

Section 4

Joseph Smith said he was born to good parents who worked hard to instruct him in the Christian religion.¹ It was general Christianity that Joseph got from his parents, not a particular version of it. They had no church—and that worried them both.

Shortly after moving his family yet again, this time to a new farm in Manchester, New York, Joseph Smith Sr. dreamed he met a peddler who promised to tell him the one thing he lacked. He jumped up to get some paper and awoke before learning the secret. Though he toiled hard and wanted badly to know God's will, Joseph Smith's father had a gnawing feeling that something vital was missing in his life.²

As his understanding of Joseph's mission grew, Father Smith began to believe that God would reveal the answers through Joseph. Early in 1829, Joseph Sr. visited Joseph in Harmony, Pennsylvania, longing to know what the Lord wanted him to do.³

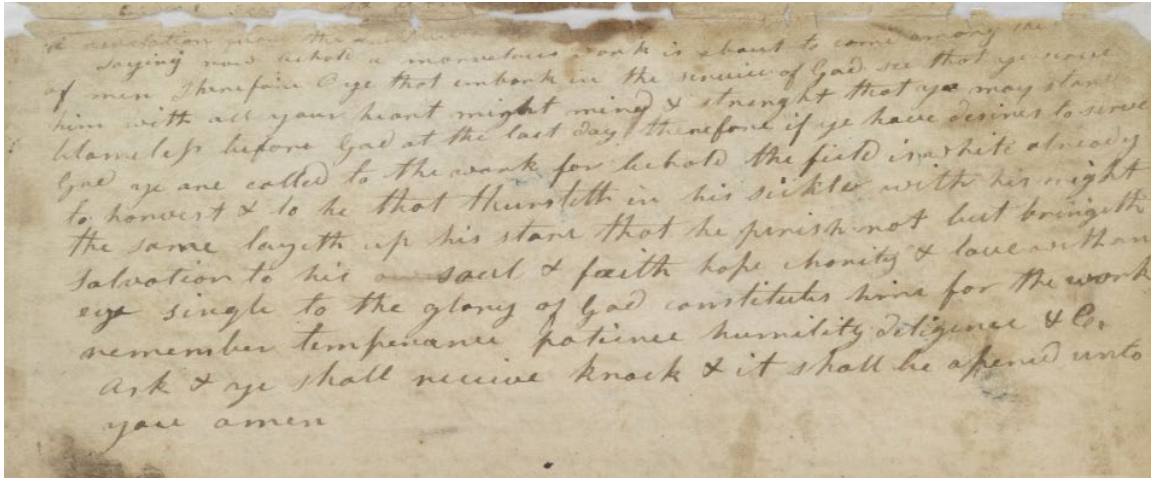
In the revelation, the Lord spoke the language of a God-fearing farmer who, by his own admission, sometimes drank too much and who wanted to be blameless. Section 4 sounds like it applies to everyone, but it is also perfectly adapted to Joseph's father. For example, the command to be temperate meant that he should not drink

¹ [“History, circa Summer 1832,”](#) p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 21, 2020.

² [“Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845,”](#) p. 72, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 21, 2020.

³ [“Revelation Book 1,”](#) p. 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 21, 2020.

excessively. The Lord's metaphor of a ripe field ready for harvesting made perfect sense to Father Smith, whose life as a farmer depended on reaping successful harvests and who knew exactly what it meant to thrust in his sickle and reap all day long.



Revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 4. Image via The Joseph Smith Papers.

This revelation turned Father Smith into a farmer of souls. He had been tight-lipped to Oliver Cowdery, the school teacher who was boarding with his family, but when Joseph Sr. returned home to New York, he told Oliver about the marvelous work about to come forth.⁴ As soon as the Book of Mormon was off the press and the Church of Jesus Christ was restored, Father Smith spent the harvest season visiting his parents and siblings. He found most of them ripe and his ministry brought salvation to their souls and his.⁵

⁴ “Revelation, February 1829 [D&C 4],” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 21, 2020.

⁵ On Father Smith's mission to his family, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 114.