beginning to grow, and they were not close to the time of harvest.

*The Missionary Journals of Orson Hyde, Samuel Smith and John Murdock*

Orson Hyde and Samuel Smith were serving a mission together during this time of great excitement over the Second Coming. Both had been commanded in Doctrine and Covenants 75 to travel together “into the eastern countries and proclaim the things which I have commanded them” (13). They both frequently recorded in their journal receiving the newest editions of *The Star* and how quickly they would devour the messages in them, including the message to gather to Zion. From their writings it is very apparent that they took seriously their mission to call for people to gather to Zion.

Jared Carter, who was also on a mission at this time, frequently taught the importance of gathering to Zion. The following illustrations from these three missionaries’ journals show their consistency in delivering the newest addition to the message of the Restoration.

On Feb. 9, 1832, while speaking to a group who had gathered to hear the message, Orson “warned them faithfully.” But he did not elaborate in his journal what that meant. Two days later
he again was preaching but this time he recorded their reaction to the message when he wrote, “Some I think will go to Zion.” Orson was warning them to flee to Zion.155

Samuel Smith was Orson’s missionary companion and his journal is also full of references about gathering to Zion. On March 2, 1832 the two companions stayed with a Mr. Jacob Long who was a local professor. The initial conversation with their host was very positive and Mr. Long was receptive to the message but in the end it was hard for him “to understand that he must be baptized and go to Zion.”156 The message to gather to Zion was not only for members, it was taught to everyone who would hear the message of the Restoration.

One fascinating experience which dealt with the message to gather to Zion was that of Isaac K. McMahn and his baptism by John Murdock. Isaac had heard the message of the Restoration and was interested in knowing more from the missionaries, but they left the town before he had the opportunity to talk to them in more detail. The missionaries did not realize there was someone in the town interested in not just hearing more about the message, but also wanting to be baptized.

Isaac did not let the departure of the missionaries quench his desire to be baptized. Isaac followed the missionaries for 27 miles and in the early hours of March 13, 1832, he finally caught up to them. John Murdock was awakened by the hallooing of Isaac McMahn who had walked almost 30 miles to be baptized, and now that he had reached the missionaries he immediately requested them to perform the ordinance. The missionaries agreed, but a problem presented itself rather quickly. There was no water nearby deep enough to baptize someone.

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156 Smith “Diary” 3.
Isaac though was undaunted, he had already walked 27 miles and traveling a few more miles was worth it to him.

So John Murdock, his companion and Isaac McMahan all walked together for an additional four miles, until they arrived at a suitable location at 2 a.m. Once they arrived, John Murdock performed the ordinance, and after Isaac came out of the cold water, John Murdock “taught him to go to Zion.”

In May of that year Elder Orson Hyde was working with a group of Free Will Baptists that were not very receptive to his message. After preaching for a day, Orson Hyde prayed that some of these people would “come out from Babylon.” Six days later he again talked to this group of Baptists. Afterwards Orson remarked they were becoming more receptive to the message and he believed they would go to Zion. By this time, Zion and Babylon were mentioned in his journal more than the Book of Mormon or the angel Moroni.

In the fall of 1832, Orson Hyde recorded he was teaching a Mr. Langley in his house and a good crowd had also come to listen. Orson and Samuel had stayed all night with this family and Mr. Langley had listened to the message but he still did not understand “the importance of

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157 Murdock “Journal,” 12. What is even more interesting about this account is seen when you read the journal itself with the surrounding entries. As mentioned earlier, John Murdock made it to Independence, Missouri the year earlier and missed the conference which designated that location as the center place of Zion because on the way there he stopped often to preach about The Book of Mormon. When John finally did make it to Missouri he was so sick that he decided to stay there until he was feeling better. Once he was better he started back for Kirtland Ohio and while traveling and preaching he mentioned The Book of Mormon regularly in his journal as the message he was teaching. Even though by that time the main message was to gather to Zion, John was obviously not aware of the shift in the message because of his absence from Kirtland and the writings of the Church leaders. John Murdock arrived in Kirtland and then a short time later started on another mission. This time however, because while in Kirtland he had time to hear the new message of the Restoration he started to mention the new theme more often in his journal as seen in this experience with Isaac McMahan.

The idea to gather to Missouri was not just to gather for gatherings sake, but was to escape the wicked people who would be destroyed at the Second Coming. The next day Orson again taught this message to a crowd of about 50 people who had come to hear the elders speak. Orson recorded that he spoke on “the ‘gathering’ and the ‘Second Coming of Christ.’” [I spoke] with authority; the Lord was with me; gave them a loud call to arise and trim their lamps and go forth. Many I saw were cut down and melted into tears which gave me some hope.”

On Sunday November 4, 1832 these two missionaries went to a Methodist meeting in hopes of setting up a preaching appointment at the end of the meeting. However, when the meeting was over, the preacher saw the two elders and correctly assumed they were there to announce a meeting. To prevent this from happening, he scheduled another meeting himself which frustrated Orson and Samuel from doing the same. Orson however, although disappointed, arose and “spoke to them [for] about 15 minutes, and bore a strong testimony upon the ‘gathering.’” Even when Orson had only a little time to preach, he spoke on gathering to Zion.

The missionary journals from this time period definitely had a different feel than those of just a few years earlier. Although many times these journals mentioned the Book of Mormon, it was very apparent that because of the new revelations to gather to Zion these missionaries were warning people to do just that. And everyone was encouraged to go to Zion, whether Church member or not. The missionaries really believed that war, famine, pestilence and many other

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159 Ibid., 40.
160 Ibid., 35. It is interesting to notice the reference to the ten virgins in this entry which also deals with the Savior’s Second Coming.
161 Ibid., 43.
destructions were in the near future and the only way to escape the calamities and be ready for the Second Coming was to leave Babylon and gather in Zion.

October 8th, 1832, Visited some of the families in the neighborhood and in the evening had a meeting. The people paid. . . good attention. Bro. Orson took the lead of the meeting. Preached upon the Gathering of the People and the people did not appear to have a disposition to fight against the work. October 10th 1832, Stayed in the neighborhood through the day and a less number came together in the evening than before, but we declared unto them that they must repent and go up to Zion. Stayed overnight in the neighborhood.  

However, while gathering to Zion was a fundamental part of the message of the Restoration, it was not meant to completely supplant the message of the Book of Mormon. On the night of September 26, 1832 both Orson and Samuel were trying to get a place that would let them stay for the night. They tried at three different locations but all three times they are not allowed to stay once it was discovered who they were and what religion they represented. Finally they tried a different tactic and instead of looking for a place to stay, they started to teach their message to anyone who would listen. Once the crowd formed, Orson and Samuel delivered the gospel message and then afterwards informed the crowd they were in need of a place to stay for the night. Finally they were invited to a house and once there decided to stay an additional day in town to continue the message they had begun to share earlier. The next evening the Book of Mormon and gathering to Zion were both mentioned as the missionaries’ message.  

The Evolving Message of the Restoration: “The Vision”

During these years when the Church was growing rapidly, Joseph Smith continued to receive many revelations from the Lord about the organization of the Church, the order in which they should act, gathering to Zion, the Second Coming and many other points of Doctrine. Many

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163 Ibid., 19-20.
of these revelations were being prepared for publication in *The Book of Commandments*, but of all these revelations, no single revelation stands out so plainly and uniquely in the messages of the Restoration as did “The Vision.”

“The Vision,” as it was called, is presently known as Doctrine and Covenants 76 and is the revelation which teaches about the three degrees of post mortal glory known as Celestial, Terrestrial and Telestial. And even though it was not uncommon for Joseph Smith to receive revelations, “this revelation was so magnificent in scope and precept and restored such important information on life after death and other matters that for years afterwards the Saints referred to [it] simply as ‘The Vision’.”

The new doctrine revealed in “The Vision” was previously unimaginable. At this time in the minds of some of the earliest Saints, “the old orthodox belief that most of humanity would be tortured in hell forever was so ingrained in contemporary religious thinking that Joseph’s glorious message of God’s inexhaustible love and mercy was unwelcome to some.” But whether welcome or not, the doctrines contained in “The Vision” spread, and spread quickly.

As mentioned briefly in the first chapter, the message about “The Vision” began to be taught by the few elders who were in the room with Joseph and Sidney at the time the vision was received. As they left that occasion, some of them took handwritten copies of the revelation with them as they went to preach the gospel, and although the Lord did not specifically tell them to teach this doctrine, many did.

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165 Ibid., 285-286
Samuel Smith was on a mission almost 200 miles away from Ohio at the time that his older brother received “The Vision,” but it was not long before the word reached him. Thirty-three days after “The Vision” was first received, Samuel and Orson were traveling towards Buffalo, New York when they were overtaken by a Brother Haskins who was a recent convert to the Church and who had recently seen the Prophet Joseph back in Ohio. It was Brother Haskins who, in his excitement of hearing of the monumental doctrine taught in “The Vision,” first told these two elders about the new revelation.

Six days later, Orson and Samuel again were met by two additional elders who knew about “The Vision.” This time however, these two elders, Joel and Seth Johnson, had a copy of “The Vision” with them, and they let Samuel Smith and Orson Hyde read it.

For five months, the only copies of “The Vision” generally available were from those who took the time to copy the lengthy document. That changed with the printing of the *Evening and Morning Star*, which gave the Church a venue for getting the revelation to the general membership. However, “The Vision,” which was received four month before the first edition of *The Evening and Morning Star*, did not appear in the first edition. The Church leaders decided to postpone printing “The Vision” in its entirety for a month and instead printed only key phrases from it in that first June edition.

As mentioned earlier, the article entitled “To Man” was to show why the newspaper was published. But within this article the wording from “The Vision” is unmistakable. *The Star* “comes in meekness and mercy to all mankind that they may do works meet for repentance and be saved in the first resurrection, and afterward dwell with the spirits of just men made perfect in the celestial kingdom, which transcends the glory of the terrestrial as much as the terrestrial
transcends the telestial or the telestial transcends the prison of the imperfect.” Not only does this article mention the three degrees of glory a month before the actual vision was published, but it also used the phrase, “just men made perfect” which is a direct quote from “The Vision” (see D&C 76:69).

After the July edition of The Star was published, it became easier for the elders in the Church to preach the newest addition to the message of the Restoration. The Star printed the full account of “The Vision” calling it, “the greatest news that was ever published to man.”

By the middle of August, the July edition of the Star began to reach those living outside the immediate gathering areas of the Saints. Both Samuel Smith and Orson Hyde, in their respective journals, recorded the memorable day when they too received the second installment of the newspaper. Both elders did not waste any time before they started to teach this new doctrine as part of the message of the Restoration. That same day, they taught “The Vision” and then at night they held another meeting and “read and explained ‘The Vision’” to those in attendance.

But “The Vision” was so monumental and new, and the message traveled so quickly that it also caused problems. For many people the doctrine went against everything they had previously thought about post mortal life. Many Saints could not imagine a God so merciful and kind as inferred in “The Vision”. Brigham Young later wrote that:

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166 “To Man,” 7.
167 “Items for the Public,” The Evening and Morning Star 1, no. 2 (July 1832): 25. The title of the article which printed The Vision was named very plainly as “A Vision” which seems to contrast the earlier declaration that it was “The greatest news that was ever published to man” but might explain why it quickly became known exclusively as “The Vision.” see “A Vision,” The Evening and Morning Star 1 no. 2 (July 1832): 27.
when God revealed to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon that there was a place prepared for all, according to the light they had received and their rejection of evil and practice of good, it was a great trial to many and some apostatized because God was not going to send to everlasting punishment heathens and infants, but had a place of salvation, in due time, for all, and would bless the honest and virtuous and truthful, whether they ever belonged to any Church or not. It was a new doctrine to this generation, and many stumbled at it.\textsuperscript{169}

Even though there were those who “stumbled” and rejected this vision, it still became an important part of the message of the Restoration. The elders continued to teach it to people who were not members of the Church, and, when necessary, explain it to members who had previously rejected it.

John Murdock had the opportunity near Geneseo, New York, to explain “The Vision” to a member of the Church who had initially rejected it. The member, Brother Landen, firmly stated that “‘The Vision’ was of the Devil,’ and that he did not believe it, anymore than he believed the Devil was crucified.” The situation was compounded by the fact that Brother Landen did not keep his doubts to himself, but had begun to preach against “The Vision” to other Church members. John Murdock traveled to the small town with Brother Rich and Brother Orson Pratt, to teach this man the error of his ways.

When the small group of missionaries arrived, Brother Landen emphatically declared to them he would not teach the false doctrines contained in “The Vision” even if they paid him a thousand dollars to do so. After hearing this, Brother Orson Pratt led a discussion and explained “The Vision” to Brother Landen. After elder Pratt finished, Brother Lyman Johnson and Brother John Murdock followed suit and taught about “The Vision.” In the end, Brother Landen acknowledged the error of his way and accepted the doctrines taught. Once Brother Landen fully

\textsuperscript{169} Brigham Young, in \textit{Journal of Discourses}, (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854-86), 16:42.
understood “The Vision,” he declared to the elders that for two thousand dollars he would not go back to his former thoughts on the subject. He also promised to have it taught to the rest of the Church in the area.170

“The Vision” never totally supplanted the other messages of the Restoration, but was only added as another part of the message. The doctrines contained in “The Vision” still continue to be a vital part of the message of the Restoration to the present day, and have only been excluded from the message in the past when the leaders of the Church have specified otherwise.171

1833

When the Joseph Smith arrived in Missouri in 1831 with the small band of elders, they could not have possibly imagined all of the tragedy and heartache that 1833 would later bring. The Lord though had warned them when He said, “Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand (D&C 58:3-4).

170 John Murdock, “John Murdock Diaries,” 18-20, ms sc 997 box #97, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

171 When the first elders were sent to England to preach the Gospel, Joseph advised them about what to teach and what not to teach. “The Vision” was one thing Joseph specifically instructed them missionaries not to mention until the Church was more established in the country. Most of the elders obeyed this wise counsel, but an Elder Goodson mentioned briefly “The Vision” in Bedford, while teaching to a group of interested people. He later read to them the full revelation. They rejected this new doctrine outright and “nearly closed the door in all that region.” (Smith, History of the Church, 2:492-505). Even those in the area that had previously allowed the missionaries to use their houses as a meeting place no longer felt comfortable with this arrangement and asked them to find another place to worship.
However, 1833 started out much like 1832 had ended. The message was to still gather to Missouri to escape the destruction and calamities of the Second Coming. *The Evening and Morning Star* was still publishing articles on why it was necessary to gather and also the correct method of gathering, including the actual route the converts should travel. *The Star* continued to feature stories from around the world that told of famine, disease, war and destruction in far away countries, but Joseph Smith knew that these same calamities would happen closer to home.  

*A New understanding about the concept of Zion*

In the closing months of 1832 Joseph prophesied that before the Second Coming, South Carolina would rebel against the Northern States and cause a war which would “eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls” (D&C 87:1). The last paragraph of the same revelation told the way to escape the death and misery. “Stand. . .in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord. . .[which] cometh quickly” (D&C 87:8).

Then in January 1833, in an effort to declare this message beyond the readership of his own paper, Joseph wrote to an editor of another newspaper and boldly shared the message of the Restoration. The letter told about the Book of Mormon, about the visits of the angel Moroni and about the gold plates. Joseph expounded upon the message of the Restoration further by saying the Book of Mormon revealed that the Indians (Native Americans) would inherit the American continent along with the other tribes of Israel and a few believing Gentiles. Joseph also explained that the Book of Mormon divulged that the New Jerusalem would be built on the American

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continent and then he forcefully declared that gathering to Zion was the way to escape certain destruction.

And now I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that not many years shall pass away before the United States shall present such a scene of bloodshed as has not a parallel in the history of our Nation; pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake will sweep the wicked of this generation from off the face of the land, to open and prepare the way for the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the north country. The people of the Lord, those who have complied with the requirements of the new covenant, have already commenced gathering together to Zion, which is in the state of Missouri; therefore I declare unto you the warning which the Lord has commanded [me] to declare unto this generation. . . wishing nothing worse to my fellow-men than their eternal salvation; therefore, “Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come.” Repent ye, repent ye, and embrace the everlasting covenant, and flee to Zion, before the overflowing scourge overtake you, for there are those now living upon the earth whose eyes shall not be closed in death until they see all these things, which I have spoken, fulfilled. Remember these things; call upon the Lord while He is near, and seek Him while He may be found, is the exhortation of your unworthy servant.

By the spring of 1833, Zion was flourishing. Houses were being built, farms were planted and the community was expanding. Converts from around the country were determined to sell their possessions and travel to Zion where they could be safe and also associate with others who believed as they did. Parley P. Pratt lived among the Saints in Missouri at the time and observed that there was seldom, if ever, “a happier people upon the earth than the Church of the Saints now were.” But this happiness was to end, quickly, and as it did the message of the Restoration would also be changed dramatically.

Irreconcilable differences between the Saints who were flocking to Missouri and the original settlers of the area came to a boiling point in the summer of 1833. The two groups of people were fundamentally different and while that did not bother the ever growing population of

173 Ibid., 315 original Italics
175 Church Educational System, Church History in the Fulness of Times, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 129.
Saints, it did raise concerns among the original townsfolk who saw the end of their way of life quickly approaching unless something was done.

Some of the more radical original settlers believed the solution to the “Mormon” migration involved the entire removal of the Saints from Independence, Missouri, by mob violence and force if necessary. Unfortunately for all those involved, the Saints saw Independence as Zion, their place of safety from the violence that would precede the Second Coming, and they were not willing to simply pack up and leave. The tensions grew until the mob turned to violence and decided to use as much force as necessary to remove the Saints from their homes. Tragically, Zion, the place of supposed safety for the Saints in the last days turned into a place of violence and destruction for them. By the end of the year, the Saints had been forcefully driven from their homes.  

As the Saints were driven from their homes their understanding of Zion was challenged, but at that same time the Lord began to expand their understanding of the concept of Zion. In August, as the persecution and violence was occurring in Missouri, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith in Kirtland Ohio that Zion was more than just a physical location. “Therefore, verily, thus saith the Lord, let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion – THE PURE IN HEART; therefore, let Zion rejoice, while all the wicked shall mourn” (D&C 97:21).

The idea that Zion was a state of being began to unfold. This declaration that Zion was the pure in heart built upon an earlier revelation which classified Zion as a title the Lord calls His

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176 To encapsulate all of the violence and expulsion from Zion in so few a paragraphs in this thesis does not seem to do justice to the injustice the Saints experienced at this time. To get a better understanding of the expulsion of Zion see Church History in the Fulness of Times, 127-139.
people once they were of “one heart and one mind, [who dwell] in righteousness” and who have “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18).

This new understanding about Zion was again modified in December of 1833. By the time this revelation was received, the Saints in Jackson County, Missouri, had been driven from their lands. Hundreds of Saints were without homes and living by the banks of the Missouri River; the fortunate families had at least tents to live in. While in this situation, the Lord again clarified slightly what “Zion” could mean. He had already specifically identified Zion as Jackson County, Missouri, and He had also referred to Zion as a state of being. Now He was going to bring in a third element into the definition of Zion.

In Doctrine and Covenants 101, the Lord stated that the gathering for the Saints was supposed to happen in Jackson County, Missouri, “until the day cometh when there is found no more room for them, and then I have other places which I will appoint unto them, and they shall be called stakes” (D&C 101:21). These “stakes” were additional gathering places which would offer the protection and promises afforded to those in Zion.

Once the Lord clarified the definition of Zion, He gave the call to gather. The call sounded the same as it had for the last three years, but this time it meant something different. When the Lord said, “gather together and stand in holy places” (D&C 101:22) that no longer necessarily meant Jackson County, Missouri. It was no longer a singular place, but rather multiple places. Then again, to reemphasize the same message in the same revelation the Lord gave the command again. “Therefore, a commandment I give unto all the Churches, that they shall continue to gather together unto the places which I have appointed” (D&C 101:22, 67. Italics added).
Summary

From 1831 to 1833 the Church grew rapidly, and so did the spreading of message of the Restoration. To unify the missionary program, the freelance missionary force ended. It was no longer appropriate for anyone to serve a mission in the name of the Church without first being called by the Lord. This move made it more likely that the message of the Restoration the missionaries were teaching was the appropriate message for the time.

Once this change was official, the message itself began to evolve from information about Joseph Smith, the angel Moroni, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, to include the message to gather to Zion.

The doctrine of gathering was not given all at once, but instead was added to “line upon line, precept upon precept” (2 Nephi 28:30). Eventually, Independence, Missouri, was designated as the main gathering place for the Saints, the Zion in the last days.

Then, to make sure the Saints understood the importance of gathering, another aspect was added to the message. This piggybacked on the idea that the Second Coming was near and before this great and dreadful day there would be wars, famine, destruction, disease and pestilence in the land. Those who wished to avoid such catastrophes were warned to gather to Zion, for Zion would be a safe haven for all who were within its metaphorical walls.

This Zionist message became the prominent message of the Restoration in the early years of the 1830’s and while it did not totally supplant the previous teachings of the Restoration, it was stressed considerably in the records of the Church and in the missionary journals at the time.
Those who believed in the messages of the Restoration found that they needed to change their lifestyle, religious beliefs, and also their physical address. Hundreds and thousands of converts started to gather with the rest of the Saints. Some of those converts went to Kirtland, Ohio, but many wanted the promised protection of Zion.

The Saints believed it would be only a matter of years before wars and destruction would blanket the American continent in preparation for the glorious return of the Savior. As more Saints came to Missouri for protection from the storm, they increasingly agitated the settlers in Jackson County, Missouri, who did not welcome such a large number of Mormons in their county.

Tensions between the Mormon settlers and the original townsfolk increased until in the summer of 1833, when violence broke out between the two groups. Ironically, the Saints in Zion experienced what they had hoped to avoid by gathering; destruction. In the end, the pacifist Saints were driven from Zion. This was a hard blow to the Saints who not only lost their homes, but also their Zion.

It was in these months of hardship when the Lord expanded the Saint’s understanding about Zion. Although Jackson County, Missouri, was an important place for the new Church, Zion was more than just a physical location; it was a state of being. During these hard times, the Lord also introduced to Joseph the concept of Stakes in Zion which could serve as additional gathering places for the Saints in the future. In the end, the Saints began to understand that Zion was not a singular place, but rather a plurality of holy places – places where the pure in heart gathered together. Once this new definition was established in the writings of the Church, the call again went out; “Gather to Zion.”
It was 1831 to 1833 when the Saints passed through the refiners fire both physically and spiritually. It was during these years when the message of the Restoration changed as quickly as did the Saints’ understanding of that message. However, while the definition of the message continued to evolve over the lifetime of Joseph Smith, the message itself stayed basically the same for years to come. Gather to Zion!
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The rapid growth of the Church was accompanied by a fast growing and frequently evolving proselyting message. The very first message of the Restoration came from a grove of trees on the Smith family farm in Palmyra, New York, in 1820. It was there that Joseph Smith, at the age of 14, received his “First Vision.” The message of the Restoration he received there, among other things, was that God did not have His Church still upon the earth. There was a need for a Restoration.

The vision was so marvelous and the message so astounding that the young Joseph did not keep the message to himself. But few people beyond his immediate family believed his account of the vision. Joseph admitted how he felt in those few days following this vision. “My soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the heavenly vision.”

Whether Joseph continued to share the message amid the sever persecution that followed is unclear, but either way the message became unstoppable. Even those people who were determined to undermine the message and persecute Joseph for such heresy ended up spreading it, even in disbelief, to others.

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Then, in the fall of 1823, the message of the Restoration was quickly transformed. That expansion began when the angel Moroni came to Joseph in September 1823. Moroni told him about a set of gold plates deposited in a neighboring hill which contained the history of God’s dealings and teachings to the early inhabitants of the American continent.

However, even though the message of the Restoration to Joseph had changed, it was not time for this message to be publically preached. Joseph was warned by Moroni to keep the existence of the gold plates private. The persecution he had already experienced because of the First Vision was nothing like it would be once the news of Moroni’s visitation became public. Joseph was obedient to the counsel and only confided to his family about the gold plates.

Because of the warning and the amount of persecution Joseph was already experiencing, this second message of the Restoration was closely guarded and only shared with the closest confidants of the Smith family. However, in time, that same message would grow into one of the most amazing and fundamental messages of the Restoration.

By 1827, people started to hear about the gold plates and, with that occurrence, the message of the Restoration naturally changed too. This news of gold plates and angels was so monumental that it quickly became the thing people talked and asked Joseph about. This message was so incredible that it overshadowed the news of the First Vision. In time, the First Vision became almost completely obscured even for many of the Saints.

With the translation of the plates, the message was added upon again and contained information gleaned from the plates themselves. Once they were completely translated, the proof sheets and later the published Book of Mormon became the main message of the Restoration.
But the message did not linger on these points for long. At this same time a new phrase was working its way into the conversation of the Saints; establish the cause of Zion. In a very short time, the references to Zion would come to the forefront and would eventually dominate the message of the Restoration. By 1832, the phrase “gather to Zion” was frequently talked about by the Saints, constantly written about in the Church’s newspaper, devotedly expounded upon by the leaders of the Church, and faithfully preached by the missionaries serving at the time. The purpose of gathering to Zion was to escape certain destruction and prepare for the Second Coming. If the Saints wanted to be safe, they would have to move to Zion.

That message of the Restoration required moving. As a recent historian explained:

From the time Joseph Smith arrived in Kirtland in February 1831, ‘the gathering’ knit together Mormon belief and experience. Latter-day Saint converts came to understand the gathering as a divine work of calling out the elect from the world – Babylon – to build communities of believers - Zion and her stakes – who would construct temples and prepare for the imminent return and millennial reign of Christ. Places where the Saints gathered would provide refuge from the destruction expected prior to the Second Coming… Gathering made conversion to Mormonism no longer analogous to joining other Christian congregations: Mormonism involved changing location as well as belief.178

During 1832, the call to Zion became the most prominent message of the Restoration, followed closely by the Book of Mormon and Moroni’s visit. Then in 1833, the Saints in Zion, Missouri, lost everything, including their concept of the message, when they were expelled from Jackson County. Nevertheless, the message of the Restoration remained the same. Gather to Zion. However, Zion no longer meant a specific location in Missouri; it was now a state of being that could be reached in an additional gathering location known as “Stakes of Zion” (D&C 107:36).

178 Smith, The Joseph Smith Papers, L.
Although the phrase, “gather to Zion” would continue to be the main focus of the message for the rest of the Prophet’s life, it definitely had a different connotation associated with it by 1844. As Joseph grew as a prophet, so did his (and the Saints) understanding of the message.

By the end of the Prophet’s life, the Saints did not gather to Zion to escape the destruction of the Second Coming, but to build a House of God. Once the temple was completed the missionaries could go into the world and build up more Stakes of Zion.

Joseph Smith taught this broader definition of gathering to Zion in a speech he gave at Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1843. “What was the object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world? . . . The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His Kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation.”

A year later, Joseph again exclaimed:

I have now a great proclamation for the Elders to teach the Church hereafter which is in relation to Zion, The whole of North and South America is Zion, the mountain of the Lord’s House is in the centre of North & South America, when the House is done, Baptism font erected and finished and the worthy are washed, anointed, endowed and . . . when the place is prepared you must go through all the ordinances of the House of the Lord. . . then the Elders are to go through all America and build up Churches until all Zion is built up, but not to commence to do this until the Temple is built up here and the Elders endowed. Then go forth and accomplish the work and build up stakes in all North and South America. . . So there will be gathering fast enough here.

After Joseph revealed that all of America was Zion, Hyrum Smith addressed the audience with these words. “I never knew a proclamation to be understood at one. We must do all we can

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179 Smith, History of the Church, 5:423
180 Joseph Smith, The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph, comp. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, (Orem, UT: Grandin Book Company), 363-364. It is interesting to note that when the Church leaders first began to teach the gathering to Zion that the Keys of the gathering had not yet been restored. Notice the completely different understanding of the concept after Joseph Smith’s vision in the Kirtland temple in 1836.
to build the Temple, and after that to build up Churches. The gathering will continue here [in Nauvoo] until the Temple is so far finished that the Elders can get their endowments; and after that the gathering will be from the nations to North and South America, which is the land of Zion.”

But if the gathering to Zion was always intended to be about building temples, why did the Lord speak so much about the Second Coming and the destruction that would precede it? Why did he let the Saints believe His coming was close? Those questions bothered the author while researching this topic until a passage in the Book of Mormon cleared up the confusion.

In his record, the prophet Enos recorded the answer. Enos lived in a time when the Nephites were becoming hardened towards their message. Therefore, to keep the people in “the fear of the Lord”, prophets were sent into the land to preach.

And there were exceedingly many prophets among us. And the people were a stiffnecked people, hard to understand.

And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things—stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction. And after this manner do I write concerning them (Enos 1:22-23).

For those first Saints, baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ meant sacrifice. It meant changing many aspects of their life. Making and maintaining those changes would be hard for many who were not used to living the principles of the gospel. Therefore, the Lord, knowing the

181 Wandle Mace, “Journal of Wandle Mace” 128, Bx 8670.1 .m15, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. (More research is needed to document the growth of the message from 1833 to 1844.)

182 Nephites were a nation in the Book of Mormon who knew about God and who usually had the gospel available to them.
difficulties his Saints would experience, had a message preached that would help: Gather to Zion to escape the coming destruction.183

The Church of Jesus Christ has grown rapidly ever sense its organization on April 6, 1830. The message of the Restoration has expanded and grown too, but that growth was neither by happenstance nor by chance. God directed the message His Church would declare to the world, and He gave it line upon line (2 Nephi 28:30).

When the Lord would add another “line” that new message became the next focal point the Elders stressed while preaching. However, the new additions from the Lord were not meant to supplant the previous messages. They were only the newest layers to the message. As the Church grew, so did its message!

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183 A faithful view of this circumstance is that the message to gather to Zion accomplished its task. All those Saints living during the 1830s, when this message was preached, were more prepared to meet their God when they died due to the fact that they had prepared for his Second Coming. As Enos wrote, the message of destruction kept them from going down speedily to destruction.
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