

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, September 21th, 1879.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

If the congregation will give their attention I will read a portion of the word of God, given in these last days, dated March 1829—a portion of revelation, given to the Prophet, and Seer, and Revelator, Joseph Smith, in Harmony Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, a little over one year before the rise of this Church, commencing with the 10th verse:

"But this generation shall have my word through you; and in addition to your testimony, the testimony of three of my servants, whom I shall call and ordain, unto whom I will show these things, and they shall go forth with my words that are given through you; yea, they shall know of a surety, that these things are true, for from heaven will I declare it unto them. I will give them power that they may behold and view these things as they are; and to none else will I grant this power, to receive this same testimony, among this generation, in this the beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of my Church out of the wilderness; clear as the moon, and fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. And the testimony of three witnesses will I send forth of my word; and behold whosoever believeth on my word, them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit, and they shall be born of me, even of water and of the Spirit. And you must wait yet a little while, for ye are not yet ordained; and their testimony shall also go forth unto the condemnation of this generation, if they harden their hearts against them; for a desolating scourge shall go forth, among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out until the earth is empty; and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming. Behold, I tell you these things, even as I also told the people of the destruction of Jerusalem, and my word shall be verified at this time as it hath hitherto been verified."

Fifty two years have passed away tomorrow since the Lord permitted his holy angel to descend from heaven and commit into the care and charge of Joseph Smith, a young man, plates which had the appearance of gold, filled with engravings. He obtained these plates on the 22nd day of September in the year 1827, being then not quite 22 years of age. This young man was not learned, like those educated in colleges and theological institutions; indeed, he was a farmer's boy, unacquainted with the arguments, and the tenets, and creeds, and the institutions of religion that existed around him, except what he had heard from time to time, in the neighborhood where his father resided; a young man not versed in the Scriptures any more than most of the common lads of that age. And we all know that there are but a very few among farmers that have the opportunity of informing their minds at so early a period,—at the age of 21,—in regard to the doctrines and prophecies contained in the Scripture.

You may, some of you, wonder, perhaps, why the Lord should select an instrument of this kind; why he did not take a person, more qualified by education, more experienced in the doctrines taught among the human family, more conversant with the Bible. You perhaps, may think in your own mind that if you had had the selection of the individual to begin the work of the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth in the last days, and you had followed the best wisdom you had on the subject, that you certainly would have selected a person well trained and skilled in the different doctrines of the day. But the Lord does not see as man sees, his thoughts are not like our thoughts, neither are his ways like our ways. Hence he chose a man unconnected with any of the religious societies of the day—untaught in the Scriptures and doctrines of the different religious denominations—he selected a man of his own choice, as he had frequently done in former ages of the world. We all recollect the selection that the Lord made, in relation to David, when he was called to be king of the house of Israel, and anointed for that purpose. There were, I think, seven brethren older than David,—

men of fair appearance, men of experience,—men that probably their neighbors, their acquaintances, would have selected either one of them in preference to the youth that was tending the sheep. But Samuel being a prophet of the Lord, when these certain brethren came up before him he said "the Lord hath not chosen him" and continued to say so until all the seven had passed before him, and then the inquiry was made, "Is there not another?" "Why yes, there is a boy; but he is keeping his father's sheep." "Send and fetch him," said the Prophet Samuel. He was brought in he was goodly to look upon, but he was simply a youth, untrammelled with the traditions around him, but yet an honest hearted boy. The Lord chose him, the anointing oil was poured upon his head, and he was anointed to be the future king of Israel.

Now, the Lord did not have any prophets in the year 1827 on all the face of the earth. There was no Samuel existing, no person who had the spirit of prophecy; consequently the Lord, instead of sending a Samuel, sent an angel to make the selection. This angel committed, as I have always said, the plates of the Book of Mormon, together with the Urim and Thummim, into the hands of this youth, and also gave him many instructions informing him that he must be very strict in keeping the commandments of God, and that he must do with these plates as he was counseled from time to time, not to shew them to everybody that might wish to see them, but was strictly forbidden by the angel to shew them unto any person until the Lord should give him commandment so to do. He translated these plates unlearned as he was. And now let me ask, would you naturally expect that if he (this unlearned youth) did this by his own wisdom, that it would agree with the Jewish record in all the doctrines taught, or said to be taught in the translation of this record? Would it be reasonable to expect that this unlearned unexperienced youth could be able to sit down and in a very short period of time translate a book two thirds as long as the old Testament, without contradicting himself in some way? Would it be reasonable to suppose or to conclude that he would get all the doctrines, contained in that book of nearly 600 pages to agree in every respect with the old ancient gospel as it was taught in the New Testament, especially when there were several thousand different notions in regard to that doctrine? We could not expect any such thing. The more inexperienced a man is the less qualified he is to write, by his own human wisdom, and get into proper shape, a history said to extend over a thousand years or a little more—a history commencing with the colony that came from Jerusalem to this continent, down until the records were sealed and hid in the earth—a thousand years, history of a nation, of two nations that were opposed to each other, of their wars and their travels to and fro upon a large continent, like ours—we would naturally expect that a young man, so inexperienced, would, by his own human wisdom, get that country awfully muddled up as regard places, as regards the location of cities, and location of countries. We would naturally expect, I say, such contradiction to occur in the writings of an unlearned youth.

But what is still more marvellous, is the prophetic portions of this record, call the Book of Mormon. It is full of prophecies from the opening of the record unto the closing thereof. Predictions, not only concerning events that took place after this colony left Jerusalem, during 600 years before Christ, predictions that were to take place down to the coming of Christ in the flesh, but predictions that were to be fulfilled after the first coming of Christ down until the end of time. The book is full of these predictions. Would you not naturally expect therefore, could you look for any other thing than that an inexperienced, unlettered young man, unread in prophetic history, should contradict himself in different parts of the record; speak of an event on one occasion and forget and speak of something quite different on another? Then again, where would you find a young man, unacquainted with the Jewish record, that could make all these predictions and prophecies coincide with the ancient prophecies of the Jews? Would it be likely that he could do so by his own wisdom? I think not. All these things, therefore, so far as the history is concerned in the Book of Mormon, so far as the

prophetic writings are concerned in this late record, so far as the doctrinal parts of that book are concerned, it is a marvel in the age in which we live; it is a marvel in my eyes; but perhaps my eyes are not constituted as the eyes of others. To me however, it is one of the greatest marvels of the age. I am familiar with this work; and I have read it, perhaps, more carefully than any other man that has ever lived in this generation, and probably ten or fifteen times more than any other man has done. Why, when I was a boy, 21 years of age, I had, for the two years during my first acquaintance with the book, read it so much that I could repeat over chapter after chapter, page after page, of many portions of the Book of Mormon, and could do it just as well, with the book closed or laid to one side, as I could with the book open; and I have continued to read it from that day down to the present, without finding one contradiction in the book. I have read the comments, I have read the writings of our greatest opposers who have undertaken to examine the book from the beginning to the end. I have tried to follow their arguments, in relation to the contents of this book, but I have never unto the present day—and it is 49 years since I became acquainted therewith, been able to find one contradiction in the whole work.

Can we say as much concerning the Jewish Bible in the present state of its existence? What is the great fault found by the opposers to this Jewish Bible. The infidel says, "We do not believe it, because it apparently contradicts itself in doctrine, in history, and in many other portions." And the Christian undertakes to read it, he undertakes to show that, these are not contradictions; but with the arguments of the Christian on the one side, and the infidels on the other, in relation to the Bible, it is confessed by the generality of mankind, that there are many contradictions, not original contradictions, but contradictions that have been introduced into the record since it was originally given,—introduced by the wisdom of man, or rather by the wickedness of man. But does the Book of Mormon contradict the teachings of the present day? Yes. There is a great difference between the Book of Mormon and modern Christian religion; but there is no difference between that book and ancient Christianity. We may hunt the wide world over, amongst some 400 millions of Christians, so called, and search deeply for a complete, and good, and thorough understanding of their doctrines, and when we have made ourselves thoroughly acquainted with them, take up the Book of Mormon, compare their doctrines with this Bible of ancient America, and there is a great difference, a fundamental difference, not trifling difference, but a difference that lays at the foundation. It is the same when we come to compare these modern doctrines of Christendom with the doctrine taught in the New Testament. Where can we find a man who can reconcile the two? Or the thousand if you please? Who is able to show that the New Testament proves and sets forth clearly the ancient doctrine of the Gospel? There may be now and then an item which each denomination has in accordance with the New Testament; but where is the authority which lays at the foundation of Christianity? Where is the man among all these 400 millions of Christians that is a revelator, that is a prophet, or is inspired of God? He cannot be found and yet the ancient Christianity, recorded in the Bible advocates that great gift as one that lays at the foundation of Christianity. Christianity is built upon it, built upon Jesus, who was the great revelator to the Church, and built upon apostles who were also revelators, as well as Jesus, and who received their revelations by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, by inspiration as men of God. Can you find such an order of things in Christendom? Do any profess to have these gifts? They say that they are unnecessary; they say that these gifts were intended for the first age of Christianity, but when Christianity was once established these high gifts were no longer necessary. This is their argument almost as one. They seemed to be agreed, however much they may be opposed in other points of doctrine—they all, almost without an exception, seem to be agreed that there is no need of these high gifts of inspiration, and prophecy, and new revelation that accompanied the preaching of the gospel in ancient times. "The gospel is established," say they; "we have no

need of it." As much as to say that these gifts are no part of the gospel; that the gospel is one thing and the gifts are another; that the gospel was established by the evidence of the gifts, but the gifts are no part of the gospel. They are as much a part of it as faith, just as much a part of the gospel as repentance, as baptism for the remission of sins, or as the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost; and to undertake to separate the blessings of the gospel, and then call something else the gospel, does seem very absurd, very inconsistent, and is something that cannot be proved from the divine record. Now here is, not something of minor importance,—something that is not particularly necessary, that might be called non-essential, but it is something that lays at the very foundation of Christianity. These gifts are a portion of Christianity; revelation, inspiration, and the gift of prophecy are part and portion of the gospel, as taught by the ancient apostles and men of God, and by our Savior; and to do away with these gifts you destroy the fundamental principles of Christianity.

What does the Book of Mormon advocate? It comes directly in contact with all modern Christendom, and goes back to the old gospel as it was taught 1,800 years ago, and maintains that there must be in the kingdom and church of God, in every age of the world, these gifts as well as outward forms and ceremonies,—maintains that these gifts are a part of the ancient gospel and must exist—wherever the gospel exists, and when they cease the gospel ceases to be preached, and true believers in the scriptural sense, cease to exist.

Now, it does not seem likely to me, that a young man whose beard had scarcely grown—a youth untutored, untaught in the sectarian notions of the day, brought up to labor hard on his father's farm, should be able to make these great distinctions, to come out in opposition to all modern systems of religion, and establish the very fundamental principles that are necessary to the very existence of Christianity in the last days. But God was with that young man. He was not his own teacher, he was not left to his own judgment in regard to what Christianity should be and what it should not be. The angel that came from heaven and revealed himself to the youth understood his mission. He understood what the gospel was and should be; he understood the revelations of St. John; he understood that these revelations never could be fulfilled unless an angel were sent from heaven in the last days, with the message of the gospel to be proclaimed unto the inhabitants of the earth, not to a sectional portion of it, not to some corner of it, or to some obscure people, but to commit the everlasting gospel unto the inhabitants of the earth, to be proclaimed to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. He understood the difference between modern Christianity and ancient Christianity. And when the Urim and Thummim was lighted up by the power of God, and magnified before the eyes of this youth, those ancient characters upon the plates of the Book of Mormon, the distinction was clearly made, between the purity of the gospel as it was taught in ancient days, and the doctrines and innovations of man as have been taught during many long centuries of apostasy.

How I have rejoiced, since I was a youth of nineteen in this record! Why I esteem it—I was going to bring up some earthly comparison, but I will not compare great and glorious and heavenly things, so great, so pure and so important, as that of the plan of salvation, with anything of an earthly nature, as there cannot really be any comparison. When I look at all the earthly riches and grandeur of this world, and then look at the Book of Mormon and the Bible, with power to select, which should I choose? Why, the grandeur of this world, the riches of this world, the glories of this world would be nothing; they would be like the dream of a night vision when a person is disturbed, not by the Spirit of God, but by his own cogitations in the night. I would look upon them as nothing, as vanity and foolishness, as unworthy of the love or approbation of any man of God, were they to be set before me, and contrasted with the glory of this book. It is a record given to this generation, as one of the choicest gifts of heaven! No other books exist upon the face of our globe so choice as the books which God has given in different

ages of the world, the Bible for one, the Book of Mormon for another, and the book called the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, containing the revelations which God gave through his servant the prophet, during some seventeen of the last years of his existence here upon the earth. These revelations, these books are more precious than the riches, and kingdoms, and glories, and honors of this present life, so far as I am concerned. Do I esteem them more than I do my own life? I would be unworthy of my Father and my God in the eternal worlds if I would refuse to lay down my life, if it were required of me of the Lord. If I should save it for a moment, and deny the Book of Mormon, if I were to deny the gifts of the gospel, or any of the revelations that God has given—that are published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants,—if I were to do such a thing, could I look upon my Father's face without blushing? could I think upon God without blushing? could I think upon anything that was pure and holy, without being, in my own mind, in great torment? If I were to be so ungrateful as to deny anything that God has given me, I should be unworthy of the kingdom of God, and do most sincerely and humbly, and trust that the Lord will not call me and try me in this respect, for I know the weakness of man; I know that man has been weak in all ages and I do not wish to be thus tried. I do not covet this trial, I do not pray for it; but if ever I should be brought to this condition, with my present feelings, with the feelings I have had for a great many years, would say "come martyrdom, come burnings at the stake, come any calamity and affliction of the body that may be devised by wicked and ungodly men—let me choose that and have eternal life beyond the grave; but let me not deny the word of God." Why do I thus feel? If I had not I knowlege that the Book of Mormon was true, I should not have these feelings. Then I should probably say, if I only had faith that the Book of Mormon is true, I merely believed it to be true, "my life is precious, let me save myself, let me deny something which I do not know is true." But when a person has a knowledge, as I have of the divinity of this work,—having this revealed to me when I was but a beardless boy—I hope never to be brought into that condition, when the trial will be upon me, but should it come I hope to be able to lift up my hands to high heaven, and say, "Oh Lord enable me to endure the trials and afflictions that may come, that I may be faithful unto death."

Am I the only one that feels in this way, among the Latter-day Saints? Are there no other persons that have this knowledge, excepting your humble servant? Yes, there are scores of thousands, if they testify the truth, and I have no reason to think that they would falsify their word; scores of thousands who know as well as they know they have an existence, that the Book of Mormon is a divine record; that the Bible is a divine record; that the revelations given through the Prophet Joseph Smith, published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, are divine; they know it. Would they be willing to suffer martyrdom? I think they would. There might be individual cases, as in ancient times where they might reject the truth, lose their hopes of salvation, to save their temporal lives; but take the great mass of this people, they would be willing to lay down their lives, to be burned at the stake before the world would reject their religion.

How kind, how good was our Heavenly Father, before the rise of this Church, after he had inspired the boy to translate these records; how good it was to send an angel from heaven to three other persons, namely: David Whitmer, Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith being with them on the occasion. The angel descended from heaven, clothed with light and glory, and, taking these records in his hands, turned them over leaf after leaf, showing to these three other men, besides the translator, the engravings on the plates. How kind this was. A Church was to be raised up. The Lord was willing that the world should have all the evidence that they could reasonably ask for before even the first branch of the Church was organized. Did he descend, in many of the past ages of the world, to do so much for the different generations that have lived, as he has done for the present generation? Look at the days of Noah. He had a message to deliver—a message that affected all the human family.