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An Insider's View of Mormon Origins by Grant H. Palmer

James B. Allen

Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*

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Reviewed by James B. Allen

Reviewing Grant Palmer's first published work became an unusual personal challenge to me, for it touched on two things I hold dear. One is balanced scholarship and academic integrity, which I have spent a career trying to teach and practice. The other is something especially sacred: my personal belief in the reality of Joseph Smith's First Vision, the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of priesthood authority. Book reviews ordinarily center just on scholarly matters, but somehow I could not approach this particular review without intermixing the two. My commentary, therefore, is first-person and personal.

Even though, to me, the evidence favoring Mormonism's foundational events is powerful and convincing, I believe that the literal reality of the First Vision and other sacred experiences can be neither "proved" nor "disproved" by secular objectivity. Believing Latter-day Saint scholars study the documents with all the detachment possible but also take literally the affirmation of Moroni that "by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things" (Moro. 10:5). Knowing something of Palmer's background, therefore, I was disappointed to read of his belief that the Holy Ghost is an "unreliable means of proving truth" (133).

Palmer portrays Joseph Smith as a brilliant, though not formally educated, young man who made up the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures by drawing from various threads in his cultural environment. Joseph's early religious experiences were not real or physical but only "spiritual," though Palmer never really explains what that means. According to Palmer, the stories evolved over time from "relatively simple experiences into more impressive spiritual manifestations, from metaphysical to physical events" and were "rewritten by Joseph and Oliver and other early church officials so that the church could survive and grow" (260–61).

Despite such assertions, Palmer presents himself as a faithful Mormon and retired Church Educational System (CES) instructor whose "intent is

to increase faith, not to diminish it" (ix). His announced purpose is twofold. The first is simply to introduce Church members who have not kept up with the developments in Church history over the last thirty years to "issues that are central to the topic of Mormon origins" (x). This, however, is one of Palmer's first misleading statements, for to achieve such a goal an author has a duty to introduce readers to developments of all kinds, not merely those that are radical or revisionist or that make traditional Church history look bad. Instead, Palmer simply presents his own interpretations of the founding events, citing only those sources that support his views and making no effort to tell readers about the vast body of scholarly literature that presents different perspectives.[1]

Palmer's second objective is to help Church members "understand historians and religion teachers like myself" (x). Just who those historians and teachers are is anyone's guess, though in his introduction Palmer praises highly the work of scholars at Brigham Young University and other parts of the Church Educational System. He rightly observes that "too much of this [historical research] escapes the view of the rank-and-file in the church" (viii). Such a statement, however, may mislead some into assuming that the Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers alluded to agree with his perceptions or that he draws his conclusions from their works. For the record, nothing could be further from the truth.[2]

There is another implication, not stated by Palmer but apparently circulated in some of the discussion that goes on through the Internet and other places, that people still in the employ of the Church dare not come out with their "true" feelings because they are intimidated by fear of loss of jobs and even loss of Church membership. Palmer himself may have felt such fear, for he did not publish any of this before he left Church employment. But "now that I am retired," he says, "I find myself compelled to discuss in public what I pondered mostly in private at that time" (x). It amazes me, however, that some people (not Palmer, perhaps, but some of his promoters) can impute such hidden sentiments to others whom they do not know, scholars who have continually published their own findings and interpretations for years. Many who are now retired or who otherwise are not dependent upon the Church for their livelihood (and are therefore "safe" from intimidation) still continue to publish and lecture on Mormon origins with no change at all in their perspectives.

Palmer complains about the "Sunday School" type of history, claiming that his "demythologized" versions of the foundational stories "are in many cases more spiritual, less temporal, and more stirring" than what is generally taught (ix), though he spends precious little time trying to demonstrate this curious pronouncement. What we must do, he says, is

address and ultimately correct the "disparity between historical narratives and the inspirational stories that are told in church" (xii). Narrowing the gap between the ordinary perceptions of average Church members and professional historians is an important goal, but reaching that goal is not legitimately achieved by simply throwing all popular perceptions into the trash bin. Besides, there are other purposes for Sunday School. For those who wish to go into Church history in greater depth, detailed treatments are certainly out there to be read and can be found by anyone who has the interest.[3]

This review is limited to the space normally allowed for such reviews in *BYU Studies*. A much longer version is forthcoming in the *FARMS Review*.[4] Readers are also urged to consult the reviews by Davis Bitton, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Steven C. Harper, and Louis C. Midgley in the *FARMS Review of Books*. Bitton identifies many sources, scholars, and issues that Palmer all too conveniently ignores.[5] Harper focuses mainly on how Palmer "manipulates evidence" regarding the Book of Mormon witnesses, on his "exaggerated hermeneutic of suspicion" regarding the priesthood restoration accounts, and on his recycling of Wesley Walters's 1969 arguments regarding the First Vision, adding "nothing new."[6] Ashurst-McGee addresses the central thesis of each chapter in Palmer's book, responding to virtually each of his arguments and concluding that "an open-minded reader may find that, in most cases, interpretations favorable to the integrity of Joseph Smith and his revelations are as reasonable as or even more reasonable than those presented by Palmer."[7] Midgley explores some sordid details in the making of *An Insider's View*, the basic facts about Palmer's employment record in the Church Educational System, and the unconvincing parallel between Hoffmann's "The Golden Pot" and the Book of Mormon.[8]

My intent here is only to summarize and comment briefly on Palmer's main assertions, nearly all of which have been already addressed by well-qualified Latter-day Saint scholars. "Asked and answered," we frequently hear lawyers say during trials on television crime shows when their opponents persist in bringing up old questions. "Asked and answered" is a good part of my response to most of the questions Palmer puts forth.

The Book of Mormon

In chapters 1–5, Palmer presents his views on the Book of Mormon. He claims that Joseph Smith did not have the power to translate anything and, therefore, not just the Book of Mormon but also his Bible translations and the Book of Abraham were fabricated (albeit in some kind of inspired way).

In support of his argument, he tells of the infamous Kinderhook Plates, showing that they were a hoax but suggesting that Joseph Smith nevertheless claimed that he could translate them. What he does not say is that all this information has been dealt with earlier in many publications, including Church magazines, so it is no secret to Latter-day Saints.

Stanley B. Kimball, for example, tells the story in detail in the *Ensign*.[9] Joseph may at first have thought these plates were authentic, and the *Times and Seasons* even published a statement saying that a translation was forthcoming. But the translation was not forthcoming, according to Kimball, simply because Joseph Smith was not fooled for long and soon dropped the matter. The statement in Joseph Smith's *History* saying that "I have translated a portion of them"[10] did not come from Joseph Smith. Rather, it was taken from the diary of William Clayton, who wrote on May 1, 1843, that "I [Clayton] have seen 6 brass plates. . . . Prest J. [Joseph] has translated a portion of them."[11] Whether Joseph Smith actually tried to translate the plates or was just speculating on their contents in Clayton's presence, or whether Clayton himself was just speculating, is unknowable. The statement got into Joseph's history sometime later, when Clayton's diary was used as a source. Third-person references were simply transposed by the editors into first-person statements. The fact that the plates were a hoax was not revealed until many years after Joseph's death, but Latter-day Saint scholars have not been hesitant to discuss the issue, and the Church has not hidden the facts.

Admitting to the possibility of at least some inspiration in the Book of Mormon, however, Palmer describes it as "a nineteenth-century encounter with God rather than an ancient epic" (36). In other words, it is inspired fiction. He belabors the well-known fact that several passages in the Book of Mormon are similar to, or the same as, passages from the King James Version of the Bible and then claims that "scholars have determined that he [Joseph] consulted an open Bible, specifically a printing of the King James translation dating from 1769 or later, including its errors" (10). Later in the book, Palmer suggests that Joseph Smith knew the Bible thoroughly, perhaps even having memorized it, thus accounting for his ability to insert Bible passages as he dictated (46–47).

One problem here is that the writers Palmer cites really have no way of knowing whether Joseph did or did not have an open Bible in front of him, and there is no evidence that any of his associates said such a thing. In fact, the statements usually cited are not always contemporaneous (some were made years after the fact), they do not agree in detail, and some of the people who made them were not actual witnesses to the translation, or dictation, process. Latter-day Saint scholars have already dealt with the issue

of biblical passages in the Book of Mormon many times, but Palmer chooses either to ignore or brush too lightly over what they have to say.[12]

The problems inherent in Palmer's view of the Book of Mormon are too numerous to discuss here, but a few additional examples will illustrate the kind of faulty speculation, incomplete evidence, and misleading "parallels" that plague his entire book.

Palmer's hypothesis is that the Book of Mormon began to form in Joseph's mind long before Martin Harris became his scribe in 1828 and that Joseph had three years or more to "develop, write, and refine the book" (66–67). Having memorized it in detail, he then dictated it from memory over a short period of time. But this explanation does not take into account some important things about the book itself. Latter-day Saint scholars have consistently pointed out that along with its complex story line there is a singular internal consistency within the Book of Mormon, including recurring patterns and flashbacks, that would seem impossible for Joseph Smith to keep in mind over the years and then dictate, without notes, over a nine- to ten-week period. Moreover, the central material in the Book of Mormon is not the story line but rather the powerful, often profound and beautiful spiritual messages given throughout, most of them centering on Christ and his teachings. These messages are so abundant that it seems highly improbable that someone trying to perpetrate a fraud could work all that, along with a consistent, highly complex narrative, into a book dictated in so short a time. With what we know about Joseph Smith's inherent lack of literary prowess, it becomes especially difficult to believe that he was the author.

One of Palmer's "parallels" is a comparison between the apocryphal book of Judith and the story of Nephi killing Laban (55). The story of Judith and Holofernes (the general killed by Judith) is so completely different from the story of Nephi, however, that the so-called similarities are, at best, superficial. This issue is aptly dealt with by John Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper in their extensive critique of the same charges originally made by Jerald and Sandra Tanner. Actually, Tvedtnes and Roper point out, Nephi's story "has much more in common with that of David and Goliath than that of Judith and Holofernes, but to cite from 1 Samuel 17 would have detracted from the Tanners' [and, thus, Palmer's] thesis that Joseph Smith got the idea from the book of Judith."[13]

Palmer also discusses parallels between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* in order to show that in Joseph Smith's cultural setting there was a belief that American Indians were descended from Israelites and that this idea provided the inspiration for Joseph Smith to make the same claim in the Book of Mormon (58–64). Again, however,

Palmer presents nothing new; information about *View of the Hebrews* has been available through Latter-day Saint sources for many years.[14] As in the case of most of his assertions, Palmer simply does not tell his readers about the work of believing Latter-day Saint scholars, even though he claims that one of his purposes is to introduce them to the developments in Church history over the last thirty years.

He also emphasizes presumed parallels with evangelical Protestantism, including Book of Mormon teachings that compare with evangelical doctrines, as well as words and phrases in the Book of Mormon that seem similar to words and phrases in the emotionally charged sermons of early American evangelical ministers. Reading such Book of Mormon language through the eyes of faith, however, leads one to ask "why not?" If similar problems existed in Book of Mormon times, why would not the scoldings, when translated into the English Joseph knew, sound evangelical? The similarity would be consistent with the way the Lord described other revelations which, he said, "were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). Moreover, even though some evangelical language appears in scattered places in the Book of Mormon, it is just that—scattered, not incorporated wholesale.

Palmer sees still another kind of parallel in "The Golden Pot," a story by a brilliant German writer of fantasy and horror, E. T. A. Hoffmann—a tale that, he contends, had a direct influence on Joseph Smith's story of how the Book of Mormon came to be. He does not claim that Joseph Smith read "The Golden Pot," but only that Joseph got ideas about it from Luman Walters, a necromancer who became acquainted with Hoffmann's work while studying in Europe. The evidence that Joseph knew Luman Walters is, at best, tenuous, but Palmer's comparisons between Joseph's story and "The Golden Pot" are so strained as to be almost laughable. "The Golden Pot" is a complex fantasy, and Palmer's highly selective, widely spaced examples of "parallels," when read in context, are not at all what he makes them out to be. Anyone who takes time to examine "The Golden Pot" will have an entertaining read but will be hard pressed to find any real comparisons between Joseph Smith's angelic visitations and Serpentina, the golden snake from Atlantis that Anselmus (the hero of "The Golden Pot") ends up marrying. Nor is there a sensible parallel between Anselmus being hired by Serpentina's father to copy *(not translate!)* some ancient manuscripts and Joseph Smith's call to translate the golden plates.[15]

Palmer brings up DNA research in an attempt to show that the peoples of the Book of Mormon could not have been the ancestors of the Native Americans. The lack of DNA evidence of Native American ancestry has

been dealt with in detail by Latter-day Saint experts, who have shown that this kind of research is so complex and tentative that no firm conclusions can be made.[16] Beyond that, however, Latter-day Saints have long recognized that the Book of Mormon is a history of only a small group of people in a very limited region and that there were numerous others on the continent when the Jaredites arrived. Given that fact, there is no need to assume that the Book of Mormon people were the *only* ancestors of Native Americans or even that the majority of inhabitants of North, Central, and South America are descended from the Nephites and Lamanites.[17]

Book of Mormon Witnesses

In chapter 6, Palmer attacks the testimonies of the witnesses to the gold plates, arguing that, deeply immersed in the magical world view of the times, they were so susceptible to Joseph's suggestions that they had "visions of the mind" that "erased the boundaries that separate the spiritual and the physical worlds, a perspective consistent with how a number of people of that day perceived reality" (202). The witnesses were thus gullible enough to see whatever Joseph Smith wanted them to see. Interspersed in this line of reasoning is also the old argument that the witnesses were inconsistent and at times denied actually seeing the plates. However, the integrity of the witnesses' testimonies has already been dealt with effectively by Richard Lloyd Anderson.[18]

In one instance, Palmer claims that in 1838 Martin Harris testified publicly that "none of the signatories to the Book of Mormon saw or handled the physical records" (204). His source is a letter written by Stephen Burnett. Anderson shows, however, that Burnett's statement is an interpretive "first-hand report of a half-truth" and that Burnett probably "bent words" to support his own theory that Mormonism was a "lying deception." The incident Burnett was reporting concerned Martin Harris standing up in the Kirtland Temple to answer charges made by apostates. Burnett was ridiculing Harris and therefore quoting him in derision, saying that he had seen the plates "only" in vision, and "only" four times. The term "only" seems to be Burnett's caustic addition to what Harris really said.[19] Anderson goes into much more detail, demonstrating the long-term integrity of all the witnesses, and anyone would do well to read his work before accepting uncritically what Palmer has to say.

These are only a few of Palmer's misleading assertions, but even responding to all of them would still provide a very incomplete picture of Book of Mormon scholarship, for there is so much that he does *not* consider of what Latter-day Saint scholars have written about for years. There

is no space here to deal with these things, but four recent compilations provide valuable studies relating to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as well as new insights into its richness and complexity: *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before;*[20] *Reexploring the Book of Mormon;*[21] *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited;*[22] and *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon.*[23]

Numerous other works by Latter-day Saint scholars deal with all aspects of the Book of Mormon and, as a group, consider every significant issue put forth by Palmer. The point, however, is not just that these works present more sophisticated arguments but that none of the questions he raises have been hidden by the Church or ignored by its scholars. As forcefully stated as Palmer's arguments may be, his readers must not presume that his assertions can withstand the scrutiny of well-trained scholars and students of scripture who have spent their careers studying the same issues.

Priesthood Restoration

Palmer also challenges the story of the restoration of the priesthood, though his main focus is not on whether it was restored but whether it was done by the physical process of the laying on of hands by heavenly beings rather than simply by some spiritual manifestation. The story, he speculates, evolved from a "spiritual" but physically unreal experience to one that took on a physical reality. As with other issues, however, Palmer fails to tell his readers of the significant work done by the Latter-day Saint scholars he praises so highly in his introduction and of the fact that even though the scholars may not always agree on *when* priesthood restoration occurred, they present ample evidence that the Saints believed early on that it *did* occur through the physical laying on of hands.[24]

The First Vision

Palmer's final attack is on the story of Joseph Smith's First Vision, which, he claims, also evolved from a simple story, told first in 1832, then, deliberately altered in later versions to change its nature. Because I have researched this subject in depth over a period of more than thirty-five years, I am especially troubled by Palmer's treatment.

Palmer focuses on Joseph Smith's various accounts of the vision in an attempt to show not only that they are inconsistent but also that in 1838 he rewrote the story in order to meet certain institutional needs. In the process, he says, it was transformed from a "spiritual" or metaphysical experience into one depicting a physical reality. Exactly why this revision would be so essential to Church growth Palmer never satisfactorily

explains, though he theorizes that, as a result of troubling apostasies, Joseph found it necessary to reestablish his authority. Accordingly, Joseph "then told a revised and more impressive version of his epiphany" and announced for the first time that "his initial calling had not come from an angel in 1823, as he had said for over a decade, but from God the Father and Jesus Christ in 1820" (248, 251). This claim is not only pure speculation, it also distorts the various accounts themselves.

There are several contemporaneous accounts of the vision, four of them recorded by Joseph Smith or under his direction. His first effort, the 1832 account, is grammatically unpolished, composed in a style similar to that of the evangelical spirit of the times. The 1835 account was recorded by a scribe as Joseph told his story to a visitor. The 1838 version was prepared under Joseph Smith's direction and is now published in the Pearl of Great Price. The 1842 account is part of a letter written by Joseph Smith to John Wentworth. All these accounts are readily available.[25]

Palmer says that the revival Joseph Smith describes in his 1838 account did not occur in 1820 but, rather, in 1824 (240–44), thus casting doubt on the accuracy of that account. This discussion is hardly new, for Mormon historians and anti-Mormon writers began debating the issue as early as the late 1960s, after Wesley P. Walters published a challenging article, "New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (NY) Revival," in 1967.[26] Walters claimed that there was no revival in Palmyra in 1820, concluding that if Joseph Smith's description of what was happening in Palmyra that year cannot be trusted, neither can his description of the First Vision itself.

However, even before Walters produced his article, Milton V. Backman Jr. was at work scouring the religious records of Palmyra and vicinity, including some Walters never consulted. In a subsequent article, Backman observed that in western New York "between 1816 and 1821, revivals were reported in more towns and a greater number of settlers joined churches than in any previous period of New York history."[27] He also demonstrated that in the "great revival" of 1819–20 there were numerous reports of "unusual religious excitement" within such reasonable distance of the Smith home that young Joseph and his family could easily have known of and attended some of them.[28]

In his effort to demonstrate the evolutionary nature of the First Vision story, Palmer claims that Joseph Smith did not announce that he was "called of God" to restore the ancient gospel until he wrote the 1838 account, and then it was only to add "material that bolstered his authority during a time of crisis" (251). This supposition does not take into account the natural development of Joseph Smith himself as his own understanding of the significance of the vision unfolded. Latter-day Saint scholars have already spent considerable time on this topic. One article was my

own, which appeared in the April 1970 *Improvement Era*. It discussed eight contemporaneous accounts, observing that the differences may be explained by such factors as (1) Joseph Smith's age and experience at the time a particular account was prepared, (2) the different circumstances surrounding each account, including the special purposes Joseph Smith may have had in mind at the time, (3) the possible literary influence of those who helped him write it or who recorded it as he talked, and (4) in the case of secondhand versions, the fact that different points would impress different people, and therefore they would record the story somewhat differently. One would hardly expect to find every account to be precisely alike.[29]

In a more direct response to the Palmer-type argument that Joseph adapted his First Vision account at will, Richard L. Bushman has explained the differences between the 1832 and 1838 accounts in terms of a broadening of Joseph Smith's own understanding of what the vision really meant. At first Joseph understood his experience in terms of his own needs and background. By 1832 he knew that the 1820 vision was one step in "the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time" (a quote from the 1832 account).[30] Bushman explains:

> Even twelve years after the event the First Vision's personal significance for him still overshadowed its place in the divine plan for restoring the church. In 1832 he explained the vision as he must have first understood it in 1820—as a personal conversion. . . .
>
> . . . Three years later in 1835, and again in another account recorded in 1838, experience had enlarged his perspective. The event's vast historical importance came to overshadow its strictly personal significance. He still remembered the anguish of the preceding years when the confusion of the churches puzzled and thwarted him, but in 1838 he saw the vision was more significant as the opening event in a new dispensation of the Gospel. In that light certain aspects took on an importance they did not possess at first.[31]

Palmer plays on the differences between the accounts, but the versions are actually remarkably consistent—much more so than he is willing to admit. All four of Joseph Smith's personal accounts (1832, 1835, 1838, and 1842) rehearse his disillusionment with the religions of the day, though the 1832 account also goes into detail concerning his quest for forgiveness of personal sin. All four accounts refer to his anguished prayer. Three of them (1835, 1838, and 1842) make it clear that trying to find out who was right or wrong was the reason he went into the grove to pray. This purpose is not specific in the 1832 account, but it is at least implied in his comment that the churches of his day were in a state of apostasy and did not build on the gospel of Jesus Christ. All four accounts are consistent in their timing of Joseph's religious concerns. A revival or religious excitement is mentioned

specifically only in the 1838 account, but there are strong suggestions of it in all the others—else why was Joseph's young mind so wrought up on the subject of religion and why, in the 1832 narration, did he write in language so reminiscent of the revivalists?

The major discrepancy between the accounts is that in 1832 Joseph mentioned only the appearance of "the Lord," who forgave him of his sins, though the reference to "the Lord" is so brief that it does not preclude the possibility that another personage was there. None of the accounts use the words "the Father and the Son," but three tell of two personages appearing and one of them delivering the important message(s). On page 240, Palmer says that Joseph does not mention the appearance of God the Father in his 1835 account, but this assertion is very misleading. The reference in this account to two personages and the statement that the second was "like unto the first"[32] is just as direct a reference to the Father and the Son as the statements in the 1838 and 1842 narratives, neither of which specifically says "the Father."

The fact that Joseph was forgiven of his sins is stated in both the 1832 and 1835 accounts, and even though it is not stated in the 1838 account, it was duly reported in the first account actually to be published. This version was prepared by Orson Pratt (who obviously received his information from Joseph Smith) and published in Scotland in 1840. Joseph did not repeat that part of the story in 1838, but it was in no way hidden from the Saints. An 1830 revelation, printed first in the Book of Commandments in 1833 and later in the Doctrine and Covenants, stated, "After that it truly was manifested unto this first elder [Joseph Smith], that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; But after truly repenting, God ministered unto him by an holy angel."[33] Just because Joseph Smith did not say in the 1838 record that he had been forgiven of his sins during the First Vision is no evidence that he changed what he wanted the Saints to understand.

Palmer says that Joseph Smith did not claim that he was "called of God" to restore the gospel until 1838, but the fact is that not even in that account is there a statement specifically to that effect. What Joseph does say is that after the vision he succumbed to various temptations and his actions were "not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been."[34] But called of God to do what? The account simply does not say.

Actually, Joseph is more specific about his mission at the beginning of his unpolished 1832 account, where he says that this is a history of his life

> and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord brought forth and established by his [Joseph's]

> hand <firstly> he receiving the testamony from on high secondly the ministering of Angels thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of Aangels [*sic*] to adminster the letter of the Gospel—the Law and commandments as they were given unto him—and the ordinencs, forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinence from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God confered upon him.[35]

When this inclusive statement is combined with Joseph's complaint later in the account that mankind had apostatized from the New Testament faith, can there be any question that he was saying as early as 1832 that part of his mission was to restore that faith? One wonders why Palmer could not see this.

Palmer raises questions about why Joseph Smith sought the Lord in the first place. The motive, he says, differed between the 1832 and 1838 accounts, the first saying that it was a quest for forgiveness and the second that it was a desire to know which church was right. Why should it be surprising that Joseph should emphasize one motive at one time and another at a different time, especially when he probably had *both* motives in mind? Palmer also avers that in 1832 Joseph "does not mention concern for doctrinal corruption" (252). What, then, does the following 1832 assertion mean? "And by Searching the Scriptures I found that ~~mand~~ <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament."[36] How much more clearly could a concern for "doctrinal corruption" be stated?

In 1835 (not waiting until 1838, as Palmer wrongly insists), Joseph also made his doctrinal concerns abundantly clear when he said, "Being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of Religion, and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong, but considered it of the first importance to me that I should be right, in matters of so much moment, matter involving eternal consequences."[37] Though stated in different words, this is the same concern as that expressed in 1838: "My object in going to enquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right."[38]

It seems to me, however, that all this wordplay is almost insignificant. The differences between the accounts are easily explained, but the important thing is whether the vision of the Father and the Son was a literal reality. This is something that can be neither proved nor disproved by scholarly investigation, but only by the testimony of the Spirit, which, as I noted earlier, Palmer unfortunately believes to be an "unreliable means of proving truth" (133).

It is easy to find all kinds of bitter anti-Mormon literature, both in print and on the Internet. It is also becoming disturbingly easy to find people like Palmer who claim to be faithful Church members but who nevertheless take aim at our foundational stories, hoping that we will see them as inspiring myths but not true history. But believing Latter-day Saint scholars have also been busy and have answered their arguments—sometimes, as in the case of most of Palmer's book, long before they were made. Those who sincerely seek the truth will read not only the naysayers, who obviously look at the evidence through the eyes of disbelief, but also the array of Latter-day Saint scholars who look at it through the eyes of faith and whose works are readily available to those who want to find them.

James B. Allen (who can be reached via byustudies@byu.edu) is Professor of History Emeritus and Senior Research Fellow at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, Brigham Young University.

1. In a few rare exceptions, Palmer provides footnote citations to the works of believing Latter-day Saint scholars, but only when something those scholars said supports some factual statement.

2. See, for example, "Statement regarding Grant Palmer's book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*" on the website of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at http://smithinstitute.byu.edu/news/announcements.asp.

3. An important guide to the published historical literature on the Church, including controversial works, is James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). This work is constantly being updated and will soon be available over the Internet. See also the websites of *BYU Studies* and FARMS for indexes to their publications.

4. James B. Allen, "'Asked and Answered': A Response to Grant H. Palmer," *FARMS Review*, 16 no. 1.

5. Davis Bitton, "The Charge of a Man with a Broken Lance (But Look What He Doesn't Tell Us)," *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2 (2003): 257–71.

6. Stephen C. Harper, "Trustworthy History?" *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2 (2003): 305, 293.

7. Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins," *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2 (2003): 312.

8. Louis Midgley, "Prying into Palmer," *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2 (2003): 365–410.

9. Stanley B. Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax," *Ensign* 11 (August 1981): 66–74. See also the short entry "Kinderhook Plates," by Stanley B. Kimball, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:789.

10. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 5:372.

11. William Clayton's journal is in private possession. See Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith," 74n3.

12. See, for example, Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 121–44; John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), especially chapters 5 and 8.

13. John Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha: Shadow or Reality?" *FARMS Review of Books* 8, no. 2 (1996): 338.

14. In 1996, BYU's Religious Studies Center even republished, in its entirety, the 1825 edition of *View of the Hebrews*. A review of the book and commentary by Andrew Hedges may be found in *FARMS Review of Books* 9, no. 1 (1997): 63–68. The reader may also be interested in looking at John W. Welch, "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparallel,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992): 83–87. See also Spencer J. Palmer and William L. Knecht, "View of the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?" *BYU Studies* 5, no. 2 (1964): 105–13.

15. For more details on "The Golden Pot," see the Ashurst-McGee and Midgley reviews in *FARMS Review* 15, no. 2 (2003): 334–40, 369–71, 379–84, 404, 409–10.

16. See, for example, Michael F. Whiting, "DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 24–35; and John M. Butler, "A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 36–37.

17. One extensive discussion of this issue is James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994).

18. See, for example, these works, all by Richard Lloyd Anderson: *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), which includes several of Anderson's previously published articles; "Book of Mormon Witnesses," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:214–16; "Cowdery, Oliver," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:335–40; "David Whitmer: Unique Missouri Mormon," in *Missouri Folk Heroes of the 19th Century*, ed. F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1989), 43–59; "Did Oliver Cowdery, One of the Three Special Book of Mormon Witnesses, Express Doubt about His Testimony?" *Ensign* 17 (April 1987): 23–25; "Oliver Cowdery, Esq.: His Non-Mormon Career," *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 45, pt. 1 (1968): 66–80; "Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 39–60; "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration," *Improvement Era* 71 (September 1968): 15–24; "The Smiths Who Handled the Plates," *Improvement Era* 72 (August 1969): 28–32, 34; *Testimonies of the Three Witnesses* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994).

19. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 155–59.

20. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before* (Provo, Utah, and Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1991).

21. Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*.

22. Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*.

23. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002).

24. Years ago, Richard Lloyd Anderson dealt with Oliver Cowdery and his various accounts of priesthood restoration in his article "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration," *Improvement Era* 71 (September 1968): 15–24. See also Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies Staff, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 162–207, which publishes seventy primary documents on the subject. Richard L. Bushman has also looked at the complexities of the issue, raised questions about the date of the restoration of the apostleship, and opined in print that it came only after the organization of the Church—certainly a nontraditional view but still one that supports the physical reality of the experience. Larry C. Porter, on the other hand, supports the traditional view. See Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 162–63, 241n; Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign* 26 (December 1996): 30–47.

25. The most convenient source is Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

26. Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins From Palmyra (N.Y.) Revival," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10 (Fall 1967): 227–44. Also published as a tract by the Utah Christian Tract Society, La Mesa, Calif. Reprinted in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4 (Spring 1969): 60–81, in "Roundtable" on "The Question of the Palmyra Revival." See also the critique by Richard Bushman, with the response by Walters, in the same roundtable.

27. Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 302. Backman's source for this information includes Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950), 9–11, as well as a large number of church records from this area.

28. See, for example, the maps in Backman, "Awakenings in the Burned-over District," 312–13.

29. James B. Allen, "Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision: What Do We Learn from Them?" *Improvement Era* 73 (April 1970), 6.

30. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 155.

31. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 56–57.

32. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 159.

33. *A Book of Commandments for the Governance of the Church of Christ* (Zion [Independence, Mo.]: W. W. Phelps, 1833), 24:6–7; Doctrine & Covenants 20:5–6.

34. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 167.

35. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 155.

36. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 156.

37. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 158.

38. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 163.