

6-page Proper Translation of the Book of Mormon, using the “Key”

In the Spirit of love and reconciliation I share this information with friends and fellow faithful Saints, who may believe the translation of the Book of Mormon was done using a stone in a hat, which is sometimes called by them, the Urim and Thummim. I hope and pray you may consider my opinion as the Prophet and Apostles have not yet received revelation about the method of translation.

I would like to share with you a feeling of joy and possibility. I know the Book of Mormon is the word of God by the Spirit of the Lord. That is a feeling every faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has or could have in regard to the Gospel and the Book of Mormon.

It the past year or so, I have had a wonderful journey of reading and studying about what the phrase, “by the gift and power of God” means in relationship to Joseph’s translation of the plates. Reading scriptures and other worthy books, such as the Elder’s Journal has inspired me. “Thus, a close look at the Prophet’s comments is probably the most reliable method of understanding how he produced the Book of Mormon. As is generally known, Joseph Smith chose to speak in summary terms, though there are interesting reiterations in early but little-known sources. For instance, the Prophet gave a private account of his early visions in 1832, speaking of the Urim and Thummim in simple terms: **“The Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the book; therefore, I commenced translating the characters...”**

Joseph Smith used practically the same words in respond to a standard question on the ancient records in 1838: **“I obtained them and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which I translated the plates,** and thus came the Book of Mormon.” *Main source: Answers to Questions, Elders’ Journal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (July 1838): Secondary sources: Richard Lloyd Anderson By The Gift and Power of God*

Joseph’s Key

Joseph’s Key, as spoken of by Lucy Mack Smith said, *“Joseph termed a key, was indeed nothing more nor less than a Urim and Thummim”* and in my opinion is certainly not a seer stone. It is the spectacles **acting as a key** to unlock the breastplate for an **attached view** of revealing “by the gift and power of God.”

We will call the Key with the Breastplate, **“Interpreters”** as Moroni first said, “I have sealed up the interpreters, according to the commandment of the Lord” (*Ether 4:5*).

As you read the Book of Mormon there is only one word that describes what to call the breastplate with the two stones in the rims of a bow. **INTERPRETERS. Nowhere in the entire Book of Mormon will you hear the term Urim and Thummim or seer stone or single stone in a hat.** It also mentions Interpreters once in the PGP in JSH 1:75* That means whenever we say the word "Interpreters" we mean the breastplate with the spectacles attached.

There are millions of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that believe the Interpreters are the instrument that Joseph Smith found with the gold plates buried in the hill Cumorah. These Interpreters began their journey near hill Ramah in upstate New York as the Lord touched these two stones and asked the Brother of Jared to seal these stones up with the interpreters to come forth at a later date to be translated, and as we know Joseph Smith was that person. *Ether 3:22-24*. We also know that Mosiah had these same Interpreters. *Mosiah 8:13*. Alma the Younger also had these identical Interpreters as they were probably handed down from prophet to prophet. *Mosiah 28:20*

Jonathan Neville's View

My friend Jonathan Neville said, "We wonder, why do the revisionist Church historians prefer the stone-in-a-hat theory over the definitive, consistent explanations from Joseph and Oliver? We can't read minds, and so far, as I know the intellectuals have not articulated the rationale for their preference, but it is deliberate, as we've just seen from the selection of quotations in the Gospel Topics Essay on Book of Mormon Translation.

One possibility is that the revisionist historians think they have discovered something in Church history that was "covered up" for decades. In the interest of openness, they have brought forth the stone-in-a-hat theory.

That makes sense from an academic perspective. To get a PhD and have a career, historians have to contribute something new to their field, and because the prophets have consistently taught that Joseph translated with the Urim and Thummim, the idea that Joseph "really" used a seer stone instead would have appeal to an academic.

The problem, of course, is that the stone-in-a-hat theory is 185 years old. Those familiar with Church history have always known about Mormonism Unveiled.

Rather than contributing something new, these revisionist historians have resurrected an old, discredited claim made by critics to undermine faith in the accounts of Joseph and Oliver." *Jonathan Neville*

I believe many historians and Intellectual men and women of the Church, who believe in a Mesoamerican geography and the use of a stone in the hat, have a strong testimony of the Book of Mormon, just as I do. I hold no ill will as I respect their opinions as I hope they respect mine. I have studied and prayed about the geography of the Book of Mormon in North America, and about the proper translation of the Book of Mormon using the Interpreters, and these feelings are part of my divine testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. I also believe a feeling of truth with the New York Cumorah as the only Cumorah, and the place of the last battles of the Book of Mormon, along with a belief there was a great cave in a different part of hill Cumorah in New York in addition to the stone box, that Joseph Smith entered, which cave holds over 10 wagon loads of records as Brigham Young said, along with the Liahona and Sword of Laban which were not in the box with the gold plates. "Many have wondered what became of the golden plates following the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. The plates were deposited in Cumorah's cave, *Cameron J. Packer wrote in an article for Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.*

Packer's article presents several accounts from church leaders and others about what happened to the plates. One account by *Young in the Journal of Discourses, June 17, 1877*, reports that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdrey walked into a cave at the hill and found themselves in a room full of other ancient records, "probably many wagon loads," the account said." May all pray about it and come to your own personal revelation.

No Curtain or Blanket

There has been a lot of information about whether Joseph had a curtain or blanket between him and the person who transcribed for him. I believe there may have been a curtain briefly during Martin's translation of the Characters, but not at any other time.

"With regard to the physical circumstances of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his scribe, Martin Harris was quoted as saying there was a blanket or curtain hung between himself and Joseph during the translation process. If Martin is accurately quoted, perhaps this occurred when the Prophet was copying characters directly from the plates in the sample to be taken to Professor Charles Anthon, since the dates mentioned are several months before Martin Harris's brief

scribal duties began. I say this because although David Whitmer mentions a blanket being used—it was only to partition off the living area in order to keep both the translator and scribe from the eyes of visitors (see David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness, ed. Lyndon W. Cook, [1991], 173).

In fact, Elizabeth Anne Whitmer Cowdery, Oliver’s wife, said, “Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe” (quoted in John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information,” F.A.R.M.S. report WRR–86, p. 25). Emma likewise said of her days as scribe, early on, that Joseph dictated “hour after hour with nothing between us” (“Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 289).” *Truths Restored “By the Gift and Power of God” 1997 By Elder Neal A. Maxwell Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*

Harris declares, that when he acted as amanuensis, and wrote the translation, as Smith dictated, such was his fear of the Divine displeasure that a screen (sheet) was suspended between the prophet and himself. “Gold Bible, No. 6.” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, New York) 2, no. 16 (19 March 1831): 126–27. I believe Martin Harris was very superstitious and scared of the Lord. The way he acted would seem to me that he made Joseph put a curtain between them as Martin wanted no chance of himself accidentally seeing the plates, breastplate, or spectacles, as he was afraid that he may meet his utter destruction as the Lord said to Joseph, if Joseph showed them to anyone.

Art by Anne Marie Oborn

I asked a wonderful artist named Anne Marie Oborn to paint a scene that showed on canvas, what my heart was feeling. When I visited her home and first saw her painting, I saw Joseph with the “Key” or the spectacles, and he looked perfect as he held his farmers hat between the spectacles and Emma’s view, so Emma couldn't see them. The Lord had instructed Joseph that no one see the plates, the spectacles, or the breastplate, and all three of those issues were taken care of. I could see the spectacles were attached to a rod on Joseph's right side and you could tell they were being held up with the breastplate that Joseph had “tightly on his person” and under his shirt. You can't see the front of Joseph which is perfect as none of us know exactly what, "by the gift and power of God" means, but the one thing I do know through the spirit, is that the spectacles and the breastplate **had to be attached** as the scriptures say in order for Joseph to receive the proper translation of that most sacred record.

“With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called ‘Urim and Thummim,’ which consisted of **two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate**. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift, and power of God.” *Times and Seasons, 1 March 1842,* p. 707, *The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 13, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-march-1842/5>*

Elder Jeffrey Holland

Elder Holland has said, “Truly rock-ribbed faith and uncompromised conviction comes with its most complete power when it engages our head as well as our heart... “Two manifestations, two witnesses if you will—the force of fact as well as the force of feeling.” *Jeffery R. Holland 2017*. There was heart and head confirmation in this painting, you knew by both feelings that the breastplate and the spectacles represented this head and heart feeling, that the translation was indeed from the Lord. I know through the powerful words of my now favorite woman in the church, Lucy Mack Smith, that these, (**meaning the spectacles and the breast plate**) "remained constantly on his person." as the quote in Lucy's book says.”

Lucy Mack Smith

Lucy Mack Smith said, "I trembled so much with fear lest all might be lost again by some small failure in keeping the commandments, that I was under the necessity of leaving the room to conceal my feelings. Joseph saw this and followed me. "Mother," said he. "Do not be uneasy. All is right. See here," said he, "I have got the key."

*I knew not what he meant, but took the article in my hands and, examining it with no covering but a silk handkerchief, found that **it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows connected with each other in much the same way that old-fashioned spectacles are made.** He took them again and left me but did not tell me anything of the record....*

That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was indeed nothing more nor less than a Urim and Thummim by which the angel manifested those things to him that were shown him in vision; by which also he could at any time ascertain the approach of danger, either to himself or the record, and for this cause **he kept these things constantly about his person.**" (*History of Joseph Smith, Revised and Enhanced, p. 139, 145*)

Joseph loved this "Key", as through it he could see all things as prophets of old have as well. "After breakfast [on the day he received the plates and the Urim and Thummim] Joseph [Smith] called me into the other room and he set his foot on the bed and leaned his head on his hand and says,... "it is ten times better than I expected." Then he went on to tell the length and width and thickness of the plates, and said he, "they appear to be gold." But **he seemed to think more of the glasses or the Urim and Thummim than he did of the plates, for, says he, "I can see anything; they are marvelous."** (*Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History, BYU Studies, Vol. 17, No. 1; spelling modernized*)

Spectacles Attached to the Breastplate

It makes sense to me, that a very big part of the phrase, "by the gift and power of God" means that Joseph used the spectacles **attached** to the breastplate to translate. That is why the Lord had told Moroni to bury the Interpreters in the same box with the gold plates. There is a large amount of scriptural confirmation that Joseph indeed used the Interpreters, and not a seer stone in a hat. Many can now say that the possible use of the farmer's hat, not a stove pipe hat, was no more than Joseph blocking the view of the transcriber. Since David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Emma Smith never saw inside the hat, or for that matter ever saw what Joseph was hiding using the hat, the only guess the second-hand witnesses could share, is that the stone we know Joseph did find in a well many years earlier, remained in his pocket or hidden somewhere, and was never used as a translating instrument.

According to Oliver it seems he and Joseph are the only ones to see all three articles without a covering. When Cowdery returned to Church membership in 1848 he spoke to an Iowa conference. His words there were recorded by Reuben Miller: "I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet as he translated it by the gift and power of God by means of the Urim and Thummim, or as it is called by that book, holy interpreters. **I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. I also beheld the Interpreters.** That book is true. ... I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet." <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/09/by-the-gift-and-power-of-god?lang=eng> If Oliver had the stone that Joseph gave him at the time of this conversation, wouldn't he have held up that stone and told the audience that the stone he possessed is what Joseph used? You decide.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Elder Russell M. Nelson has said, , “The details of this miraculous method of translation are still not fully known. Yet we do have a few precious insights. David Whitmer wrote...” After this quote, Elder Nelson quotes from David Whitmer and Emma Smith who are quoted as speaking about the stone in the hat. If Elder Nelson had a revelation or knew what David and Emma said was true, he wouldn't have said, “The details of this miraculous method of translation are still not fully known. Yet we do have a few precious insights...” *A Treasured Testament* by Russell M. Nelson 1992 This is a quote you can find in 1996 and 2002 as well as other times when Elder Nelson has shared "A Treasured Testament “

Conclusion

If the seer stone was used it would contradict all the scriptures, which we find that are the “true word of the Lord”, and that is what I rely upon when understanding the proper method of translation. This is the **scripture** that sums up the “Proper Translation” in my opinion. “He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and **these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim**—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted “seers” in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them **for the purpose of translating the book.**” *JSH 1:34-35. No Stone in a Hat is mentioned!*” *Proper Translation of the Book of Mormon using the “Key” by Rian Nelson*

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