

Joseph Smith's Accounts of the First Vision

1832 Account

SOURCE: Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, pp. 1-6. [See here](#). See also Dean C. Jessee, "The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844* (Provo: BYU Studies Press, 2005), 1-33. Emphasis below not in original.

At about the age of twelve years my mind become seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to searching the scriptures believing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God thus applying myself to them and my intimate acquaintance with those of different denominations led me to marvel exceedingly for I discovered that they did not of adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind the contentions and divi[si]ons the wicke[d]ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind my mind become exceedingly distressed for I become convicted of my sins and by searching the scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my own sins and for the sins of the world for I learned in the scriptures that God was the same yesterday to day and forever that he was no respecter to persons for he was God for I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their magesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in magesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intilgence in governing the things which are so exceding great and marvilous even in the likeness of him who created them and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said it is a fool that saith in his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all all

these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotant and omnipreasant power a being who makith Laws and decreeeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity and when I, considered all these things and that that being seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth therefore **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 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 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 according to th[e]ir ungodliness and to bring to pass that which hath been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[ostles] 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 [I] could find none that would believe the hevny vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart but after many days I fell into transgression and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul and there were many things which transpired that cannot be written

1835 Account

SOURCE: Joseph Smith Diary (1835–1836), entry for 9 November, 1835, original in Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. [See here](#). Published in Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 86-88. Emphasis added.

...while setting in my house between the hours of ten & 11 this morning a man came in, and introduced himself to me, calling himself by the name of Joshua the Jewish minister [Robert Matthias], his appearance was some thing singular, having a beard about 3 inches in length which is quite grey, also his hair is long and considerably silvered with age I should think he is about 50 or 55 years old, tall and strait slender built of thin visage blue eyes, and fair complexion, he wears a sea green frock coat, & pantaloons of the same, black fur hat with narrow brim, and while speaking frequently shuts his eyes with a scowl on his countenance: I made some enquiry after his name but received no definite answer; we soon commenced talking upon the subject of religion and after I had made some remarks concerning the bible I commenced giving him a relation of the circumstances connected with the coming forth of the book of Mormon, as follows being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and I considered it of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involve eternal consequ[e]nces; being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove and bow[e]d 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 libarally and upbradeth not; information was what I most desired at this time, and with a fixed determination 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 p[r]ay, my tounge 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 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 tounge liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down upon me, 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; When I was about 17 years old I saw another vision of angels in the night season after I had retired to bed ...

1839 Account

SOURCE: The most familiar account, “*I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun...*” Now canonized in Joseph Smith—History, Pearl of Great Price. [See here](#) for the original handwritten version.

1842 First Vision Account

SOURCE: The Wentworth letter, published in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 Mar. 1842): 706-710. The handwritten version is not currently extant. [See here](#). See also Dean C. Jessee, "The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844* (Provo: BYU Studies Press, 2005), 1-33. A truncated version of this account was also published in 1844 in Israel Daniel Rupp, ed., *He Pasa Ekklesia [The Whole Church]* (Philadelphia: J. Y. Humphreys; Harrisburg: Clyde and Williams, 1844). [See here](#).

When about fourteen years of age I began to reflect upon the importance of being prepared for a future state, and upon enquiring the plan of salvation I found that there was a great clash in religious sentiment; if I went to one society they referred me to one plan, and another to another; each one pointing to his own particular creed as the summum bonum of perfection: considering that all could not be right, and that God could not be the author of so much confusion I determined to investigate the subject more fully, believing that if God had a church it would not be split up into factions, and that if he taught one society to worship one way, and administer in one set of ordinances, he would not teach another principles which were diametrically opposed. Believing the

word of God I had confidence in the declaration of James [1.5]... 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.

At least five other secondary accounts were related by contemporaries of Joseph Smith rather than firsthand, and were published between 1840 and 1844. [See here](#).

Additional Reading:

LDS.org Gospel Topics, "First Vision Accounts," [lds.org/topics/first-vision-accounts](https://www.lds.org/topics/first-vision-accounts).

James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Autumn 1966): 29-45. [Available here](#).

Milton V. Backman, Jr., "Joseph Smith's Recitals of the First Vision," *Ensign* (January 1985). [Available here](#).

Steven C. Harper, "Four Accounts and Three Critiques of Joseph Smith's First Vision," 2011 FAIR Conference. [Available here](#).

Steven C. Taysom, "Approaching the First Vision Saga," *Sunstone* (2012). [Available here](#).

Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).