

The firsthand accounts recorded by Joseph Smith or under his direction are as follows:

1F. [JS History, ca. Summer 1832, pp. 1–3](#). This is the earliest and most personal account, and the only one that includes Joseph Smith's own handwriting.

2F. [JS, Journal, 9–11 Nov. 1835, pp. 23–24](#). Joseph Smith described his early visionary experiences to a visitor at his home in Kirtland, Ohio, in November 1835. His description was written down, and Warren Parrish later copied it into Joseph Smith's journal.

a. Parrish later repurposed Joseph Smith's 1835–1836 journal for inclusion in a history, and he included a lightly edited copy of this same account: [JS History, 1834–1836, entry for 9 Nov. 1835, pp. 120–121](#).

J. Smith Jr. First Vision Accounts continued:

- 3F. [JS History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, pp. 2–3.](#) This best-known account of Joseph Smith’s first vision opened what was to become a six-volume history of his life. Copied by scribes into a large bound volume, this account was later canonized by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Pearl of Great Price.
- a. In the early 1840s, Howard Coray began making an edited copy of the history begun in 1838. His copy was discontinued after a hundred pages. Although some portions of this copy vary from the original, the account of Joseph Smith’s first vision is virtually identical to its source text: [JS History, 1838–ca. 1841, draft copy, pp. 2–4.](#)
- b. Around the same time, Coray made a fair copy of the pages he copied from the 1838 history: [JS History, ca. 1841, fair copy, pp. 2–4.](#)

J. Smith Jr. First Vision Accounts continued:

- 4F. [JS, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 Mar. 1842, 3:706–707.](#) This brief history of the church, often referred to as the “Wentworth letter,” was prepared at the request of a Chicago newspaper editor. The extent of Joseph Smith’s involvement in writing it is not known, but it was published with his signature. This account borrowed language from Orson Pratt’s *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (see below).
- a. An updated version of this history was prepared for a collection of essays about religions in the United States, published in 1844. The account of Joseph Smith’s vision was a word-for-word copy of the 1842 version: [JS, “Latter Day Saints,” in Israel Daniel Rupp \(ed.\), *He Pasa Ekklesia* \[The whole church\], 404–405.](#)

The early accounts written by contemporaries who heard Joseph Smith speak about the vision include the following:

- 1S. [Orson Pratt, *A\[n\] Interesting Account*, pp. 3–5](#). This is the earliest published account of Joseph Smith's first vision of Deity. It was written by Orson Pratt of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and published as a pamphlet in Scotland in 1840.
- 2S. Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* [A cry out of the wilderness], pp. 14–16 ([original German](#)) ([modern English translation](#)). Another member of the Quorum of the Twelve, Orson Hyde, published this account of Joseph Smith's earliest visions in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1842. He wrote the text in English, relying heavily on Pratt's *A[n] Interesting Account*, and translated it into German for publication.

The early accounts written by contemporaries who heard Joseph Smith speak about the vision continued:

- 3S. [Levi Richards, Journal, 11 June 1843](#). Following an 11 June 1843 public church meeting at which Joseph Smith spoke of his earliest vision, Levi Richards included an account of it in his diary.
- 4S. [Interview, JS by David Nye White, Nauvoo, IL, 29 Aug. 1843; in David Nye White, "The Prairies, Joe Smith, the Temple, the Mormons, &c.," *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, 15 Sept. 1843, \[3\]](#). In August 1843, David Nye White, editor of the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, interviewed Joseph Smith in his home as part of a two-day stop in Nauvoo, Illinois. His news article included an account of Joseph Smith's first vision.
- 5S. [Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844](#). On 24 May 1844, German immigrant and church member Alexander Neibaur visited Joseph Smith in his home and heard him relate the circumstances of his earliest visionary experience.

1F. JS History, ca. Summer 1832, pp. 1–3.

“I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and to obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in <the> attitude of calling upon the Lord <in the 16th year of my age> a pillar of fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life <behold> the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them acording to thir ungodliness and to bring to pass that which <hath> been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[o]stles behold and lo I come quickly as it [is?] written of me in the cloud <clothed> in the glory of my Father and my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the hevny vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart”

2F. JS, Journal, 9–11 Nov. 1835, pp. 23–24.

being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking upon <at> the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and **concoiding it of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involved eternal consequences**; being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove and bowed down before the Lord, under a realising sense that he had said (if the bible be true) ask and you shall receive knock and it shall be opened seek and you shall find and again, if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbradeth not; **information was what I most desired at this time**, and with a fixed determination I to obtain it, I called upon the Lord for the first time, in the place above stated or in other words I made a fruitless attempt to pray, **my toung seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me**, <I> strove again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet, and and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking, I kneeled again my mouth was opened and **my toung liberated, and I called on the Lord** in mighty prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down upon my <me> head, and filled me with joy unspeakable, **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**> **I was about 14. years old** when I received this first communication;

4F. JS, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 Mar. 1842, 3:706–707.

- I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord, while fervently engaged in supplication my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day. They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to “go not after them,” at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.

1S. Orson Pratt, *A[n] Interesting Account*, pp. 3–5 1840.

When somewhere **about fourteen or fifteen years old**, he began **seriously to reflect upon** the necessity of **being prepared for a future state of existence**: but how, or in what way, to prepare himself, was a question, as yet, undetermined in his own mind: he perceived that it was a **question of infinite importance**, and that **the salvation of his soul** depended upon a correct understanding of the same. He saw, that if he understood not the way, it would be impossible to walk in it, except by chance; and the thought of resting his hopes of eternal life upon chance, or uncertainties, was more than he could endure. . . . He, therefore, retired to a secret place, in a grove, but a short distance from his father's house, and knelt down, and began to call upon the Lord. At first, he was **severely tempted by the powers of darkness**, which endeavoured to overcome him; but he continued to seek for deliverance, until **darkness gave way from his mind**; and he was enabled to pray, in fervency of the spirit, and in faith. And, while thus pouring out his soul, anxiously desiring an answer from God, he, at length, saw **a very bright and glorious light** in the heavens above; which, at first, **seemed to be at a considerable distance**. He continued praying, while the light appeared to be gradually descending towards him; and, as it drew nearer, it increased in brightness, and magnitude, so that, **by the time that it reached the tops of the trees, the whole wilderness, for some distance around, was illuminated** in a most glorious and brilliant manner. **He expected to have seen the leaves and boughs . . .**

1S. Orson Pratt, *A[n] Interesting Account*, pp. 3–5 1840 (cont.)

. . . **of the trees consumed**, as soon as the light came in contact with them; but, perceiving that it did not produce that effect, he was encouraged with the hopes of being able to endure its presence. It continued descending, slowly, until **it rested upon the earth**, and he was enveloped in the midst of it. When it first came upon him, it produced a peculiar sensation throughout his whole system; and, immediately, his mind was caught away, from the natural objects with which he was surrounded; and he was **enwrapped in a heavenly vision**, and **saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other** in their features or likeness. He was **informed, that his sins were forgiven**. He was also informed upon the subjects, which had for some time previously agitated his mind, viz.—that **all the religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines**; and, consequently, that none of them was acknowledged of God, as his church and kingdom. And he was **expressly commanded, to go not after them**; and he received a promise that the true doctrine—the fulness of the gospel, should, at some future time, be made known to him; after which, the vision withdrew, leaving his mind in a state of calmness and peace, indescribable.

2S. Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* [A cry out of the wilderness], pp. 14–16 (original German) (modern English translation), 1842.

After he had sufficiently convinced himself to his own satisfaction that darkness covered the earth and gross darkness [covered] the nations, **the hope of ever finding a sect or denomination that was in possession of unadulterated truth left him.**

Consequently he began in an attitude of faith his own investigation of the word of God [feeling that it was] the best way to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. He had not proceeded very far in this laudable endeavor when his eyes fell upon the following verse of St. James [1:5]: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” He **considered this scripture an authorization** for him **to solemnly call upon his creator to present his needs before him** with the certain expectation of some success. **And so he began to pour out to the Lord with fervent determination the earnest desires of his soul. On one occasion, he went to a small grove of trees** near his father’s home and **knelt down before God in solemn prayer. The adversary then made several strenuous efforts to cool his ardent soul. He filled his mind with doubts and brought to mind all manner of inappropriate images** to prevent him from obtaining the object of his endeavors; but the overflowing mercy of God came to buoy him up and gave new impetus to his failing strength. However, the dark cloud soon parted and light and peace filled his frightened heart. Once again he called upon the Lord with faith and fervency of spirit.

2S. Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* [A cry out of the wilderness], pp. 14–16 ([original German](#)) ([modern English translation](#)), 1842 (cont.)

At this sacred moment, **the natural world around him was excluded from his view**, so that he would be open to the presentation of heavenly and spiritual things. **Two glorious heavenly personages stood before him, resembling each other exactly** in features and stature. **They told him that his prayers had been answered** and that the Lord had decided to grant him a special blessing. He was also **told that he should not join any of the religious sects or denominations, because all of them erred in doctrine and none was recognized by God as his church and kingdom**. He was further commanded, to wait patiently until some future time, when the true doctrine of Christ and the complete truth of the gospel would be revealed to him. The vision closed and peace and calm filled his mind.

3S. [Levi Richards, Journal, 11 June 1843](#). Following an 11 June 1843 public church meeting at which Joseph Smith spoke of his earliest vision, Levi Richards included an account of it in his diary.

at 6 AM. heard Eld. G[eorg]e J Adam Adams upon the book of Mormon proved from the 24,th 28th & 29th of Isaiah that the everlasting covenant set which was set upon by Christ & the apostles had been broken .

Pres. J. Smith bore testimony to the same— saying that **when he was a youth he began to think about these these things** but could not find out which of all the sects were right— he went into the grove & **enquired of the Lord which of all the sects were right—re received for answer that none of them were right, that they were all wrong,** & that **the Everlasting covenan[n]t was broken** = he said he understood the fulness of the Gospel from beginning to end— & could Teach it & also the order of the priesthood in all its ramification s = **Earth & hell had opposed him & tried to destroy him— but they had not done it** = & they <never would>

4S. Interview, JS by David Nye White, Nauvoo, IL, 29 Aug. 1843;
in David Nye White, “The Prairies, Joe Smith, the Temple, the
Mormons, &c.,” *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, 15 Sept. 1843, [3].

- “[...] The Lord does reveal himself to me. I know it. He revealed himself to me first when I was about fourteen years old, a mere boy. I will tell you about it. There was a reformation among the different religious denominations in the neighborhood where I lived, and I became serious, and **was desirous to know what Church to join.** While thinking of this matter, I opened the Testament promiscuously on these words, in James, ‘Ask of the Lord who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not.’ I just determined I’d ask him. **I immediately went out into the woods where my father had a clearing, and went to the stump where I had stuck my axe when I had quit work, and I kneeled down, and prayed,** saying, ‘O Lord, what Church shall I join.’ **Directly I saw a light, and then a glorious personage in the light, and then another personage,** and the first personage said to the second, “Behold my beloved Son, hear him.” **I then, addressed this second person,** saying, “O Lord, **what Church shall I join.**” He replied, “**don’t join any of them, they are all corrupt.**” **The vision then vanished,** and when I come to myself, I was sprawling on my back; and it was sometime before my strength returned. When I went home and told the people that I had a revelation, and that all the churches were corrupt, they persecuted me, and they have persecuted me ever since. They thought to put me down, but they hav’nt succeeded, and they can’t do it. **When I have proved that I am right, and get all the world subdued under me, I think I shall deserve something. [...]**”

5S. Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844.

24 called at Br J = Smet Mr Bonnie = Br Joseph told us the first call he had a Revival Meeting his Mother & Br & Sister got Religion, he wanted to get Religion too wanted to feel & shout like the Rest but could feel nothing, opened his Bible the first Passage that struck him was if any man lack Wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all Men liberality & upbraided not went into the Wood to pray knelt himself down his **tongue was closet cleaved to his roof**— could utter not a word, felt easier after a while = **saw a fire towards heaven came near & nearer saw a personage in the fire light complexion blue eyes** a piece of white cloth drawn over his shoulders his right arm bare **after a while** other person came to the side of the first Mr Smith then **asked must I join the Methodist Church = No = they are not my People, they all have gone astray there is none that doeth good** no not one, but **this is my Beloved son harken ye him**, the fire drew nigher Rested upon the tree enveloped him *[illegible]* comforted Endeavoured to arise but felt uncomen feeble = got into the house told the Methodist priest, said this was not a age for God to Reveal himself in Vision Revelation has \diamond ceased with the New Testament

ELEMENTS OF FIRST VISION ACCOUNTS

Vision Identity	Purpose		Personages Present			Brilliant Light		Evil Expressed via			Decision to Petition in Grove		Age
	Forgiveness	Which Church	God the Father	Jesus Christ	Angels	Confor-ting	Appre-hensive	Inapropriate Thoughts	Muted Voice	Destructive Power	Immediately after Reading James 1:5	After Much Reflection	
1F	X			X		X							16
2F	?	X	?	?	X	X			X				14
3F		X	X	X		X			X	X		X	14
4F		X	?	?		X						X	
1S	?	X	?	?			X	?	?			?	14 or 15
2S		X	?	?				X				X	
3S		X											
4S		X	X	X		?					X		14
5S		X	X	X		?			X				

Why all this fuss about the inconsistencies in the first vision?

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

Book of Mormon title page => Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, And also of the Lamanites.

Written to the Lamanites which are a remnant of the house of Israel, And also to Jew and Gentile.

Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, And that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.

And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that [Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God](#), manifesting Himself unto all nations.

RLDS Mosiah 9:10 (LDS Mosiah 17:7-10) And he said unto him: "Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee and thou art worthy of death,

11 For thou hast said that **God Himself** should come down among the children of men;

12 And now **for this cause** thou shalt be put to death, unless thou wilt recall all the words which thou hast spoken evil concerning me and my people."

13 Now Abinadi saith unto him: "I say unto you, **I will not recall the words which I have spoken** unto you concerning this people, **for they are true**;

14 And that ye may know of their surety, I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands,

15 yea, and I will suffer, even until death; And I will not recall my words, And they shall **stand as a testimony against you**;

16 And if ye slay me, ye will shed innocent blood, And this shall also stand as a testimony against you **at the last day**."

RCE (matches text of original 1830 BoM) 1 Nephi 3:54 And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open and an angel came down and stood before me; And he saith unto me: "Nephi, what beholdest thou?"

55 And I saith unto him: "A virgin most beautiful and fair above all other virgins."

58 And he said unto me: "Behold, the virgin which thou seest is **the mother of God**, after the manner of the flesh."

59 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit;

60 And after that she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time, the angel spake unto me, saying: "Look!"

61 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a Child in her arms;

62 And the angel said unto me: "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, **even the Eternal Father!**

LDS 1 Nephi 11:14 And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou?

15 And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins.

18 And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is **the mother of the Son of God**, after the manner of the flesh.

19 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.

21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, **even the Son of the Eternal Father!** Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?