

SERMON BY PRESIDENT W. W. BLAIR,

At Lamoni, Iowa, November 27, 1892.

Subject, A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER.

(Concluded from last number.)

“AND he further stated, the fullness of the Gentiles was soon to come in. [Jesus declared that in the latter days wondrous things were to be manifest when the times of the Gentiles were to be fulfilled, and this angel reminded the young man of what was to transpire, saying that the times of the Gentiles were about to be fulfilled, also of the ushering in of the millennial reign]. Again, he told me that when I got those plates of which he had spoken—for the time that they should be obtained was not then fulfilled—I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly, that I knew the place again when I visited it.

“After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so, until the room was again left dark, except just around him, when instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended up till he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light made its appearance.

“I lay musing on the singularity of the scene, and marveling greatly at what had been told to me by this extraordinary messenger; when, in the midst of my meditation, I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get

lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside. He commenced, and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit, without the least variation; having done which, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things, he again ascended as he had done before.

“By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard: but what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before, adding a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me, in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family, to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying, that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God; and must not be influenced by any other motive but that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them. After this third visit he again ascended up into heaven as before, and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced; when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me the third time, the cock crew, and I found that day was approaching, so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.

"I shortly after arose from my bed, and, as usual, went to the necessary labors of the day; but in attempting to labor as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as rendered me entirely unable. My father, who was laboring along with me, discovered something to be wrong with me, and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house; but, in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me and I fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything. The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name: I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received.

"I obeyed; I returned back to my father in the field and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there."

After relating the above, Joseph gives a description of the place where he found the plates, which was near the town of Manchester, Ontario county, New York. These are wonderful claims, and very marvelous; and with some almost past belief, for they are contrary to what we have been taught in past days; for we have been taught that there were to be no angel ministrations after the days of the apostles; that the day of the manifestations of God's power to man was past; that it ceased in the days of the apostles and was never to be restored again.

But persons who have that idea mistake greatly as to God's methods of doing. We see the manifestations of God's work with the ancients, and with John on the Isle of Patmos. All along those years, whenever the people were living in righteousness before God, angels manifested themselves, and sometimes to the humblest ones. Angels appeared anciently and revealed matters of the highest importance for man to know. Even in the second century this was the case, for it is recorded of Justin Martyr, who had been one of the celebrated philosophers of Greece, and who had heard the gospel of Christ, that his heart was touched with it, and he carried the matter to God; and a personage met him as he was meditating in the grove and instructed him in regard to the gospel of Jesus Christ; and that personage was said to be an angel of God; and Justin Martyr became one of the greatest gospel advocates of his day, or of any time after the apostles.

Now I desire to show that God's work will not be carried on in these latter times without angelic administrations, for this is made plain in Holy Writ, as plain as language can make it. Prior to the second advent of Christ angels will appear to the sons of men to bless them with knowledge, wisdom, and everything necessary to prepare them for that most wonderful event. We will present evidence to you, but first of all we will notice some peculiarities of angels. You know the old pagan idea obtained in the world that angels have wings; that angels in outward appearance are like womankind instead of mankind; and that some angels are like little babies. Have not you seen them in paintings—beautiful paintings, executed by masterful minds and exhibiting wonderful, artistic skill and wonderful power in the art of painting? Have you not seen them? They are stately looking; in the form of women; with long hair down their backs

and a ponderous pair of wings—great white wings—coming down to their feet! Have you not seen them? I know you have. And then you have seen little baby angels, to whom they did not give any legs, but gave them very large heads and very small wings; a wonderful class of angels, truly. But that is the conception and creation of the pagan world, and has been followed by the so-called Christian world, and this has had the effect of fastening upon the minds of the people very erroneous ideas as to what a heavenly angel is. I may tell you, plainly, that I believe that angels, proper, are beings who have once dwelt on this planet, and have been either translated or resurrected, and have entered into those higher conditions of knowledge, and wisdom, and power, and glory—conditions that are far superior to that obtained in mortal life, and that they have always appeared in the form of men.

I do not say that women are not angels, too. I am not going to dispute that, for they are acknowledged to be angels in this world—at times. But I want to give you a description of Bible angels; we are discussing this matter in the light of Bible truths, and not in the mists of the creeds and traditions of men. I discover my time is passing, and I must be brief on this branch of my subject. Angels appeared unto Abraham; and you know Paul says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Abraham and Sarah did that, and I will read you the account of it:—

"And the Lord appeared unto him [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said."

And good Sarah made cakes after the olden style, and Abraham killed a calf, tender and good, and dinner was prepared for those three individuals. These were three angels of God, and Abraham thought (as it was said) that they were men. Abraham supposed that they were men, and he treated them after the customs and hospitality of the age in those ancient countries. I do not presume that their hair was extremely long, and I am right sure that they did not have great white wings; these would have betrayed them; Abraham would have known at once that they were angels. But he supposed they were men. Why? Simply because they appeared as men. But he learned afterwards that they were angels of God. These were finally instrumental in overthrowing the cities of the plains, bringing the wrath of God upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim.

I will invite your attention to another example (and there are scores of such examples in this book), and you will find it in the thirteenth chapter of Judges:—

"And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and barest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore, beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: for, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor

shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: but he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Then Manoah entreated the Lord, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her. And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him? And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe. And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it

unto the Lord. For Manoah knew not that he was an *angel* of the Lord. And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honor? And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground."

You now discover that the above-mentioned angel had wondrous knowledge, marvelous power, and was in his appearance like unto a man. There were no wings in that case.

And now we will see what is said by Daniel, the prophet of God, in his tenth chapter:—

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz; his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude." Who was this man that appeared in this glorious form?

He had said before, "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God." He had come to answer Daniel's supplication. You will discover in these instances of angels appearing unto men (and there are many more cases in the Bible) that they had power to appear in the form of men traveling on the earth, as in the case to Abraham, and to Manoaah and his wife; and also to appear surrounded with effulgent glory as in the case to Daniel. But Daniel was prepared and strengthened to stand in the presence of the angel all radiant with the glory of God. And what a wondrous personage this was! and yet he was in the form of a man.

Did the young Seer, Joseph Smith when he made the claim, the marvelous claim that he had seen an angel of God, did he claim that the angel was in the form of such angels as appeared in ancient times or did he tell a story about seeing an angel in the form of a woman with long hair down her back, and that he heard the beat of angel's wings? O, no! His claim is in harmony with the Bible account of angels, so far as their appearance is concerned. It is decidedly so, and therefore it is not in harmony with the theories of the world in this nineteenth century, neither with that of many preceding centuries. What a remarkable coincidence this is! The world has had numerous painters, and sculptors, and others, yes, preachers, too, that were living under the belief that angels had these wondrous wings, and in their flights of pulpit oratory have so described the idea set forth in the nineteenth century in regard to what angels are with regard to form. But the young man, Joseph, claims that the Lord spoke to him; that angels appeared to him; and his claim as to their appearance and form is in exact harmony with God's word, and is squarely against the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent both in the centuries past and in

the present one. The wisdom of the wise perishes by comparison, and the understanding of the prudent is hid by comparison in these things.

Joseph, mark you, makes the wonderful claim; and we remind you again that the claim of the founder of this latter-day work must be a very notable one in regard to the "marvelous work" that was to come forth in these times. If it was not it would not fill the prophetic pattern. It must be strange, it must be out of the ordinary course of things, or it would not fulfill the description conveyed in God's good book.

"But," says one, "where is the evidence that there are to be angel manifestations in these latter days?" If God is no respecter of persons, as the word declares, and deals with mankind in these latter times, in the building up of his church and kingdom, as he did in ancient times, then angels will minister unto men in these days. How was it before John the Baptist was born, and before Jesus was born? Angels appeared and announced wonderful things that were soon coming to pass. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea the angel of the Lord appeared unto the shepherds and told them that the Savior was born in Bethlehem that night, and other angels came and with their heavenly symphony confirmed the statement to the humble shepherds. Now, reasoning by analogy or by comparison, it evident that if God would act like himself, as he sent angels in ancient times to minister to his people, he must likewise send them in these latter times to minister to his children. This is in keeping with the teachings of the good book. And when we come to the prophetic testimony we find that God will send angels; that they will minister among the people; and that they will gather out the wicked from his kingdom. "Yes," says one, "I have read that, I know that is in the Bible; but I never saw it in that light." It is written in the

New Testament that in the last days God will send his angels and they shall gather his elect from the four quarters of the earth, and his angels are to minister in the midst of his people, and they shall also gather the wicked out of his kingdom just prior to his second advent; and, as the Inspired Translation says, "they shall cast them out into the world."

In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, commencing at the thirty-sixth verse, we read:—

"Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Can there be found within the lids of the New Testament, in the sayings of Jesus Christ, anything that is more direct and full than is that text, that prior to the end of the world, prior to the second advent, Christ will send forth his angels and will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and do iniquity?

There is one thing that the Latter Day Saints should understand; namely, that in the church there will be more or less iniquity until the final sifting time comes, therefore we need not look to see all sinless and holy who profess to be in God's kingdom; for you will never see that until Jesus comes and gathers out the wicked ones.

But further, in regard to the angels ministering in the latter times; there is an abundance of testimony in the Scriptures pointing to this fact, which is unquestionable, something that we may not deny and which we cannot explain away, that ministering angels will be sent to minister in the affairs of Christ's kingdom. We will now give you a few passages from the Revelation of St. John, and then we must close for want of time, not for want of material. I now come to Revelation chapter 14. John had been blest with many visions, and promises, and statements, in all the preceding chapters; and in this fourteenth chapter he says:—

"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, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

You will remember what I read in the history of Joseph; namely, that this Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the gospel, and that it was revealed to him by the angel Moroni. Now the text that I have read shows the probability of his claim being correct. He declares that the angel did appear to him; that the angel gave him the book of plates with instructions concerning the gospel's being preached in all its fullness; and here is the Bible testimony that in the last days, just prior to the second advent of Christ, just prior to God's hour of judgment, an angel would come from heaven and reveal the gospel to be preached unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people! Yes, the claim and the promise fit together like the key in the lock of a door. The key is adapted to lock or unlock the door and only the right key will do it. So with the claim

made by this young man, Joseph Smith, as to the restoration of the gospel by an angel of God in fulfillment of the prediction revealed to John. It should be restored in that manner, in God's own way, in the last days, just prior to the overthrow of Babylon and the second advent of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We may ask Bible believers,—and countless thousands profess to believe the Bible,—Do you believe the Revelation of St. John? Do you believe that an angel of God was to reveal the gospel in the last days? That may come in contact with old theories, for many have been taught that the gospel has always been upon the earth and was to remain on the earth until the world was evangelized. But do you now believe that the angel of God, in the last days, just prior to God's judgment, just prior to the overthrow of Babylon, just prior to the second advent of Christ, would restore the gospel again to be preached to all the world? There are some who believe it, thank God. We praise him that there are so many believing it, and millions and tens of millions more would believe it if it could reach them.

Joseph declares that God revealed this gospel as early as 1827, and the Bible says that in these latter times God will reveal the gospel by an angel from heaven. What agreement! what harmony! what consistency! The Bible predicts it, and the young seer claims its fulfillment. Can you not see that this is a remarkable coincidence? Joseph was not a Bible scholar, yet he had an understanding of this Bible promise far superior to the learned ministers of his time. He is a fit witness for the work of God. He answers to this prophetic description as is claimed for him. The claim is not made that by human wisdom his knowledge is superior to the religious world at large in respect to Bible truths, but by the inspiration of the Almighty. There is the full statement of Holy Writ that God, in

the last days, will send the gospel to the earth by the hand of an angel, and that it will be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, upon the earth; and here is an obscure boy, raised in the backwoods of New York and having but little understanding of Bible truths, who comes forward and makes a claim that is just in harmony with Scripture, in all its parts, that an angel restored the gospel unto him. Marvelous! wonderful! and very blessed if true, which we claim it is.

There is just another passage, and then I must close, and that you will find in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation of St. John:—

“And after these things I saw another angel came down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.”

This angel came from heaven and therefore must be a heavenly one; he was to minister upon earth to the children of men in great power, and was to lighten the earth with his glory. Where in the history of the world since Christ, has anything occurred to the sons of men, save in the case of Joseph the seer, where an angel of God appeared having great power, and that blessed the earth with the light of his glory? Where has an instance like it occurred in any of the religious churches? Has anything like it taken place in the Russo-Greek church? Has there anything like this taken place in the Catholic Church? in the Lutheran Church? in the Church of England, or in any Protestant church?

No; they do not claim it. But who has claimed manifestations like this that would answer to this prophetic description? Joseph Smith, the young seer; he claimed to receive angelic ministrations, not only from Moroni, but from various other angels in the founding and building up of the church of the living God.

Jesus said that angels would administer in the latter times; John said that an

angel would deliver the gospel in the latter times, and that, as we have just read, one would "come down from heaven, having great power" and would enlighten the earth with his glory. And now what are we going to do about these things? Will we believe them? God's precious word makes these promises.

We claim that Joseph, having come at the right time, and having made claims that are in harmony with the promises of the Bible, the probabilities are strong that his work was indeed ordained of God.

Now what other evidences have we to sustain his claim? He organized the church after the ancient pattern in its offices, ordinances, and ceremonies. And not only were these in harmony with the ancient patterns, but the promises he made concerning the Holy Spirit were in harmony with the promises made by God's servants eighteen hundred years ago. Joseph said that those who receive this gospel in its fullness shall have the testimony of God and a knowledge of God and of angels. And if the Saints in this age had not received such manifestations as they did in ancient times, then they would have proved his promise to be false. But how has it been with numbers in this congregation, some of whom have come from France, some from England, and others from the different nations of the earth—are you witnesses for Jesus Christ since you received this

gospel? Have you received the divine confirmation? Do you know, in your own experience, that God confirms this work begun by Joseph the Seer? I presume there are more than a hundred in this house who, if I were to call on them, would say, Yes; I have embraced the work brought forth by Joseph Smith—the gospel brought to him by the angel of God—and have received the testimony of its truth by the gift of visions, or by the gift of tongues, or by the interpretation of tongues, by prophecy, or other of the various manifestations of the Spirit. And this has been the case not only in this country, but in all the different parts of the world where this gospel has been preached. Thousands have received evidences confirmatory of the truth of this "marvelous work and a wonder" brought forth, under God, by Joseph the Seer. It had to be, in order to fulfill the prophetic description given in the Old and New Testaments. We prove it by analogy; we prove it by prophecy; and we prove it likewise by living men and women that this work is divine; that the church is not a man-made church; that it did not rise out of mere coincidences nor from persecution, nor anything of the kind as did the Baptist Church in the case of Roger Williams. But it rose by revelation, by the angels of God, by the testimony of God's Spirit, and is being built up in harmony with the revelations of God.—*Reported by Bro. E. Stafford.*