

Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," BYU Studies, vol. 9, no. 3, Spring 1969, p. 275-296.

[Excerpts only – page number is given before the quote.]

275 On June 11, 1839, less than two months after his arrival in Illinois from confinement in a Missouri jail, and one month after moving his family into a small log house near Commerce, Illinois, Joseph Smith commenced dictating his history to his clerk James Mulholland. At that time some nineteen years had elapsed since Joseph's First Vision, and nine years had passed since the revelation commanding him to keep a history. [That is the version that is published in the Pearl of Great Price.]

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The 1831-32 history transliterated here contains the earliest known account of Joseph Smith's First Vision. [footnote reads: Kirtland Letter Book" (MS, LDS Historian's Library), 1829-1835, pp, 1-6.]

[Dean Jessee is a good scholar, and he reprinted the document just as it appears in manuscript form. My purpose is different from his. My object is to make it easier to read, so I have modernized spelling and punctuation. The part of the quote from the Kirtland Letter Book that deals with the First Vision is:]

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... 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 omnipotent and omnipresent power a being who maketh Laws and decreeeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to that 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 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" is crossed out] 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 aside 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 this ungodliness and to bring to pass that which hath been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Apostles. Behold and lo, I come quickly as it 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 heavenly vision. ...

In October 1834 Oliver Cowdery, the editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, introduced the first published history of the Church. This work was presented in the form of correspondence between Cowdery and William W. Phelps, and was anticipated as a "full history of the rise of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, and the most interesting parts of its progress, to the present time."

[This is the version that reads: "I saw many angels in this vision." The portion of the Cowdery letter that deals with the First Vision reads:]

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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, but considered it of the first importance to me that I should be right, in matters of so much moment, matter involving eternal consequences. Being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove and there bowed down before the Lord, under a realizing sense (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 of God who giveth to all men liberally & upbraideth not. Information was what I most desired at this time, and with a fixed determination to obtain it, I called on the Lord for the first time in the place above stated, or in other words, I made a fruitless attempt to pray My tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some one walking towards me. I strove again to pray, but could not; the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprang upon my feet and looked round, but saw no person, or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking. I kneeled again, my mouth was opened and my tongue loosed; I called on the Lord in mighty prayer. A pillar of fire appeared above my head; which presently rested down upon me, and filled me with unspeakable joy. 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 also unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God. I saw many angels in this vision. I was about 14 years old when I received this first communication. ...

[The other version is from the famous "Wentworth letter" in which the Prophet Joseph first wrote the Articles of Faith. It was published in the Times and Seasons, 15 March 1842. The portion of the letter that is about the First Vision reads:]

I retired It 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.