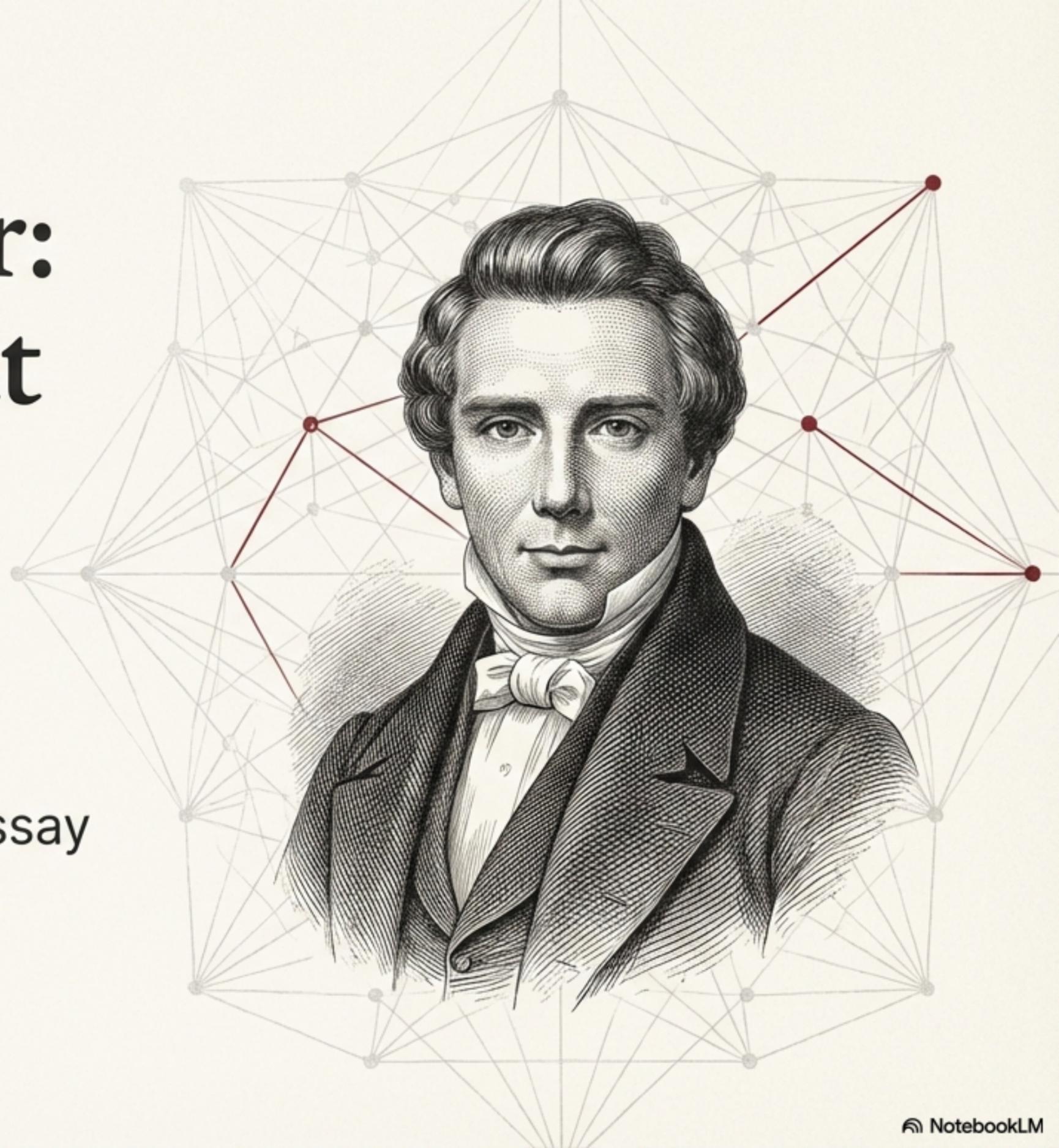


Patterns of Power: A Critical Look at Joseph Smith's Revelations

An analysis based on the research presented in the LDS Discussions essay series and Mormon Stories Podcast.



Divine Proclamation or Human Motivation?

Top-Down Revelation

Revelations are the direct, unaltered word of God, delivered to a prophet. The prophet is a passive vessel for divine communication.

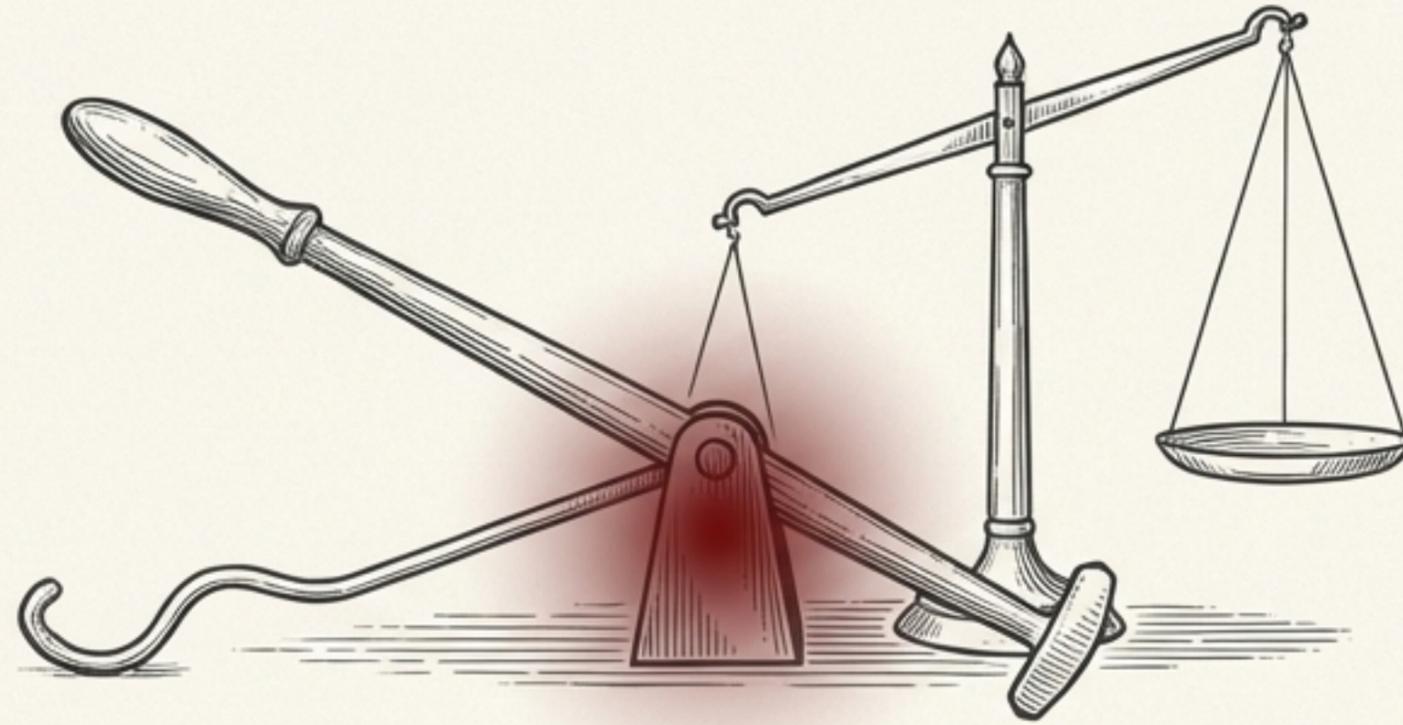


Situational Revelation

Revelations consistently appear in response to specific, earthly problems: financial needs, threats to authority, doctrinal inconsistencies, and personal desires. This suggests an active, human author shaping doctrine in real-time.



Pattern 1: Revelation as a Tool for Coercion



This pattern emerges when Joseph Smith needs others to take actions they are hesitant to perform on his request alone, such as providing money, property, or compliance with polygamy.

By framing the request as a direct command from God, the stakes are raised from personal loyalty to eternal salvation or damnation, making refusal incredibly difficult for a believer.

Case Study: Funding the Book of Mormon

The Situation



Joseph Smith needs funds to print the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris is hesitant to mortgage his farm, facing pressure from his wife, Lucy.

The Revelation (D&C 19)

“I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore... And again, I command thee that thou shalt not covet thine own property, but impart it freely to the printing of the **Book of Mormon.**”

The Outcome



Immediately after receiving this revelation, Martin Harris mortgaged his farm to provide the necessary funds.

Case Study: The Angel with the Drawn Sword

The Situation

Joseph Smith proposes polygamous marriage to women who are resistant, including Zina Huntington Jacobs, who is already married to Henry Jacobs.

The Revelation

Joseph claims an angel appeared to him with a drawn sword, threatening his life if he did not “establish that principle upon the earth.” He relayed this threat to Zina.

Critical Question

At the time of this threat, Joseph had already secretly married at least three other women. If the principle was already “established,” why was his life still being threatened? Why did the angel threaten Joseph instead of revealing God’s will directly to Zina?

“Tell Zina I put it off and put it off till an angel with a drawn sword stood by me and told me if I did not establish that principle upon the earth I would lose my position and my life.”



Pattern 2: Revelation as Crisis Management



This pattern is visible when the church or Joseph Smith faces a significant setback, a logical contradiction, or a direct challenge to his prophetic authority.

In these moments, a timely revelation emerges that re-contextualizes the problem, provides a divine explanation, and re-establishes control.

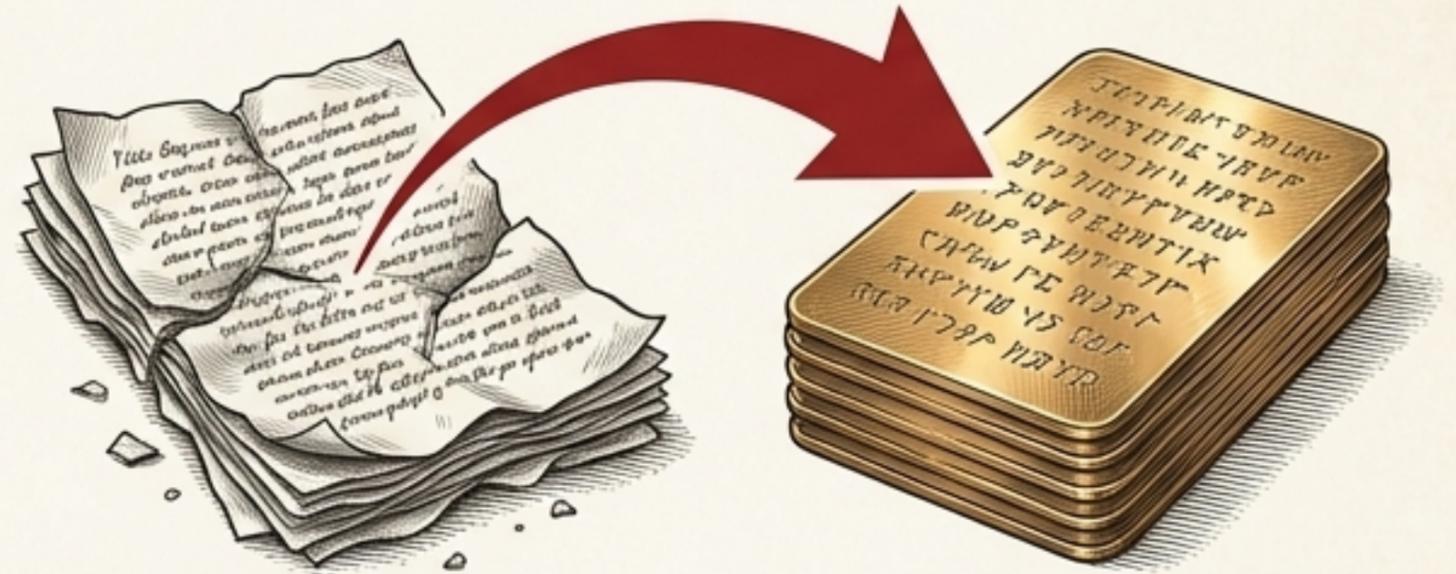
Case Study: The Lost 116 Pages

The Crisis

Martin Harris loses the first 116 translated pages of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith cannot simply re-translate them, as any differences from the original text (which he feared his enemies possessed) would expose the translation as a work of memory or creation, not divine power.

The Revelation (D&C 10)

A new revelation explains the crisis away. God declares he foresaw this event and had inspired Nephi to create a backup record (the “small plates”) centuries earlier. Joseph is commanded *not* to re-translate the lost portion, but to instead translate this newly-revealed backup text.



Lost Manuscript

Small Plates (Backup)

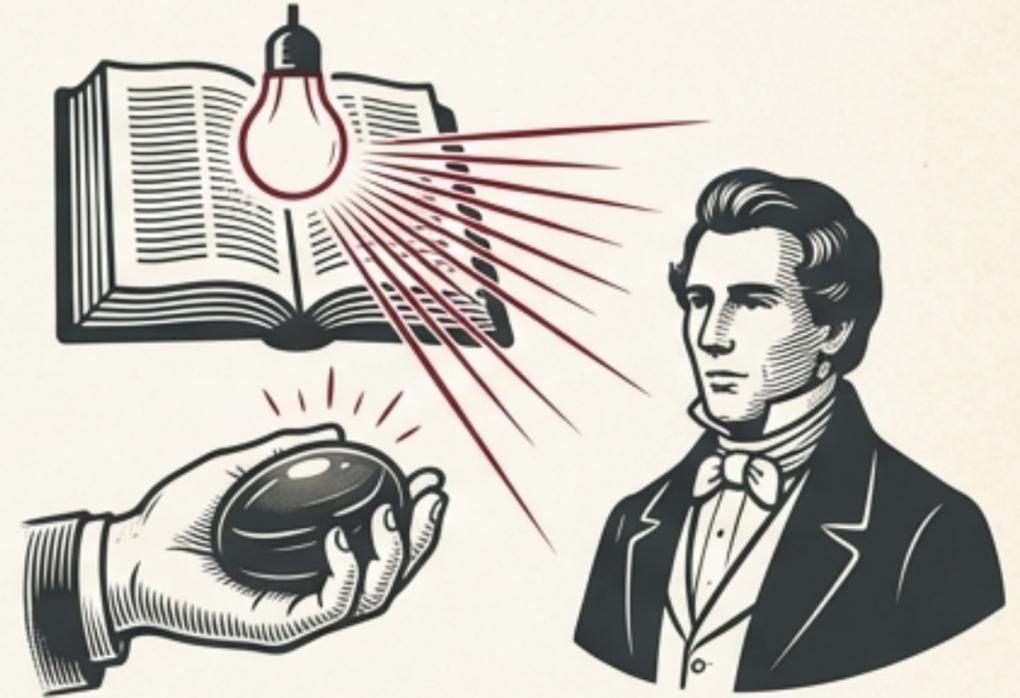
The Outcome

The revelation provides a perfect solution that avoids the risk of contradiction, preserves Joseph’s credibility, and frames the crisis as part of God’s master plan.

Case Study: Neutralizing a Rival Revelator

The Crisis

In 1830, Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses, acquires his own seer stone and begins receiving revelations that gain a following among key figures like Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer. This directly challenges Joseph's role as the sole revelator for the church.



The Revelation (D&C 28)

A revelation is given to *Oliver Cowdery* through Joseph Smith. It declares two things:

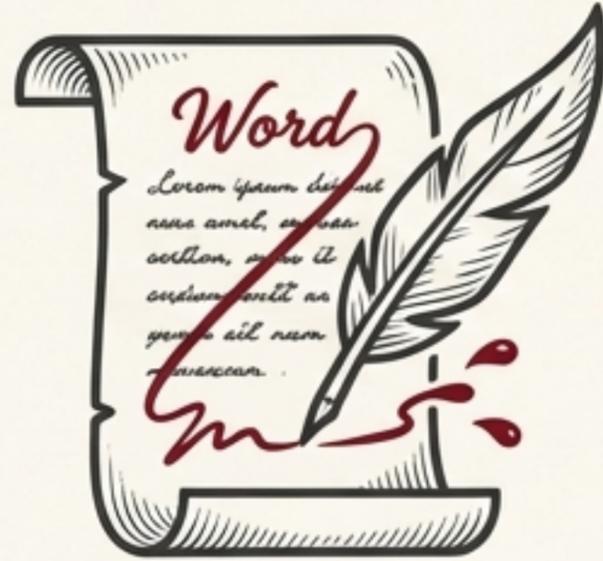
1. Only Joseph Smith can receive commandments and revelations for the church, "even as Moses."
2. Hiram Page's revelations are not from God.

"...tell him [Hiram Page] those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that **Satan deceiveth him.**"

The Outcome

Joseph's authority is solidified. Page's competing revelations are delegitimized, and the principle of a single prophetic channel is established.

Pattern 3: Revelation as a Moving Target



- The text of revelations was not fixed. Early versions recorded in the *Book of Commandments* were often altered, expanded, or reversed in the later *Doctrine & Covenants* (D&C).
- These changes frequently align with Joseph Smith's evolving theology, expanding authority, and changing needs over time.

Before & After: Expanding the Prophetic Gift

1833 Book of Commandments (Chapter 4)

“And he has a gift to translate the book, and I have commanded him that he shall pretend to **no other gift**, for I will grant him **no other gift.**”

1835 Doctrine & Covenants (Section 5)

“And you have a gift to translate the plates; and this is the first gift that I bestowed upon you; and I have commanded that you should pretend to no other gift **until my purpose is fulfilled in this**; for I will grant unto you no other gift **until it is finished.**”

The addition of four words—“until it is finished”—fundamentally alters the original meaning, opening the door for Joseph to claim the gift of receiving all subsequent revelations for the church.

From “Abominable” to “An Everlasting Covenant”

Condemned



Commanded

Book of Mormon (Jacob 2:24, ~1829)

Condemns the practice of having multiple wives and concubines, calling it **‘abominable before me, saith the Lord.’**

Doctrine & Covenants (Section 101, 1835 Edition)

A declaration on marriage explicitly states, “...we declare that we believe, that **one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband.**”

Doctrine & Covenants (Section 132, revealed ~1843)

Joseph Smith receives a revelation commanding plural marriage as a **“new and an everlasting covenant.”** It **threatens his wife Emma with destruction** if she does not accept it.

Pattern 4: Revelation Reflecting Human Error



The Premise: If revelations are divine, they should be free from the common factual or historical errors of the era in which they were given. However, some revelations contain mistakes that reflect Joseph Smith's limited, 19th-century understanding.



Case Study: Elias and Elijah

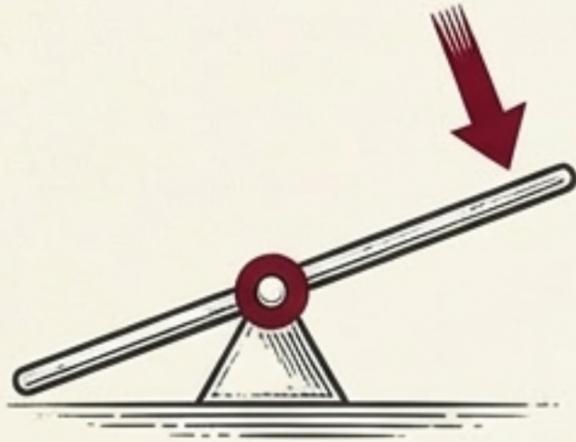
The Vision (D&C 110)

In a vision in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery report visits from Moses, followed by **Elias**, and then **Elijah**.

The Error

The problem: "Elias" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name "Elijah." They are the **same person**. Treating them as two separate individuals is a mistake a 19th-century Bible reader might make, but not a divine being orchestrating a heavenly visitation.

The Patterns Paint a Coherent Picture



Coercion

Revelations were used to secure money, property, and compliance when personal requests failed.



Crisis Management

Revelations appeared at convenient times to solve doctrinal contradictions and neutralize threats to authority.



Evolving Doctrine

The text of revelations was altered over time to support an expanding and changing theology.



Human Error

Revelations contain historical and biblical inaccuracies consistent with the knowledge of a 19th-century author.

Viewed together, these patterns point not to a passive vessel for God's word, but to an active, resourceful leader shaping scripture and doctrine in real-time to meet strategic and personal needs.

Moving Beyond “True” or “False”

The evidence presented isn't simply about labeling Joseph Smith a “fraud.” It offers a more complex and nuanced understanding of the founding of a major world religion.

It reveals the powerful interplay of genuine faith, human desire, charisma, and the strategic use of spiritual authority.

This shifts the fundamental question from:
~~“Was Joseph Smith a prophet?”~~



To a more analytical question:
“What do these patterns reveal about how prophetic authority was constructed, wielded, and justified?”

Continue Your Own Journey of Discovery

For those interested in a deeper, evidence-based exploration of these topics, the original source materials provide comprehensive analysis and citations.

Read the Full Essay

LDSDiscussions.com/revelations-josephsmith

Listen to the Full Podcast

Mormon Stories Podcast, Episode 1734

