

Comparison of Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision

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Joseph Smith's first vision: New methods for the analysis of experience-related texts.

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- 1832js — Joseph Smith, History, circa summer 1832, *JSP*, H1:3–16.
 1833a — Milo Andrus, 17 July 1853. Papers of George D. Watt. MS 4534 box 2 disk 1
 May 1853–July 1853 images 231–256. Transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth,
 3 October 2012; corrected October 2013.
 1835c — Joseph Curtis, “Joseph Curtis reminiscence and diary, 1939 October — 1881
 March,” MS 1654, pages 5–6, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
 1835js — Joseph Smith, History, 1834–1836, 9 November 1935, *JSP*, H1:115–119.
 1839js — Joseph Smith, History [ca. June 1839 — ca. 1841], *JSP*, H1:205–235.

Dark Gray = material only in 1832js Light Gray = material only in later versions	
Unintended experience event [what happened]	
1832js	“my mind become exceedingly [sic] distressed”
1835js	“being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion ... perplexed in mind”
1835c	Curtis: “he [JS] feeling anxiety to be religious his mind some what troubled”
1839js	Felt “desire” and implicit distress
Cause explanation [why it happened]	
1832js	“I [had] become convicted of my sins” in context of “contentions and divi[si]ons”
1835js	“looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong”
1835c	Because “a revival of some of the sec[t]s was going on [and] some of his father[']s family joined in”
1839js	“I felt some desire to be united with [the Methodists]” but impossible to decide “who was right and who was wrong” [“desire” + inability to decide = implicit distress]. Context note: “In the midst of this war of words, and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, what is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? and if any one of them be right which is it? And how shall I know it?”
Intended behavior event [what he did]	
1832js	“by searching the scriptures I found that mankind ... apostatized from true ... faith and there was no ... denomination that built on the gospel of Jesus Christ”

Reason explanation [why he did it]	
1832js	Implicitly to find denomination where his sins could be forgiven
Unintended experience event [what happened]	
1835js	“under a realising sense that [the Lord] had said (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 him ask of God who giveth to all men libarally and upbradeth not”
1835c	Curtis: “this scriptures came to his mind which sayes if a man lack wisdom let him ask of god who giveth liberaly and upbradeth not[.]”
1839js	“While I was laboring under...[these] difficulties...I was one day reading [James 1:5] It seemed to enter with great force into ... my heart.” [No cause given]
Intended behavior event [what he did]	
1839js	“reflected on it again and again”
Reason explanation [why he did it]	
1839js	“the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passage of Scripture so differently as [to] destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible”
Intended behavior event [what he did]	
1839js	“I at last came to the determination to ask of God”
Reason explanation [why he did it]	
1839js	“I must either remain in darkness and confusion or else I must do as James directs, that is, Ask of God.”
Intended behavior event [what he did]	
1832js	“I cried unto the Lord for mercy”
1835js	“I retired to the silent grove and bow[e]d down before the Lord...and with a fixed determination to obtain it [information], I called upon the Lord for the first time”
1835c	Curtis: “believing it he went with a determinati[on] to obtain to enquire of the lord himself”
1839js	“I retired [to the woods] ... kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God”

Reason explanation [why he did it]	
1832js	“for there was none else to whom I could go to obtain mercy”
1835js	“to obtain it [information]”
1835c	he “believed it [“ask and you shall receive”]
1839js	Reasons for praying as above; reasons for kneeling in the woods not given.

Unintended experience event [what happened]	
1835js	“my tounge seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, I strove again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking”
1835c	Curtis: “after some struggle”
1839js	“[seized] upon by some power which entirely overcame me ... [the power bound] my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me and it seemed... as if I were doomed to sudden destruction ... I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction”

Cause explanation [why it happened]	
1835js	He could not find an ordinary explanation (“he saw no person or thing ...”)
1839js	The feeling of being seized by a power was attributed to “this enemy.” The cause was not imaginary. He was threatened “not [by] an imaginary ruin by to the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had a marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being”

Unintended experience event [what happened]	
1832js	“While in the attitude of prayer ... a pillar of light [brighter than the sun at noon] came down from above and rested upon me and I was filled”
1835js	“I kneeled again my mouth was opened and my tounge liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down up[on] me head , and filled me with Joy unspeakable”*
1839js	“Just at this moment of great alarm I saw a pillar [of] light exactly over my head above the brightness of the sun, which descended ... upon me. ... I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound.”

Cause explanation [why it happened]	
1832js	Image of pillar of fire/light associated with “shekinah” in OT; filling attributed to the “spirit of god”
1835js	No cause given for the “pillar of fire”; implicitly understood as response to prayer

1839js	No cause given for the light; implicitly understood as response to “great alarm”
Unintended experience event [what happened]	
1832js	“the Lord opened the heavens ... I saw the Lord ... he spake to me saying ... thy sins are forgiven thee” [the Lord’s speech continues in an apocalyptic vein and ends with promise to “come quickly”]
1833a	Andrus: “angel came and that [glory?] and trees seemed to be consumed in blaze and he was there entrusted with this information that darkness covered the earth that the great mass of Christian world universally wrong their creeds all upon uncertain foundation now as young as you are I call upon you from this obscurity go forth and build up my kingdom on the earth”
1835js	“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 unto me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and I saw many angels in this vision”
1835c	Curtis: “the Lord manifested to him that the different sects were [w]rong also that the Lord had a great work for him to do.”
1839js	“I saw two personages ... standing above me in the air. One of [them] spake unto me ... and said (pointing to the other) ‘This is my beloved Son, Hear him.’ ... No sooner ... did I get possession of myself so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong) and which I should join. I was answered that I just join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors were all corrupt, that ‘they draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me, they ... [have] a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof’”*
Unintended experience event [what happened]	
1832js	“my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me”
1835js	No indication of what happened next.
1839js	“When I came to myself again I found myself lying on [my] back looking up into Heaven.”
Intended behavior event [what he did]	

1832js	"[I] could find none that would believe the hevnyly [sic] vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart"
1839js	"Some few days later after I had this vision I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist Preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement and conversing with him on the subject of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior, he treated my communication not only lightly but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil, that there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days, that all such things had ceased with the apostles and that there never would be any more of them."

*This quotation could be broken down further, but is left together because themes align with other material in this box.