

Did An Angel Come To Palmyra?

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The "translation" of the plates revealed that a Hebrew prophet named Nephi with his family and followers sailed to America in the year 400 B.C. to escape the threatened destruction of Jerusalem. Nephi's older brothers Laman and Lemuel, stained seriously and God punished them by turning their skin red.

The descendants of the brothers kept up the old family feud for a thousand years. The red-skinned, bloodthirsty Lamanites always disturbing the hard-working, desert-dwelling Nephtes.

These Nephtes, according to Joseph's "translation," are the father sheep to whom Christ said He must preach. So our Lord visited the Nephtes in the early weeks following His ascension after the American continent was terrorized by three days of darkness and massive cataclysms. The impact of our Lord's visit united the Nephtes and Lamanite clans for nearly three centuries until both Lamanites and Nephtes stained, resumed their ancient wars and threatened Lamanite domination in the year 321 in a final battle at Cumorah Hill. Mormon buried the sacred record of the Nephtes to await Joseph Smith's coming 15 centuries afterwards.

The "translation" also described the practice of polygamy in America. In ancient times, approximately fifty wives ranging in age from 15 to 35.

He entered himself as a candidate for president of the United States in the election campaign of 1844 but his losing power spelled his doom. Every gain he made created also another enemy to hate him. He was summoned for arrest when he smashed the press and burned the issues of a Nauvoo newspaper which repeatedly needed him.

He could have escaped but with a grim prophecy, "I shall be butchered," he turned himself over for trial at Carthage. There on June 27, 1844, only days after he was at the crest of his career, he was shot by an armed mob with painted faces. He was not yet 40 years old. His dying words were a cry, "Oh, Lord, my God!"

His martyrdom sealed the faith of his followers, obliterated all of their lingering doubts and forged them into a unity which survives in the 1,500,000 members of his Church today.

That is his story. What are we to think about it?

His story, later research has shown, was a skillful blending of ideas current in early 19th century America—the Hebrew origin of the American Indians, the divine destiny of the United States, anti-Masonic and anti-Catholic feelings, firm expectation that Christ's second coming was imminent.

Even the buried gold-plate book idea was not original—others along the Erie Canal had unearthed such enigmatic treasure along with skeletons, as reported in a Palmyra newspaper in 1821, two years before Joseph's bedside visit with his angel.

But what about these visions he claimed he had?

Even here he was not unique. Religion along the American frontier was an erratic affair which thrived on scores of visionaries and New York state had a reputation for some of the most daring claims.

Jemima Wilkinson of Keuka

Lake Erie claimed she was Christ incarnated as a woman as once He had been a man. Anne Lee, whose Shaker community settled at Sodus Bay, claimed that she too was Christ. William Miller, the prophet of doom, predicted the end of the world would occur in 1843 and John Noyes of Oneida said Christ had already come to earth to begin the expected millennium. Otis in Ohio, Abel Sargent reported he talked with angels and John Dwyke, like the New York women, claimed he was the Saviour come back to earth.

Even Joseph Smith's close associates had their visions too. Martin Harris, Joseph's first and perhaps most lavish benefactor, claimed he saw and talked with our Lord disguised as a deer in the woods and that he saw the "Garden of Eden" in the form of a house with mossy halls. Harris also prophesied that Palmyra would be destroyed by 1836.

Oliver Cowdery had a vision of our Lord in the temple at Kirtland. Later, in 1827, Harris, Cowdery and David Whitmer—Joseph's chief witnesses of his gold plates—gave their allegiance to a dancing prophetess at Kirtland who claimed she like Joseph, had magic stones in which she could see visions.

Joseph's visions, therefore, whether a hoax or not, were certainly anything but unique in an era which was rife with them.

As he himself admitted, "Some revelations are of God, some revelations are of man, and some revelations are of the devil. When a man enquires of the Lord concerning a matter, if he is deceived by his own carnal desires, and is in error, he will receive an answer according to his erring heart, but it will not be a revelation from the Lord."

Whatever is the explanation of his visions, there is no question about the sincerity of the faith he created in his followers. Faced with the turmoil of competing claimants, a 44-year-old man searched for religious truth and was satisfied with the answers given them by this fronting farm boy.

He did not claim to have all the answers, however. He even told his faithful that God "will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Catholics can hope that God by His grace will indeed reveal to them that the one, true Church of Christ, for which they seek, has survived the centuries, that it was built on a Rock named Peter and that the Saviour never broke His sacred promise, "Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world."

Quotations in this article are from "The Book of Deeds" a booklet printed in Salt Lake City and obtained at the Cumorah Hill information center, from the book "The Man Known as Mormon" by Fern Brooks published in New York, and from the book "The Mormons" by Thomas F. O'Dea, University of Chicago Press.



Seminarian Gives Communion

Kansas City—(RNS)—William A. Bauman, ordained a deacon of the Roman Catholic Church by special permission from Rome before entering his final seminary year, distributes Communion daily in Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Church, Kansas City, Mo. Ordinarily a candidate for the priesthood does not receive the discipline until beginning his last year of study, and the powers conferred—to preach, baptize, and distribute Communion—are not exercised in a parish until after he becomes a priest.

Spain Protestants Said Like Eskimos On Equator

Cleveland—(RNS)—Spain has a "Protestant problem" like countries around the equator have an "Eskimo problem," according to a Franciscan priest who returned here after four years in Spain.

The priest is Father Loyola Lawrence Knoblauch, who in Spain he preached his doctrine in sacred theology and was English teacher to the foreign minister, Fernando Maria Castiella.

FATHER KN OBLAUCH pointed out that Spain is more than 99 per cent Catholic and added:

"There is no more of a Protestant problem in Spain than there is an Eskimo problem in Panama. There might be a few Eskimos here, but there is no demand for special legislation for them."

Father Knoblauch referred to repeated criticism of Spain by U.S. Protestants. He said the Spanish constitution protects non-Catholics in "private practice of religion" but prohibits public ceremonies and altars.

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