

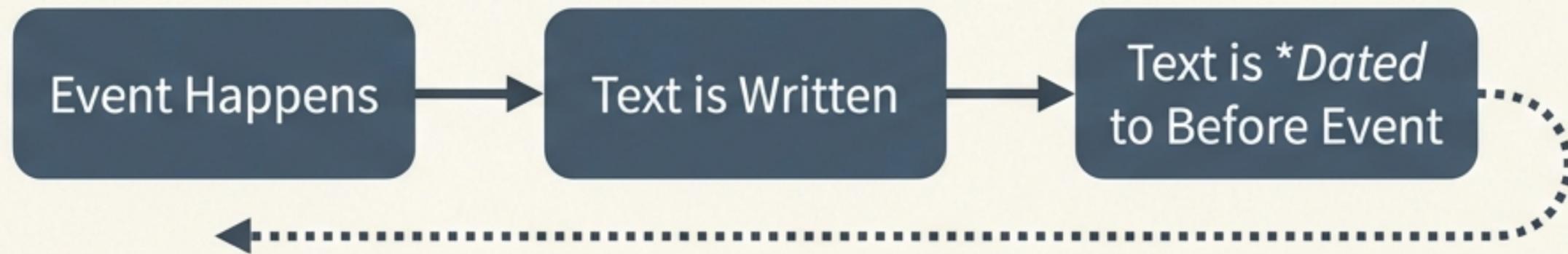
**The Author's Fingerprint:
Uncovering Backdated Prophecy
in Mormon Scripture**

Source Sans Pro

A textual analysis of Joseph Smith's
scriptural productions.

A Prophecy Written After the Fact

Backdated prophecy is a literary technique where a writer describes an event *after* it has occurred but presents it as a prediction made long before. The writer places the “prophecy” in the mouth of a past figure (like an ancient prophet) to give it credibility and authority.



This allows an author to “prove” the prophetic power of a figure by having them predict events the author already knows the outcome of.

“Scholars can see these fingerprints and get really good dating on a text by what they’re saying all by itself.”

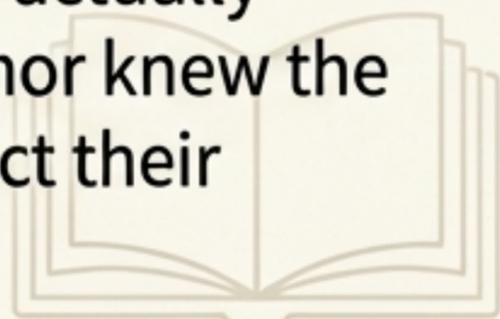
— Mike, LDS Discussions

The Scholar's Toolkit: Dating the Book of Daniel

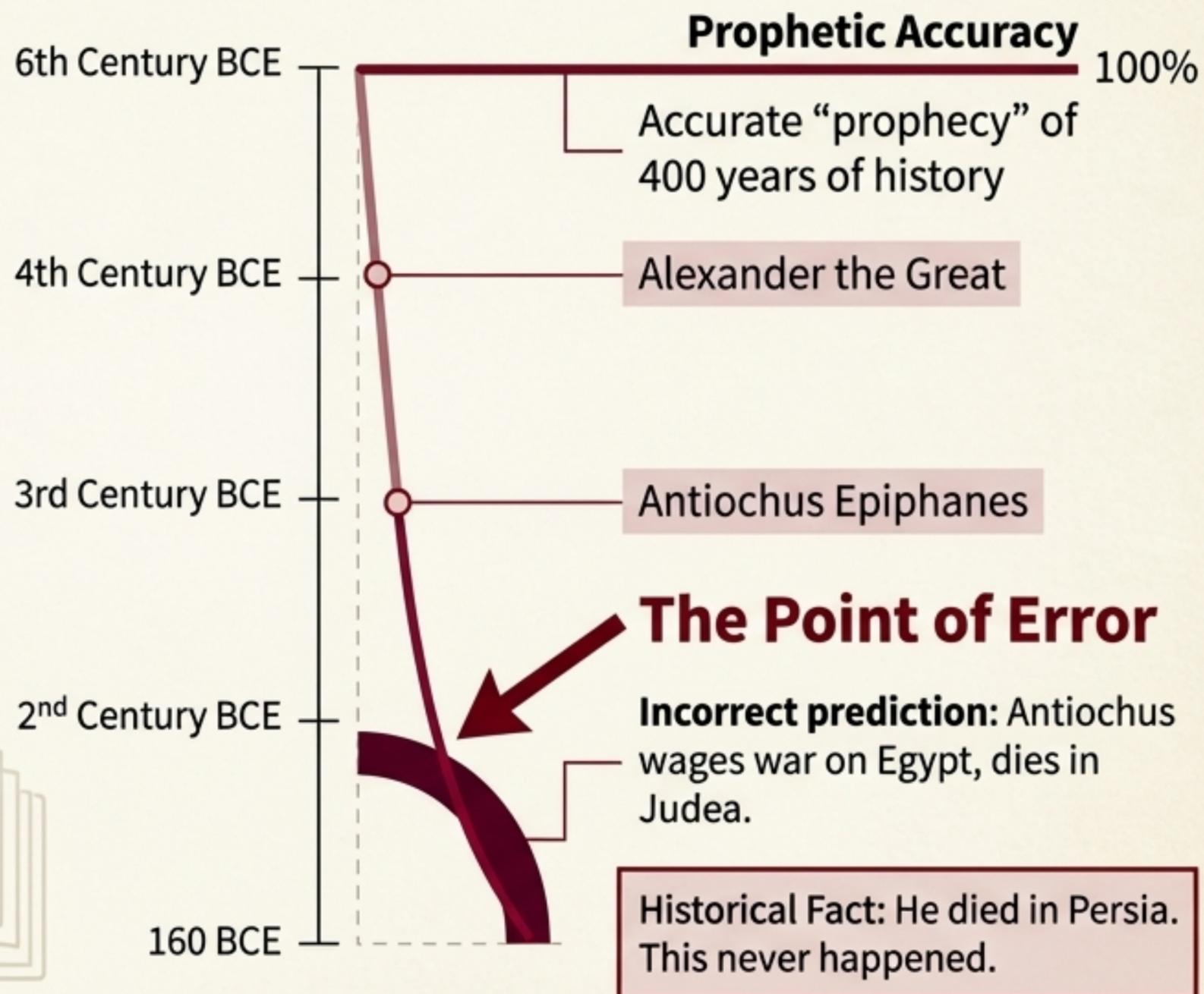
The Book of Daniel provides a classic example of backdated prophecy. The text claims to be written by Daniel in the 6th century BCE, but contains a sweeping, accurate history of events down to the 2nd century BCE.

Conclusion

Scholars identify the “cliff”—the point where the prophecy stops being accurate—as the approximate time the author was actually writing, around 167 BCE. The author knew the past perfectly but could not predict their own future.

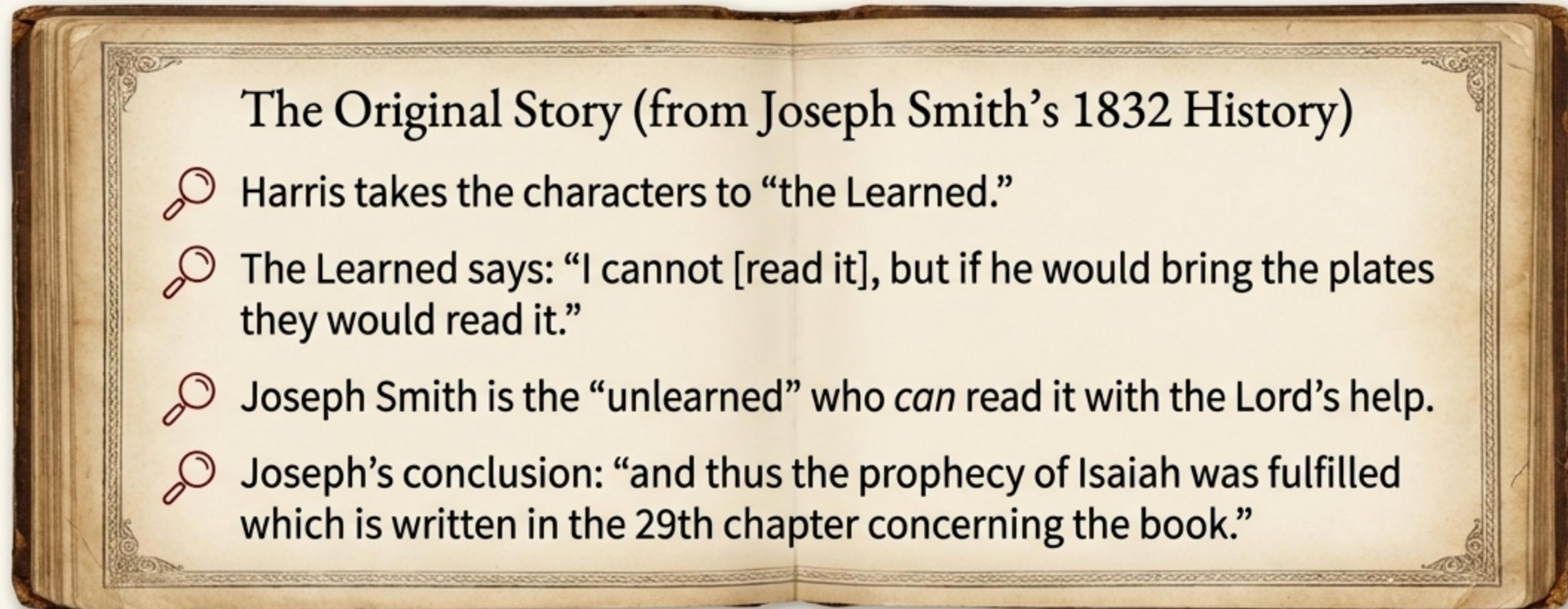


The Prophecy Cliff



The First Fingerprint: Martin Harris and the Professor

In 1828, Martin Harris visited Professor **Charles Anthon** in New York City with a transcription of characters from the golden plates. This event would become a key “proof” of prophecy for the church.



Key Observation: This initial account is a simple, barebones story focused on fulfilling a general concept from Isaiah—the learned cannot read a book that the unlearned can.

Not Just Fulfilling Prophecy, Rewriting It

In the Book of Mormon (composed in 1829), Joseph Smith doesn't simply quote Isaiah 29. He expands two verses from the Bible into a lengthy, detailed narrative that mirrors the Anthon visit, turning a vague passage into a literal, customized prediction.

KJV Isaiah 29:11-12

And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed:

And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

2 Nephi 27 (Expanded Version)

Adds details about **“the words of a book...of them which have slumbered.”** 🔍

Explicitly mentions the book will be **“delivered unto a man”** (Joseph Smith). He will **“deliver these words unto another”** (Martin Harris). 🔍

Details **“show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee... And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them... And the man shall say, I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed. Then shall the learned say, I cannot read it.”** 🔍

Analysis

This is a direct textual fingerprint showing a 19th-century author retrofitting scripture to validate his own contemporary experiences.

The Story Becomes Grandeur

By 1838, after all three of the Book of Mormon witnesses had been excommunicated, Joseph Smith rewrote his history. The Anthon visit narrative grew significantly more detailed and dramatic, with no one left to challenge the account.

Key Embellishments in the 1838 Canonized Account



1. Translation Certified

Anthon now declares the translation “correct, more so than any he had seen before translated from the Egyptian.” (Note: In 1828, Egyptian was still largely undecipherable).



2. Exotic Languages

Anthon identifies the characters as “Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic.”



3. A Written Certificate

Anthon provides a written certificate of authenticity, which he then dramatically tears up after hearing about the angel.

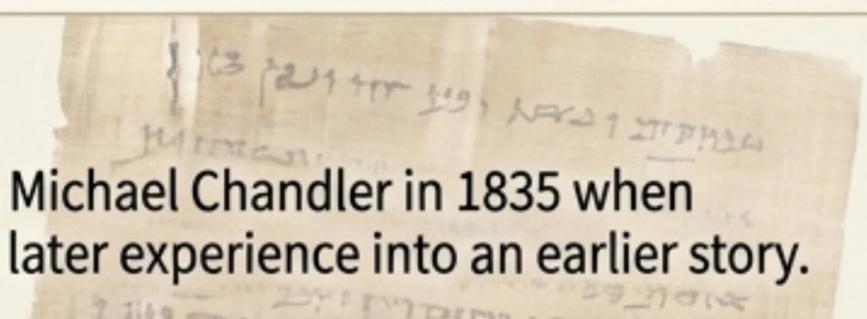


4. The Famous Line

He explicitly says, “I cannot read a sealed book”—a line inserted into the draft manuscript in darker ink, showing a conscious effort to align the story with the altered Isaiah text.

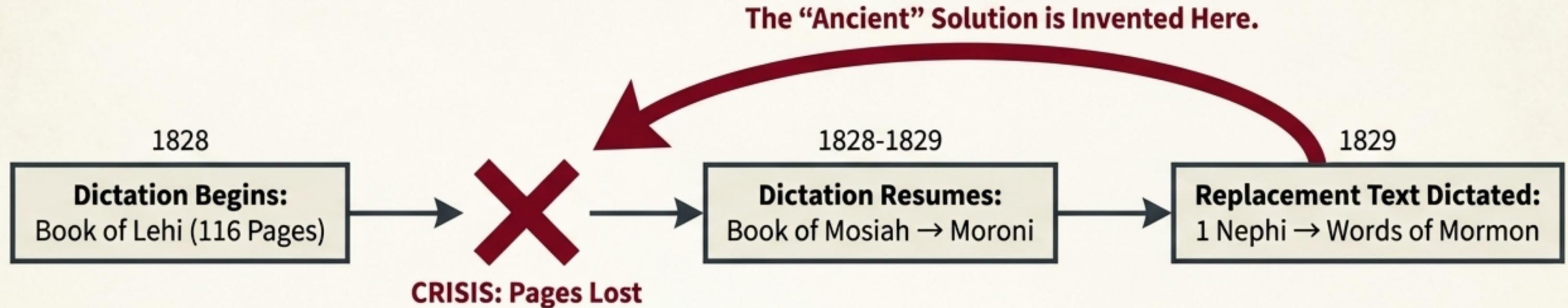
The Book of Abraham Connection

The detail of a “certificate” from an expert mirrors the certificate Joseph Smith received from Michael Chandler in 1835 when purchasing the Book of Abraham papyri. Smith appears to be backdating a useful tool from a later experience into an earlier story.



Backdating a Solution: The Crisis of the Lost 116 Pages

After Martin Harris lost the first 116 pages of the manuscript (the Book of Lehi), Joseph Smith was faced with a dilemma: how to replace the text without creating contradictions if the original pages reappeared.



The Invented Solution

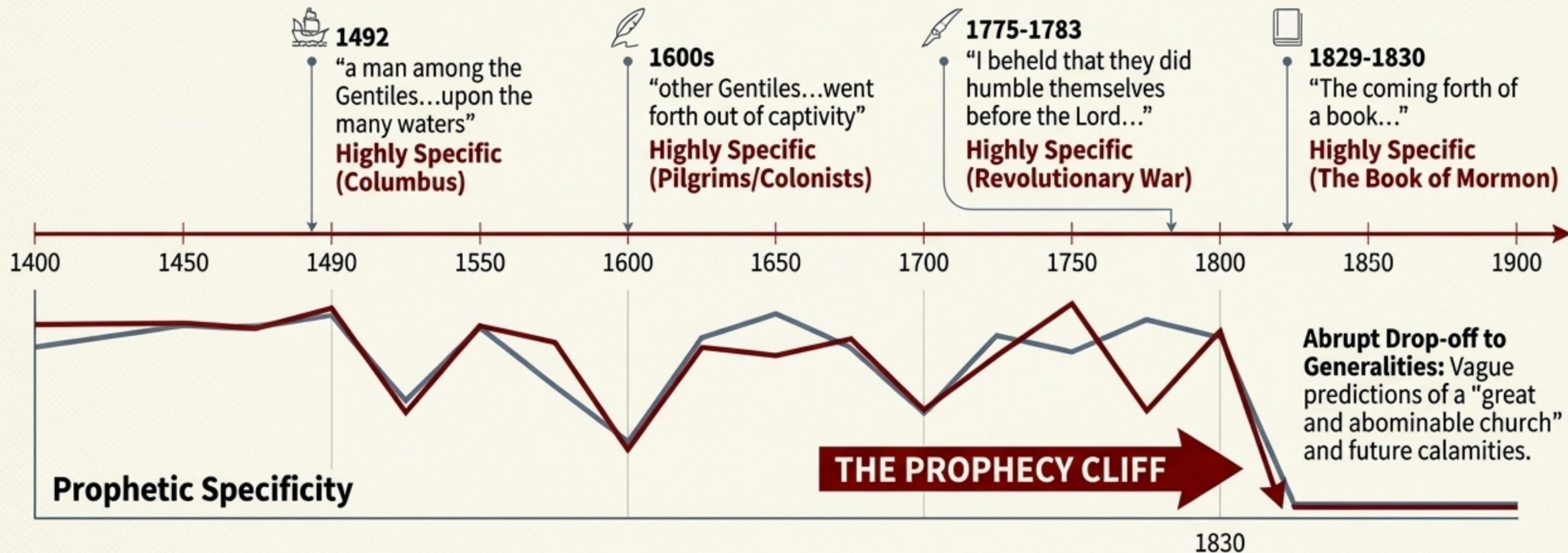
It is only in this *later-dictated* beginning section that the concept of two sets of plates appears:

- **The Large Plates of Nephi:** A secular history (the basis for the lost pages).
- **The Small Plates of Nephi:** A sacred, spiritual history prepared by God 2,400 years earlier specifically to solve the 116-pages problem.

Conclusion: The solution to the 1828 crisis was written into the text in 1829 and presented as ancient foresight. The author of 1 Nephi knew about the problem because he had just finished dictating the rest of the book and was living through the consequences.

Nephi's Vision and the Prophecy Cliff of American History

Just as with the Book of Daniel, a close reading of Nephi's vision in 1 Nephi reveals a "prophecy cliff"—a point where detailed, accurate historical prediction suddenly stops and becomes vague.



🔍 Analysis

The detailed knowledge of American history ends precisely at the time Joseph Smith was producing the Book of Mormon. An ancient author would have no such knowledge, but a 19th-century author would know it as his own nation's history.

Writing Himself into the Story

The most audacious examples of backdated prophecy involve Joseph Smith inserting predictions about his own identity and work into ancient texts.

In the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 3)

> ...and his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father.

This perfectly describes **Joseph Smith, Jr.**, son of **Joseph Smith, Sr.**
This was written in 1829.



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In the Bible (JST Genesis 50)

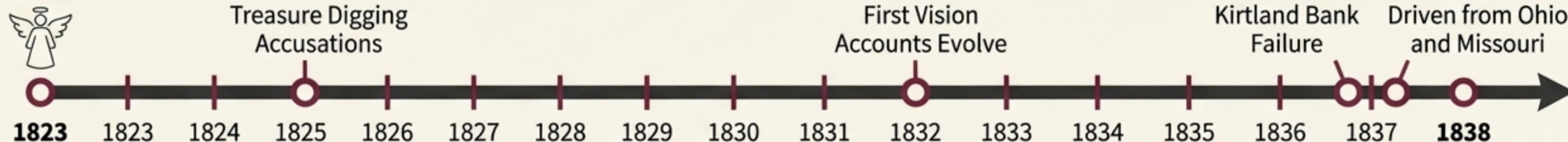
> ...and his name shall be called **Joseph**, and it shall be after the name of his father; and he shall be like unto you...

These passages are not subtle. They are the author explicitly writing his own biography into the holy books he is producing to establish his divine authority.

A Prophecy of Convenience: “My Name Should Be Had for Good and Evil”

In the official history, Joseph Smith states that the angel Moroni told him in 1823 that his “name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues.” This is often cited as proof of his prophetic calling.

The “Prophecy”
is dated here.



The Reality

This account was written in **1838**.

- By 1838, Joseph Smith’s name was *already* intensely controversial. He had been involved in treasure digging, faced legal troubles, founded a polarizing new religion, seen the failure of the Kirtland bank, and had been driven from multiple states.
- His name was already known for “good” among his followers and “evil” among his detractors.

**The Account is
Written Here.**

Analysis

Smith was not predicting the future. He was writing a past reality into a foundational story, turning 15 years of accumulated controversy into a fulfilled prophecy. It’s an effective tool for inoculating followers against criticism.

The Cultural Echo: Retrofitting Prophecy Today

The pattern of reinterpreting past statements as prophecy continues in the modern church.

The Statement (Oct 2019 General Conference)

“President Russell M. Nelson announced that the April 2020 conference would be “different from any previous conference” and “memorable and unforgettable,” explicitly linking this to the 200th anniversary of the First Vision.

The Retrofit (After March 2020)

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the conference to be a remote, broadcast-only event, many members reinterpreted Nelson’s words as a divine prediction of the pandemic.



The Prophet’s Own Words (April 2020)

> Little did I know... that speaking to a visible congregation of fewer than 10 people would make this conference so memorable and unforgettable for me.

Corroboration

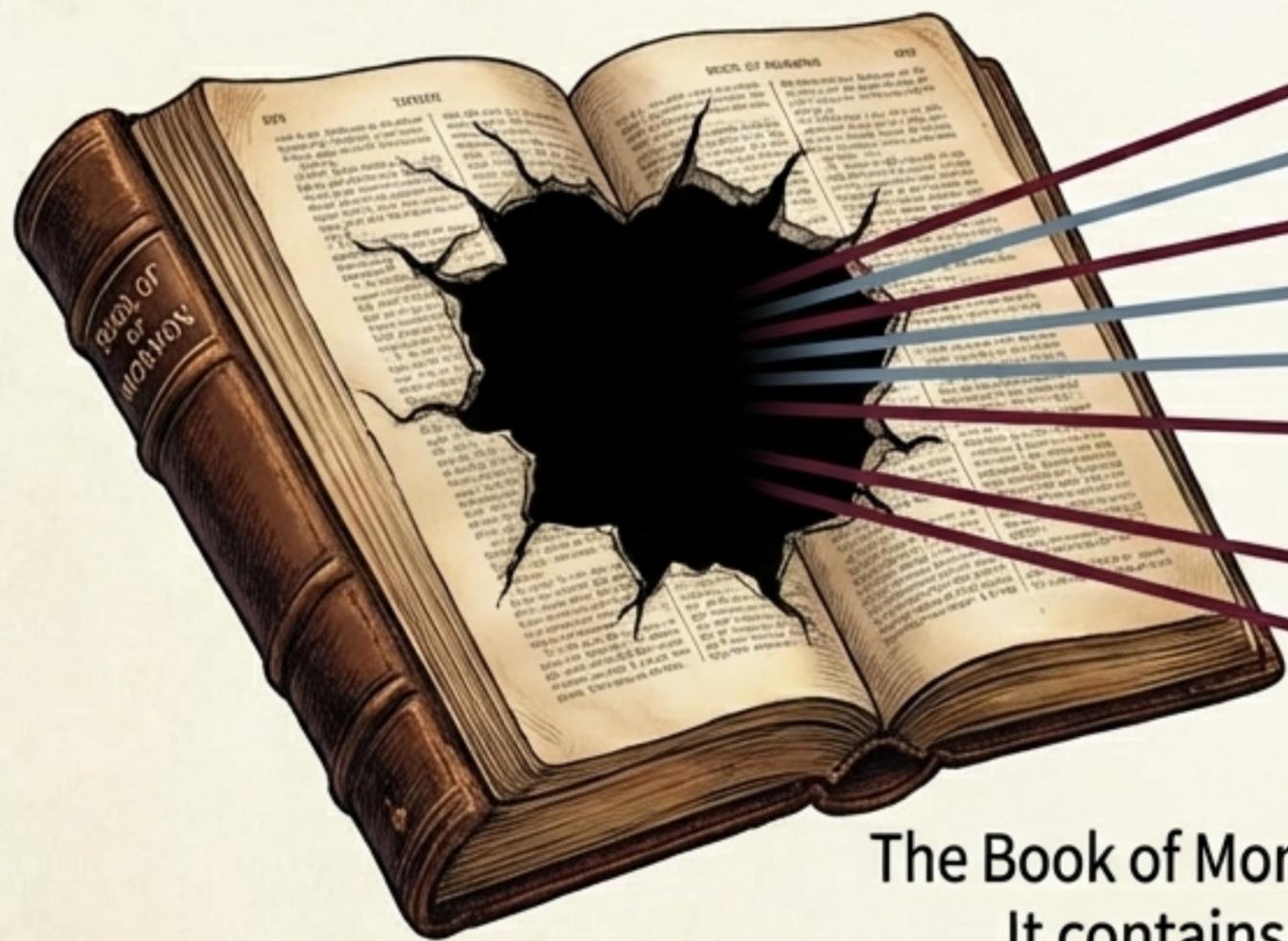
> We didn’t have revelation there was going to be a pandemic.

Apostle Quinton L. Cook, *Church News* podcast

This modern example shows how easily vague statements can be reshaped into prophecy after the fact, especially when historical records are not readily available or consulted.

The Gospel That Isn't There: What the Book of Mormon **Doesn't** Know.

Claim vs. Reality: The Book of Mormon is subtitled “Another Testament of J” and is claimed to contain the “fullness of the everlasting gospel.” However, the text is completely unaware of the most distinctive and essential doctrines of modern Mormonism, all of which were developed **after** 1829.



- Temple Marriage for Exaltation
- Baptism for the Dead
- The Endowment Ceremony
- A multi-tiered Priesthood (Aaronic & Melchizedek)
- The Word of Wisdom
- Celestial Marriage (Polygamy) – In fact, it's condemned as an “abomination.”
- The location of the Garden of Eden in Missouri.
- The nature of God as an exalted man with a body of flesh and bone.

The Book of Mormon doesn't contain the “fullness” of the modern LDS gospel. It contains the fullness of Joseph Smith's theology as it existed in 1829.

A Document Sealed in Time

When subjected to standard methods of textual criticism—the same methods used by scholars to date biblical and other ancient texts—the Book of Mormon and other scriptures by Joseph Smith consistently reveal their origin.



Backdated Prophecies

Historical events up to 1829 are predicted with perfect accuracy, while the future beyond that point remains unknown.



Biblical Errors

The text incorporates biblical interpretations and errors common in Joseph Smith's time but now understood differently by modern scholarship.



Contemporary Solutions

Real-time problems, like the Lost 116 Pages, are solved with retrofitted, "ancient" solutions written into the text.



A Time-Capsule Theology

The book meticulously reflects the theological landscape of early 19th-century America and lacks any of the key doctrines that would later define Mormonism.

Final Takeaway: The evidence does not point to an ancient record translated by a prophet, but to a 19th-century creation authored by a man intimately familiar with his own time and history.