

Lucy Mack Smith Speaks to the Nauvoo Saints

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From the moment Joseph Smith declared his revelation of a visiting angel and the existence of the golden plates, the character of the Smith family has been important. Were the Smiths the God-fearing and honest folk that they and most traditional Latter-day Saint accounts said they were? Or were family members the idle and unstable people that D. P. Hurlbut's Palmyra affidavits made them out to be? First appearing in Eber B. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, these affidavits have since become a staple used to disparage the religion's first years.¹

This issue's Historians' Corner adds another piece of evidence. A key personality in question is Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Smith's mother. Like many nineteenth-century American women, she deeply influenced her children, nine of whom lived to adulthood. But her influence was stronger than that of many women because in the Smith household her husband, Joseph Smith, Sr., usually acceded to her domestic industry and initiative. What kind of woman was she? What values did she teach her children?

Fortunately she left behind several historical records that are biographically revealing, including an October 1845 Nauvoo general conference talk delivered in her seventieth year. In this sermon, Lucy speaks of her basic religious feelings. She encourages honesty, applauds youthful Bible study and obedience, and affirms general Christian beliefs. She is quick to teach, even moralize.

But there is more. The sermon shows Lucy's consistency. In her advanced years, Mother Smith, as she was called, continued to tell the same story about the origins of Mormonism that she had told earlier. For instance, in her Nauvoo speech she confirms Martin Harris's major role during the first years of the Restoration and speaks tellingly of the poverty of the Smith family, who despite their lack of means, struggled to get the Book of Mormon translated and published. The document, however, does more than help readers understand its author. It is important for history's sake, clarifying and giving texture to a variety of issues, including Mormonism's first missionary effort. Lucy's accounts of this preaching, performed by her son Samuel, places a woman, Rhoda Young Green, in an unfamiliar leading role in the chain of events that helped bring about the conversion and baptism of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. Moreover, she gives important and often poignant detail about the Missouri turmoil of 1837–38. Here Lucy remembers herself busy with good works,

ministering to twenty or thirty who were sick. She also speaks of the moment when she believed Missourians were carrying her son to his death (as she reached for his hand, he said, “God bless you my poor mother”) and of her own terrible suffering during the Church’s retreat from the state.

During her lifetime, the Nauvoo newspaper *Times and Seasons* provided a sketchy synopsis of her speech, and that account was later republished in the *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.² These early reports drew on the original minutes of the conference, hastily penned by William Clayton, who without shorthand skills did his best to catch Lucy’s words. These original minutes, now included in the General Church Minutes collection, are printed below for the first time. They have not been altered except for bracketed editorial insertions.

The Clayton transcript has been enlarged by references to two other sources of the speech, which were apparently made shortly after the general conference. Both of these—one written in an anonymous hand, the other by Curtis E. Boltions³—likely relied on the Clayton manuscript but were more polished and complete. Where the anonymous and Bolton versions provide significant additional phrasing, these words are placed within braces { } and angle brackets < > respectively. The Nauvoo General Church Minutes and the two other transcripts of the Smith address are housed in the Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

The Lucy Mack Smith sermon was given in the Nauvoo Temple, which Church leaders had opened for congregational worship several days before the conference. Elder Joseph Young and President Brigham Young spoke at the morning session, after which Mother Smith requested the podium and began her remarks.

LUCY MACK SMITH SPEAKS TO THE NAUVOO SAINTS

Well[,] bro[thers] & Sis[ters] I have been looking round upon this con[gregation]. I have long been waiting for the time when the Lo[rd] would give me strength to look upon you & my children. [I] feel solemn. [I] Want every one to look into their hearts to see what they have come to this place for Whether [they have come] to follow Ch[ri]st through evil & good report or for any other cause. I want to have time to talk about my husband[,] [and my sons] Hyrum [and] Joseph and want to give you all my advice. B[righam] Y[oung] has done the errand. He has fixed it completely.⁴ For a long time I have [been] wanting to ask whether you were willing to receive stolen goods or not. <I want to know if you believe in such things> There is one thing I want to speak off—There is may be 2000, here

that never was acquainted with Mr Smith or my family. I raised 11 children, 7 boys, we raised them in the fear of God.⁵ When they were 2 or 3 year[s] old {I told them I wanted} that they may [would] love God with all their hearts <I told them to do good> Wants all you to do the same.⁶ God gives us our children & we are accountable. In the fear of God I warn you I want you to take your little children & teach them in the fear of God. [I] Want you to teach them about Joseph in Egypt and such things and when they are 4 yr. old they willlove to read their bible. I presume there never were a family that were so obedient as mine. <I did not have to speak to them only once—Set your children to work & try to bring them up to your comfort> don't let them play out of doors.⁷ If I cant talk to a few 1000s how can I meet millions and talk in celestial glory [?].⁸ [I] Want the young men to remember that I love children, young folks and every body. [I] Want them to be obedient to their parents and do every thing just right. [I want them to] <be good & kind and do in secret as you would do in the presence of Millions> Brothers & sisters I can call you bro[ther]s sisters children If you consider me a mother in Israel I want you to say so <Presid[ent]. B[righam] Young arose & said—all who consider Mother Smith as a Mother in Israel signify it by saying yea (loud shouts of Yes)> my feelings has been hurt by hearing them say[,] [“]Told mother Smith. there goes old Mother Smith.[”] had her feelings hurt a great deal. [I] Want to speak about the dead. 18 years ago last 2[2]⁹ September that J[oseph] took the plates out of the earth. 18 years last Monday since the J[oseph]. S[mith] the prophet of the Lord got the plates from the earth.¹⁰ {It was in a morning my son} J[oseph]. came to me and told me he had taken those plates out of the ground. <and he said [“]go> Tell all three f them¹¹ {The} (Harris[’s]) that I have got them I want Martin to assist me and {I want} [to] take some of the characters off to send them to N[ew]. Y[ork].[”]¹² I am in my 70[th] year—{it is} 18 years since J[oseph] began to receive this gospel {of Glad tidings to all people} and preach it. I have got [it] all in a history & I want this people to be so good {and so kind} as to get it printed before they go to C[alifornia].¹³ Martin Harris was the first person that helped Joseph about this work to get the book of Mormon printed[,] for the gospel Could not be preached until this was done.¹⁴ <here was only my family and Martin Harris to do anything about it> Just as soon as they commenced the devil began to war {roar} <and attempt to destroy them>. But a little while before we were turned out of house & home.¹⁵ Joseph went to P[ennsylvania]. Joseph, Hyrum and Samuel had to go and work in the woods <all day & then at night

haul[ing] the wood> & they had to go to get means to help Joseph publish the book. 2 of them guarded the house. This was the way it commenced and now see what a congregation is here. You talk about going to Cal[ifornia]. how easy this can be done. My family could go to work and get means to print the B[ook] of M[ormon]. You need not be to work and get means to print the B[ook] of M[ormon]. You need not be discouraged you cant get wagons & every thing else. {As Brigham says you must be honest} But if you are not honest you wont get there and if you feel cross you will have trouble. My family made out to get the Book pr[inted]. the Angels <of the Lord> told them what to do. They began 18 years last Monday. {Thousands have come into the church since then} [I] Dont suppose that 1/3 of this people every saw or knew any thing of Joseph H[yrum] S[amuel],¹⁶ {William} or [the rest of] my family. Now they are all gone and none left but poor Wm. and he is gone I don't know where.¹⁷ I have 3 daughters¹⁸ at home they have never had any thing [from tithing] but worked for the church. After the Book was printed Samuel took some of them to sell. He went into bro. Greens. <a Methodist preacher.>¹⁹ [Samuel] had been turned out of doors 3 times. Samuel asked him[,] ["wont you buy a book?"] He²⁰ asked[,] ["what it is?"]. Samuel said[,] ["it is a B[ook] of M[ormon]. that my brother has translated <from plates out of the ground>."] She²¹ asked her husband but he would not buy. Sam[ue]ll left one till he returned. He had to sell them to buy us victuals. I want to speak of this that you may not complain of hard times. {He went into a [another] house [in the neighborhood] and asked to have a breakfast & he would give a book for it} [Later] He again went to Mr Greens²² he was not at home. She [Mrs. Green] said he must take the book again. Samuel took the book & looked & looked—said {She afterward told me} she never saw a man look so—she [k]new he had the sp[ir]it of God. He said he could not take the book. <the Spirit forbids me taking this book> She fell on the floor & asked him to pray with her. She read & became a Mormon & thus the work began <& then it spread like a mustard seed>—After the church began to grow we were driven again we had to go from place to place to Kirtland <then> to Mo. W[illia]m was taken sick—Sam[ue]ll's wife²³ and others [too] and we had 20 or 30 sick to take care off during the mobbing. <I felt strong in health> [I] Could take care of 20 sick then better than sit on my chair now. Whilst W[illia]m. was sick he had a Vision & saw the mob come in. He said he saw them come thousands & thousands and says he <Mother> {You will be driven and says} ["if I die I want you to take care of my wife <I want you to carry my corp[se] wherever

you go["]—The first day William was able to Walk as far as the door> {the mob came} When the mob came in 10 of them into my house {room} after they had taken Joseph & Hyrum {into their camp} there was thousands of them hollowing & screaming in my hearing how do you think I feel [felt][?] Have you any feelings for me[?]. Whilst they were in the camp I could not go to see them {and now my children are in the grave} 10 men came in & said they wanted {we have come in} to kill the heads of the family. Says I[,] ["do you want to kill me.["] They said ["yes.["] Then says I[,] ["do it quick like men for I would then be happy.["] They then said ["G-d damn it these Mor-mons would as soon die as live.["] They then tried Joseph & Hyrum & sentenced them to be shot in 15 minutes. A man came in and said[,] ["<Mother Smith> if you ever want to see Mr Smith again you must go now for he is going to be shot in Jackson Co.["] I went to the wagon they men lift up their swords and swore I should not see them. {He took me by the hand & it was as much as we could do to get thru the crowd to the waggon} I finally got to the wagon & put up my hand & he [Joseph] took hold of it & kissed it. Says I ["now Joseph speak once more.["] Says he now ["God bless you my poor mother.["] They were taken away They were in bands and irons. All this time my <my son> W[illia]m & wife²⁴ were sick. Samuels wife was sick and some others & I had them all to take care off. After that we had to move. Joseph went to City of Washington²⁵ It rained 3 days as hard as it could rain but we had to travel & nothing to shelter us We walked 6 miles <in the [river] bottom> my cloth[e]s was wet {so high up I could scarcely walk} and when we got to the quincy river²⁶ it snow[d] {it rained} & hailed and was cold. We laid down on the <cold> snow <& a blanket over us> and took off our wet stockings & did the best we could. In the morning <the cover [over us] was frozen stiff> we could not make a fire for the snow, Joseph then went to the City of W[ashington]. He had a rev[elation]. to importune at the Governors feet & the prest. feet for the Lord said if they would not heed them he would vex the nation.²⁷ After he returned he went to preaching down between Mr. Durfees [and] the Mansion house He told the brethren & sis[ters] that he had done all he could for them, says he ["they are determined we shall not have justice <while we stay in Nauvoo>["] But says he ["keep good courage You never shall suffer for bread as you have done before.["] says he ["all these cases is a record on earth & what is recorded here is a record in heavenly.["] Now says he ["I am a going to lay this case of their taking away our property or I am a going to take it up to the highest court in heaven.["] he said so 3 times—Never did I think he was going to leave us so soon

to take this case to heaven. He never could get justice till he took it there. {The Lord has got even the Marshall there²⁸} I feel now just exactly that the Lord has got even the Smiths there—They know all our sufferings and dont you think our case is being tried[?] I think they will do more for us there than they could if they were here. I feel if there was no evil here [—] no talking [—] all would go right <I feel that if every soul would stay at home they would be blessed> I feel that the Lo[rd] is vexing the Nation a little here & there. And I feel that the Lo[rd] will let brother Brigham take the people away.²⁹ I dont know that I shall go [West] but if W[illia]m and the rest of the family go I shall go. I feel to bless you all <I pray that the Lord may bless the heads of the Church> Brother Brigham and all. <when I go to another world I want to meet you all> Here lays my dead my husband and children. I want to lay my bones so that in the res[ur-ec-tion]. I can rise with my husband & children. If so be that my children go <And I would to God all my children would go> with you but they will not go without me and if I go I want to have my bones fetch[ed] back to be laid with my husband & children.³⁰

1. Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or a Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, Ohio: The Author, 1834). For recent evaluations of Hurlbut, see Richard L. Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10 (Spring 1970): 283–314; and Marvin S. Hill, review of Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, in *BYU Studies* 30 (Fall 1990): 70–74.

2. *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 1, 1845): 1013–14; Joseph Smith, Jr., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1952), 7:470–72; hereafter cited as *HC*.

3. Curtis E. Bolton Journal, October 1845, Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives. Wrote Bolton: "At the October Conference Br. B. Young called upon me to take the minutes and prepare them for the press which I did."

4. Lucy Smith uses this nineteenth-century idiom to applaud Brigham Young's earlier comments, which roundly denounced the dishonesty of a few Nauvoo Church members who had taken non-Mormon property. Such action, said Brigham, was "mortifying to him & every one who desire to be a true servant of God." Brigham's preaching struck an obvious resonance with Lucy and may have been one of the reasons prompting her to address the Saints during the conference session.

5. Of her eleven children, nine grew to adulthood; one was stillborn, and another died in infancy.

6. Occasionally the obviously rushed Clayton stops recording the speech in the first person to give an abbreviated summary of her sentiment.

7. Apparently Lucy Smith's censure relates to the Mormons who allowed their children to roam the Nauvoo neighborhood without supervision.

8. Lucy struggles to maintain her strength. Speaking to a congregation of two thousand without the aid of a microphone was physically taxing.

9. The General Church Minutes version of the speech has Lucy giving the date on which Joseph Smith received the plates as September 2, 1827; the two subsequent copies, however, say September 22, 1827, suggesting the former was a simply a recording error.

10. Lucy appears to have lost a week. September 22 was two weeks from the preceding Monday, October 6, 1845, which was just two days prior to her speech.

11. At the time, Martin and Lucy Harris had a daughter living with them.

12. This desire of course led Harris to take some transcribed Book of Mormon characters to leading specialists of the time. He visited Charles Anthon and Samuel L. Mitchill, both residents of New York City, and possibly also a third, Luther Bradish, whose residence at the time is uncertain (Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism* [New York: D. Appleton, 1867], 42). According to Joseph Smith, Moroni had so directed him when Joseph received the plates (Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, "Letter IV," *Messenger and Advocate* [February 1835]: 80). For an overview of Harris's experience, see Stanley B. Kimball, "The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems," *BYU Studies* 10 (Spring 1970): 323–52.

13. Lucy Smith would be disappointed in her wish. Her memoir, the *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: Orson Pratt, 1853), was not published until eight years later and then was met with the disapproval of Brigham Young, who believed it contained disturbing historical errors. A corrected edition of the book was later issued and has remained in print. At the time *California* was an imprecise term applying to lands west of the Rocky Mountain cordillera.

14. This refrain is contained in advice given to Hyrum Smith (D&C 11:15–22).

15. The family had lost their newly constructed home in a foreclosure of a mortgage.

16. The two later versions, probably mistaking Clayton's letter S for a C, supply the name of another of Lucy's sons, Don Carlos in the place of Samuel. With the versions in conflict, the reference is uncertain.

17. Two days before, at the beginning of the general conference, William Smith had been dropped both as a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and as Patriarch to the Church. On the following Sunday, October 12, 1845, he was excommunicated. Smith, repeatedly at odds with Brigham Young, had left Nauvoo in the fall of 1845 and rumors swept the city that he had left to secure the assistance of U.S. troops to prevent the planned migration west. See Minutes of the General Conference, October 6, 1845, LDS Church Archives; *HC* 7:460, 483; and Andrew F. Ehat, ed., "They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet"—The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding," *BYU Studies* 19 (Winter 1979): 161.

18. Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith had three daughters: Sophronia Smith Stoddard, Catherine Smith Salisbury, and Lucy Smith Millikin.

19. John Portineus Greene and his wife Rhoda Young Greene, a sister to Brigham, were residents of Mendon, New York. John was successively a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Reformed Church, serving the latter as an itinerant preacher.

20. The anonymous transcript has Mrs. Green asking the question.

21. Rhoda Young Greene.

22. The traditional account of this episode is told in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 88–89: "Samuel was discouraged, but continued on his journey. That night he slept under an apple tree. In the morning he called at the home of Rev. John P. Greene, a Methodist minister. Mr. Greene was just leaving on a preaching tour and like the others who had been approached [earlier], he was not interested in the book. However, he manifested a friendly spirit and, at the earnest solicitation of Samuel, consented to take a subscription paper and try to sell

copies of the book. Thereupon Samuel left him a copy of the Book of Mormon with the understanding that the missionary would call again in about two weeks. At the appointed time, Samuel returned and was disappointed to learn that there had been no sale. . . . He returned home after his labors were finished, feeling that his work had proved to be fruitless. More out of curiosity than desire, both Mr. Greene and his wife read the book and were deeply impressed. The copy Samuel left with John P. Greene was placed by the latter in the hands of members of the Young family, which was the first direct information to Brigham Young and his brother and some of their friends, including Heber C. Kimball, of the restoration of the Gospel." On the other hand, both Brigham Young and his brother Phineas spoke of another copy of new scripture circulating in the family that may have been more influential in the family's conversion. See "History of Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, February 5, 1858, 377; Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Albert Carrington and others, 1853–1886), 3:91, August 8, 1852; and "A Family Meeting in Nauvoo," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 11 (July 1920): 110.

23. Samuel Harrison Smith married Mary Bailey on August 13, 1834.

24. Caroline Grant, sister to Jedediah Grant, Salt Lake City's first mayor and a counselor to President Young in the First Presidency, married William Smith in 1834.

25. Here Lucy's impressionist account departs from chronology. As she makes clear later in her remarks, Joseph Smith's trip to Washington, D.C., followed the Church's expulsion from Missouri. At the time of Lucy's Exodus from Missouri, he remained incarcerated in the Liberty Jail in Clay County.

26. Perhaps on or near the Mississippi River bottom near Quincy, Illinois. The latter was a gathering area for many of the Mormons who fled from Missouri.

27. A delegation of Latter-day Saints, led by Joseph Smith himself, visited the nation's capital and secured an appointment with President Martin Van Buren in November 1839. An echo of Joseph Smith's belief that the nation's failure to respond to the Mormon entreaties for justice would bring God's punishment upon the country can be found in *HC* 3:332: "Is there no virtue in the body politic?" Joseph asked. "Will not the people rise up in their majesty, and with that promptitude and zeal which are so characteristic of them, discountenance such proceedings [the Missouri turmoil], by bringing the offenders to that punishment which they so richly deserve, and save the nation from that disgrace and ultimate ruin, which otherwise must inevitably fall upon it?"

28. No doubt Lucy speaks ironically here.

29. A central question weighing on Church leaders and members was whether government authorities would permit their departure west. As Brigham Young had commented earlier in the morning when speaking to the conference: "The government of the State has sent his force to hold the Mormons still while our enemies [in the immediate neighborhood] put the red hot Iron into us" (General Church Minutes Collection, October 8, 1845). Lucy Smith expresses her faith that the people would be allowed to go west.

30. At this point Lucy's voice apparently gave out, and after saying a few more words that the clerks found difficult to hear, she left the speaker's stand. After her remarks, President Young pledged his assistance should the Smith family decide to go west and, in harmony with Lucy's stated desire, promised: "I pledge myself if Mother Smith goes with us that I will do all in my power to bring her bones back here to her children and I want to know if this people are willing to enter into a covenant to do the same." The Saints in the congregation voted to do likewise (General Church Minutes Collection, October 8, 1845).