**The Story of the Church of Christ**

**VIII. The Angel Message**

 “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people...” (Revelations 14:6)

 This verse from the Book of Revelations in the New Testament tells what was to happen after the Apostasy when men no longer had the gospel, in its purity here on earth. God’s plan was to restore that pure gospel to earth in the latter days before Christ returns to earth. That restoration of the gospel was to be by the hand of an angel. Many times through the ages angels have been God’s messengers to men.

 In America, known as a “choice land” there was the freedom that allowed people to examine and question the false religious teachings that were believed during the time of the apostasy. In the state of New York in the United States, there was a great revival of interest in religion about 1820 A.D.

 At that time the family of Joseph Smith, Senior lived in Manchester, New York. Among the nine children of Joseph Smith, Sen. was a son, Joseph Smith, Junior. Some of the Smith family favored one of the churches in the revival and some favored another church. Joseph, Jr. was very confused about which church he should join. One day he read these words in the Book of James---”If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbradeth not and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5)

 Joseph decided he should go to the woods alone and pray to God that He would show him the right church. Just as Joseph began to pray, a great darkness surrounded him. He was very frightened and called on God to save him from the darkness. A pillar of light from heaven rested on Joseph and the darkness disappeared. He saw two wonderful, bright personages standing just above him. One person spoke to Joseph saying “This is my beloved son, hear him.” Joseph asked the personage which church he should join. He was told he should join none of them because their teachings were of men and not the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.

 Joseph told about his vision to one of the leading preachers in the community. The preacher laughed at Joseph and told him things like visions from God didn’t happen any more. Other preachers joined in making fun of

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Joseph, giving him a hard time. Joseph, however, **knew** what he had seen and heard, and he **knew it came from God.** Joseph was less than fifteen years old at the time of this first vision. Once again God was looking with favor on a very young person, not one of the older religious men of that day. It is not surprising Joseph was given harsh treatment by these people. Prophets of God and other chosen by God for His special work often suffered the same treatment.

 Joseph continued with his ordinary life until the night of Sept. 21, 1823. As Joseph lay in bed he prayed again for knowledge from God. As he prayed, the dark room was filled with a light and a personage appeared in the room. The personage told Joseph he had been sent from God. His name was Moroni. He said God had a work for Joseph to do, and his name should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He told Joseph there were gold plates engraved with a record of the people who had lived on this continent in old times. This record also told about the everlasting gospel. Buried in the earth with the plates was something God had prepared to translate the record. It was called a Urim and Thummim--two stones in bows (like glasses) and fastened to a breastplate. Seers in Old Testament times had also used the Urim and Thummim. The angel quoted several scriptures to Joseph and told him when he received the plates he shouldn’t show them or the Urim and Thummim to anyone unless commanded to do so by God.

 While the angel was speaking, Joseph in a vision saw the place where the plates were hidden. Then the light in the room gathered around the angel and a pathway opened up into heaven. Two more times that night Joseph had a similar visit from the angel, who repeated what he had said during the first visit. Each time he added little more instruction and warned Joseph he should never use the records for personal gain---only for God’s purposes.

 Next day when Joseph was working in the field with his father he was so tired his father told him to go home. The angel appeared again to Joseph when he was part way home and told him to go back and tell his father everything that had happened the night before. Joseph’s father believed everything Joseph said, and he told Joseph he must do everything the angel told him to do.

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 As he was directed Joseph went to the place where the records were buried in a box on the Hill now called Cumorah. The hill was located between Joseph’s home in Manchester and a town named Palmyra. Joseph was allowed to see the plates and the Urim and Thummim inside the box, but he wasn’t allowed to take them. He was told to come back every year for four years. On Sept. 22, 1827 he went to the hill to meet Moroni. Joseph was given the plates and told he must guard them **very** carefully. If he lost them he would be cut off from God. If Joseph was very careful with the precious records, God would safeguard them until the translation was finished and they were returned to Moroni.

 In a few short years Joseph Smith had experienced marvelous things. He had seen a vision and been told by Jesus himself about the work Joseph would do in the restoration of the Gospel and the priesthood to the earth. Joseph had also been visited by the angel Moroni, and eventually given the ancient plates he was to translate. Now it was time to begin God’s work.