

## DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED

In the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, September 20, 1874.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I WILL read the 3rd and 4th verses of the 29th chapter of Isaiah:

And I will campaign against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee.

And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

[The speaker also read the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 18th verses of the same chapter.]

It will be forty-seven years the day after to-morrow since the plates, from which the Book of Mormon was translated, were obtained by the prophet Joseph Smith, and as there may be persons in this assembly who are unacquainted with the circumstances of the finding of this book, I will relate some circumstances in relation to the beginning of this great and marvelous work.

Joseph Smith, generally known in the world as "Old Joe Smith," was a boy about fourteen years of age at the time the Lord first revealed himself in a very marvelous manner to him. The circumstances were these: This boy, in attending religious meetings that were held in his neighborhood, seemed to be wrought upon in a very wonderful manner, and he felt great concern in relation to the salvation of his soul. Many young people were wrought upon by the same spirit, and they commenced seeking the Lord, and professed to be converted. Among this number were several of the Smith family, who united themselves with the Presbyterians. During the progress of this revival a sort of rivalry sprang up among the ministers of the various denominations, and each one seemed determined to obtain as many of the converts as possible, and have them unite with his particular religious order. This boy, Joseph Smith, was solicited and advised to unite himself with some of the religious denominations in that vicinity, but being of a reflecting turn of mind, he inquired in his own heart which among these several religious bodies was right. I presume that many of you, at some period of your existence, have been wrought upon in the same manner, because you have been anxious to join yourselves to the true church of God if you could only find which was God's church. It was not, therefore, at all strange that this young man should have these ideas passing through his mind; but how to satisfy himself he did not know. If he went to one denomination they would say, "We are right, and the others are wrong;" and so said all the others. Like most boys of his age Joseph had never read the Bible to any great extent, hence he was unable to decide in his own mind as to which was the true church. When he saw several denominations contending one with the other, he naturally enough supposed that some of them must be wrong. He began to search the Bible in his leisure time after his work was done upon the farm; and in perusing the New Testament, he came across a passage which is very familiar indeed to most of my hearers; the passage reads thus—"If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not." Mr. Smith really believed this passage. He did not read it as one would read a novel, thinking that it was all imaginary; but, from his heart, he believed that it meant what it said, and he said to himself—"I certainly lack wisdom in relation to my duty. I do not know which of these denominations is correct, and which is the church of Christ. I desire to know, with all my heart, and I will go before the Lord, and call upon his name, claiming his promise." He therefore retired a short distance from his father's house, into a little grove of timber, and called upon the Lord, claiming this promise, desiring to know his duty and to be informed where the true church of Christ was. While thus praying, with all his heart, he discovered in the heavens above him, a very bright and glorious

light, which gradually descended towards the earth, and when it reached the tops of the trees which overshadowed him, the brightness was so great that he expected to see the leaves of the trees consumed by it; but when he saw that they were not consumed he received courage. Finally the light rested down upon and overwhelmed him in the midst of it, and his mind at the same time seemed to be caught away from surrounding objects, and he saw nothing excepting the light and two glorious personages standing before him in the midst of this light. One of these personages, pointing to the other, said—"Behold my beloved Son, hear ye him." After this, power was given to Mr. Smith to speak, and, in answer to an inquiry by the Lord as to what he desired, he said that he desired to know which was the true church, that he might be united thereunto. He was immediately told, that there was no true church of Christ on the earth, that all had gone astray, and had framed doctrines, and dogmas, and creeds by human wisdom, and that the authority to administer in the holy ordinances of the gospel was not among men upon the earth, and he was strictly commanded to go not after any of them, but to keep aloof from the whole of them. He was also informed that, in due time, if he would be faithful in serving the Lord, according to the best of his knowledge and ability, God would reveal to him still further, and make known to him the true gospel, the plan of salvation, in its fulness.

Mr. Smith had this vision before he was fifteen years old, and immediately after receiving it, he began to relate it to some of his nearest friends, and he was told by some of the ministers who came to him to enquire about it, that there was no such thing as the visitation of heavenly messengers, that God gave no new revelation, and that no visions could be given to the children of men in this age. This was like telling him that there was no such thing as seeing, or feeling, or hearing, or tasting, or smelling. Why? Because he knew positively to the contrary; he knew that he had seen this light, that he had beheld these two personages, and that he had heard the voice of one of them; he also knew that he had received instruction from them, and, therefore, to be told that there was no such thing as revelation or vision in these days, was like telling him that the sun did not shine in these days. He knew to the contrary, and he continued to testify that God had made himself manifest to him; and in consequence of this, the prejudices of the different denominations were aroused against him.

Why should they feel such concern and anxiety in relation to his testimony as to persecute him, a boy not quite fifteen years of age? The reason was obvious—if that testimony was true, not one of their churches was the true church of Christ. No wonder, then, that they began to persecute, point the finger of scorn, and say—"There goes the visionary boy."

In the year 1823, Mr. Smith, being not quite eighteen years old, was meditating in his heart concerning the former vision, and was feeling great anxiety that the promise might be fulfilled to him, that he should, at some future time, have revealed to him the gospel in all its fulness. He retired to his room one Sunday evening, in September (1823), and commenced to pray with all the earnestness and faith that he could possibly obtain, that the Lord would fulfill the promise that he had made to him. While thus praying, he discovered that a light seemed to be breaking into his room, growing brighter by degrees, until he saw a personage, apparently an angel, standing before him. This personage wore a white robe, and his countenance had the appearance of lightning, but yet appeared of an innocent expression. This personage did not stand upon the floor of the room, but his feet were a short distance above the floor. He informed this boy that the Lord had sent him as a messenger, in answer to his prayer, in order to impart unto him further information. And then he commenced telling him that this great American continent was once occupied by a numerous people, the descendants of the house of Israel, most of them the descendants of a remnant of the tribe of Joseph; that they came here from Jerusalem by the direct guidance of the Almighty,

some six centuries before Christ; that in a vessel, which they built by the command of God, they came round by the Gulf of Arabia, crossed the Great Pacific Ocean, and landed on the western coast of South America; that the descendants of these people had many prophets among them, and that after they had been on this continent about a thousand years, during the progress of which they had become divided into two distinct nations, they fell into great wickedness, and that God threatened them with overthrow; the people of one of these nations were called Lamanites, from Laman, one of the colony which came out of Jerusalem; that the people of the other nation were called Nephites, taking their name from Nephi, the brother of Laman; that between three and four centuries after Christ these two nations occupied the two great wings of this continent, the Lamanites occupying South America, and the Nephites North America; but the Nephites, at that time, having apostatized from the religion of their fathers, and many of them having become exceedingly wicked, the Lord threatened them with an overthrow. And he commanded one of the last prophets, named Mormon, to make an abridgment of all the records of former prophets who had been raised up on this land, an abridgment of the history of the nation from the time that they left Jerusalem until that time. He did so, and committed the abridged record, written on plates of gold, into the hands of another prophet, his son Moroni. The original records, from which the abridgment was made, were hid up by Mormon in a hill called Cumorah, in the interior of what is now called the State of New York, but the abridgment was still in possession of the prophet Moroni. About this time, or a little before this time, there had been a fifty years war between the inhabitants of North and South America; and finally the Lamanites of South America drove the Nephites from the Isthmus, and continued to burn their towns, cities, and villages, and they destroyed hundreds and thousands of the Nephites; and ultimately they were driven into what we now call the State of New York. Three hundred and eighty years after the birth of Christ they entered into terms of peace, or, in other words, an armistice, for the space of four years, during which time the two nations gathered together all their forces into one vicinity, near the hill Cumorah. And when the four years of peace, or armistice, had expired, they came together in battle, in which the Nephites were overpowered, and hundreds of thousands of them killed, including women and children. Moroni, who was among the few Nephites who were spared, and in whose possession was the abridgment which had been made by his father, Mormon, was commanded to hide up that abridgment in the hill Cumorah, near the town of Manchester, Ontario County, State of New York. The Lord commanded him not only to hide up the record, but also to deposit with it the Urim and Thummim, an instrument used by the ancient seers who dwelt on this Continent. The Lord promised Moroni that, in the latter days, he would bring forth that book out of the ground, that it should whisper out of the dust, that it should speak unto the living as if it were from the dead, and that when he should bring it forth this Urim and Thummim, deposited with it, should enable the finder to translate it into the language of the people who should then inherit the land.

I have now given you a brief statement of these things, in substance, as they were taught by the angel of God who administered to Joseph Smith in September, 1823. After giving this instruction the angel disappeared; and as Mr. Smith continued to pray and call upon the name of the Lord, the angel appeared the second time, and made the same narration in relation to the Lamanites and Nephites as he made on his first visit. When conversing with Mr. Smith about these records, the vision of his mind was opened so that he was enabled to see where the records were deposited, and he was told by the angel that, if he would be faithful and do according to the commandments of the Lord his God, he, in due time, should have the privilege of bringing the records forth, and that he should translate them for the benefit of the people.

The angel again departed, and Mr. Smith, being unable to go to sleep, continued to pray, and the vision was renewed again; the angel, on his third visit, not only reiterating his previous statement, but also declaring many things that were then in the future in relation to the marvelous work and wonder which the Lord was about to perform upon the earth. When he had withdrawn for the third time, daylight began to appear in the east, and Mr. Smith had not slept the whole night, but he nevertheless went to work with his father in the field, at their usual early hour. But the visions of the night wrought upon his mind to that degree, that his natural strength began to fail, and his father, noticing that he looked pale, advised him to return at once to the house. He started to do so, but had only gone part of the way, when he again saw the light in the heavens, and the angel of God came down and stood before him, and commanded him to return to his father, and relate the visions of the previous night

to him. He did so; and the old man commanded his son to be obedient to the heavenly messenger, believing with all his heart that the vision was from the Almighty. On this last occasion the angel told Mr. Smith to go to the hill Cumorah, which had been shown to him in vision the previous night, which was about three miles from his father's house, and there he should have the privilege of beholding the records. He, after having spoken to his father, accordingly went, and beheld the records. He knew the place as soon as he saw it. He saw the crowning stone of the stone box that covered the records. It was oval in form, and was partially bare, the edges being under the sod. He immediately removed the turf that covered the edges of this stone, and, with a lever, succeeded in lifting off the upper stone, which was cemented to four others, in the form of a box, within which he saw the plates and the Urim and Thummim. He was about to put forth his hand to take the plates, when lo! the angel of God appeared again, and told him that the time had not fully come for these records to come forth; that he (Joseph) was yet inexperienced, and needed strength, and that if he would be obedient to the commands which he would give to him, and which the Lord would impart from time to time, he should, in due time, be permitted to receive these records, commanding him at the same time to come there one year from that date, and that he would appear again to him, and give him further instructions; and thus he should do from year to year, until he should receive the plates, provided that he should prove himself worthy before God; for the angel said unto him, that these plates could not be obtained by any person for speculative purposes; that they contained records that were sacred, prophecies and doctrines that were written by ancient prophets, and that the Lord God had promised that these prophecies and revelations should go forth to all people, nations and tongues, and that they could not be entrusted with any one to get gain.

From that time, Mr. Smith, on the 22nd of September each year, continued to visit this place, until the year 1827, he being then not quite twenty-two years old. On the morning of the 22nd of September, in the year 1827, the angel of the Lord permitted him to take these records, with the Urim and Thummim, and he carried them to his father's house. The people in that neighborhood, having learned about these things, sought by every means in their power—by persecution, mobs, and every other means that they could bring to bear, to find these plates and take them from him. But the Lord gave him directions, through the Urim and Thummim what he should do with the plates, where he should hide them, and gave him all the information that was necessary to keep them out of the hands of the mobs.

Finally the persecution became so great, that this young man was obliged to leave his father's house, and proceed to the Susquehanna river, in Pennsylvania, and there he commenced to transcribe or make a fac-simile of some of the characters or words that were written on these metallic plates; and the transcript, then made, was taken by a man named Martin Harris to the city of New York, and exhibited to the learned, to see if they could translate them. Remember, it was not the plates that were taken to the learned, but it was the words of the book, transcribed from the plates, and the learned were requested to read them. But Mr. Harris could not succeed in finding any person who was able to translate them; although he found one man—Professor Anthon—well known through the United States, and in European nations; as a great linguist, who said that he would assist, according to his best ability and judgment, in translating the transcript presented to him by Mr. Harris, and he gave a written promise to that effect. "But," said he, "where did you get these records?" Mr. Harris informed him that they had been revealed by an angel of God to a young man named Joseph Smith. Mr. Anthon then said to Mr. Harris—"Give me that paper I have given you." Mr. Harris handed it back to him, and he tore it in pieces, saying—"There is no such thing as the ministering of angels in these days, but bring the record here, and he will see what we can do in relation to assisting in translating it." Mr. Harris replied that a part of the record was sealed, and that only one portion of it was permitted to be translated at the present time. This learned man said—"I can not read a sealed book," thus fulfilling the words I have read—"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 saith, 'I can not for it is sealed, I can not read a sealed book.'" The next verse says—"And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying—'Read this I pray thee,' and he saith—'I am not learned.'"

When Martin Harris reported to this boy, what the learned had said, and how they had proceeded in relation to this matter, the Lord God commanded this young man to translate the record himself, through the aid of the Urim and Thummim. But he made this excuse—"I am not learned." And the Lord answered him in the very words of Isaiah, as recorded in the next verse—"Wherefore the Lord said, inasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, and have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men, therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." This is the answer that the Lord made this young man, commanding him to read the book.

It was marvelous that a man who did not possess the ordinary education, ob-

tained in the common schools of the country, and who could barely read, and could write but very little; a man who had only read the Bible a very little, and who knew but little about the various theological doctrines of the day; I say that for such a man to be called of the Lord God, and commanded to translate from an ancient record and to bring forth a book for the benefit of all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples, was marvellous in the extreme, and it did literally cause the wisdom of the wise to perish. "And I will raise forts against them, they shall be brought down, and shall speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust," &c.

Now this record is as if one spoke from the dead; it is the voice of the ancient dead prophets who once inhabited this great continent; it is the voice of the dead to the living, a warning voice, the everlasting gospel in all its plainness and purity, speaking out of the ground, whispering out of the dust, just as this passage of Scripture declares. Not the book, but the words of the book were sent to the learned; and, lastly, the book itself was commanded to be translated by the unlearned. All this is marvellous.

The eighteenth verse, which I read, says—"And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book." What book? We answer, the one that the prophet had been speaking of, the one that was to speak out of the ground, and that was to be translated by the unlearned. "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

This book, that has thus been marvelously translated, is for the benefit of the meek and the poor among men. When Jesus came in ancient days, and preached the gospel to the learned and the unlearned, we are told that on one occasion, the disciples of John came and asked him if he was the true Messiah, or should they look for another? And he said unto them—"Go and tell John that the dead are raised, that the blind see, and that the poor have the gospel preached to them." So, in these latter days, when the Lord God causes a book to come forth out of the ground, and to whisper from the dust, it is for the benefit of the poor among men, and they are to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Has this ever been fulfilled literally? It has. We have lifted up our voices for forty-four years and upwards among the inhabitants of this nation, and also for many years among the inhabitants of other nations, bearing testimony to all people that the Lord God has sent his angel, according to the promise made in the fourteenth chapter of the Revelations of St. John, flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people that dwell upon the face of the earth. We have borne testimony, faithfully and diligently without purse or scrip, for these many years among the inhabitants of the earth, to the rich as well as the poor. But the rich will not obey it; no, they have their riches to look after. One says—"I have a yoke of oxen that I have just bought, I must go and try them." Another says—"I have invested so many hundred thousand dollars in merchandise, I must attend to that." Another says—"I have some other business, I must look after that." But the poor among men, whose hearts are pure and meek because of the oppression that they have received from the monopolist, and from the rich, are humble, and they receive this work, hence they have gathered out from among the various nations, where they are no longer oppressed or under taskmasters, and have accumulated homes of their own, and lands, and flocks and herds of their own, which neither they nor their fathers in the old countries inherited from generation to generation. The poor among men, when they shall hear the words of the book, shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

To show more fully the time when this book should be brought to light, let me say that it is a latter-day work, and to prove it, I will read the following verses. "The poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, for the terrible one is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off; all that make a man an offender for a word, or that lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, or that turn aside the just for a thing of naught." All these are to be cut off. When? When they have heard the words of this book, when the proclamation has been sounded in their ears. When they are become fully ripened in iniquity, they will be cut off according to the declaration of the Prophet Isaiah. But their times must first be fulfilled; their fulness must come in, before these terrible judgments and destructions shall lay waste the nations of the Gentiles. But is there no hope for Israel, when this book comes forth? When I speak of Israel I mean the literal Israel, the descendants of the twelve tribes, whose fathers inherited ancient Palestine. Is there no hope for them when this great and marvellous work shall be accomplished? We will read the next verse. "Therefore, thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob. Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale; but when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel."

It seems then, that Jacob was to be scattered and dispersed, and made ashamed, his face was to wax pale, and he be counted a hiss and a byword among the people, until the set time should arrive, until God should rise up in his majesty and power in the latter days, and should set his hand according to the words of the prophets, ob-