

Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, April 15, 1838

Orange Township, Geauga Co
Ohio 15th. April 1838

Br Johnson - Dear Sir I have with pleasure just received your favor post marked 26th Ult and now you see I take a large sheet that I may have ample room to write - my heart is sickened within me when I reflect upon the manner in which we with many of this Church have been led & the losses which we have sustained all by means of two men in whom we placed implicit confidence, that Joseph Smith & Sidney Rigdon are notorious liars I do not hesitate to affirm, & can prove by a cloud of witnesses & this is not all, Joseph has prophecied in a public congregation lies in the name of the Lord & by undue religious influence he has filched the monies of the Church from their pockets and brought them nigh unto destruction, leaving helpless innocence destitute of a comfortable support while he has squandered the hard earnings of those to whom it justly belonged. I have reflected long and deliberately upon the history of this church & weighed the evidence for & against it - loth to give it up - but when I came to hear Martin Harris state in a public congregation that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundations was sapped & the entire superstructure fell a heap of ruins, I therefore three weeks since in the Stone Chapel gave a full history of the church since I became acquainted with it, the false preaching & prophecying etc of Joseph together with the reasons why I took the course which I was resolved to do, and renounced the Book of Mormon with the whole scene of lying and deception practiced by J. S & S. R in this church, believing as I verily do, that it is all a wicked deception palmed upon us unawares

I was followed by W. Parish Luke Johnson & John Boynton all of who concurred with me, after we were done speaking M Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight was false, if it had not been picked out of air but should have let it passed as it was— Now br Johnson if you have any thing to say in favour of the Book of Mormon I should be glad to hear it. - -

About six hundred souls are making preparations to leave Kirtland for Far West the first of May to be called the Camp.

Property is worth nothing in Kirtland, I was told Luke offered his house [p. 64] And Lot for \$100 Cash, and could not get that - Marks & others have turned out their farms to pay J S. & S. R debts & take orders upon them & the bishop at Far West for land there, but I fear for them, you state in your letter that you have lost six thousand dollars Kirtland paper - now I will tell you what Joseph Smith Jr told me when he was here on his West last Sept, I asked him about you, he said you had bagg of money & could pay all of your debts if you would, I asked him if you did not loose by the bank & he said no - not a cent, He said you never took it for goods any longer than it would pay your debts. And after that you refused to take it, besides you loaned two thousand out of the bank which you never paid but exchanged a large amount with a broker in St Louis at 5 per cent for specie when you and Luke went west last fall and you bought land, hired a house built &c, this however I believe to be a lie amongst the rest. As respects my

temporal concerns, I am at present much embarrassed in consequence of that store concern, M^r Olney has never paid a cent but kept out of my way as that I have not seen him since last fall, we have paid six or seven ~~thousand~~ hundred dollars & are now sued for the remainder which is near sixteen hundred dollars and I do not know but we shall have to sell out altogether, if we should at a tolerable fair rate we should have about four thousand dollars left, I rather think I shall go west if there is an opportunity to do well, I wish you would write respecting the country and to what advantage I could lay out my money if I should come there, I believe I wrote you that I had a note of one hundred dollars made by A Barney & signed over by Ebzr Robinson - Barney has run away like other lickskillets & if there is any chance to get anything if I should send the note to you I wish you would write in your next - Parley Pratt was in Boston and Orson going to New York about six weeks since, nothing of late from Orsen Hyde - the Spring has been remarkably forward so much so that the lake navigation opened in March, there are n Kirtland Esq^r Smalling, Coe & Harris and others who still believe the Book of Mormon &c but discard Joseph & M^r Coe proposed an investigation of the subject, and Parish took up on the negative, but I have not heard how they got along with it, I am well satisfied for myself that if the witnesses whose names are attached to the Book of Mormon never saw the plates as Martin admits that there can be nothing brought to prove that any such thing ever existed for it is said on the 171 page of the book of covenants that the three should testify that they had seen the plates even as J S Jr & if they only saw them spiritually or in vision with their eyes shut - J S Jr never saw them in any other ~~light~~ way & if so the plates were only visionary and I am well satisfied that the 29 & 37 Chaps of Isai[a]h & Ezek[i]el together with others in which we depended to prove the truth of the book of Mormon have no bearing when correctly understood but are [p. 65] entirely irrevelent - but if any man differs from me I can adopt the language of Josephus, he is at liberty to enjoy his opinions without any blame from me - We are all ~~well~~ in usual health, my respects to your family & all our old friends, I am with respect yours &c

S. Burnett

I shall expect a letter in due time

P. S. please direct your letters, P. M Burnetts cornrs Cay [Cuyahoga] Co O

I send you Zion's Watchman printed at N Y - 29 Mar & I would invite your attention to W Parrish's letter contained in the same -

We the undersigned certify this to be a true copy of a letter written to Lyman E Johnson by S Burnette —

Albert Petty
Dimick B. Huntington

May 24th 1838 [p. 66]

Joseph Smith Letterbook 2:64-66, recorded by James Mulholland in 1839, Church History Library, Salt Lake City