

DISCOURSE BY ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED IN THE
New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,
on the Afternoon of Sunday,
July 18th, 1875.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I WILL read a few verses in the 29th chapter of Isaiah, commencing at the 13th verse. [The speaker read from the 18th verse to the end of the chapter.]

That which I wish to call to your mind, more particularly, on the present occasion, will be found in the first verse that I read—"In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book."

The Latter-day Saints are a peculiar people among the inhabitants of the earth of the present age, peculiar in many things, peculiar in many religious notions and views. We profess to believe in this book, the Jewish record, called the Bible. We are not peculiar so far as this item of our faith is concerned; but in addition to the Bible we believe in another book called the Book of Mormon, which we believe to be equally sacred with the Bible. Some may, perhaps, call the Book of Mormon a bible, and in one sense of the word it may be called that, for it is a collection of sacred books, the same as the Jewish record is. The difference between the two records is merely in the history, and in some of the prophetic writings. The Bible professes to be a history of the people who lived on the eastern continent, while the Book of Mormon professes to be a history of the people who lived in ancient America. We have denominated the Jewish record the Bible, because it is a collection of books said to have been written by inspired men. I do not see any reason why we should not also, as Latter-day Saints, call the Book of Mormon a bible, it being a collection of books, written by prophets and revelators. Perhaps, however, the world, or those who are strangers to the evidences concerning these two books, may object and say that we have no right to call the Book of Mormon a bible, unless we can bring such evidence to substantiate its divinity as we can concerning the Jewish record. But supposing that we are in possession of similar evidences, concerning this book in relation to ancient America, as you are in regard to the Bible, the history of the people of Palestine; supposing that we can bring forth as many evidences and substantial testimonies to prove the divinity of the Book of Mormon, as you can to prove the divinity of the Jewish record, then why should we not include it among the sacred books, and denominated it a bible, as well as call the Jewish record such? I will, this afternoon, by the assistance of the Spirit of God, endeavor to lay before you, Latter-day Saints, and strangers who may be present, some of the evidences that we have concerning the divinity of this book which we esteem so highly—the Book of Mormon.

In the first place, I will give you a very brief statement concerning the manner in which the Book of Mormon was found. In the year 1827 a young man, a farmer's boy, by the name of Joseph Smith, was visited by an holy angel, as he had been for several years prior to this time. But on this occasion, in the fall of 1827, he was permitted to take into his possession the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated—the angel gave them into his hands, permitted him to take them from the place of their deposit, which was discovered to Mr. Smith by the angel of God. With this book called the Book of Mormon was a very curious instrument, such as one probably as no person had seen for many generations; it was called by the angel of God the Urim and Thummim. We know that such an instrument existed in ancient times among the Jews, and among the Israelites in the wilderness, and that it was used to enquire of the Lord, and so sacred was that instrument in the days of Moses that Aaron, the chief priest of the whole house of Israel, was commanded to place it within his breastplate, that when he should judge the tribes of the house of Israel he should not judge by his own wisdom, but should enquire of the Lord by means of this instrument; and whatever decision the Lord, by the aid of the Urim and Thummim, should give, all Israel should give heed to it. The same instrument was in use many hundred years, after the days of Aaron, by the prophets of Israel. David enquired by means of an instrument of that kind, concerning his enemies who pursued him from city to city, asking the Lord certain questions—whether his enemies would come to the city where he happened to be and whether he would be delivered up to them by the people of that city; and the Lord gave him all necessary instruction; and by this means he was delivered out of the hands of his enemies from time to time.

But it seems that, before the coming of Christ, for some reason, probably through wickedness, the Urim and Thummim were taken away from the children of Israel, and a prophecy was uttered by one of the ancient prophets, before Christ, that they should be many days without a priest, without the Urim and Thummim, without the ephod, and without many things that God blessed them with in the days of their righteousness; but that in the latter days God would again restore all his blessings to the people of Israel, including their counselors and their judges as at the first.

With these plates that Joseph Smith the prophet obtained through the instructions of the angel, he also obtained the Urim and Thummim, and by their aid he copied a few characters from the plates, and translated them. He was not a learned man himself, but an ignorant farmer's boy,

scarcely having the first rudiments of education. He could read and write a little, and that was about the amount of his educational acquirements. After having copied a few of the characters from these plates and translated them, he committed them into the hands of Martin Harris, a man with whom he was acquainted, who lived not far from his neighborhood; and Martin Harris took these few characters and the translation to the city of New York, to show them to the learned, and if possible to get some information in regard to their meaning. This was in the year 1827. Martin Harris was then a middle-aged man, being about forty-six years of age. On arriving in New York City, he visited the learned Dr. Mitchell, professor of languages, and obtained some information from him in relation to the manuscript which he held, and was recommended by Dr. Mitchell to see Mr. Anthon, professor of ancient and modern languages, probably one of the most learned men in ancient languages that ever lived in our nation. Mr. Harris went to see Mr. Anthon, and showed him the characters. The professor examined them and the translation and, according to the testimony of Martin Harris, given from this stand, he gave him a certificate that, so far as he could understand the characters, the translation seemed to be correct; but he wished further time, and desired that the original plates should be brought to him. Mr. Harris then informed him how Mr. Smith came in possession of the plates—that he did not find them accidentally, but that an angel of God revealed to him the place of their deposit. This was after Martin Harris had obtained the certificate from Professor Anthon, and just before Mr. Harris took his leave of the learned gentleman, the latter having ascertained how Mr. Smith came in possession of the plates, that part of them were sealed, and that the Lord had given a strict command that they should not be shown to the public, but only to certain witnesses; I say that, the professor, having learned this, wished to see the certificate again; Mr. Harris returned it to him, and he tore it up, saying that there was no such thing as angels, or communications from the Lord in our day; and upon Mr. Harris telling him that a portion of the plates were sealed, he very sarcastically remarked, that he could not read a sealed book.

Mr. Harris left him, and returned, some two hundred and fifty miles or more, to the neighborhood where the plates were found, and informed Mr. Smith of his success with the learned, after which the Lord gave a special command to Joseph, unlearned as he was, that he should translate the record by the aid of the Urim and Thummim. Mr. Smith commenced the work of translation: Mr. Harris, acting as his scribe, wrote from his mouth one hundred and sixteen pages of the first translation, given by the prophet.

The work was continued from time to time, until finally the unsealed portion of the Book of Mormon was all translated. In the meantime Martin Harris, Joseph Smith, the translator of the book, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, four persons, retired to a little grove in the year 1830, not far from the house of old father Whitmer, where this church was organized. They retired to this grove for the special purpose of calling on the name of the Lord, and they all knelt down and commenced praying, one by one, and while thus engaged, they saw an angel of God descend from the heavens, very bright and glorious in his appearance, and he came and stood in their midst, and he took the plates and turned over leaf after leaf of the unsealed portion, and showed to these four men the engravings upon them; and at the same time they heard a voice out of heaven saying unto them, that the plates had been translated correctly, and commanding them to bear testimony of the same to all nations, kindreds, tongues and people to whom the translation should be sent. In accordance with this command, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris have attached their testimony after the title page of the Book of Mormon, testifying to the appearance of the angel, signing their names and testifying to the correctness of the translation; testifying to having seen the plates and the engravings upon them, and to the voice of the Lord which they heard out of the heavens.

Now let me say a few words concerning the nature of this testimony. This testimony was given prior to the publication of the book, and also previous to the organization of the Latter-day Saint church. The book was printed early in 1830, with their testimony. Thus you perceive that this work, this marvellous work, was not presented to the inhabitants of the earth for their belief until God had favored them with four persons who could bear witness to what their eyes had seen, what their ears had heard and what their hands had handled, consequently there was no possibility, so far as these four men were concerned, that they themselves could be deceived. It would be impossible for four men to be together and all of them to be deceived in seeing an angel descend from heaven, and in regard to the brightness of his countenance and the glory of his person; hearing his voice and seeing him lay his hands upon one of them, namely David Whitmer, and speaking these words—"Blessed be the Lord and they who keep his commandments." After seeing the plates, the engravings upon them and the angel, and hearing the voice of the Lord out of heaven, every person will say that there was no possibility of either of these men being deceived in relation to this matter; in other words, if it were to be maintained that in their case it was a hallucination of the brain, and that they were deceived, then, with the same propriety might it be asserted, that all other men, in every age, who profess to have seen angels, were also deceived; and this might be applied to the prophets, patriarchs, apostles and others who lived in ancient times, who declared they saw angels, as well as to

Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and David Whitmer. But says the objector—"No, those who testify that they saw angels anciently were not deceived, but they who come testifying about such ministrations in the latter days may be deceived." Now let me ask, is there anything logical in such reasoning as this? If these, in the latter days, who testify to having seen angels were deceived, all who testify to the same things in former days might have been deceived on the same grounds. And then, if these men whose testimonies are attached to the Book of Mormon were not deceived, it must be admitted that they were impostors of the most barefaced character, or else that the Book of Mormon is a divine record sent from heaven; one or the other must be admitted, there is no halfway in the matter. If they were not deceived—which they could not possibly have been according to the very nature of their testimony—then there are only two alternatives—they were impostors, or else the Book of Mormon is a divine revelation from heaven.

Now let us enquire what grounds there are to suppose that they were impostors? Forty-six years have passed away since this angel appeared and showed the plates to these individuals. Has anything transpired during this time that would give us any grounds to suppose that they were impostors? For instance, has either of these witnesses, or the translator of the engravings on the plates, ever, under any circumstances, denied his testimony? No. We have some accounts in the Bible of men of God, some of the greatest men that lived in ancient times, denying the things of God. We read of Peter cursing, and swearing that he never knew Jesus, and yet he was one of the foremost of the apostles. His testimony was true so far as seeing and being acquainted with Jesus was concerned, and in regard to the divinity of Jesus. Why? Because God had revealed it to him and yet he denied it. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonah," speaking to Peter, "for flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." Peter knew, just as well as he knew that he had a being, that Jesus was the Son of God, it had been revealed to him from the heavens, and though he afterwards, through fear, in the presence of the high priest, cursed and swore and denied it, yet the former testimony that he had given was true.

Now did either of these three men, or did the translator of the Book of Mormon, ever deny the truth, as Peter did? Did they ever in any way deny the divinity of the Book of Mormon? Never, no never. Whatever the circumstances they were placed in, however much they were mobbed and ridiculed, however much they suffered by the persecution of their enemies, their testimony all the time was—"We saw the angel of God, we beheld him in his glory, we saw the plates in his hands, and the engravings thereon, and we know that the Book of Mormon is true." Joseph Smith continued to bear this testimony until the day of his death; he sealed his testimony as a martyr in this church, being shot down by his enemies, who were blackened up and disguised, in order that they might not be known. Oliver Cowdery did not live his faith as he should have done, and he was excommunicated from this church during Joseph's lifetime. Did he still continue to hold fast to his testimony? He did. Never was he known to swerve from it in the least degree; and after being out of the church several years, he returned to Council Bluffs, where there was a branch of the church, and at a conference he acknowledged his sins, and humbly asked the church to forgive him, bearing his testimony to the sacred things recorded in the Book of Mormon—that he saw the angel and the plates, just according to the testimony to which he had appended his name. He was rebaptized a member of the church and soon after departed this life.

Martin Harris did not follow up this people in the State of Missouri, neither did he follow us up to the State of Illinois; but we often heard of him, and whenever we did so we heard of him telling, in public and in private, of the great vision that God had shown to him concerning the divinity of the Book of Mormon. A few years ago he came to this Territory, an old man, between eighty and ninety years of age, and spoke from this stand, in the hearing of the people. He then located himself in Cache County, in the northern part of the Territory, where he continued to live until last Saturday, when he departed this life in his ninety-third year—a good old age. Did he continue to bear testimony all that length of time—over forty-six years of his life? Did he, at any time during that long period, waver in the least degree from his testimony? Not at all. He had a great many follies and imperfections, like all other people, like the ancient apostles, like Elijah the prophet; but after all, he continued to testify to the very last, concerning the truth of this work. Nothing seemed to delight him so much as to tell about the angel and the plates that he had seen. It was only a short time prior to his death that one of our bishops went in to see the old man; his pulse was apparently sluggish in its movements, and nearly gone, but the sight of the bishop seemed to revive him; and he said to him—"I am going." The bishop related to him some things which he thought would be interesting, among them that the Book of Mormon was translated into the Spanish language, for the benefit of a great many of the descendants of Israel in this country, who understand the Spanish language, in Mexico and Central America. This intelligence seemed to revive the old man, and he began to talk about the Book of Mormon; new strength, apparently, was imparted to him, and he continued his conversation for some two hours, and in his last testimony he bore record concerning the divinity of the work, and was rejoiced to think that it was going forth in another language, that those who understood that

language might be made acquainted with the wonderful works of God.

I will here state that, Martin Harris, when he came to this Territory a few years ago, was rebaptized, the same as every member of the church from distant parts is on arriving here. That seems to be a kind of standing ordinance for all Latter-day Saints who emigrate here, from the First Presidency down; all are rebaptized and set out anew by renewing their covenants. There are thousands of Latter-day Saints who have been forth into the baptismal font and been baptized for their dead kindred and friends. Martin Harris requested this privilege, and he was baptized here in Salt Lake City for many of his kindred who are dead. I mention these things in order that the Saints may understand something concerning this man who has just left us, almost a hundred years old. God favored him, highly favored him. He was among the favored few who went up from the State of Ohio in the summer of 1831, and journeyed nearly a thousand miles, to the western part of Missouri, to Jackson County. The prophet went at the same time, and that was designated as the land where the Saints should eventually be gathered, and where a great city should be eventually reared, called the city of Zion, or the New Jerusalem, and that the Saints should be located throughout all that region of country. God gave many commandments in those days concerning what might be termed the United Order; in other words, concerning the consecration of the properties of the church. These things were given by revelation through the prophet. Martin Harris was the first man that the Lord called by name to consecrate his money and lay the same at the feet of the bishop in Jackson County, Mo., according to the order of consecration. He willingly did it; he knew the work to be true; he knew that the word of the Lord through the Prophet Joseph was just as sacred as any word that ever came from the mouth of any prophet from the foundation of the world. He consecrated his money and his substance, according to the word of the Lord. What for? As the revelation states, as an example to the rest of the church.

As I have already mentioned, one more witness remains who saw that angel and the plates. Who is it? David Whitmer, a younger man than Martin Harris, probably some seventy years of age, I do not recollect his age exactly. Where does he live? In the western part of Missouri. Does he still hold fast to his testimony? He does. Many of the elders of this church, in going to and from among the nations, have called upon him from time to time, and they all bear the same testimony—that Mr. David Whitmer still, in the most solemn manner, declares that he saw the angel and that he saw the plates in his hands. But he is not here with us; he has not gathered up with the people of God. That, however, does not prove that his testimony is not true, by no means.

Now then, let me bring forth some predictions or prophecies concerning these three witnesses. In the forepart of the Book of Mormon we have a prediction that there should be three witnesses; it was uttered nearly six hundred years before Christ, by a man, a prophet of God, who came out of Jerusalem and came to this American continent; and in speaking of the last days, when this record should come forth to the human family, he foretells that there should be witnesses who should know of a surety concerning its truth. I will read what he says—"And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered; and behold the book shall be sealed, and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof. Wherefore, because of the things which are sealed up, the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people, wherefore the book shall be kept from them. But the book shall be delivered unto a man, and he shall deliver the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust; and he shall deliver these words unto another."

Now this man spoken of was the translator, Joseph Smith; and the delivering the words to another had reference to what I have already related—the delivery of a few of the words of the book to Martin Harris. "He shall deliver the words unto another, but the words which are sealed he shall not deliver, neither shall he deliver the book; for the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book, until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold they reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof. And the day cometh that the words of the book which were sealed shall be read upon the house tops, and they shall be read by the power of Christ, and all things shall be revealed unto the children of men, which ever have been among the children of men, and which ever will be, even unto the end of the earth. Wherefore at that day, when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it, save it be that three witnesses shall behold it by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered, and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein, and there are none other which shall view it save it be a few, according to the will of God, to bear testimony unto the children of men, for the Lord God has said, that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead. Wherefore the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book, and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good, will he establish his word, and wee be unto him that rejecteth the word of God."

This was translated from the plates, and written in manuscript, before Martin Harris, David Whitmer or Oliver Cowdery ever saw this angel, but there was a promise; it was on record; it was in the manuscript that three witnesses should behold it by the power of God. That prophecy, as I said before, was delivered nearly six hundred years before Christ. There was another prophecy delivered nearly a thousand years afterwards, which I will also read—"And now I, Moroni, have written according to my memory, and I have told you the things which I have sealed up, therefore, touch them not!"—speaking to the translator that should find his records—"therefore touch them not in order that you may translate, for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God; and behold ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work, and unto three shall they be shown by the power of God, wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true, and in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established, and the testimony of three, and this work in the which shall be shown forth the power of God, and also his word, of which the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost beareth record; and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day. And if it so be that they repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God. And now if I have no authority for these things judge ye, for ye shall know that I have authority, when ye shall see me and we shall stand before God at the last day."

Here then were two prophecies delivered about a thousand years apart, translated before the three witnesses saw the angel. It was in consequence of these prophecies that these men went out to the grove to pray. You may ask me why they went there to pray? Because they had read these things, and they saw that there were to be three witnesses that should know by the power of God, being revealed to them from the heavens, concerning these matters, and they felt anxious that God might show them these things, that they might be the favored three.

Were there any others who saw these plates? Yes. How many? Eight; all of whom are now dead except one, John Whitmer, who is still living. They saw and handled the plates, and saw the engravings upon them, and they testify of the same to all people to whom the work should be sent. How many does this make? Three witnesses, eight witnesses and the translator, twelve in all, twelve who saw and bare record of the original. Now I ask every one in this house, saints and strangers, have you as many witnesses that have seen the original of any one book of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments? Have you one witness even that has seen the original from which any one of those books was transcribed? No, not one. You have the transcription of scribes from generation to generation; you have the translations from these manuscripts handed down from generation to generation, and transcribed one copy after another, until they have passed through perhaps thousands of copies, before the art of printing was known. But you believe the Bible, do you not? Replies one—"Oh yes, we believe that, but as to the Book of Mormon we doubt very much about that."

Well, now, let me ask, is there anything inconsistent in a people receiving the testimony of twelve witnesses who saw and handled the original of the Book of Mormon, when they, at the same time, believe in the Bible, the original of which was never seen or handled by any man of this generation? In other words, which of the two is most consistent to believe in? The Latter-day Saints believe in both, because we know the Bible is true, for the Book of Mormon testifies of it, and we have obtained a testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon; and hence, as that book speaks of the Bible, we know that the Bible is true. When the people, mentioned in the Book of Mormon left Jerusalem and came to the land of America they brought the books of the Old Testament with them from the history of the creation to the prophecies of Jeremiah, and in their writings made on this land, they speak of the divinity and truthfulness of the Old Testament scriptures. Hence we, as Latter-day Saints, know one book to be true just as well as we do the other. But with the world it is different, for as they never had this testimony the truth of the Bible rests to them entirely upon secondhand testimony. But we will pass on to other testimonies.

I will now refer you again to the 29th chapter of Isaiah, from which I read concerning a book, the words of which were to be heard by the deaf—"In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book." What book do you mean, Isaiah? He means the one that he had just been speaking of in the 11th, 12th, 13th, and 14th verses—"And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, 'Read this I pray thee,' and he says, 'I can not, for it is sealed.' And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying—'Read this I pray thee,' and he says—'I am not learned.' Wherefore the Lord said, 'For as much as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men, therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.'"

Here we perceive the nature of the book that he mentions in the 13th verse, and we learn something about the way that it was