

Overview of Joseph Smith's First Vision Accounts

LDS DISCUSSIONS

The First Vision

When I first took the missionary discussions a little over twenty years ago, the First Vision was the cornerstone of the initial lesson about the church. While it was not that way in the early church, the First Vision has become a symbol of the church's claim to be the one true and living church, and as Gordon B. Hinckley famously declared, "Our whole strength rests on the validity of that [First] vision. It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then it is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens." (*The Marvelous Foundation of Our Faith*, Oct 2002)

Overview of the First Vision

For a very brief history of how the First Vision is taught today by the church, we quote from the [official LDS essay](#):

Joseph Smith recorded that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him in a grove of trees near his parents' home in western New York State when he was about 14 years old. Concerned by his sins and unsure which spiritual path to follow, Joseph sought guidance by attending meetings, reading scripture, and praying. In answer, he received a heavenly manifestation. Joseph shared and documented the First Vision, as it came to be known, on multiple occasions; he wrote or assigned scribes to write four different accounts of the vision.

Joseph Smith published two accounts of the First Vision during his lifetime. The first of these, known today as Joseph Smith—History, was canonized in the Pearl of Great Price and thus became the best known account. The two unpublished accounts, recorded in Joseph Smith's earliest autobiography and a later journal, were generally forgotten until historians working for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rediscovered and published them in the 1960s. Since that time, these documents have been discussed repeatedly in Church magazines, in works

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

printed by Church-owned and Church-affiliated presses, and by Latter-day Saint scholars in other venues.

Of course, as with all of the issues we will be covering, it is a lot more complicated than this. Even when I was taught by the missionaries in the 1990s, there was no mention of multiple accounts of the First Vision nor were there any hints of the discrepancies within these accounts.

2

While we will not go into great detail on all accounts, we will be focusing on the four primary accounts given directly by Joseph Smith:

1832 Account: Handwritten by Joseph Smith himself, this was the earliest account that was written in a letterbook but never publicly known of until the 1960s.

1835 Account: This is a retelling of the First Vision by Joseph Smith to Robert Matthews, written down by Warren Parish in November 1835. This is a shorter retelling of the First Vision, but introduces the idea of two personages.

1838 Account: Adopted as the "official" version, this is included in the History of the Church and is used in all correlated materials and church manuals.

1842 Account: Otherwise known as the Wentworth Letter. This account was written in response to Chicago Democrat editor John Wentworth's request for information about the Latter-day Saints and was printed in the Times and Seasons in 1842.

Problems With the First Vision

No Contemporary Mentions of the First Vision Occurring

One theme that we're going to see with a number of issues regarding church history is that many of the stories we are told today were not spoken of when they were supposed to have occurred, despite the foundational events of the church being described in detail in many contemporary accounts. With the First Vision, Joseph Smith claimed to have experienced this vision in 1820, but there is simply no mention of this event occurring before 1832 despite Joseph Smith referring to interactions with other divine beings in the early years of the church.

In fact, the [Book of Commandments](#), which was released in 1830 with *65 chapters of revelations*, does not mention this pivotal event. The Book of Commandments was created to serve as a record of the foundational revelations and events of the church, and yet the First Vision is completely absent. There is no mention of this event from any of Joseph's

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

family or early church members who worked side-by-side with him to finance or dictate the Book of Mormon. To put it more clearly, former Assistant Church Historian James B. Allen has this to say about the First Vision:

"There is little if any evidence, however, that by the early 1830's Joseph Smith was telling the story in public. At least if he were telling it, no one seemed to consider it important enough to have recorded it at the time, and no one was criticizing him for it. Not even in his own history did Joseph Smith mention being criticized in this period for telling the story of the first vision...The fact that none of the available contemporary writings about Joseph Smith in the 1830's, none of the publications of the Church in that decade, and no contemporary journal or correspondence yet discovered mentions the story of the first vision is convincing evidence that at best it received only limited circulation in those early days."
(*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 1, No 3 [Autumn 1966])

While Joseph Smith wrote his original First Vision account in 1832, he would again recite the story in 1835 and 1838 as well, with none of these accounts being printed in official church materials until the 1842 account was produced in the [Wentworth Letters](#), meaning that early church members were completely unaware that this miraculous event ever took place.

When you think of all of the amazing events that Joseph Smith spoke of in the early years of the church including the [priesthood restoration](#), repeated visitations from Moroni, revelations about organizing the church, [restoring the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon](#), and even viewing a lost writing from John it becomes almost impossible to believe that Joseph Smith would not include what is the most important revelation in modern history: the visitation of Jesus *and* God to reveal that none of the churches of Joseph's time were true. With all of the other interactions with divine beings that Joseph claimed during the foundation of the church, how likely is it that Joseph Smith would have neglected to mention seeing Jesus and God personally in the sacred grove?

Even though Joseph Smith had revelations, scriptures, and notes dictated throughout the creation of the church, he never had this event recorded until over a decade after and there is no record that he taught it until as late as the 1840s when the first account was published to the church. While the apologetic response of many is that "Joseph didn't know how to actually write in the early days," the fact that no one close to him ever spoke of it in their missionary efforts or personal journals is just as problematic as Joseph Smith never having it dictated as he did with so many other revelations, ideas, and claims.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Contradictions of First Vision Accounts

When I took the missionary discussions, I was presented the First Vision as *the* story in the church's foundation, even as I now have learned that it was never spoken of publicly for over two decades and never even written down for twelve years following it occurring.

But more importantly, the First Vision is taught to members today as being an event with no contradictions as the church only teaches the 1838 version in correlated materials. However, when reading the four primary accounts from Joseph Smith a lot of small differences are notable that we will not go into detail in here (being bound by Satan, pillar of fire, host of angels, etc), but two very significant contradictions arise:

- In Joseph's 1832 handwritten account, he claims to have already known all other churches were not true, but in 1838 he claims the reason for prayer was to know which one was true.
- In Joseph's 1832 account, just one personage (the Lord) appears, but in later accounts he mentions that *two* personages appeared to him. In the 1835 retelling to Robert Matthews, he does not call the personages God or Jesus, but does make those titles clear in the 1838 version.

Again, we don't want to nitpick all of the changes in the First Vision accounts, but these two are incredibly significant. When looking at the changes to Joseph's First Vision accounts, it is more important to know why Joseph Smith made the changes that he did.

Timeline of Joseph Smith's Account

Joseph Smith claimed to have the First Vision in 1820 during a time of "unusual excitement on the subject of religion." The problem is that the evidence points to 1824 being the year where this religious revival takes place near Joseph Smith, and that can be summarized with these points:

- Tax records show that the Smith family moved from Palmyra to Manchester in 1822 (Walters & Marquardt 1994, pp. 1-41), and Joseph Smith notes that "Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion." That would indicate 1823-1824 as the years of excitement.
- Church denominations were steady in 1820 but grew quickly in 1824 and 1825, which is an impact of a religious revival. (Marquardt & Walters 1994, pp. 17-18). "By September 1825 the results of the revival for Palmyra had become a

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

matter of record. The Presbyterian church reported 99 admitted on examination and the Baptist had received 94 by baptism, while the Methodist circuit showed an increase of 208." (*New Light on Mormon Origins From The Palmyra (N.Y.) Revival, Walters*)

- Alexander Campbell, a Baptist minister that led the Campbellite branch that Sidney Rigdon came from, wrote this on March 1, 1824, concerning a revival in the state of New York: "Enthusiasm flourishes.... This man was regenerated when asleep, by a vision of the night. That man heard a voice in the woods, saying: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' A third saw his Savior descending to the tops of the trees at noon day." (*The Christian Baptist, Vol. 1, pp. 148-49*)
- Finally, we have a complete lack of coverage of a revival in 1820, but coverage of them occurring both four years earlier and four years later: "Another significant lack of information concerning an 1820 revival lies in the area of the religious press. The denominational magazines of that day were full of reports of revivals, some even devoting sections to them. These publications carried more than a dozen glowing reports of the revival that occurred at Palmyra in the winter of 1816-17. Likewise, the 1824-25 revival is covered in a number of reports. These magazines, however, while busily engaged in reporting revivals during the 1819 to 1821 period, contain not a single mention of any revival taking place in the Palmyra area during this time. It is unbelievable that every one of the denominations which Joseph Smith depicts as affected by an 1820 revival could have completely overlooked the event. Even the Palmyra newspaper, while reporting revivals at several places in the state, has no mention whatever of any revival in Palmyra or vicinity either in 1819 or 1820. The only reasonable explanation for this massive silence is that no revival occurred in the Palmyra area in 1820." (Walters, Dialogue, Spring 1969, p. 67)

While the timeline by itself might not seem like a huge problem, it becomes one when we look at the timeline that Joseph Smith proclaims in his history: In 1820, Joseph Smith experiences the First Vision as stated in this section, followed by the visitation from Moroni in 1823. If the First Vision happened in 1824, which would match the revivals in his area, then the visit from Moroni becomes out of place. Because of the timeline, the First Vision *has* to be placed at 1820, but the evidence does not line up for a time of unusual excitement on the subject of religion.

Evolution of First Vision Accounts

The most important change in the First Vision accounts is the evolution from one personage (the Lord) in the 1832 version to seeing both God and Jesus in the official 1838

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

retelling. This change is critical because the evolution from a trinitarian view to a plurality of gods is something we can see Joseph Smith working on outside of the First Vision, but due to this evolution the accounts have to change to be reconciled together.

If we look at the 1832 First Vision, it lines up perfectly with both the Book of Mormon as well as church materials at the time. A few examples of this are (emphasis added):

6

Evening & Morning Star, July 1832: Now what things can there be of greater moment and importance for men to know, or God to reveal, than the nature of God and ourselves the state and condition of our souls, the only way to avoid eternal misery and enjoy everlasting bliss!

The Scriptures discover not only matters of importance, but of the greatest depth and mysteriousness. There are many wonderful things in the law of God, things we may admire, but are never able to comprehend. Such are the eternal purposes and decrees of God, **the doctrine of the Trinity**, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the manner of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the souls of men, which are all things of great weight and moment for us to understand and believe that they are, and yet may be unsearchable to our reason, as to the particular manner of them.

Luke 10:22 (King James Bible): "All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."

Luke 10:22 (Joseph Smith Translation): "All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth that **the Son is the Father, and the Father is the Son**, but him to whom the Son will reveal it."

Ether 3:14 (Book of Mormon): "I am the father **and** the son."

The statement from the three witnesses: And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, **which is one God**.

The title page of the Book of Mormon: And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that **Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God**, manifesting himself unto all nations.

Now we move to the 1835 versions where Joseph is beginning to change his theology to a plurality of Gods, and we see the changes in not just the First Vision, but in the Doctrine and Covenants as well as the Book of Mormon. In the original Doctrine and Covenants,

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

the Lectures on Faith were included as the "Doctrine" section of the D&C. While those have since been removed, they gave a clear teaching on the godhead in the fifth lecture:

"There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing and supreme power over all things — by whom all things were created and made... They are the Father and the Son: The Father being a personage of spirit, glory and power: possessing all perfection and fullness: The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made and fashioned like unto man."
([Lectures on Faith](#))

7

Furthermore, in the question and answer section of this lecture, this new concept is clarified even further:

"3. Q—How many personages are there in the Godhead?

A—Two: the Father and Son (Lecture 5: 1)." ([Lectures on Faith](#))

The Lectures on Faith were written in 1834 and incorporated into the original 1835 Doctrine and Covenants under the leadership of Joseph Smith. While Joseph might not have written the exact words, he did approve of these lectures before publishing and almost certainly gave vital input and direction for these teachings as prophet of the church. If we are to believe Joseph Smith had seen Jesus and God in physical flesh as he will claim in 1838, why would he approve of a teaching here that classifies the Father being spirit while the Son is a personage of tabernacle? And furthermore, in this binitarian view, the Holy Spirit is a shared mind between God and Jesus, where Jesus is "possessing the same mind with the Father, which mind is the Holy Spirit that bears record of the Father and the Son."

This teaching in the Lectures on Faith matches almost perfectly with Joseph's 1835 account, which is given in November of 1835. In that account, Joseph Smith claims that "a personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame, which was spread all around and yet nothing consumed. Another personage soon appeared, like unto the first. He said unto me, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." He testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God. And I saw many angels in this vision." ([1835 Account, lds.org](#))

In this version, there are now two personages, and while they are not identified as God and Jesus, they appear to have one that is a spirit and one that is a physical body. It is no surprise that the Lectures on Faith were removed from official canon in 1921, as this teaching is incompatible with what Joseph Smith will teach in the later years. In addition to these changes, the Book of Mormon was also revised to remove some of the more

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

obvious references to the trinitarian view of the early church between the 1835 and 1838 accounts.

The book of First Nephi changes from a trinitarian view (original 1830 version) to a plurality of Gods (1837 version):

1830: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of God

1837: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother **of the Son** of God (11:18)

1830: Behold, the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!

1837: Behold, the Lamb of God, yea, even **the Son of** the Eternal Father! (11:21)

1830: yea, the everlasting God was judged of the world

1837: yea, **the Son of** the everlasting God was judged of the world (11:32)

1830: ...the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father

1837: ...the Lamb of God is **the Son of** the Eternal Father... (13:40)

These changes present a few problems, but three notable ones. First, why would these changes be necessary if the Book of Mormon is directly translated from the seer stone, and the words did not change in Joseph's hat until the words were written correctly as the Book of Mormon witnesses claimed? Second, why would Joseph Smith alter these verses that were preserved and translated by the power of God in order to correlate his evolving theology of the godhead? Third, and most importantly, if Joseph Smith truly saw both God and Jesus at the First Vision, why did he not pray to God for revelation when coming across verses in the Book of Mormon that are clearly trinitarian, or when revising the Bible and *strengthening* the trinitarian view as we noted above? Joseph prayed to receive answers to many other questions during this time, but never mentioned the contradiction between what he claimed to witness in the First Vision and the scriptures he was producing?

All of these examples point to a church that believed strongly in the trinity until 1835, and as such explains why in the 1832 account Joseph Smith only mentions one personage in Jesus.

Similar Contemporary Visionary Accounts

While we mentioned above that Joseph Smith never told anyone about the First Vision for at least 12 years following the supposed event, there were a lot of stories reported during this time of visionary experiences that were remarkably similar to Joseph's. When I took the missionary discussions, the First Vision was presented to me as a singular event unique to Joseph Smith and the creation of the church.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

We want to quickly detail a few of these other contemporary accounts, because it is important to note that these kinds of visionary experiences were actually *common* during this time. In fact church historian Richard Bushman wrote that he located "thirty-two pamphlets that relate visionary experiences published in the United States between 1783-1815, all but seven about visions experienced after 1776." ([Meridian Magazine, archived by BYU studies](#))

Norris Stearns, 1815: "At length, as I lay apparently upon the brink of eternal woe, seeing nothing but death before me, suddenly there came a sweet flow of the love of God to my soul, which gradually increased. At the same time, there appeared a small gleam of light in the room, above the brightness of the sun, then at his meridian, which grew brighter and brighter... At length, being in an ecstasy of joy, I turned to the other side of the bed, (whether in the body or out I cannot tell, God knoweth) there I saw two spirits, which I knew at the first sight. But if I had the tongue of an Angel I could not describe their glory, for they brought the joys of heaven with them. One was God, my Maker, almost in bodily shape like a man. His face was, as it were a flame of Fire, and his body, as it had been a Pillar and a Cloud. In looking steadfastly to discern features, could see none, but a small glimpse would appear in some other place. Below him stood Jesus Christ my Redeemer, in perfect shape like a man—His face was not ablaze, but had the countenance of fire, being bright and shining. His Father's will appeared to be his! All was condescension, peace, and love!" (Norris Stearns, *The Religious Experience Of Norris Stearns*, 1815)

Asa Wild, October 1823: "It seemed as if my mind ... was struck motionless, as well as into nothing, before the awful and glorious majesty of the Great Jehovah. He then spake ... He also told me, that every denomination of professing Christians had become extremely corrupt." ([Asa Wild, Wayne Sentinel, 1823](#))

Last, I want to highlight the account from Solomon Chamberlin, because this is a very important account. Solomon Chamberlin visited the Smith family in 1829 and told them of his own visionary experience that he had in 1816. This experience was later recorded into John Taylor's journal in 1845 as such:

"Dissatisfied with the religions he had tried, Chamberlain prayed for further guidance, and in 1816, according to his account, "the Lord revealed to me in a vision of the night an angel," whom Chamberlain asked about the right way. The angel told him that the churches were corrupt and that God would soon raise up an apostolic church. Chamberlain printed up an account of his visions and was still distributing them and looking for the apostolic church when he stopped in Palmyra." (John Taylor, *Nauvoo Journal*, Jan-Sept 1845, *BYU Studies* 23 no.3, p.45.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Referring to *A Sketch of the Experience of Solomon Chamberlin*, Lyons, New York, 1829).

Solomon's account is very similar to the one that Joseph Smith himself would record for the first time just three years after visiting with Chamberlin and hearing Chamberlin's experience in great detail. That is not to say that Joseph Smith plagiarized Chamberlin's experience, but to note that Joseph Smith had encountered these stories without question from other sources long before he first recorded or spoke of his own experience, and the similarities can not be easily dismissed.

This is a theme we are going to see in many other topics as well, where Joseph Smith introduces ideas or stories to the church that appear unique, but are actually from sources he is familiar with from his cultural milieu. If there were already over thirty similar stories to Joseph Smith's First Vision that were publicly documented *before* Joseph's was ever spoken of or recorded, why should Joseph Smith's account be given any more authority than we would give any of the other dozens of accounts?

Apologetic Responses For the First Vision

The official LDS essay covers a few of the more common apologetic responses to these issues, so we wanted to highlight them here. From the official church essay:

"Documentary evidence, however, supports Joseph Smith's statements regarding the revivals [happening in 1820]. The region where he lived became famous for its religious fervor and was unquestionably one of the hotbeds of religious revivals. Historians refer to the region as "the burned-over district" because preachers wore out the land holding camp revivals and seeking converts during the early 1800s."

We discuss above the problems with claiming any revival took place around Joseph Smith in 1820, and the evidence is very clear that any revival would have occurred in either 1816 or 1824, but not in 1820. While the church essay cites just one journal that refers to Rev. George Lane being in Joseph's area in 1820, it has been shown that Lane's assignment was in Pennsylvania from 1819-1824. While Lane was about fifteen miles from Joseph Smith for an annual conference in 1819, there is no record that he spoke at this meeting and church records actually show a *drop* in membership following this meeting. ([The Question of the Palmyra Revival, Dialogue Vol 4 No 1](#))

Obviously, the timing of the revival is important because the timing of the First Vision needs to be before 1823, but the evidence just does not line up with an 1820 revival based on contemporary records and church membership numbers. The fact that the lone

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

citation to try and put the revival in 1819-20 in the church's official essay is highly problematic further illustrates what the evidence points to.

In addition, if you look at the 1832 account in the [Joseph Smith Papers project](#), you will notice that Joseph wrote and then crossed out the sentence fragment "about that time my mother and." The footnote to this crossed out fragment in the Joseph Smith Papers project states the following:

"This canceled fragment may refer to the Presbyterian affiliation of JS's [mother](#) and three of his siblings. In 1838, JS recounted that they "were proselyted to the Presbyterian faith" in connection with the revivalism preceding his vision."

This is another hint of when the revival took place, as Lucy Mack Smith "strongly implied that she joined the Presbyterian Church after Alvin's death." Alvin Smith died in November of 1823, which would line up with the evidence surrounding the revival being in 1823/24, but again cuts against the idea that this occurred in 1820 as Joseph writes in his accounts. ([Matzko, Dialogue Volume 40, Number 4](#))

Back to the church's essay:

"The second argument frequently made regarding the accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision is that he embellished his story over time. This argument focuses on two details: the number and identity of the heavenly beings Joseph Smith stated that he saw. Joseph's First Vision accounts describe the heavenly beings with greater detail over time. The 1832 account says, "The Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord." His 1838 account states, "I saw two Personages," one of whom introduced the other as "My Beloved Son." As a result, critics have argued that Joseph Smith started out reporting to have seen one being—"the Lord"—and ended up claiming to have seen both the Father and the Son.

There are other, more consistent ways of seeing the evidence. A basic harmony in the narrative across time must be acknowledged at the outset: three of the four accounts clearly state that two personages appeared to Joseph Smith in the First Vision. The outlier is Joseph Smith's 1832 account, which can be read to refer to one or two personages. If read to refer to one heavenly being, it would likely be to the personage who forgave his sins. According to later accounts, the first divine personage told Joseph Smith to "hear" the second, Jesus Christ, who then delivered the main message, which included the message of forgiveness. Joseph Smith's 1832 account, then, may have concentrated on Jesus Christ, the bearer of forgiveness."

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

We have covered this above, but the problem isn't *only* that Joseph Smith changed the story from one personage to two - the real problem is **why** he changed the story in 1835. It's not just the First Vision that changed after 1835 - the Book of Mormon also changed to reflect the change in Joseph Smith's theology from trinitarian to a plurality of gods as we noted above.

In fact, one of the biggest problems for this argument is that not only does Joseph Smith's only handwritten account have a trinitarian view, but when Joseph Smith produced his translation of the Bible, he never changed any references of a trinitarian worldview to define God and Jesus as two separate beings. As we mentioned above, If Joseph Smith was truly visited by both God and Jesus, why did none of his productions reflect that viewpoint until after 1835?

The most consistent way of seeing the evidence is to note how Joseph Smith's worldview changed around 1835, which led to changes not just in his First Vision account, but also to the Book of Mormon and revelations given following this evolution in theology. The reason that Joseph Smith's 1832 account is an outlier is because it was the *only* account recorded before this change was made - not because there are other accounts before this year that contradict it.

One other argument that critics make with regard to Joseph's First Vision being "embellished" in further accounts is not just because of the text becoming grander and more detailed. As we will see with the priesthood restoration, the different accounts line up with times where Joseph Smith's authority was challenged.

When Joseph Smith wrote the 1832 account, he was battling with the Missouri branch of the church over his authority. There are [multiple altercations with Bishop Edward Partridge](#) leading up to the summer of 1832, and in July of 1832 Joseph Smith visits Missouri to find his leadership being challenged again by Partridge. Critics would argue that this discord leads to Joseph Smith's writing of the First Vision and also extending the priesthood restoration details.

When the 1838 account was written, Joseph Smith was coming off some of the biggest challenges to his leadership in his life. In November 1837, Joseph Smith's "Kirtland Safety Society" bank had failed, costing many early members all of their money. the very next month, the church [excommunicated 28 early members](#) including one of the three witnesses, Martin Harris. In January 1838, Smith and Sidney Rigdon fled Kirtland, and just a few months later on April 12, 1838, the co-founder of the church, [Oliver Cowdery, was excommunicated](#) after taking issue with Joseph's extramarital relationship with Fanny Alger.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The 1838 account was included as part of the new history of the church was began just fifteen days following Cowdery's excommunication, which allowed Joseph Smith to reestablish his authority after so many key members had left or were excommunicated following the collapse in Kirtland. This version is the most detailed and miraculous of Joseph's accounts, and was written much more carefully as there were [multiple versions drafted](#) and revised.

13

These are important details not just for the First Vision, but also for other areas we will cover such as the priesthood restoration, where the details we are taught today we actually retroactively inserted back into the *history and revelations years* after the events supposedly happened. While the church downplays the idea of embellishment, the actual records give us a better understanding of how the story evolved, and why Joseph Smith needed to make the changes that he did.

Conclusion

As we stated in the beginning, the First Vision was the cornerstone of my early lessons with the missionaries. They taught me the correlated 1838 account that we all know now to be the "official" version, but when you compare it with the other accounts there are some very problematic discrepancies.

One other issue that we will cover later is how the church attempted to suppress the 1832 version when it was discovered in Joseph Smith's letterbook. The church knew the 1832 was so problematic that they cut the pages out of the book, making clear that they know what a problem it causes, which is at odds with their statement in the essay that "there are other, more consistent ways of seeing the evidence."

While I would not claim the First Vision to be the biggest problem with church history, it provides a very good window into how Joseph Smith evolved his beliefs and teachings as he grew the church and incorporated other ideas and teachings around him, and how those changes led to both retrofitting earlier accounts and even the Book of Mormon.

Next section: [Overview of the Priesthood Restoration](#)

Resources

While we tried to cover the basic issues surrounding the First Vision, there is so much more to cover if you're interested in digging even deeper:

WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG

© 2023, LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—1305 CHESTER ST—CLEBURNE, TX 76033

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

- Our [annotated LDS Gospel Topics Essay on the First Vision](#), which goes into the problems in more detail along with the church's apologetics responses and how they stack up against the evidence.
- "[The Question of the Palmyra Revival](#)" from Dialogue, which covers the timing of revivals in the Palmyra area in much more detail.
- [Dan Vogel's video series on the First Vision](#). This is a three part video series from Dan Vogel covering the First Vision, including how it evolved as well as an incredible amount of sources and insight into why the details changed and the circumstances surrounding the different accounts.
- [Mormon Stories Podcast on the First Vision](#). This is a recent podcast in response to an article written by church apologist Dan Peterson, but also covers the First Vision in incredible detail along with the story of how the 1832 version was suppressed by the church.

[LDS Discussions Home Page](#)

© LDS Discussions Website. Retrieved: February 25, 2021.

<https://www.ldsdiscussions.com/firstvision-overview>.

NOTE: This post is in compliance with the Fair Use clause of the US Copyright Act of 1976 (17 U.S. Code § 107). The US Supreme Court has issued several major decisions clarifying and reaffirming the fair use doctrine since the 1980s, most recently in the 2021 decision *Google LLC v. Oracle America, Inc.*