

1828

Joseph Smith Translates the Gold Plates

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The Urim and Thummim

An instrument prepared of God to assist man in obtaining revelation from the Lord and in translating languages.

116 Pages of Manuscript Lost

In the spring of 1828 Joseph Smith had finished 116 pages translated from the Golden Plates. These were the records of Lehi. Lehi, in a dream, was told to pack up his family and leave Jerusalem in about 600 B.C. Martin Harris asked Joseph Smith to take some of the manuscripts to show his wife, Lucy Harris, back in Palmyra, New York where he resided.

Joseph asked the Lord for permission to let Martin take the translation pages, but the Lord said “no.” Martin asked Joseph to ask the Lord a second time. Joseph asked the Lord again, and again the answer was “no.” Martin pleaded for Joseph to ask the Lord once more. Joseph wanted to satisfy Martin, so he asked the Lord a third time. This time the Lord said Martin could take the translation if he agreed to show it only to his wife and certain members of his family. Martin promised that he would not show the pages to anyone else. He took the 116 pages of translation to his home in Palmyra.

After a tragic loss of Joseph’s son, Alvin, who lived only a few hours after birth, Joseph became concerned that Martin had not returned. Joseph went to Palmyra and stayed with his parents. When Martin arrived, he cried out, “Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!” Joseph jumped up from where he was sitting and exclaimed, “Martin, have you lost that manuscript? Have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head as well as your own?” Martin also broke his promise and showed them to others.

Joseph and Martin suffered greatly because of the loss of the translation. Joseph returned to Harmony, where he prayed for forgiveness. The angel Moroni took the gold plates and the Urim and Thummim for a while. Later, because of Joseph’s sincere repentance, the Lord forgave Joseph, and Moroni returned the plates and the Urim and Thummim. During this time Joseph received the revelations found in Doctrine and Covenants 3 and 10.

Martin Harris

Martin Harris was born in 1783 at Eastown, New York. And a prosperous farmer and businessman. He had giving Joseph and Emma Smith fifty dollars to help them move to Harmony, Pennsylvania. He was acting as a scribe to Joseph Smith while Joseph translated the Golden Plates. In February 1828, Joseph encouraged Martin to take copies of characters from the plates to professors in New York.

Charles Anthon

Charles Anthon was a professor of grammar and linguistics at Columbia College. Anthon had been collecting American Indian stories and speeches for publication and was eager to inspect the document Martin brought him.

Martin claimed that Anthon declared the characters authentic until he learned how Joseph Smith had acquired them. He suggested Martin bring him the plates. Martin refused, and Anthon replied, paraphrasing a verse in Isaiah, “I cannot read a sealed book.”

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Copy and cut for each child. Place on
Newspaper matching up rectangles

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Instructions:

Page 1: Sample

Page 2: Copy, cut and paste on page 3 matching rectangles

Page 3: Story line page

Page 4: Handout

Page 5: Black and white handout

Page 6: Colored blank page

Use tan or bone colored paper to copy page 2,3, or 5

What Happened to Martin Harris?

Even though Martin Harris lost the 116 pages of translation, he repented and went on to make important contributions to the Church. He was not permitted to assist Joseph further in the translation of the gold plates, but later he sold part of his farm to help pay for the printing of the Book of Mormon. He was one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon and testified of the truthfulness of the book throughout his life. Show the children “The Testimony of Three Witnesses,” printed at the front of the Book of Mormon. From Manual

Further Reading for Teacher:

Work on the translation recommenced in earnest on April 5, 1829, when newly arrived Oliver Cowdery assumed the role of scribe. Joseph and Oliver picked up where Joseph and Martin had previously left off, near the beginning of the book of Mosiah. But in May, as they approached the end of the Book of Mormon as we now have it, they wondered whether they should retranslate the lost portion. To address this question, the Lord gave Joseph Smith another revelation, now contained in Doctrine and Covenants 10. The revelation confirmed Joseph’s fears of a conspiracy: “Behold, satan has put it into their hearts to alter the words which you have caused to be written.” However, the Lord reassured Joseph that He had a long-prepared solution. Joseph was commanded not to retranslate the lost portion but to supplant it with a translation of “the plates of Nephi,” which covered a similar time period. Thus, the Lord would frustrate the plans of the conspirators and fulfill the prayers of the ancient Nephite record keepers, who desired these writings to “come forth unto this people.”

<https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-martin-harris?lang=eng>