

# 1829 Newspaper reports of Martin Harris

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## “GOLDEN BIBLE.”

The greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within the sphere of our knowledge, is one which has for some time past, and still occupies the attention of a few superstitious and bigoted individuals of this quarter. It is generally known and spoken of as the "*Golden Bible*."—Its proselytes give the following account of it: In the fall of 1827, a person by the name of *Joseph Smith*, of Manchester, Ontario county, reported he had been visited in a dream by the spirit of the Almighty, and informed that in a certain hill in that town, was deposited this Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of divine nature and origin. After having been thrice thus visited, as he states, he proceeded to the spot, and after penetrating "mother earth" a short distance, the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of Spectacles! He had been directed, however, not to let any mortal being examine them, "under no less penalty" than instant death! They were therefore nicely wrapped up, and excluded from the "vulgar gaze of poor wicked mortals!" It was said that the *leaves* of the Bible were *plates* of gold, about eight inches long, six wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved characters or hieroglyphics. By placing the Spectacles in a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least,) interpret these characters.

An account of this discovery was soon circulated. The subject was almost invariably treated as it should have been—with *contempt*. A few, however, believed the "*golden*" story, among whom was *Martin Harris*, an honest and industrious farmer of this town. So blindly enthusiastic was Harris, that he took some of the characters interpreted by Smith, and went in search of some one, besides the interpreter, who was learned enough to *English* them; but all to whom he applied (among the number was Professor Mitchell, of New York,) happened not to be possessed of sufficient knowledge to give satisfaction! Harris returned, and set Smith to work at interpreting the Bible. He has at length performed the task, and the work is soon to be put to press in this village!! Its language and doctrines are said to be far superior to those of the Book of Life!!!

Now it appears not a little strange that there should have been deposited in this western world, and in the secluded town of Manchester, too, a record of this description: and still more so, that a person like this Smith (very illiterate) should have been gifted by inspiration to read and interpret it. It should be recorded as a "*new thing under the sun*." It is certainly a "*new thing*" in the history of superstition, bigotry, inconsistency, and foolishness! It should, and it doubtless will, be treated with the neglect it merits. The public should not be imposed upon by this work, pronounced as it is, by its proselytes, to be superior in style, and more advantageous to mankind, than the Holy Bible!

The following, it is said, will be the title page of the work:

“The *Book of Mormon*; an account, written by the hand of Mormon upon plates, taken from the plates of Nephi:—

“Wherefore it is an abridgement of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, written to the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to the

Jew and Gentiles; written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation; written and sealed and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed,—to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—sealed up by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of the Gentile—the interpretation thereof by the gift of God: an abridgement taken from the book of Ether.

“Also, which is a record of the people of Jared, which were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to Heaven; which is to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers: and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. And now, If there be fault it be the mistake of men: wherefore condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.—By JOSEPH SMITH, Junior, Author and Proprietor.”

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### **Report of Martin Harris in Rochester, New York**

"Golden Bible," *The Gem, A Semi-Monthly, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* 1 (September 5, 1829):70, Rochester, New York

A man by the name of Martin Harris<sup>1</sup> was in this village a few days since endeavouring to make a contract for printing a large quantity of a work called the Golden Bible. He gave something like the following account of it.

"In the autumn of 1827 a man named Joseph Smith of Manchester, in Ontario County, said that he had been visited by the spirit of the Almighty in a dream, and informed that in a certain hill in that town was deposited a Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of divine origin. He states that after a third visit from the same spirit in a dream, he proceeded to the spot, removed earth, and there found the bible, together with a large pair of spectacles. He had also been directed to let no mortal see them under the penalty of immediate death, which injunction he steadfastly adheres to. The treasure consisted of a number of gold plates, about 8 inches long, 6 wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved hieroglyphics. By placing the spectacles in a hat and looking into it, Smith interprets the characters into the English language.["]

Harris states that he went in search of some one to interpret the hieroglyphics, but found that no one was intended to perform that all important task but Smith himself. Smith has interpreted the whole, and it is now in press in Palmyra, Wayne Co. The subject attracts a good deal of notice among a certain class, and as it will be ere long before the public, we shall endeavor to meet it with the comment it may deserve.--*Ed Gem*.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Harris (1783-1875)