

THE BOOK OF MORMON: A MYRIAD OF WITNESSES



BY AARON TESCH

About Aaron Tesch

My name is Aaron Tesch and I was born in Las Vegas, Nevada. In the mid-1980s my father, Garth Tesch began directing youth Church History tours, so I grew up visiting the Church History sites feeling the powerful, life changing spirit that can be felt at these sites. I have fond memories of visiting the early Church History sites from the birthplace of Joseph in Sharon Vermont to the martyrdom site in Carthage Jail.

For the past few years I have taken over my dad's tour with the goal to provide the best opportunities for testimony building. My tour visits Washington DC and Philadelphia because American History is really "pre-Church History." The formation of our nation in 1776, just a few short decades before the Restoration, allowed the religious freedoms necessary for young Joseph to enter into a grove of trees in the Spring of 1820 and seek answers to his questions. We visit the early Church history sites. We celebrate the Pioneers and their trek to Utah. We visit 6 temples and do baptisms in 3 or 4 temples. The main goal of this tour is to strengthen testimonies of the Restoration and deepen relationships with Jesus Christ our Savior.

For more information please contact me at teschchurchhistorytours@gmail.com . I would love to hear from you.



Table of Contents

Introduction	III-IV
The Translation Process as a Witness	1-10
Joseph Smith ,the Choice Seer	11-21
The Three Witnesses	22-25
Oliver Cowdery, the Second Elder	26-32
David Whitmer, the Most Interviewed Witness	33-39
Martin Harris, Testimony to the Whole World	40-48
The Eight Witnesses	49
Hyrum Smith, the Lord Loveth because of the Integrity of His Heart	50-53
Samuel Harrison Smith, Faithful as the Sun	54-56
Joseph Smith Senior, the First Patriarch	57-60
Hiram Page, How Can I Deny What I Know to be True	61-63
Christian Whitmer, a Faithful Witness	64-66
Peter Whitmer Jr., Missionary to the Lamanites	64-66
Jacob Whitmer, Always Faithful	67-70
John Whitmer, Writer and Keeper of a Regular History	67-70
Informal Witnesses	71
Mary Musselman Whitmer as the Fourth Witness	72-73
Lucy Mack Smith Testifies	74-77
Josiah Stowell Sees the Plates	78-79
Luke Johnson Shown the Plates by the “Angel of God”	78-79
Lucy Harris and Her Daughter	80-81
Martin Harris Witnesses Before Being a Three Witness	82-83
Oliver Cowdery Shown the Plates by the Lord	82-83
“Old Mr. Beaman” Lifts the Plates	84
Katherine Smith Lifts the Pages of the Plates	85-89
Sophronia Smith Hides the Plates	85-89
William Smith Thumbs Through the Plates	85-89
Emma Smith’s Experiences with the Plates	90-94
Isaac Hale Hefts the Box Containing the Plates	95-96
Joseph McKune Sr.	95-96
Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery, A Cheerful Observer	97-98
Conclusion of the Informal Witnesses	99
Moroni, I will not deny the Christ	100-112
Appendices	
Chart of what the Witnesses Saw	113-115
Moroni’s Message to Joseph Smith Summarized	116-117
Moroni’s Visit to the Hill Cumorah, Accounts in Parallel	118-125
Lost Manuscript	126-129
Hugh Nibley’s Book of Mormon Challenge	130
The Ongoing Translation of the Book of Mormon	131

Foreword

On a camping trip with my wife's family, my mother in law had planned a fireside about the Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. She invited me to share a few thoughts about the witnesses and their testimonies. I gladly accepted. After sharing some experiences and quotes, mostly from the Three Witnesses, my brother in law remarked that he hadn't heard the stories and asked which book he should read. I was amiss on which book contained all the stories of the witnesses of the plates.

From that conversation began a deep delve into the accounts and a compiling of the stories, life experiences, and quotes from all the witnesses of the Book of Mormon I could find. This book is the result.

Josiah Quincy, Mayor of Boston, visited Nauvoo in 1844 a short time before the Martyrdom. He was awed by all the Saints had accomplished. As he saw the culture, comradery and leadership of Joseph Smith he noted a seeming paradox.

On one side of the paradox, Joseph had established a lasting religion in "the age of free debate," with "hundreds of thousands" who upheld Joseph as "an emissary from the Most High." On the other side of the paradox, Joseph was branded a murderer, thief, liar and deceiver, "a fanatic, imposter, [and] charlatan." He noted that "fanatics and imposters are living and dying every day, and their memory is buried with them; but the wonderful influence which this founder of a religion exerts throws him in relief before us not as a rogue to be incriminated, but as a phenomenon to be explained." Because of this seeming paradox, Josiah Quincy was forced to exclaim, "I have no theory to advance respecting this extraordinary man ..."¹

To further complicate this paradox, the Introduction to the Book of Mormon adds eternal consequence to the question of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. It states, "Those who gain a divine witness [of the Book of Mormon] from the Holy Ghost will also come to know by the same power that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith is His revelator and prophet of these last days and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the Second Coming of the Messiah."

The paradox only exists if Joseph was an imposter *and* he was God's chosen prophet. Through the Book of Mormon we can know by the Holy Ghost that he is not both. If the Book of Mormon is true, then Joseph *is* God's prophet and the Church of Jesus Christ is the true and living Church with whom Jesus is well pleased.²

Since the Spring of 1820 critics have sought in every way possible with every explanation possible to explain away Joseph Smith, to belittle and undermine his history. However, Joseph didn't testify of the Plates and Moroni by himself. Numerous people stand as witnesses alongside Joseph.

This book explores the accounts of early people who had very real and physical experiences with the Book of Mormon plates. Surprisingly many had experiences with the plates. 7 individuals were shown the plates by Moroni. 16 saw the plates uncovered. 18 people lifted the plates. 11 saw the plates covered with a thin cloth. 6 individuals specifically recorded hearing a metallic "jink" or tinkling. 10 saw additional Nephite relics liked the Urim and Thummim, breastplate, Liahona, and/or the sword of Laban. 9 witnesses of the plates also scribed for Joseph. 21 individuals who physically experience the plates were baptized while 13 officially served missions for the Church. This book relates their experiences with the Plates.

Introduction

To emphasize the importance of the Book of Mormon, ponder the History of the early Restoration. With the crucifixion of Jesus, the Apostles directed the work. They faced stiff opposition from the Roman Empire and from within the Church itself. This opposition intensified and the Apostles were martyred. Due to wickedness the world was thrust into apostasy, a time when there was not an individual authorized to act in God's name for the next 1,600 years. James E. Talmage noted that this was a time when "sacred records had been burnt; places of worship razed to the ground; thousands of Christians put to death; and every possible effort had been made to destroy the Church and abolish Christianity from the earth."³ There were good men and women who feared God, but no one authorized to restore God's Church.⁴

In the Spring of 1820 the heavens were opened and God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to a young 14 year old Joseph Smith, beginning the Restoration. God again spoke to His children on earth. 19 revelations were received before the Church was organized on April 6, 1830 and recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants.

On May 15, 1829 John the Baptist, acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John⁵ appeared to Joseph and Oliver Cowdery and restored the Aaronic Priesthood, ordaining them to the office of a "priest after the order of Aaron & to hold the keys of this priesthood which office was to preach repentance & baptism for the remission of sins."⁶ A short time after Peter, James, and John "ordained" Joseph and Oliver to the Melchizedek priesthood and "ordained and confirmed [them] ... to be apostles and special witnesses of my name and bear the keys of the ministry."⁷ With the authority to act in God's name they baptized each other.

Joseph recorded that after the restoration of the priesthood "many became believers, and some were baptized."⁸ At least 7 were baptized in May and June 1829.⁹

9 months before the reorganization of the Church everything seemed to be in place. God had called Joseph and ordained him with the holy Priesthood, authorizing him to act in God's name. God had spoken to him in person, inspired him through revelation, and sent His holy angels to instruct him. Yet, God chose to wait. The Book of Mormon went on sale in Palmyra at the E. B. Grandin building on March 27, 1830, just 11 days before the reorganization of the Church. That seems significant.

In November 1841 while teaching the leaders of the Church Joseph declared "that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man [or woman] would get nearer to Go by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."¹⁰ That instruction on the Book of Mormon contains 3 parts.

The most correct of any book. The Book of Mormon itself testifies and teaches that the Bible had been passed through the great and abominable church and many plain and precious truths had been removed. The Book of Mormon put back those truths.

The keystone of our religion. While building an archway the keystone is placed last and holds all other stones in place. If the keystone is taken out then the arch falls. The analogy is clear. Though the restoration is ongoing even today, the Book of Mormon was the last piece of the reorganization of the Church on April 6, 1830. Joseph taught, "take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? *We have none.*"¹¹ Joseph recognized the importance of the Book of Mormon in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Draw closer to God by abiding by its precepts. After establishing its validity and importance, Joseph then taught the purpose of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon brings us closer to God and Jesus Christ if we abide by its precepts and teachings. Ultimately, being brought to God's presence is the purpose of His Plan of Salvation and Exaltation for each of us and the Book of Mormon is vital.

Ezekiel saw the restoring power of the Book of Mormon. He saw in vision that Israel was like a valley full of "very dry" bones, cut off from the Living Waters. The Lord breathes life into the house of Israel and the bones come together and are covered with skin. Ezekiel then sees what brought life back to Israel. It was the stick of Judah, the Bible, and the stick of Ephraim, the Book of Mormon, becoming one. Together these Books gather Israel, bring them into the lands of their inheritances, forming one nation with one king, and establishing a "covenant of peace ... an everlasting covenant" with Israel. Ezekiel then sees that this will happen in a time when "a sanctuary ... [and] a tabernacle," a house of God and temple will be built among them.¹²

Joseph in Egypt also saw the day when "a choice seer" named Joseph will bring forth the knowledge of the covenants. He saw that the writings of Judah, the Bible, and the writings of Joseph, the Book of Mormon will grow together confounding false doctrines, laying down contentions, establishing peace, and bring the knowledge of God's covenants.¹³

Lehi, drawing from the writings of Joseph, also taught that the Book of Mormon and the Bible would grow together and establish one doctrine in the hands of the Lord.¹⁴

Isaiah taught that the sealed book would be delivered to an educated man who would declare that he could not read a sealed book. It would then be delivered to an uneducated man, and God, through the uneducated man would bring forth the words of the Book. This will be a manifestation of God as a "God of miracles." This book, the Book of Mormon, will come in a time when the people draw near to God with their lips, but their hearts are far removed from God. The Book will "turn things upside down" even though it will be esteemed as common clay.¹⁵

Nephi declared that the Bible and the Book of Mormon serve as "the testimony of two nations" and that God continues to speak.¹⁶ He also stated that the last records, the Book of Mormon, will establish the truth of the first records, the Bible as it restores the plain and precious truths that were removed.¹⁷

The Lord testified that a purpose of the Book of Mormon is to heal the animosity among the children of Lehi as they "believe the Gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ." They will be "glorified through faith in his name and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen."¹⁸

Reading the witnesses of ancient prophets we begin to see why God waited until the Book of Mormon was published and available before reorganizing His Church in the Latter Days. Because of its importance, God has sent many witnesses in this to establish to testify of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

These individuals weren't perfect. But, they were near perfect in their charge to bear witness of the Book of Mormon as special witnesses to the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. One Historian noted, "I've got about 200 times ... very positive and specific statements ... and I am dealing with about 8 to 10 documents [with negative comments allegedly from or about the Book of Mormon witnesses], in other words 5 percent. And the question is, 'Do you believe the 95% or do you believe the five?'"¹⁹

-
- ¹ See Richard L. Bushman, "The Character of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2003), 29–30.; see also Acts 5:34-39
- ² D&C 1:30
- ³ James E. Talmage, *The Great Apostasy, I* (1968), 73
- ⁴ See 1 Nephi 13-15
- ⁵ See *Joseph Smith History* 1:72; D&C 7:7
- ⁶ Joseph Smith Sermon 10 March 1844 as recorded by Willford Woodruff in his journal, see *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, as found in *Opening the Heavens*, 241 document #19
- ⁷ D&C 27:12
- ⁸ *History of the Church* 1:51
- ⁹ Joseph and Oliver, May 15, 1829 (*HC* 1:39), Samuel H. Smith, May 25, 1829 (*HC* 1:44); Peter Whitmer Jr., David Whitmer, Hyrum Smith, possibly June 3, 1829 (*HC* 1:51); John Whitmer, early June (*JSP*, Biographies). Historian B. H. Roberts believed there could have been no more than 9 baptized (*HC* 1:76-77, footnote)
- ¹⁰ *History of the Church* 4:461
- ¹¹ Kirtland High Council Minutes, 21 April 1834, 43-44
- ¹² Ezekiel 37
- ¹³ Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 50:24-38
- ¹⁴ 2 Nephi 3
- ¹⁵ See Isaiah 29:11-16, 2 Nephi 27:15-26; Joseph Smith History 1:63-65
- ¹⁶ 2 Nephi 29:8, 9
- ¹⁷ 1 Nephi 13:40
- ¹⁸ D&C 3:16-20
- ¹⁹ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Explaining Away the Book of Mormon Witnesses," Address at the August 2004 FairMormon Conference as found in Tad R. Callister, *A Case for the Book of Mormon*, 161-62

Translation Process as a Witness of the Divine Origins of the Book of Mormon

When studying the myriad witnesses who bore testimony of the Book of Mormon the list would include Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and the Smith and Whitmer families. But an often overlooked witness would be the translation process itself, bearing testimony that the Book of Mormon comes from God as revealed to prophets.

Joseph enlisted the help of a few intimate friends to help with the scribing during the translation process. Martin Harris appears to have scribed during the first 116 pages of manuscript. Oliver scribed the majority of the plates. Emma stated that she and Samuel Harrison Smith¹ scribed for Joseph as he translated the Plates.² Christian Whitmer,³ Peter Whitmer Jr.⁴ and David Whitmer scribed small portions. John Whitmer scribed about 60 pages of manuscript.⁵ Emma positively identified her brother Rueban Hale⁶ as a brief scribe. Alva Hale⁷ has also been identified as a potential scribe, though this is unlikely. 9 (possibly 10) individuals heard the words of the Book of Mormon as Joseph translated the plates and could also act as witnesses to the divine origins of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph never left any details about the process of translation. He simply stated that he had translated the Book of Mormon by the “gift and power of God.”⁸ At a general conference in 1831 several of the members bore testimony of the Book of Mormon. Hyrum felt that Joseph could best describe how the Book of Mormon came to be “that all might know for themselves. Brother Joseph said it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things.”⁹ While Joseph was silent on the manner in which he translated the plates, his scribes left details.

Where some see mysticism, magic, and even deception in the things they cannot understand in the translation process, we should also see that the translation process itself testifies of the divinity of the plates, the translation, and the Book of Mormon. There are 8 aspects of the translation process that direct to a translation by the gift and power of God, the “blanket screen,” Joseph’s lack of education, the stones or interpreters, the translation appeared in English, Joseph needed to be righteous and rely on God to deliver the translation, and Joseph translated the Book of Mormon relatively quick.

The Curtain

First, there is one statement associated with Martin Harris indicating that a blanket was placed between Joseph and Martin. However, the statement is laced with bias, not a direct quotation from Martin, and had inaccuracies. “The way Smith made his transcripts and transcriptions for Harris,” the interviewer reported, was with Joseph “concealed behind the blanket, pretend[ing] to look through his spectacles ...”¹⁰ Depending on how “Smith made his transcripts ... for Harris,” it is possible that the blanket was only used when Joseph was copying the symbols directly from the plates in preparation for Martin to take the copies to scholars in New York; an idea that Elder Neal A. Maxwell believed.¹¹ Emma made no mention of a sheet and her descriptions made it clear there was no concealment between Joseph and herself. David Whitmer stated that the “blanket-screen” was used to block light from a window and to prevent any visitors

to the house from seeing the interpreters, plates, and/or manuscript while the work was in progress.¹² Oliver's wife was a Whitmer and a young lady while Joseph translated the plates. She stated, "I often sat by and saw and heard them translate and write for hours together. Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating."¹³ This statement would include Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and likely include Christian and John Whitmer. The only scribes left unknown would be Samuel Smith and Rueban Hale.

Joseph was Generally Uneducated

The second aspect of the translation process that indicates that the Book of Mormon came by the "gift and power of God" is that Joseph was uneducated; not just ignorant of languages, but generally uneducated. By reading all the accounts left by the witnesses, in particular his scribes, a process of translation emerges. Emma Smith,¹⁴ David Whitmer,¹⁵ Martin Harris,¹⁶ and Oliver Cowdery¹⁷ all testified that Joseph was uneducated. For each of them knowing Joseph's lack of education and seeing the progress of the translation reinforced their faith that the Book of Mormon came from God.

Joseph Smith noted numerous times his lack of education,¹⁸ even stating that his "crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language" was like a "little, narrow prison ... of paper, pen and ink."¹⁹ The Smith family often experienced economic hardship which necessitated the continual effort and resourcefulness of all the family to support the family. This meant that Joseph and the other children were denied the benefit of an education.²⁰ Lucy Mack Smith similarly recorded that because of frequent moving²¹ the children "were [prevented] from the benefit of an education."²²

On one occasion Emma stated that Joseph could not even pronounce the name "Sarah" and had to spell it out for Emma to pronounce. On another occasion Joseph stopped translating and looked "pale as a sheet." He asked Emma if Jerusalem really had walls. When Emma responded, "Yes," Joseph said, "Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived."²³ According to David Whitmer he had to find a Bible and read it for himself before he could move on with the translation.²⁴

Emma unequivocally declared, "My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscript unless he was inspired; for when [I was] his scribe, your father would dictate hour after hour; and after returning after meals, or after interruptions he would at once begin where he had left off, without seeing the manuscript or without having any portion of it read to him. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and for one so ... unlearned as he was it was simply impossible. Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well worded letter, let alone dictate a book like the Book of Mormon, and though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translating of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder' as much so as to anyone else."²⁵ What was the source of Emma's firm faith in the Book of Mormon coming from God? It was two fold; she knew intimately the limitations of her husband Joseph and yet, she watched the work of translating the plates progress despite it. For her "it was simply impossible" for the unlearned Joseph to translate the plates without divine help.²⁶

"I knew not who was right or who was wrong, and I considered it of the first importance to be right in matters that involve eternal consequences ... thus ... I retired to a silent grove and bowed down before the Lord" Joseph Smith

The Urim and Thummim

Because of Joseph's lack of education God prepared a means to help Joseph accomplish the work given to him.²⁷ The third aspect of the translation that points us to the divine origins of the Book of Mormon is the use of the interpreters. The Book of Mormon teaches vital information about the interpreters. They are a "gift from God" to aid in the translation of languages, only seers can look into them, they must be used for the purposes of God, if they are not used for the intended purposes the individual's life could be in danger, they reveal great mysteries contained in unknown languages, and they bring forth out of darkness unto light the secret works and abominations. A Nephite taught, "Thus God has provided a means (the interpreters) that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore, he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings."²⁸

In the 1820s there likely wasn't anyone who could have translated the Plates. In the late 1820s Egyptology was a new and budding science in the United States. Additionally, the Nephites altered the Egyptian language. Nephi began his record stating that he wrote "in the language of my father [Lehi], which consisted of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians."²⁹ Nephi was writing in one language, Egyptian, while being influenced by the methods, manners, and styles of another language, Hebrew. One thousand years later the last Nephite, Moroni, recorded that the Nephites called it "Reformed Egyptian" and that the language and mode of writing has "been handed down and altered by us (the scribes/historians)," further complicating the language. Moroni points out that this language was chosen because it saved space on the plates and lessened the effort necessary to engrave it on the plates.³⁰ There truly was no one who could have translated the plates by their intellect alone. God, therefore, provided interpreters.

Emma,³¹ Martin Harris,³² David Whitmer,³³ Oliver Cowdery³⁴ and William Smith³⁵ stated that Joseph placed the stone in a hat to block out the light. David stated that "in the darkness the spiritual light would shine."³⁶ William Smith, Oliver's wife Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery, and Joseph Knight were all intimately acquainted with Joseph and they also stated that Joseph placed the interpreters in a hat to block out the light.³⁷ Pulling the hat close enhances the statements made by Emma concerning the use of source materials. Joseph III reported that his mother said "she could see and know what was being done; that during no part of [the translation of the plates] did Joseph Smith have any ... book of any kind from which to read, or dictate, except the plates."³⁸ On another occasion Emma declared, "[Joseph] had neither manuscript nor book to read from ... If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me."³⁹

David Whitmer also saw a witness of the divine origins of the Book of Mormon in the use of interpreters. He declared, "In the darkness [of the hat] the spiritual light would shine ... The Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man."⁴⁰

Martin Harris noted an interesting incident with a seer stone. After repeated hours of translating, Joseph and Martin would grow restless. They would walk a short distance to the Susquehanna River. On one occasion Martin found a small stone that resembled the seer stone. Martin swapped the seer stone with the river rock that he had found. Joseph sat down to translate but could not. "Martin!" Joseph exclaimed, "What is wrong? All is as dark as Egypt!" Martin then exclaimed that he had swapped the stones "to stop the mouths of fools, who had told him that the Prophet has learned those sentences and was merely repeating them."⁴¹

Translation Appeared in English

The fourth aspect of the translation process that points to the divine origins of the Book of Mormon is that Joseph was given the translation in English. David Whitmer,⁴² Oliver Cowdery,⁴³ William Smith,⁴⁴ and Joseph⁴⁵ testified that Joseph read in English the words on the interpreters. David stated that the Urim and Thummim would “convert” the characters into English so that he could read in English,⁴⁶ according to what Joseph had told him.⁴⁷ Martin,⁴⁸ David,⁴⁹ Oliver,⁵⁰ and John Whitmer⁵¹ all stated that the words would remain on the interpreters until they were correctly written by the scribe, then the words would disappear and new words would appear. Looking at the original manuscript Joseph spelled out words, usually names, relatively often. As examples, Oliver phonetically spelled Zenoch, Coriantumr, and a few others and then crossed out the names and used the corrected spelling.⁵²

Martin Harris reported that Joseph would look at the “seer stone” and “sentences would appear and were read by the prophet.” Martin would then inform Joseph when the sentence was written. “If correctly written that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.”⁵³ David Whitmer reported that the words would appear on something like a “parchment” and the sentence would remain until it was written correctly by the scribe.⁵⁴

The importance of the Urim and Thummim

The use of the Urim and Thummim is a key evidence that supports Joseph’s claim that the Book of Mormon came from God. If God would have revealed the words to Joseph’s mind as Joseph read from the plates it would have been easy to assume that Joseph invented the words. By revealing the word through the Urim and Thummim or seer stone Joseph is removed as a possible source of the Book of Mormon or its translation.

Despite this, the use of a seer stone or Urim and Thummim is often looked down upon, viewed as magic or mysticism. It seems strange that God would reveal the words of the Book of Mormon to His prophet through a stone. Even in Joseph’s day the use of the “interpreters” was viewed negatively by some. In 1826 and twice in 1830 Joseph was arrested on charges of being a “disorderly person,” a general category that included those “pretending ... to locate buried treasure.”⁵⁵ The extended family of Josiah Stowell accused Joseph of looking into a stone to discover lost property, an accusation that Joseph acknowledged.⁵⁶ Isaac Hale, who first came to know his son in law Joseph during this time, was very opposed to Joseph’s use of the seer stone and did not want his daughter to get involved. Again, in 1830 during the baptism of Emma and others Joseph was arrested and charged with “being a disorderly person; of setting the country in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁷

Because of its importance and the ease of portraying it negatively, the Urim and Thummim is a point of attack for Satan. If he can get the translation method to look evil, then the Book of Mormon looks evil as well.

Joseph had to be Righteous

Because he was uneducated and had to rely on revelation from God, Joseph had to exhibit profound righteousness in his daily life and relationships with others. The sixth aspect of the translation process is that nothing could be amiss in his personal and spiritual life. David Whitmer often spoke about Joseph’s need for personal righteousness in order to translate. He said,

“[Joseph] was a religious and straightforward man. He had to be; for he was illiterate and he could do nothing himself. He had to trust in God. He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings toward everyone⁵⁸ ... and just right before the Lord.”⁵⁹ “This rigorous exactment required him to be humble and spotless in his deportment in order that the work might progress.”⁶⁰ He also recalled, “Each time before resuming the work all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the [translation].”⁶¹

Four events during the translation process illustrate that Joseph needed to be righteous in order to translate, Joseph had to be righteous before he could take the plates from Cumorah, Oliver’s attempt to translate the plates, the lost 116 pages of manuscript and an argument between Joseph and Emma that prevented Joseph’s translation.

First of all, Joseph had to achieve a certain level of preparedness and righteousness before he was allowed to take the plates from the Hill Cumorah. When the 17 year old Joseph first went to the Hill Cumorah he attempted three times to remove the plates and was shocked three times with progressive intensity. In frustration he cried out, “Why can I not obtain this book?” Moroni appeared and told him it was because he had not kept the commandments of God. Moroni showed Joseph an extended vision in vivid imagery of the glory of God contrasted with “the prince of darkness and his innumerable train of associates.” Moroni did this so that Joseph could “know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one. ... [The Plates] are sacred, and must be kept so, for the promise of the Lord concerning them, must be fulfilled. No man can obtain them if his heart is impure, because they contain that which is sacred ... you see that there is nothing that is desirable in the works of darkness; that they cannot bring happiness; that those who are overcome therewith are miserable, while on the other hand the righteous are blessed with a place in the kingdom of God where joy unspeakable surrounds them. ... The glory of God crowns them, and they continually feast upon his goodness and enjoy his smiles.”⁶² This vision was so powerful and remarkable that just prior to his death Joseph remarked to his mother “that ever afterward he was willing to keep the commandments of God.”⁶³ Joseph had learned his lesson. If he was to do the work the Lord had for him, he needed to be righteous and have only righteous desires.

After the young 17 year old Joseph came home from the Hill Cumorah without the plates after the first visit with Moroni in 1823, Lucy describes the “much uneasiness” the family felt, fearing “that he might utterly fail [in] obtaining the Record through some neglect on his part.” Because of this feeling, Lucy continued, “We therefore, doubled our diligence in prayer and supplication to God in order that he might be more fully instructed in his duty and be preserved from the wiles and machinations of him ‘who lieth in wait to deceive.’”⁶⁴

For the next 4 years Joseph “was visited constantly by angels ... He had vision after vision in order that his mind might be saturated with the knowledge of the things of God and that he might comprehend the great and holy calling God had bestowed upon him.”⁶⁵ Joseph also stated, “after having many visits from the angels of God, unfolding the majesty and glory of the events ... [Moroni] delivered the records into my hands.”⁶⁶ Only after a period of proving and trying did Joseph receive the plates.

The second illustration that Joseph had to be righteous comes from Oliver’s attempt to translate. As the translation process continued Oliver desired to take a greater role; he desired to translate. The Lord taught him that he must “ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that [he] shall receive knowledge concerning the engravings of old records.” The Lord would then tell

“‘I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.’ Amaleki

him in his mind and in his heart by the Holy Ghost. The Lord recognized that Oliver had a gift, an aptitude, for things of the Spirit and needed to “apply unto it.” Then he reminded Oliver, “behold, there is no other power, save the power of God that can cause this gift ... to be with you.”⁶⁷ Oliver tried to translate but could not, evidently causing some complaint from Oliver, for he is told, “Murmur not my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner.” The Lord revealed why Oliver could not translate. “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause ... you to feel that it is right. ... Now if you had known this, you could have translated.”⁶⁸ Oliver’s attempt to translate indicates that the process was far more complicated and required a level of receptivity to the Holy Ghost. It also require “a gift” and “a power of God.”⁶⁹ A desire was simply not enough.

Joseph had to be humble and righteous is also illustrated in the loss of the 116 pages of manuscript. When Joseph had lost the manuscript he made statements like “I am afraid I have broken the commandments and will not be able to translate,”⁷⁰ “all is lost! What shall I do? It is I who have sinned. It is I who tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which I had no right to ask, as I was asked differently by the angel.” His mother recorded that in devastation “He wept and groaned, walking the floor continually.”⁷¹

One month after losing the manuscript Joseph was reprimanded by the Lord for boasting in his own strength, setting at naught God’s counsels, following his own dictates, entrusting the manuscript contrary to previous instructions, fearing man more than God, and not being faithful. Martin Harris was called “a wicked man.”⁷² In consequence of their actions, Moroni took the plates⁷³ and Joseph wasn’t allowed to translate for “a season.”⁷⁴ That “season” became 9 months during which time Joseph worried that he had failed in his divine calling.⁷⁵ Martin was no longer permitted to serve as scribe and was eventually replaced by Oliver Cowdery.⁷⁶ They had transgressed the commandments and lost the gift of translation.

Because of transgression, repentance was necessary. His sister Katharine recorded that he “fasted and prayed several days, and [then] the angel returned them (the Plates) again and told him that his sins were forgiven and for him to go ahead and translate.”⁷⁷ Joseph related, “I continued my supplication to God without cessation, and on the twenty second of September [1828] I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim and Thummim with which I have again commenced translating, and Emma writes for me ... The angel was rejoiced when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim, and told me the Lord was pleased with my faithfulness and humility and loved me for my penitence and diligence in prayer ... and was able to enter upon the work of the translation again.”⁷⁸

The fourth incident that illustrate that Joseph needed to be holy in order to translate was a “stormy quarrel” that occurred between Joseph and Emma. “Something went wrong about the house and Joseph was put out about it.” Evidently, Joseph treated her roughly. David Whitmer recalled that “without pacifying her or making any reparation for his brutal treatment” he tried to translate and could not. He went out into the woods and prayed “fully an hour. ... When Joseph entered the room, pale and haggard, having suffered a vigorous chastisement at the hands of the Lord. He went straight in humiliation to his wife, entered and received her forgiveness, returned to his work, and, much to the joy of himself and his anxious friends surrounding him, the stone again glared forth its letters of fire.”⁷⁹

“I desire the room that I may write the things of God ... wherefore, I ... give commandment unto my seed that they shall note occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men. ... I engrave that which is pleasing unto God.” Nephi

Joseph had to be righteous, spiritually in tune, and right with everyone—nothing could be amiss.

The Speed of Translation

The seventh aspect of the translation process is the speed at which Joseph translated the plates also testifies of divine origins to the Book of Mormon. The translation was sped up by hard work. The weather was hot and the work was laborious; “the days were long and they worked from morning till night.”⁸⁰ David Whitmer recalled, “The boys, Joseph and Oliver, worked hard, early and late while translating.”⁸¹ The translation required continual effort.

The work was also sped up by inspiration and revelation. Emma recorded that after breaks he would begin again “without any hesitation.”⁸² She also stated, “your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.”⁸³

Recent research suggests that Joseph translated the portion of the plates that comprises the current Book of Mormon in 74 working days.⁸⁴ Two historians noted, “The pace of translation was stunning: about eight pages a day—remarkable even for skilled translators.”^{85 86}

The Complexity of the Book of Mormon Text

The eighth aspect of the Book of Mormon that points us to the divine origins of the Book of Mormon is the complexity of the text itself. The intricacies of the Book of Mormon are sometimes lost because the story seems so simplistic. However, the Book of Mormon contains over 165 people names, most of whom occupy 1 or 2 verses, over 75 city names, and almost 30 names of geographical features like rivers, bodies of water, hills, and valleys.⁸⁷

It contains a narration woven into the story of the evolution of 4 Nephite governmental systems (Nephi as its protector,⁸⁸ Kings,⁸⁹ Judges,⁹⁰ Tribes,⁹¹ and the eventual Nephite destruction⁹²). It contains descriptions of a monetary system⁹³ and descriptions of wars, tactics, strategy, and battles. It contains numerous writing styles to match the storyline of numerous prophet/historians.⁹⁴

It also contains over 100 names or titles of Christ, each with its own distinct meaning. There are only 30 pages of the current Book of Mormon that don't contain a reference to Jesus.⁹⁵ There are 3,600 references to Jesus;⁹⁶ that number grows to 7,452 when pronouns like He, Him, I are included.⁹⁷ As President Russell M. Nelson declared, “I testify with my whole soul that in the most miraculous and singular way, the Book of Mormon teaches us of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.”⁹⁸ The Book of Mormon teaches more clearly the depth, scope and magnitude of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Think of what our lives would be like without King Benjamin's powerful discourse of the Atonement and its miraculous impact on the hearers who declared, “because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, ... that we have no more disposition to evil, but to do good continually.”⁹⁹ Or the harrowing story of Alma the Younger who lived a riotous and wicked life as “one of the most vilest of sinners” contrasted with his devoted life as the Church's High Priest and tireless missionary because his mind finally caught hold of “Jesus Christ, [the] son of God, [who would] atone for the sins of the world” while his soul was racked with eternal torment.¹⁰⁰ Alma, through life experiences teaches us the power of repentance and the Atonement of Jesus. What might our lives be like without Jacob's teachings of an infinite atonement that snatches us from the grasp of “the awful monster” of physical death

and spiritual death called hell.¹⁰¹ Or Alma's teachings of Jesus who suffers our pains, afflictions, temptations of every kind, the sicknesses of his people, their infirmities, and their sins that "he might know according to the flesh how to succor his people."¹⁰²

It contains powerful teachings on complex topics like the scattering and gathering of Israel, adoption, histories, the generalized apostasy and the need for a restoration, the fall and the atonement, and nature of Jesus and God. It contains testimony strengthening discourses on faith, charity, God's love, prayer and so much more. It contains stories of individuals who courageously withstood evil like Nephi, Abinadi, Alma and his son Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, Captain Moroni, Moroni and his father Mormon, and "the Nephites [who] did not fear [the Gadianton Robbers], but ... did supplicate [God] for protection."¹⁰³

It would be very difficult to justify that Joseph, in the time he had the plates could write such a literary complex book.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Almost every aspect of the translation process itself testifies that the Book of Mormon came forth by the gift and power of God. It was not mysticism or magic. It was a loving Heavenly Father providing the means for His "choice seer" to accomplish a work far beyond Joseph's limited abilities. The process testifies, just as Joseph testified, that the Book of Mormon was "translated by the gift and power of God." Those who prayerfully read the Book of Mormon come to know that it is God's masterpiece, restoring the long lost plain and precious doctrinal truths. They draw strength from the lives of those whose voices cry from the dust. It truly was written for our day!

"I can assuredly tell ... of a man that can translate, for he has wherewith he can look and translate all records ... and it is a gift from God. And the things are called 'interpreters' and no man call look in them except he be commanded." Ammon

¹ See Paul Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Little Known Truths about the Book of Mormon*, 56

² Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:16 and footnote 64

³ See *Juvenile Instructor* 19:106

⁴ "Peter Whitmer Jr.," *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, 679

⁵ See *Saints' Herald* 26, (15 December 1876), 307b

⁶ Interview of Emma Smith by Edward M. Tullidge as cited in Paul Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Little Known Truths about the Book of Mormon*, 56

⁷ "He Will Not Give Up," *Daily Missouri Republican*, Saint Louis, 16 July 1884

⁸ See *History of the Church* 1:1:58 and footnote; 1:72; 1:315; 3:537. For additional statements from Joseph see *Opening the Heavens: Divine Manifestations 1820-1844*, First Edition, documents, 10, 16, 20, 21, 22, 32, 33, & 37 as found on pages 121-129; Joseph Smith Papers, *Documents*, 2:354; for statements from Martin Harris see *Opening the Heavens*, documents 46, 48, 66, & 68 as found on pages 133-141; for similar statements by Oliver Cowdery see *Opening the Heavens*, documents 72, 77 on pages 143 & 144; For David Whitmer statements see *Opening the Heavens*, document 96 on page 156; for John Whitmer statements see *Opening the Heavens*, document 99 on page 158.

⁹ *Far West Record Book*, Book 2, 13 as found in *History of the Church* 1:220 footnote; see also <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/15> as retrieved 12/25/23

¹⁰ John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia, 1842), 224, 228, 230-31

¹¹ As one example see Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Echos and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, (2002), 7-8

¹² "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, 3

¹³ William E. McClellin, "My Dear Friends," Community of Christ Library Archives

¹⁴ "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints Herald* 26, (1 October 1879), 289-90

¹⁵ M. J. Hubble Interview, 13 November 1886; *An Address to all Believers in Christ: By a Witness of the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, (Richmond, Mo.: By the author, 1887), 6

¹⁶ Rueben P. Harmon Statement witnessed by Arthur Deming and Granville Harmon, *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1, April 1888, 1

¹⁷ Samuel W. Richards Statement (21 May 1907), Holograph, 2-3 Church Archives

¹⁸ Letter of Joseph Smith to James Arlington Bennett, 13 November 1843, *History of the Church*, 6:74 JSH

¹⁹ Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832 as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition, (2005), 2

²⁰ 1832 History, Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:11

Translation Process as a Witness of the Divine Origins of the Book of Mormon

- ²¹ The Smith family moved 10 times before they left the Palmyra area in 1829. 1797-1802 Tunbridge VT; 1802-03 Randolph VT; 1803-04 Tunbridge VT; 1804-07 Sharon VT; 1807-08 Tunbridge VT; 1808-11 South Royalton VT; 1811-15 Lebanon NH; Joseph spent the summer 1813 in Salem MA to recuperate from leg surgery; 1815-18 Norwich VT; 1816-25 Manchester log home; 1825-29 Manchester frame home.
- ²² *History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, (1979), 51
- ²³ Emma Smith Bidamon interviewed by Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9, (October 1916) as found in *Opening the Heavens*, 129
- ²⁴ "The Book of Mormon," *The Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, 3 as found in *Opening the Heavens*, 153
- ²⁵ *The Saints Advocate*, October 1879
- ²⁶ *The Saints Advocate*, October 1879
- ²⁷ See also 1 Nephi 3:7
- ²⁸ See Mosiah 8:13, 19, 18; Alma 37:24-25
- ²⁹ 1 Nephi 1:2
- ³⁰ Mormon 9:32-33
- ³¹ "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints Herald* 26, (1 October 1879), 289-90
- ³² "Mormonism—No II," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (May 1859), 163, 165-66; "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *The Millennial Star* 48 (21 June 1886), 389-90; R. W. Alderman's Statement, *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1, (January 1888), 3; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ³³ J. L. Traughber, Jr., "Testimony of David Whitmer," *Saints Herald* 26, (15 November 1879), 341; Eri B. Mullin, *Saints Herald* 27, (1 March 1880), 13; *Kansas City Daily Journal*, 5 June 1881; James H. Hart, "About the Book of Mormon," *Deseret Evening News*, 25 March 1884; George Q. Cannon interview with David Whitmer, 27 February 1884; Zenas Gurley Interview 14 January 1885, "Questions asked of David Whitmer," Holograph 3-4; The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, 3; *An Address to all Believers in Christ: By a Witness of the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, (Richmond, Mo.: By the author, 1887), 12; *Richmond Missouri Democrat*, 26 January 1886; Nathan A. Tanner Jr. to Nathan A. Tanner, 17 February 1907; *Kansas City Journal*, 19 June 188; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ³⁴ Christian Goodwillie, *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 143
- ³⁵ *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni Iowa: Herald Steam Book, 1883), 80; "The Old Soldier's Testimony," *Saints' Herald* 31 (4 October 1884), 644; "Statement of J. W. Peterson on William Smith," 1 May 1921, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, Community of Christ Library Archives; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ³⁶ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, Mo.: By the author, 1887), 12
- ³⁷ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*,
- ³⁸ See Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 29
- ³⁹ "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald*, (1 October 1879), 290-91
- ⁴⁰ David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers in Christ: By a Witness of the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, (Richmond, Mo.: By the author, 1887), 12
- ⁴¹ *Millennial Star*, 44:86-87
- ⁴² *Kansas City Daily Journal*, 5 June 1881; E. C. Briggs, *The Saints' Herald* 31, (21 June 1884), 396-97; George Q. Cannon interview with David Whitmer, 27 February 1884; Zenas Gurley Interview 14 January 1885, "Questions asked of David Whitmer," Holograph 3-4; "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, 3; *Omaha Herald*, 17 October 1886; *An Address to all Believers in Christ: By a Witness of the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, (Richmond, Mo.: By the author, 1887), 12; *Richmond Missouri Democrat*, 26 January 1886; Nathan A. Tanner Jr. to Nathan A. Tanner, 17 February 1907; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁴³ Benton, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (19 April 1831) as found in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 66
- ⁴⁴ "The Old Soldier's Testimony," *Saints' Herald* 31 (4 October 1884), 644; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁴⁵ Truman Coe, *Hudson Ohio Observer*, 11 August 1836; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁴⁶ *Chicago Times*, 17 October 1881; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁴⁷ J. L. Traughber, Jr., "Testimony of David Whitmer," *Saints Herald* 26, (15 November 1879), 341
- ⁴⁸ Edward Stevenson interview of Martin Harris in 1870, 30 November 1881, *Deseret Evening News*, 13 December 1881; "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *The Millennial Star* 48 (21 June 1886), 389-90; Andrew Jenson, "The Three Witnesses," *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887), 2:16-17; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁴⁹ *Kansas City Daily Journal*, 5 June 1881; George Q. Cannon interview with David Whitmer, 27 February 1884; Zenas Gurley Interview 14 January 1885, "Questions asked of David Whitmer," Holograph 3-4; *Omaha Herald*, 17 October 1886; M. J. Hubble Interview, 13 November 1886; *Richmond Missouri Democrat*, 26 January 1886; Nathan A. Tanner Jr. to Nathan A. Tanner, 17 February 1907; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁵⁰ Samuel W. Richards Statement (21 May 1907), Holograph, 2-3 Church Archives; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁵¹ S. F. Walker, "Synopsis of a Discourse Delivered at Lamoni, Iowa," *Saints' Herald* 26 (15 December 1879), 370; as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 118-213
- ⁵² Royal Skousen, "Oliver Cowdery as Book of Mormon Scribe," *Days Never to Be Forgotten: Oliver Cowdery*, 61-62. For a greater discussion on name changes see the entire chapter by Skousen.
- ⁵³ *Millennial Star*, 44:78-79
- ⁵⁴ *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881
- ⁵⁵ <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-was-joseph-smith-accused-of-being-a-disorderly-person-in-1826> as retrieved on 5/26/2024
- ⁵⁶ Essay's in Church History "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trials, as retrieved from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/joseph-smiths-1826-trial?lang=eng> on 5/25/2024
- ⁵⁷ *History of the Church* 1:88; Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:392

Translation Process as a Witness of the Divine Origins of the Book of Mormon

- ⁵⁸ Interview on 15 January 1882 as found in *Saints' Herald* 29, (1 March 1882), 68
- ⁵⁹ E. C. Briggs letter to the *Saints' Herald* 31, (21 June 1884), 396-7
- ⁶⁰ *Omaha Herald*, 17 October 1886 as quoted in *Opening the Heavens: Divine Manifestations 1820-1844*, First Edition, 155
- ⁶¹ "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, 3
- ⁶² Oliver Cowdery Account, *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, vol 2, 197-99
- ⁶³ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 109
- ⁶⁴ Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 84-85
- ⁶⁵ George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:362; Orson Pratt also said Joseph was "often ministered to by the angels of God and received instruction concerning the work that was to be performed in the last days" (*Journal of Discourses*, 15:185).
- ⁶⁶ *History of the Church* 1:495
- ⁶⁷ D&C 8:1, 2, 4, 7
- ⁶⁸ D&C 9:6-8, 10
- ⁶⁹ D&C 8:7
- ⁷⁰ See Katherine Smith Salisbury, "An Angel Told Him: Joseph Smith's Aged Sister Tells about Moroni's Talk," *Kansas City Times*, 11 April 1895 as found in Kyle Walker, "Katherine Smith Salisbury's Recollections of Joseph's Meeting with Moroni," *BYU Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002), 16.
- ⁷¹ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 165-66
- ⁷² July 1828, D&C 3:4, 5, 7, 8, 12
- ⁷³ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 173-74, 176
- ⁷⁴ D&C 3:14
- ⁷⁵ See Church History Essays, "The Lost Manuscript of the Book of Mormon," as found on <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/lost-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng> as retrieved on 12/28/23
- ⁷⁶ Martin Harris stated, "I was never permitted to write for the Prophet anymore. Oliver Cowdery did all the rest of the writing." (William Pinkerton Affidavit, 3 April 1934, Church Archives as cited in *Opening the Heavens: Divine Manifestation 1820-1844*, First Edition (2005), 140
- ⁷⁷ Katherine Smith Salisbury, "An Angel Told Him: Joseph Smith's Aged Sister Tells about Moroni's Talk," *Kansas City Times*, 11 April 1895 as found in Kyle Walker, "Katherine Smith Salisbury's Recollections of Joseph's Meeting with Moroni," *BYU Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002), 16.
- ⁷⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 176;
- ⁷⁹ Interview on 15 January 1882 as found in *Saints' Herald* 29, (1 March 1882), 68; *Omaha Herald*, 17 October 1886 as quoted in *Opening the Heavens: Divine Manifestations 1820-1844*, First Edition, 155
- ⁸⁰ James H. Hart, "About the Book of Mormon," *Deseret Evening News*, March 25, 1884
- ⁸¹ E. C. Briggs, Letter to the editor, *Saints' Herald* 31 (June 21, 1884): 396-97
- ⁸² Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9 (October 1916): 454
- ⁸³ Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289-90
- ⁸⁴ John W. Welch, "Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon: Days [and Hours] Never to be Forgotten," *BYU Studies Quarterly*, vol 57, no. 4, 50 (pgs. 10-50)
- ⁸⁵ Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 19-20
- ⁸⁶ Though Joseph received the plates on 22 September 1827 very little was translated due to lack of scribe and materials, preparing copies of the characters to take to scholars in New York, persecution for neighbors seeking to take the plates, and necessity of supporting a wife. Once Martin began scribing the work progressed, but soon halted for 9 months when Martin lost the 116 pages of manuscript and was no longer permitted to scribe. Joseph waited until Oliver could begin scribing full time from April 7 to June 30, 1829 when they completed their work.
- ⁸⁷ I looked through the Index to the Triple Combination and found approximately 166 names of people, 76 city or land names, and 29 geographical feature names. The intent of this count was not be precise and exact, but to illustrate the sheer number of names Joseph would have had to come up with in order to support the claim that Joseph wrote the Book of Mormon. Most names needed to be original while sounding Biblical (Old Testament time period names).
- ⁸⁸ 2 Nephi 5:18; 6:2; Jacob 1:10
- ⁸⁹ Before his death, Nephi anointed a King. Kings ruled from 550 to 91 bc. Jacob 1:9, 11
- ⁹⁰ King Mosiah reorganized government system to Judges elected by the voice of the people. 91 bc to 30 ad. Mosiah 29.
- ⁹¹ Just before the coming of Christ the Judge system collapsed due to secret combinations and the Nephites were thrust into a tribal system. 3 Nephi 7:1, 2
- ⁹² At their destruction they were absorbed into the Lamanite nation, which was warring among itself. Mormon 8:9, 10
- ⁹³ Alma 11:4-19
- ⁹⁴ For a great description of how the Book of Mormon contains nearly twice the number of author voices as compared to the great authors of Joseph's day, such as Charles Dickens and Mark Twain see <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/is-it-possible-that-a-single-author-wrote-the-book-of-mormon> as retrieved 1/21/24
- ⁹⁵ Susan Easton Black, *Ensign*, August 1978, 60-61
- ⁹⁶ Susan Easton Black, *Ensign*, August 1978, 60-61
- ⁹⁷ John Hilton III, *Liahona*, January 2024, 10-11
- ⁹⁸ "The Book of Mormon: What would Your Life Be Like Without It?," Conference Report, October 2017
- ⁹⁹ Mosiah 5:2
- ¹⁰⁰ Alma 36
- ¹⁰¹ 2 Nephi 9
- ¹⁰² Alma 7
- ¹⁰³ 3 Nephi 4:10
- ¹⁰⁴ See Appendix 1 – Hugh Nibley's Book of Mormon Challenge

Witness # 1

Joseph Smith, The Choice Seer

December 23, 1805 to June 27, 1844 (38 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Joseph was born in Sharon Vermont. At the age of 7 Joseph and all the Smith children became ill with typhoid fever. Sophronia was ill and nearly died. Lucy held would hold Sophronia in her arms and pray for nearly 3 months. At the same time Joseph was extremely ill. As they both healed, Joseph suddenly screamed out in pain. A doctor was called and noticed an infection between his chest and shoulder. The doctor cut it open and pain “shot like lightning” to his left leg. After weeks of pain the doctor cut a long incision in Joseph’s leg, relieving the pain to some degree. After additional weeks the pain increased until the doctor lengthened the incision. Relief was only felt when Hyrum would squeeze Joseph’s leg, which he did day and night. Doctor Nathan Smith had been performing and perfecting a leg and life saving operation for 15 years and was just 5 miles from the Smith’s home at Dartmouth Medical College. In the procedure large pieces of infected bone were broken off and removed, allowing uninfected bone to grow. A team of doctors performed this surgery that was decades ahead of the time.¹

The Smiths moved to Norwich Vermont. The crops failed the first two years and Joseph Sr. resolved to move west if the crops failed a third year in a row. In 1815 Mount Tambora, a volcano in Indonesia erupted and ash circulated the globe altering the climate, causing freezing snow and frost into mid summer, increasing sicknesses and preventing the Smith’s crops from growing. Joseph Sr. moved to New York to prepare for the family to join him in 1816. As Lucy brought the children by caravan by hiring a man and renting a sleigh to carry their belongings and Joseph, whose leg still had not healed. He walked on crutches for 3 years. The hired man knocked Joseph off the sleigh. When Alvin and Hyrum tried to defend their brother the man whip and hit them. Lucy fired this man and Joseph was allowed to ride on another sleigh, until that driver also knocked Joseph off, bloodying his mouth. A stranger carried 9 year old Joseph to Palmyra.² It seems the entire early history of the Smiths was a series of heart wrenching events that brought Joseph to where he needed to be.

By 1818 ministers held religious revivals in the Palmyra area seeking to reclaim the frontiersmen. As a result, at the age of 12 Joseph began to worry about his immortal soul and his standing before God.³ For two years he sought truth, until he went into a grove of trees near his home and prayed. Satan appeared, binding Joseph and tempting him with doubt and “all manner of inappropriate images.”⁴ Just at the point when Joseph was about to resign himself to utter destruction he was delivered by God and Jesus Christ. A short time before the First Vision a shot was fired across Joseph’s path. The shot missed, killing a cow and frightening the Smith family.

The earthly Restoration of all things had begun. 3 years later Moroni informed Joseph that his name would be known among all nations for good and evil, causing the righteous to rejoice and the wicked to rage. Joseph was instructed by and visited with numerous angels,⁵ but he also was confronted with persecution, lawsuits,⁶ arrests,⁷ forced moves, exiles, and hardships. Joseph accomplished a work few could have and endure hardship none could have fathomed.

“[Joseph] stood upon his feet some 3 hours. The room was filled as with consuming fire, and his face was as clear as amber and he was clothed upon by the power of God.” Wilford Woodruff speaking of conferring the priesthood keys on the Twelve

Moroni and the Hill Cumorah

Joseph Smith is the first witness of the Book of Mormon in this dispensation. He first heard of the Plates as a 17 year old boy. For 3 years from the First Vision to 1823 Joseph reflected on his weaknesses and follies and often felt condemned because of his foolish errors. He wasn't guilty of any malignant sins, but behavior common to teens of his day. He endeavored to pray to know his "state and standing before [God]."⁸ Because he had previously seen God and Jesus Joseph had "full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation."⁹ Joseph stated "[I lay] meditating upon my past life and experiences ... I repented heartily from all my sins ... and humbled myself before Him."¹⁰

That night Moroni appeared 3 times. Each time his room began to fill with light "far purer and more glorious" than daylight. It seemed as though "the house was filled with consuming fire." But "a glory yet greater" accompanied Moroni.¹¹ "Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his entire person was glorious beyond description and his countenance truly like lightening."¹² quoting scripture that hinted at Joseph's role in the Last Days. Joseph was also shown a hill near his parent's home where golden plates were deposited. Moroni instructed Joseph that the plates contained "the fulness of the everlasting Gospel ... as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants."¹³

This experience had a deep impact on young Joseph. Joseph described his feelings with phrases like "I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard;" "I couldn't possibly sleep;" "So deep were the impressions;" and "I lay absorbed in astonishment."¹⁴

As Joseph traveled the short distance from his home to the Hill Cumorah a desire to fulfill the commandments of God *and* alleviate the poverty of this family occupied his mind. These "two invisible powers [were] operating on his mind"¹⁵ as he traveled to the Hill Cumorah.

The vision was so vivid that when he arrived at the Hill he immediately recognized the location where the plates were buried. On "the west side, not far from the top" Joseph unearthed the stone box and used a lever to pry open the lid. Inside he found the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate.^{16 17}

He then made an attempt to remove the Plates but was shocked. He made two additional attempts to remove the Plates and was progressively shocked,¹⁸ illustrating God's power to protect the plates. He then exclaimed, "Why can I not obtain the plates?" Joseph heard Moroni's voice, "Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord." Joseph was reminded that obtaining the Plates required keeping the commandments. Moroni appeared and "showed him many things which he saw in vision."¹⁹ "[T]he heavens were opened and the glory of the Lord shone round about and rested upon him. While he thus stood gazing and admiring, the angel said, 'Look!' and as [Moroni] thus spake, [Joseph] beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates." Like the First Vision, this vision contrasted good and evil, joy and misery, holy and impure so that he could know the two powers and never be overcome by the evil one. Moroni then continued to teach Joseph, "You now see why you could not obtain this record; that the commandment was strict, ... if ever these sacred things (the plates) are obtained they must be by prayer and faithfulness in obeying the Lord. They are not deposited here for the sake of accumulating gain and wealth. ... No man can obtain them if his heart is impure, because they contain that which is sacred; and besides, should they be entrusted in unholy hands the knowledge could not come to the world, because they cannot be interpreted by the learning of this generation. ... Therefore, remember, that they are to be translated by the gift

"[Joseph Smith] will stand at the head of the resurrection. He is the man who will receive the keys of the resurrection and will seal authority upon others and they will hunt out their friends and resurrect them. ... No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith." Brigham Young

and power of God. By them will the Lord work a great and a marvelous work ... There they rest beyond the power of the enemy of truth, where no evil can disturb them. The glory of God crowns them ...”²⁰

Lucy Mack Smith stated “that [Joseph] could not take [the plates] ... until he had learned to keep the commandments of God—not only till he was willing [to keep the commandments], but able to do it.”²¹ After showing Joseph the need for strict obedience in order to receive the plates and the power and influence he would be under if he did not keep the commandments, Joseph was taught about the impact the Book translated from the plates would have on the world. Moroni told the 17 year old Joseph on the first visit to the Hill Cumorah on September 22, 1823 that when the Plates are translated 1) the priesthood will be given, 2) missionaries will baptize and give the gift of the Holy Ghost, 3) persecution will increase, 4) those who are not built upon the Rock of Jesus will persecute the Saints, 5) the Church will grow the more it is opposed, 6) the Redeemer will come to Zion, 7) Joseph will be born of conqueror if he is obedient, and 8) Joseph’s name will cause the wicked to rage and the righteous to rejoice.²² All 8 blessings were seen in Joseph’s life, and have continued since. Moroni reiterated that the beginning piece, the key aspect of the restoration is the translation of the Plates and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Within a month of this visit to the Hill Cumorah and the teachings of Moroni, Joseph’s oldest brother Alvin passed away, devastating the family. Lucy recalled, “Thus was our happiness blasted. When we least expected the blow, it came upon us. The poisoned shaft entered our very hearts’ core and diffused its deadly effect throughout our veins. We were for a time almost swallowed up in grief.”²³ Because of the believing heart of Alvin and the close proximity of his death to Moroni’s visit the Book of Mormon became linked with Alvin for the Smith family. Lucy Mack Smith recalled, “Alvin manifested ... greater zeal and anxiety in regard to the Record that had been shown to Joseph, than any of the rest of the family; in consequence of which we could not bear to hear anything said upon the subject. Whenever Joseph spoke of the Record, it would immediately bring Alvin to our minds, with all his zeal, and with all his kindness; and, when we looked to his place, and realized that he was gone from it, to return no more in this life, we all with one accord wept over our irretrievable loss, and we could ‘not be comforted, because he was not.’”²⁴

The following year when he visited the Hill Cumorah he took the plates from the box and set them on the ground to bury the box, however, when he turned to pick them up the plates were gone. Joseph prayed to know why the record had been taken from him and was informed that he had not yet reached the level of obedience to take the plates.²⁵

Joseph was to return each year and be tutored by Moroni and other angels in preparation to receive the plates and translate them by the gift and power of God. His mother recorded that Joseph would relate “some of the most amusing recitals ... [about] the ancient inhabitants ... with as much ease, seemingly as if he had spend his whole life among them.”²⁶ Joseph reported that in the years between 1823, when Moroni first appeared and 1827 when Moroni gave Joseph charge over the plates he “... received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days ...”²⁷ George Q. Cannon reported, “[Joseph] was visited constantly by angels ... He had vision after vision in order that his mind might be fully saturated with a knowledge of the things of God, and that he might comprehend the high and holy calling that God had bestowed upon him.”²⁸

“Joseph Smith loved learning even though he had few opportunities for formal education. In his journals he spoke happily ... and often expressed his love for learning. The prophet Joseph taught, ‘knowledge does away with darkness [anxiety] and doubt, for these cannot exist where knowledge is.’” Dieter F. Uchtdorf

While Joseph was receiving heavenly visions and instructions, Joseph Sr. and Lucy felt the necessity to continue to instruct the family. In Lucy's memoirs she puts the family at the center of the plates and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. She wrote, "Joseph continued to receive instruction from time to time, and every night we gathered our children together ... all seated in a circle ... listening in breathless anxiety to the religious teachings of a boy eighteen years of age ..." ²⁹

Joseph as Translator and Protector of the Plates

Joseph was both translator and protector of the plates, which were in his possession for just under 2 years. ³⁰ The day Joseph received the plates on September 22, 1827, Moroni strictly cautioned him that he was now responsible for the safety of the plates, to not let them pass from his possession carelessly, and that he should endeavor to preserve the plates until he, Moroni, should call for them again. Joseph soon discovered the reason behind the strict commandment. The people from Palmyra exhibited "the most strenuous exertions [and] ... every stratagem that could be invented [to get the plates from Joseph]." Joseph continued, "the persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually ... But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand." ³¹

Not having a chest or any other secure place Joseph hid the plates in a hollowed out birch tree near the Hill Cumorah about 3 miles from the Smith home. He then covered it with branches to conceal it better.

Interestingly enough, the persecution surrounding the First Vision happened because they did not believe Joseph's story. However, the persecution surrounding the plates occurred because they believed the plates existed and that Joseph had them. The next morning Joseph left early in the morning to work on a well in nearby Macedon to earn money for a secure chest. The Smith family learned of a small mob of 10 to 12 men that had gathered with a "Methodist class-leader" named Willard Chase at a neighbor's house. They had sent 60 to 70 miles for a conjuror to divine where the plates were hidden. This conjuror was "much animated, although he had traveled sixty miles the day and night previous." When the mob was hushed by the neighbor's wife, "the conjuror bawled out at the top of his voice, 'I am not afraid of anybody—we will have them plates in spite of Joe Smith or all the devils in hell.'" Among this mob was Samuel Lawrence who, according to Joseph Knight Sr. was a "seer ... who had been to the Hill and knew about the things in the hill and ... was trying to obtain them." ³²

Upon hearing this Emma rode a stray horse to Macedon to inform Joseph of the danger. Joseph, through the Urim and Thummim discovered that Emma was coming and that the plates were safe. Upon arriving home Joseph went immediately to the place where the plates were concealed.

After retrieving the plates, he left the road and walked through the forest thinking it would offer protection. However, he was attacked three times in the course of returning home. His mother stated, "...as he was jumping over a log a man sprang up from behind it and gave him a heavy blow with a gun. Joseph turned around and knocked him down, then ran at the top of his speed. About a half mile farther he was attacked again in the same manner as the former and ran on again; and before he reached home he was assaulted a third time. In striking the last one, he dislocated his thumb, which however, he did not notice until he came within sight of the

"[Joseph] attended my school [in Kirtland] ... hence I think I knew him. I here say that he had one of the strongest, well balanced, penetrating, and retentive minds of any man with whom I ever formed an acquaintance." William E. McLellin

house.”³³ Joseph’s sister Katherine said Joseph came into the home nearly exhausted with his “left hand and arm and his right hand ... badly bruised.”³⁴

Joseph and the Urim and Thummim

On Moroni’s first visit with Joseph on September 21 and 22, 1823 Joseph was shown the Urim and Thummim which was deposited with the plates. Moroni informed Joseph that “the possession and use [of the Urim and Thummim] constitutes a seer in ancient times.”³⁵ On September 22, 1827 Joseph received the breastplate and the interpreters or Urim and Thummim, which were used by the Brother of Jared.³⁶ Joseph stated that “with the record was found a curious instrument .. called the ‘Urim and Thummim,’ which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow ...” The primary function of the Urim and Thummim was translation of ancient writings. Joseph concluded, “Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God.”³⁷ There is also some indication that Joseph may have used additional seer stones.³⁸ Joseph also used the Urim and Thummim to keep the plates safe and to receive revelation.

Joseph always kept the Urim and Thummim on his person to warn him of pending danger.³⁹ Lucy Mack Smith related a series of events in which Joseph protected the plates. Shortly after receiving the plates, Joseph burst into the home and informed the family that a mob was approaching and that the plates must be hidden. A neighbor, likely Alva Beaman,⁴⁰ suggested hiding the plates under the fireplace hearth. As the mob approached Joseph rushed out the front door and hollered for an attack. All the males, including 11 year old Don Carlos rushed out banging on pans and shouting causing the mob to retreat and disband.⁴¹ Undeterred, the mob hired a skilled⁴² conjurer or rodsman who identified the location of the plates under the hearth.⁴³ A few days later Joseph was impressed to take the plates from the box and to hide the plates in a grain barrel in the cooper shop across the street and the box under the floorboards. The sister of a man from Manchester used a “green glass” to discover that the plates were hidden in the cooper shop. The mob tore up the floorboards and found the box. They smashed the box to pieces but never found the plates.⁴⁴ In 1842 Joseph reminisced that “false reports, misrepresentation and slander flew ... the house was frequently beset by mobs and evil designing persons. Several times I was shot at and very narrowly escaped, and every device was made to get the plates away from me; but the power and blessings of God attended me.”⁴⁵ According to Martin Harris the persecution became so great that the mob threatened to tar and feather Joseph.⁴⁶ He put the plates inside a box hidden inside a small barrel which was placed in a larger barrel filled with beans and escaped to Harmony Pennsylvania. Despite being stopped by an officer with a search warrant the plates were not discovered. Joseph also secreted the plates in the woods in Harmony when Martin’s wife Lucy tore through their home searching for the plates.⁴⁷

Joseph also received revelation through the Urim and Thummim. Evidently Joseph was initially very impressed with the flood of revelation through the Urim and Thummim. Joseph Knight Sr. reported that Joseph declared, “It is ten times better than I expected. ... I can see anything; they are marvelous.”⁴⁸ According to David Whitmer when Joseph looked into the Urim and Thummim “his entire past history [was] revealed to him” helping Joseph to greater recognize God’s gift.⁴⁹ And his mother reported that Joseph was shown many things in vision through the Urim and Thummim when he received the plates from Moroni.⁵⁰ At least 9 revelations were received through the Urim and Thummim.⁵¹

Joseph Describes the Plates

Joseph left a description of the Plates. He said, "These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold. Each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction and much skill in the art of engraving."⁵²

Treating Lightly the Book of Mormon Brings Condemnation

Our Church has always been a missionary Church. In the early 1830s the converts were deeply religious and had already made a study of the Bible a life pursuit. Many of the early converts and early missionaries were deeply committed to the Bible and had previously been ministers and preachers for other religions, including Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt, Brigham Young and his brothers, and scores of others. However, on September 22, 1832 the Lord chastised the Saints, specifically the missionaries who were just returning to Kirtland, for brushing over the Book of Mormon. The Lord, through Joseph declared, "And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written."⁵³

Glossing over the Book of Mormon and treating it lightly are equated by the Lord with vanity and unbelief. Vanity is self serving and aggrandizing, but it can also mean useless and unsuccessful. To try to live the gospel without the Book of Mormon is unsuccessful—it is a useless way to preach the Gospel, to teach our children, and to live our lives.

It brings darkness to our minds and brings condemnation to the Church as a whole. This condemnation and darkness will rest upon the Saints until "they *repent* and *remember the new covenant*, even the Book of Mormon and former commandments ... and *do* according to that which I have written."

Joseph Testifies of the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon

Joseph continually affirmed that he was not the author of the Book of Mormon. The 1830 preface of the Book of Mormon, which was written by Joseph, he stated, "I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God."⁵⁴ He wrote that the plates were "found through the ministering of angels, and translated into our own language by the gift and power of God."⁵⁵ "Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record, by the gift and power of God."⁵⁶

In 1835 Joseph related how the Book of Mormon came forth by the ministration of angels. Joseph then emphatically declared, "[I] translated them into the English language by the gift and power of God and have been preaching it ever since."⁵⁷

He also taught, "... truth is a matter of fact; and the fact is, that by the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, ... in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation, which (if they would receive the everlasting Gospel,) would open the eyes

"Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God with the aid of the Urim and Thummim from gold plates entrusted him by Moroni." Oliver Cowdery

... and make 'plain the old paths,' wherein if a man walk in all the ordinances of God blameless, he shall inherit eternal life; and Jesus Christ, who was, and is, and is to come, has borne me safely over every snare and plan laid in secret or openly, through priestly hypocrisy, sectarian prejudice, popular philosophy, executive power, or law-defying mobocracy, to destroy me. ... One thing more in order to prove the work as we proceed. It is necessary to have witnesses, two or three of whose testimonies, according to the laws or rules of God and man, are sufficient to establish any one point.⁵⁸

Joseph realized the importance of bearing testimony of the Book of Mormon. In Far West in 1837 he declared, "The Book of Mormon is true, just what it purports to be, and for this testimony I expect to give an account in the day of judgment."⁵⁹ Now that is conviction; Joseph was willing to give an account of his testimony to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, even at the judgement seat before God!

On a mission to Philadelphia Joseph was allowed to preach to a large congregation of about 3,000. Parley P. Pratt recorded, "Brother Joseph arose like a lion about to roar; and being full of the Holy Ghost, spoke in great power, bearing testimony of the visions he had seen, the ministering of angels which he had enjoyed; and how he had found the plates of the Book of Mormon, and translated them by the gift and power of God. He commenced by saying: 'If nobody else had the courage to testify of so glorious a message from Heaven, and of the finding of so glorious a record, he felt to do it in justice to the people, and leave the event with God.' The entire congregation were astounded; electrified, as it were, and overwhelmed with the sense of the truth and power by which he spoke, and the wonders which he related. A lasting impression was made; many souls were gathered into the fold. And I bear witness, that he, by his faithful and powerful testimony, cleared his garments of their blood. Multitudes were baptized in Philadelphia and in the regions around."⁶⁰

Joseph Testifies of the Church Growth Because of the Book of Mormon

"Connected with the building up of the Kingdom, is the printing and circulation of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, . . . and the new translation of the [Bible]. ... those who have read them, and who have drunk of the stream of knowledge which they convey, know how to appreciate them; and although fools may have them in derision, yet they are calculated to make men wise unto salvation, and sweep away the cobwebs of superstition of ages, throw a light on the proceedings of Jehovah which have already been accomplished, and mark out the future in all its dreadful and glorious realities. Those who have tasted the benefit derived from a study of those works, will undoubtedly vie with each other in their zeal for sending them abroad throughout the world, that every son of Adam may enjoy the same privileges, and rejoice in the same truths."⁶¹ In a sermon, Joseph likened the Book of Mormon to a seed planted in the ground which will benefit humanity. "Let us take the Book of Mormon, which a man took and hid in his field, securing it by his faith, to spring up in the last days, or in due time; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth, yea, even towering with lofty branches and Godlike majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven [see Psalm 85:11; Moses 7:62], and God is sending down His powers, gifts, and angels to lodge in the branches thereof."⁶²

"Hell may pour forth its rage like the burning lava of Mount Vesuvius, or of Etna, or of the most terrible of the burning mountains; and yet shall 'Mormonism' stand. Water, fire, truth and

God are all realities. Truth is 'Mormonism.' God is the author of it. He is our shield. It is by Him we received our birth. It was by His voice that we were called to a dispensation of His Gospel in the beginning of the fullness of times. It was by Him we received the Book of Mormon; and it is by Him that we remain unto this day; and by Him we shall remain, if it shall be for our glory; and in His Almighty name we are determined to endure tribulation as good soldiers unto the end."⁶³

Persecution Arises Due to the Book of Mormon

Almost from the beginning of the Book of Mormon, persecution arose. Joseph was attacked 3 times as he brought the plates home from the Hill Cumorah. While in Manchester persecution intensified as the locals sought every stratagem to take the plates from Joseph. He was threatened with mob violence and even tar and feathering.⁶⁴ Joseph stated that the "persecution became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester and going with my wife to [Harmony], Susquehanna County."⁶⁵ Initially, Emma's family was friendly and offered protection, even inquired into the work. However, the spirit of persecution arose and "slander with an iron tongue began its work of destruction." As the persecution intensified and Joseph continued to affirm that he could not show them the plates to the Emma's relatives, the Hale family could "no longer promise ... protection nor believe [the] doctrine."⁶⁶ Isaac refused to have the plates on his property and Joseph buried them in the woods. Isaac Hale's brother in law, a minister, increased his persuasion and relations between Joseph and his father in law deteriorated until Isaac Hale was about to turn Joseph and Emma out of doors forcing the Smiths and Oliver to Fayette onto the Whitmer property.⁶⁷

A group of ministers, fearing to lose congregants and their livelihood banded together to formulate a plan. They would ask Lucy Mack Smith to read to them from the manuscript. Then 3 would distract her, while the 4th would take the manuscript and toss it in the fire. Oliver discovered the plot and warned Lucy. 16 days before the Book of Mormon went on sale the ministers came to Lucy, but she refused to read to them and bore a testimony of the Book of Mormon. These ministers changed tactics and tried to remind Lucy, Hyrum, and Samuel of their previous dedication to the Presbyterian Church and threatened suspension from the Presbyterian Church. When Lucy, Hyrum and Samuel all withstood the ministers they were suspended from the Presbyterian church for "neglect of public worship and the sacrament."⁶⁸

The ministers also resolved that they would not purchase or read or permit their families to purchase or read the Book of Mormon, binding themselves with "a solemn covenant" and "tremendous oaths."⁶⁹ Three months earlier, in January 1830 the citizens of Palmyra threatened a boycott causing E. B. Grandin to halt publication until Martin Harris stepped forward and offered a portion of his farm as collateral. Martin did sell 151 acres for \$3,000 to pay Grandin when the Book did not sell as they previously thought.

Shortly after the organization of the Church in April 1830 Joseph reported, "The Book of Mormon (the stick of Joseph in the hands of Ephriam) had now been published for some time, and as the ancient prophet had predicted of it, 'it was accounted as a strange thing.' No small stir was created by its appearance. Great opposition and much persecution followed the believers of its authenticity. But it had now come to pass that truth had sprung out of the earth ... we feared not our opponents, knowing that we had both truth and righteousness on our side, that we had both the Father and the Son, because we had the doctrines of the Christ, and abided them; and therefore we continued to preach and to give information to all who were willing to hear."⁷⁰

"No man knows my history. I cannot tell it; I shall never undertake it. I don't blame anyone for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself. ... I cannot lie down until all my work is finished. I never think any evil, nor to do harm to my fellow-man. When I am called by the trump of the archangel and weighed in the balance, you will all know me then ... God bless you all." Joseph Smith

In Colesville New York Joseph had labored to establish a small branch. Joseph and others dammed off a small stream for baptisms. However, mobs tore it down. They dammed the stream again and 13 people, including Emma were baptized. Before finishing the baptisms, a mob of about fifty men gathered surrounding the house “raging with anger ... determined to commit violence upon us.” The Saints fled to the nearby house of Newel Knight and the mob followed. Before the Saints could proceed with the confirmations a constable arrested Joseph for “being a disorderly person, of setting the county in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon.” One 1830s legal definition of a “disorderly person” is someone “pretending to tell ... where lost or stolen goods may be found.”⁷¹ Joseph's life was preserved from mob violence by the peace officer. Joseph stated the officer declared “he would fight for me, and defend me as far as it was in his power.” He even slept on the floor with his feet against the door and a loaded gun by his side while Joseph slept in the bed.”⁷²

Sadly, the persecution did not subside, but continued. Joseph cautioned the Apostles to not lose faith in the revelations of God when faced with persecution, adversity and opposition. He said, “O ye Twelve! and all Saints! profit by this important Key— that in all your trials, troubles, temptations, afflictions, bonds, imprisonments and death, see to it, that you do not betray heaven; that you do not betray Jesus Christ; that you do not betray the brethren; that you do not betray the revelations of God, whether in the Bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine and Covenants, or any other that ever was or ever will be given and revealed unto man in this world or that which is to come.”⁷³

The Book of Mormon and the Martyrdom

The evening before the martyrdom in the Carthage Jail on June 26, 1844 “Patriarch Hyrum Smith read and commented upon extracts from the Book of Mormon ... Joseph bore a powerful testimony to the guards of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the Gospel, the administration of angels and that the kingdom of God was again established upon the earth.”⁷⁴ The day of the Martyrdom, June 27, 1844 “both Joseph and Hyrum bore a faithful testimony [to the few intimate friends gathered in the upper room of the Carthage Jail about] the Latter-day work, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and prophesied triumph of the Gospel over all the earth. Exhorting the brethren present to faithfulness and preserving diligence in proclaiming the Gospel, building up the [Nauvoo] temple, and performing all the duties connected with our holy religion.”⁷⁵

Conclusion of Joseph Smith, the Choice Seer

Joseph was a key witness of the plates. Though there were additional witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates, Joseph carried the bulk of the responsibility for the care and protection of the plates. Joseph prophetic seership was on full display in the translation of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon truly was translated and Joseph stated, “through the gift and power of God.”

“If we do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. ... God Himself was once as we are now ... It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, to know that we may converse with him ... You have got to learn to be Gods yourselves. ... My Father worked out his kingdom ... and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. ... God is thus glorified and exalted in the salvation and exaltation of all his children.” Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith, the Choice Seer

- ¹ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 72-77; Leroy Wirthlin, "Joseph Smith's Boyhood Operation: An 1813 Surgical Success," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol 21 Iss. 2, 132
- ² See Mathew S. Holland, "The Making of the Book of Mormon and You," Devotional given at Provo MTC, 15 February 2014
- ³ Joseph dictated 8 histories about the First Vision. All reflect a concern for his spiritual welfare. "At about the age of twelve years my mind became seriously impressed with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my soul ... I felt to mourn for all my sins," (1832); "I knew not who was right and who was wrong and I considered it of the first importance that I should be right in matters that involved eternal consequences," (1835); "I began to reflect upon the importance of being prepared for a future state," (1842/43)
- ⁴ Orson Hyde Report, 1842 as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition, 200, 21-22
- ⁵ 1) Abraham, Adam/Michael, Alvin, Elias, Elijah, God, Jesus, James, John the Baptist, John the Beloved, Moroni (22 times), Moses, Paul, Peter, Satan, unnamed angels, and likely Enoch, Jacob, Isaac, Mormon, Nephi, Noah, 12 Apostles of Christ, 12 Nephite apostles, and Eve (see FAIR Mormon article, "Personages who appeared to Joseph Smith," as retrieved on 2/25/24 from https://www.fairmormons.org/answers/Personages_who_appeared_to_Joseph_Smith; Joseph also saw Raphael (D&C 128:21) and Alma (George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 13:47).
- ⁶ Joseph had 80 lawsuits, including 50 criminal charges brought against him, Bentley, Joseph I. (2016) "Road to Martyrdom: Joseph Smith's Last Legal Cases," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 55: Iss. 2, Article 3.
- ⁷ Joseph was arrested 42 times, James A. Cullimore, "Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet," BYU Speech, 4 January 1977
- ⁸ Joseph Smith History 1:28-29
- ⁹ See Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:222-224
- ¹⁰ Joseph Smith Narration with "Joshua the Rabbi." 9 November 1835, Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:116
- ¹¹ Joseph Smith Paper, *Histories*, 1:494
- ¹² Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:222-23
- ¹³ Joseph Smith History 1:34
- ¹⁴ See Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:226-30
- ¹⁵ Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:197-98; Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:82-85; 1:527-29
- ¹⁶ Joseph Smith History 1:50-52; *History of the Church* 1:16
- ¹⁷ There is some discussion as to the Liahona and the Sword of Laban also having been in the box with the plates, breastplate and Urim and Thummim. For discussion see Holbrook, Brett L. (1993) "The Sword of Laban as a Symbol of Divine Authority and Kingship," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 4., 59-61
- ¹⁸ Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:197-98; Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:82-85; 1:527-29
- ¹⁹ Lucy Mack Smith quoted in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 275
- ²⁰ Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:198-99; Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:82-85; 1:527-29
- ²¹ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 110
- ²² Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:199; Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:82-85; 1:527-29
- ²³ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 119
- ²⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 119
- ²⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 110-11
- ²⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 112
- ²⁷ Wentworth Letter, "Church History," 1 March 1842 as found in Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:495 and *History of the Church* 4:537
- ²⁸ "Discourse of President George Q. Cannon," Toole Utah, 29 October 1882, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:362
- ²⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 111
- ³⁰ Most commonly accepted time frame was 21-22 months for receiving the plates on September 22, 1827 to when he returned the plates to Moroni in June/July 1829. This time frame includes the "season" the plates were taken from Joseph after having lost the 116 pages of manuscript.
- ³¹ Joseph Smith History 1:59-60
- ³² Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection," 32-33
- ³³ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 137-145
- ³⁴ *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and Wonder*, (2015), 48
- ³⁵ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:222-223
- ³⁶ D&C 17:1
- ³⁷ The Wentworth Letter, *History of the Church*, 4:537
- ³⁸ Emma Smith and David Whitmer indicated that Joseph used one or more seer stones after the loss of the 116 pages of manuscript ("Emma Smith to Emma Pilgrim," 27 March 1870 in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:532; David Whitmer Interviewed by Zenas Gurley, 14 January 1885 and 13 June 1881 Letter to the Editor of the *Kansas City Journal*, as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition, pages 149 and 152). Martin Harris indicated that Joseph used the seer stone because of convenience (Andrew Jenson, "The Three Witnesses," found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition, 137).
- ³⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 145
- ⁴⁰ See "Witness #19, 'Old Mr. Beaman' Lifts the Plates," found herein on page 81
- ⁴¹ *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 149-150
- ⁴² Brigham Young reported that the man "possess as much talent as any man that walked on the American soil, and was one of the wicked men I ever saw." (*Journal of Discourses*, 2:180)
- ⁴³ *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 141; *Joseph Knight Recollection*, 33-34; Andrew Hedges, "Take Heed Continually, Protecting the Plates," *Ensign*, January 2001
- ⁴⁴ *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 149-150
- ⁴⁵ *History of the Church*, 4:538

- ⁴⁶ See Andrew Hedges, "Take Heed Continually, Protecting the Plates," *Ensign*, January 2001
- ⁴⁷ *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 157
- ⁴⁸ Dean Jessee, *Joseph Knight's Recollection*, 33
- ⁴⁹ Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 150
- ⁵⁰ See Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith's Visionary Experiences," *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 275
- ⁵¹ D&C 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17
- ⁵² *History of the Church* 4:537
- ⁵³ D&C 84:54-57 & Section Heading
- ⁵⁴ *History of the Church* 1:58 and footnote
- ⁵⁵ *History of the Church* 1:315
- ⁵⁶ *History of the Church* 4:537
- ⁵⁷ Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 1:89
- ⁵⁸ Letter to James Arlington Bennett from Joseph Smith, 13 November 1843, *History of the Church* 6:74, 76
- ⁵⁹ See *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 64
- ⁶⁰ *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 298-99
- ⁶¹ *History of the Church* 4:187
- ⁶² *History of the Church* 2:268
- ⁶³ *History of the Church*, 3:296-98
- ⁶⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 159 footnote 1
- ⁶⁵ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:238; *History of the Church*, 1:19
- ⁶⁶ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:432; *History of the Church*, 1:108
- ⁶⁷ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:16
- ⁶⁸ *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 207-08, 211-12; Larry C. Porter, "The Book of Mormon: Historical Setting for its Translation and Publication," *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, (1993), 49-64
- ⁶⁹ *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 207-08
- ⁷⁰ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:386 draft 2; *History of the Church* 1:84
- ⁷¹ See Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 397 footnote 183
- ⁷² Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:390-98; *History of the Church* 1:86-95
- ⁷³ *History of the Church* 3:385
- ⁷⁴ *History of the Church* 6:600
- ⁷⁵ *History of the Church* 6:610

The Three Witnesses

June 1829

Historical Sketch. In June 1829 David Whitmer, a friend of Oliver Cowdery, traveled to Harmony Pennsylvania to take Joseph, Emma, and Oliver to his father's farm in Fayette New York. Joseph had faced increasing persecution in Harmony and needed to move. David's fields were miraculously plowed and fertilized enabling him assist Joseph. As Joseph, Emma, Oliver and David traveled to Fayette they passed a pleasant looking man carrying a book shaped knapsack who stated he was heading to the Hill Cumorah. Martin followed shortly after.

The Experiences of the Three Witnesses

Martin Harris was heartbroken when the 116 pages of manuscript were lost. He feared for his salvation and that the work would be halted. These fears seemed to be confirmed when the Lord called Martin "a wicked man."¹ In March 1829 Martin visited Joseph in Harmony and was delighted to learn that the plates had been given back to Joseph and that he would soon be resuming the translation. Martin desired to see the plates and was informed if he "humbled himself in mighty prayer and faith, in the sincerity of his heart, then will I [the Lord] grant unto him a view of the things which he desires to see."² This quieted Martin and he again supported Joseph.

As Joseph translated the plates in June 1829, he discovered that Nephi and Moroni stated that there should be Three Witnesses called.³ Moroni, the last Book of Mormon prophet stated that "[the Three Witnesses] shall testify of the truth of the book and the things therein" and Nephi, the first Book of Mormon prophet, said, "all this shall stand as a witness against the world."⁴

Almost immediately after discovering in the translation that there were to be three witnesses called, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and David Whitmer asked for the privilege. Joseph recorded that "they became so very solicitous and urged me so much to inquire that at length I complied."⁵ Through the Urim and Thummim Oliver, Martin and David were told that if they relied upon the word of the Lord with full purpose of heart they would see "the plates, and also the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount when he talked with the Lord face to face, and the miraculous directors which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness" (the Liahona). The Lord told them that they would see the plates because of their faith. They were commanded to bear testimony when "they have seen [the plates] with [their] eyes and ... testify of [the plates], by the power of God" in order to preserve Joseph Smith and bring about the "righteous purposes" of God. The Lord then bore testimony that Joseph translated the book and that the Book of Mormon is true.⁶

After morning devotional, Joseph walked over to Martin and reminded him of the previous promise the Lord had made, "You have got to humble yourself before God, and obtain, if possible, forgiveness of your sins. If you do this then it is God's will that you and Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer should look upon the plates."⁷

Joseph and Oliver went out and found David plowing a field. There he was informed that he would be one of the Three Witnesses. David hopped the fence⁸ and Joseph, Martin, Oliver and David all went out into the woods near the Whitmer farm in Fayette New York. They knelt down in "fervent and humble prayer" to obtain the witness. Joseph prayed aloud and then each

The Three Witnesses Testify

of the three offered vocal prayer in turn. They did not receive an answer, so they followed the same pattern of prayer again with the same results.

Martin then felt that his presence had prevented the others from obtaining the desired witness and withdrew some distance and Joseph, Oliver and David again prayed. Joseph recorded, “we beheld a light above us in the air, of exceeding brightness; and behold, an angel stood before us. In his hands he held the plates which we had been praying for these to have a view of. He turned over the leaves one by one, so that we could see them, and discern the engravings thereon distinctly. Moroni then addressed himself to David Whitmer, and said, “David, blessed is the Lord, and he that keeps His commandments;” when, immediately afterwards, we heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, “These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.”⁹

David described the voice as “a voice that seemed to fill all space, musical as the sighing of the wind through the forest ... the voice, majestic, ringing out from earth to the mighty dome of space, still lingers in [my] ears like a chime of silver bells.”¹⁰

Joseph arose and went and found Martin a “considerable distance fervently engaged in prayer.” He asked Joseph to join him, and they also beheld the same vision.¹¹ Martin then leapt to his feet and joyfully exclaimed, “Tis enough! Mine eyes have beheld.”¹²

Though Martin had the most difficulty obtaining the vision, he was the first to come into the Whitmer home after being shown the plates, the breastplate, the Urim and Thummim, the sword of Laban and the Liahona.¹³ Martin Harris came in; he seemed almost overcome with joy and “testified to what he had both seen and heard.” David and Oliver came in shortly and testified of the same.¹⁴

Joseph was also overjoyed. He told his parents, “Father! Mother! You do not know how happy I am! The Lord has caused the plates to be shown to three more besides me. They have also seen an angel and will have to testify to the world of what I have said, for they know of themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people. I do feel as though I was relieved of a dreadful burden which was almost too much for me to endure. But they will now have to bear a part, and it does rejoice my soul that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.”¹⁵

Joseph often felt alone in his testimony of the events of the Restoration. These Three Witnesses became eyewitnesses; they were to bear part of the responsibility of witnessing of truth.

In speaking of this miraculous visitation by Moroni, David stated, “Persons may attempt to describe the presentation of the plates as shown to [myself] and other witnesses, but there was a glory attending it that no one could describe, no human tongue could tell the glorious scenes that were presented to [us].”¹⁶

During the conference in Orange Ohio in October 1831, the Three and Eight Witnesses “with uplifted hands, bore their solemn testimony to the truth of that book [of Mormon], as did the Prophet Joseph.”¹⁷

The Three Witnesses Strengthen the Church

Joseph saw the importance of the Three Witnesses and likened them to Jesus’ parable of the woman who hid three measures of meal and leavened the whole.¹⁸ He taught the Saints of the essential nature of the Three Witnesses, “It may be understood that the church of the Latter

Day Saints, has taken its rise from a little leaven that was put into three witnesses. Behold, how much this is like the parable: it is fast leavening the lump, and will soon leaven the whole.”¹⁹ Their testimony expands the Church strengthening its members.

The Three Witnesses Handled the Plates

In addition to seeing the plates and other Nephite relics, all Three Witnesses made statements that they handled the plates. It is uncertain if they handled the plates on separate occasions or if it happened while Moroni showed them the plates. Oliver stated “[I] handled with my hands the gold plates.”²⁰ Martin implied that it was on a separate occasion that he handled the plates. “Did I not at one time hold the plates on my knee an hour and half, whilst in conversation with Joseph, when we went to bury them in the woods, that the enemy might not obtain them? Yes, I did. And as many of the plates as Joseph translated I handled with my hands, plate after plate.”²¹ But, also hinted at it happening at the time of Moroni’s visit. “For I saw the angel, I heard his voice, I saw and handled the plates upon which the Book of Mormon was written.”²² He also said, “with these ears I heard the voice of the angel, and with these hands I handled the plates containing the record of the Book of Mormon, the translation was made by the prophet Joseph Smith, whom I know by the power and gift of the Holy Ghost, was a true prophet of God.”²³ David Whitmer also stated, “These hands handled the plates, these eyes saw the angel, and these ears heard his voice.”²⁴

The Three Witnesses see the Box at the Hill Cumorah

Seeing the stone box in which Moroni “sealed up” the plates was also a notable experience for the Three Witnesses. “Often overlooked,” a historian noted, “the stone box from which the plates were retrieved is one of the first physical evidences of Joseph’s origin story of the Book of Mormon plates and text. ... Ironically, while much of Joseph’s later persecution may have arisen out of others doubting the existence and possession of the golden plates, originally the difficulty was due to the exact opposite: certain persons convinced he had actually retrieved the record.”²⁵ In addition to seeing the plates and other relics Joseph showed Oliver and David the stone box on the Hill Cumorah. David stated that he saw the box on at least three occasions.²⁶ Martin Harris also went to the hill with 2 others and saw the receptacle where the plates were buried. He tried to remove the box with a crowbar, but the corner broke off. Martin indicated that the stone box was evidence of Joseph’s Book of Mormon origin story. Martin stated, “indeed we found a stone box ... Some time that box will be found, and you will see the corner broken off, then you will know I have told you the truth. Again brethren, as sure as you are standing here and see me, just that sure, did I see the angel with the golden plates.”²⁷

The Testimony of the Three Witnesses

In addition to testifying that they saw the plates and noted the ancient engravings and saw an angel from heaven, the Three Witnesses also noted that they “know that [the plates] have been translated by the gift and power of God, for the voice hat declared it unto us, wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true.”

Their testimony to the world ends with the powerful promise the Three Witnesses obtained if they were faithful. “The voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the

“Stand as a witness of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places ... even unto death, that ye may be redeemed of God and be numbered with those who of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life.” Alma¹

The Three Witnesses Testify

heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.”²⁸

The Three Witnesses Conclusion

The Three Witnesses fulfilled the prophecies of the first and the last Book of Mormon prophets. They were to bear witness that the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God and were to share that burden with Joseph. A charge all three faithfully fulfilled throughout their lives. All three served as Book of Mormon scribes and were shown the plates, breastplate, the interpreters, and the Liahona. They were also privileged to see the angel Moroni.

When the Three Witnesses were commanded to bear testimony of the Book of Mormon, David Whitmer felt that many would not believe. He recorded, “We felt sure that the people would not believe.”²⁹ Despite this apprehension they did bear testimony of what they saw and experienced and the power of the Book of Mormon to change lives.

“God has built in His own proof system of the Book of Mormon as found in Moroni, chapter 10, and in the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses” Pres. Ezra Taft Benson

¹ July 1828, D&C 3:12

² D&C 5:24

³ 2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:2-4

⁴ 2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:2-4

⁵ Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, 1:314-15; *History of the Church* 1:52-53

⁶ D&C 17:1-6

⁷ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 199

⁸ See Edward Stevenson Interview, 2 January 1887

⁹ Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, 1:316-320; *History of the Church* 1:54-55

¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 206 footnote 4

¹¹ Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, 1:319

¹² Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, 1:320-21; *History of the Church* 1:55

¹³ D&C 17:1

¹⁴ Lucy Mack Smith, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 199

¹⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 199

¹⁶ David Whitmer, interview with James H. Hart on 21 August 1883, as cited in Dan Vogel (editor), *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:97

¹⁷ “History of Luke Johnson: by Himself,” *Millennial Star* 26 (31 December 1864), 835 as found in Karl Ricks Anderson, *The Savior in Kirtland*, 167

¹⁸ Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

¹⁹ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 100; “To the Elders of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, *Messenger and Advocate* 2, December 1834, 225-230 as found on <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-elders-of-the-church-30-november-1-december-1835/4#source-note> as retrieved on 1/7/2024

²⁰ “Testimony of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris,” *Millennial Star* 21 (20 August 1859), 544 as retrieved from <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/23388> on 1/9/2024

²¹ David B. Dille, “Additional Testimony of Martin Harris (one of the Three Witnesses) to the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” *Millennial Star* 21 (20 August 1859), 545 as retrieved from <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/23388> on 1/9/2024

²² William Harrison Homer Statement, 3 January 1922 as found in *Opening the Heavens: Divine Manifestations 1829-1844*, First Edition (2005), 139

²³ “Martin Harris and the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 26 (September 1923), 980

²⁴ See Cook, *Whitmer Interviews*, 181

²⁵ Anthony Sweat, “Hefted and Handled: Tangible Interactions with Book of Mormon Objects,” *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 45

²⁶ Cook, *Whitmer Interviews*, 173, 7

²⁷ Ole A. Jensen, “Testimony of Martin Harris,” as found in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 47

²⁸ Testimony of the Three Witnesses as found in the Book of Mormon

²⁹ David Whitmer, interview with James H. Hart on 21 August 1883, as cited in Dan Vogel (editor), *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:96

Witness #2

Oliver Cowdery, The Second Elder

October 3, 1806 to March 3, 1850 (44 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Oliver holds a few unique distinctions. In addition to being a Witness, Oliver also had many divine experiences. He received the Aaronic Priesthood and was ordained a priest by John the Baptist¹ and was the first person baptized in this dispensation. He was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood as an Apostle by Peter, James and John who hold the keys of this last dispensation.² He was shown the plates by Moroni.³ He received vital priesthood keys from Moses, Elias, and Elijah.⁴ He saw the Savior multiple times.⁵ He heard the voice of the Savior at least twice.⁶ He was also one of two men to hold the office of Assistant President of the Church, Hyrum Smith being the other. Sadly, Oliver was excommunicated in 1838 and spent about a decade outside of the Church. Oliver seems to have kept up a closer correspondence than Martin and the Whitmers with the Church leaders, albeit sparse communication. In 1848 Oliver wrote to his trusted brother in law David Whitmer asking to meet at Council Bluffs Iowa to reconcile themselves with the Church led by the Apostles.⁷ Though David did not go to Council Bluffs Oliver was rebaptized by Orson Hyde in Richmond Missouri in March 1850. While trying to reunite with the Church, Oliver was the Democratic nomination for the House of Assembly in Wisconsin and gained widespread support. The Whig party, in response, blasted Oliver using his only perceived flaw—his early association with the Church and his testimony of the Book of Mormon as one of the Three Witnesses. It worked; Oliver was narrowly defeated by 40 votes, less than 10% of the total votes.⁸

Oliver was a member of the United Firm, the Literary Firm, the Kirtland High Council and the Assistant President. We was also active in civic affairs. He was a teacher, lawyer, editor, publisher, owned land in Jackson County, a police officer, and a stockholder in the Kirtland Safety Society.

Oliver in Palmyra, New York

Oliver's experience with plates and the Restoration began when he accepted a teaching position in Palmyra. His older brother had accepted the position, but could not take the position and recommended Oliver. Hyrum Smith was a member of the school board that accepted Oliver.

While teaching Oliver heard the rumors and stories of Joseph, the First Vision, and the plates. Joseph had recently been forced to move to the property of his father in law, Isaac Hale in Harmony Pennsylvania because of the intense persecution just about the time Oliver arrived.⁹ Rather than reject or dismiss, Oliver decided to investigate the rumors. When Oliver boarded with the Smith's in Manchester, he inquired, however, initially the Smiths were very reluctant to share information. At length Oliver gained the confidence of Joseph Sr. who provided him with a sketch of the facts of the plates.

The next day Oliver returned to the Smith home "highly delighted" and spoke with them saying that "he had been in deep study upon the subject [of the plates] all day, and that it was impressed upon his mind that he should yet have the privilege of writing for Joseph." The following day he conversed with the Smiths, "The subject upon which we were yesterday conversing (the Plates) seems working in my very bones, and I cannot, for a moment, get it out of my mind; finally,

"[Oliver], Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? Now, behold, you have received a witness." Jesus Christ

I have resolved on what I will do. ... I have made it a subject of prayer, and I firmly believe that it is the will of the Lord that I should go. If there is a work for me to do in this thing, I am determined to attend to it." He resolved to go with Samuel in the Spring.¹⁰ During this time of inquiry, the Lord appeared to Oliver Cowdery in vision and showed him the plates, Joseph Smith and the work which He was about to do through Joseph.¹¹

Oliver arrived in Harmony and began writing for Joseph in April 1828 replacing Martin Harris. Scribing for the prophet made an impression on Oliver. "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom. Day after day I continued uninterrupted to write from this mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim ... the history or record called the Book of Mormon."¹²

Oliver Bears Testimony

Oliver Cowdery continually affirmed his testimony of the Book of Mormon. There are about 30 documented instances when Oliver affirmed his testimony.¹³

In the decade that Oliver worked closely with Joseph, Oliver bore repeated and powerful testimony of the restoration. Wilford Woodruff recalled "I have seen Oliver Cowdery when it seemed as though the earth trembled under his feet. I never heard a man bear a stronger testimony than he did when under the influence of the Spirit."¹⁴

Oliver Preaches to the Native Americans

In October 1830, at a conference the Saints had great desires to preach to the Native Americans. The Saints exhibited "a great desire ... that [the Native Americans] would receive the Gospel, and enjoy its blessings."¹⁵ Joseph prayed and received an answer that Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer Jr. as special witnesses, Parley P. Pratt, a recent convert with a burning testimony of the Book of Mormon and Ziba Peterson would go to the western borders of the US to preach the Gospel to the Native Americans. The Lord promised that He would go with them.¹⁶

Records indicate that Parley and Ziba would teach a sermon on a Gospel principle and then Oliver and Peter would bear testimony as special witnesses of the Book of Mormon.¹⁷ Though they had great success in the Kirtland area with thousands coming to hear them teach and over a 100 baptisms in just a few short weeks,¹⁸ they had limited success among the Native Americans.

These missionaries led by Oliver faced a unique situation. United States president Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act on May 28, 1830. This act granted Native Americans to exchange lands within the United States for lands west of the Mississippi River. 6 months later the missionaries arrived in Indian Territory. Initially, the Native Americans were reluctant to listen, but after hearing Oliver Cowdery teach about the Book of Mormon they softened and were very receptive. The missionaries left Books of Mormon with the Native Americans that could read and soon "some ... rejoiced exceedingly, and took great pains to tell the news to others, in their own language." Sadly, the mission was halted by government agents,¹⁹ but the mission illustrates the power and charisma of Oliver's testimony as a Witness of the Book of Mormon.

Oliver in Jackson County

In 1833 in Jackson County the Saints faced extreme religious persecution. The leaders, in particular the Witnesses, were targeted. William E. McLellin stated that there was an \$80 bounty for the capture of Oliver Cowdery. During this time the lives of many leaders were in danger

if the mob caught them. While in hiding William petitioned Oliver and David, “‘Tell me in the fear of God, is that book of Mormon true?’ Cowdery looked at me with solemnity depicted in his face, and said, ‘Brother William, God sent his holy angel to declare the truth of the translation of it to us, and therefore we know. And though the mob kill us, yet we must die declaring its truth.’ David said, ‘Oliver has told you the solemn truth, for we could not be deceived. I most truly declare to you its truth!’” These testimonies by Book of Mormon witnesses strengthened the resolve of the McLellin at that fearful and difficult time.²⁰

Oliver Testifies of the Book of Mormon to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Feb. 1835

The first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was organized in February and March of 1835 in Kirtland Ohio. Oliver addressed many of the newly called Apostles. Part of his message to the Twelve included a charge to rely on God for a testimony of the Book of Mormon and that the Book of Mormon can bring us face to face with God. He taught, “You have been indebted to other men, in the first instance, for evidence; on that you have acted; but it is necessary that you receive a testimony from Heaven for yourselves; so that you can bear testimony to the truth of the book of Mormon, and that you have seen the face of God. That is more than the testimony of an angel when the proper time con arrives, you shall be able to bear this testimony to the world. ... Never cease striving until you have seen God face to face. Strengthen your faith; cast off your doubts, your sins, and all your unbelief; and nothing can prevent you from coming to God.”²¹

Oliver Testifies of the Book of Mormon while a Lawyer

After his excommunication Oliver was a lawyer. During one trial the opposing lawyer tried to undermine Oliver’s credibility and reputation by pointing out Oliver’s witness of the Angel Moroni, the golden plates, and his early involvement in the Church. The lawyer held up a copy of the Book of Mormon and pointed out the testimony of the Three Witnesses. “With tears streaming down his face,” Oliver boldly declared, “What I have there said that I saw, I know that I saw. Whatever my faults may be, what I have given to the world, was literally true.” He continued, “through my own weakness I have been disfellowshipped by that people.” “In his reply stated that whatever his faults and weaknesses might be, the testimony which he had given to the world was literally true.”²² “I saw the angel and heard his voice—how can I deny it.” It happened in the daytime when the sun was shining bright ... not in the night when I was asleep. That glorious messenger from heaven, dressed in white, standing above the ground, in a glory I have never seen anything compared with ... and this Personage told us if we denied that testimony there is no forgiveness in this life nor in the world to come. Now how can I deny it—I dare not; I will not!”²³

Brigham Young related a story of a man who walked into Oliver’s law office and asked him if he *believed* the Book of Mormon to be true. Oliver responded, “No, sir, I do not!” “I thought as much,” responded the man, “for I concluded that you had seen the folly of your ways and had resolved to renounce what you once declared to be true.” Oliver emphatically responded, “Sir, you mistake me; I do not *believe* that the Book of Mormon is true; I am past belief on that point, for I *know* that it is true, as well as I know that you now sit before me.” He also declared that he saw the Angel Moroni “as I see you now; and I know the Book of Mormon to be true.”²⁴

Oliver Denounces Anti-Book of Mormon Claims

Oliver, as a witness, would address the anti-Book of Mormon claims. One of the first claims against the Book of Mormon came for Alexander Campbell, a fiery and ardent Baptist preacher. Campbell’s ideology became known as Reformed Baptists or, more commonly, “Campbellites.” In 1822 Sidney Rigdon had personally met with Campbell and received his

“[Oliver], Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? Now, behold, you have received a witness.” Jesus Christ

endorsement as a preacher. By 1830, when Sidney and his congregation investigated the message taught by the four missionaries, Oliver, Peter Whitmer Jr., Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson, Sidney had become known as a Campbellite preacher. In the wake of their success, Alexander Campbell wrote in 1831 a lengthy exposé attacking the Book of Mormon, its doctrine and its origin as “delusions.” In 1835 Oliver refuted 3 concerns of Campbell’s: the location of Zion on the American continent, Temple work among the Nephites, and the authority of the Priesthood.²⁵

Many antagonists in the 1840s were putting ideas forward to explain away the Book of Mormon. Oliver emphatically stated, “That book (the Book of Mormon) is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr. [Solomon] Spaulding did not write it. I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the prophet.”²⁶

What Greater Witness can You Have than from God?

In April 1829 Oliver arrived in Harmony Pennsylvania to assist Joseph with the translation. Oliver asked Joseph for a revelation, which became known as D&C 6. The Lord told Oliver, “... if you desire a further witness [of the translation] cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?”²⁷ Joseph adds context to the revelation. Joseph reported that while living with his parents in Manchester and the Smith family having “communicated to him concerning my having got the plates, one night after [Oliver] had retired to bed he called upon the Lord to know if these things were true, but that he had kept the circumstances entirely secret, and had mentioned it to no being, so that after this revelation having been given he knew that the work was true, because no living being knew of the things alluded to in the revelation but God and himself.”²⁸

Even before Oliver would see the plates; even before Oliver would see angels, receive the priesthood, or scribe the words of the Book of Mormon, the Lord reminded him of this singular truth—that a witness from God is greater than any tangible or physical witness experienced through the senses.

Oliver and Joseph

Many have speculated that Joseph and Oliver experienced irreparable bitter feelings, preventing Oliver’s return to the Church and explaining why he did not return until 4 years after Joseph’s death. However, their paths continued to cross. When Orson Hyde went to Jerusalem to dedicate the Holy Land, Joseph wanted Oliver to accompany Orson. Joseph instructed the quorum of the Twelve Apostles to write a letter to Oliver inviting him to accompany Orson to Jerusalem and invited Oliver to take his place with them in Zion and that he was still needed in the Church.²⁹ On the day of the martyrdom, June 27, 1844 a visitor to Carthage Jail read a correspondence from Oliver to Joseph.³⁰ A law associate noted that the death of Joseph had a deep impact on Oliver and he “immediately” went home and talked with his wife. The man noted, “I was surprised to hear [Oliver] speak with so much kindness of a man that had so wronged him as Smith had.”³¹

Oliver’s Return to the Church

Oliver, having been humbled by ill health and financial struggles,³² was ready to return to Church activity. After nearly a decade outside the Church, Oliver’s rebaptism and confirmation by apostle Orson Hyde was attended by over 2,000. At a special conference Oliver was invited to speak. He powerfully emphasized his role as a Book of Mormon Witness. He said, “Friends

and brethren—My name is Cowdery ... he called me to a high and holy calling. I wrote with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages only), as it fell from the lips of the Prophet, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim ... I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the ‘holy interpreters.’ That book is true. ... It contains the everlasting Gospel ... it contains the principles of salvation; and if you, my hearers, will walk by its light and obey its precepts, you will be saved with everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God on high.”³³

Oliver’s Dying Testimony

As Oliver neared the end of his life, he continued to bear the same consistent testimony he always had. “I want you to remember what I say to you. I am a dying man and what would it profit me to tell you a lie? I know ... that the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God. My eyes saw, my ears heard, and my understanding was touched, and I know that whereof I testified is true. It was no dream, no vain imagination of the mind—it was real.”³⁴

David Whitmer recorded, “Oliver died the happiest man I ever saw. After shaking hands with the family and kissing his wife and daughter [Maria³⁵] he said, ‘Now I lay me down for the last time, I am going to my Savior.’ And he died immediately with a smile on his face.”³⁶ His last words were, “Brother David [Whitmer], be true to your testimony of the Book of Mormon.”³⁷

At the time of Oliver’s death, he had intended to migrate to Utah, but poor health prevented it. In 1849 he had been extended a political mission call to canvas for statehood for Deseret. His health prevented him from going to Washington DC and he passed away in Missouri.³⁸

At his death at the age of 44 all his wife’s family reported that he bore his testimony of the Book of Mormon.³⁹ His wife, Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery wrote, “From the hour when the glorious vision of the Holy Messenger revealed to [his] mortal eyes the hidden prophecies which God hath promised ... until the moment when he passed away from earth, he always without one doubt or shadow of turning affirmed the divinity of the Book of Mormon.”⁴⁰

Oliver’s half sister, Lucy reported, “Just before [Oliver] breathed his last he asked to be raised up in bed so he could talk to the family and friends and he told them to live according to the teachings in the book of Mormon and they would meet him in heaven then he said lay me down and let me fall asleep in the arms of Jesus, and he fell asleep without a struggle.”⁴¹

Phineas H. Young reported that “his last moments were spent bearing testimony of the truth of the Gospel revealed through Joseph Smith and the power of the holy Priesthood which he had received thorough his administrations.”⁴²

Ordinance work was done by Joseph Feilding Smith in the Salt Lake City Temple on October 18, 1934 and his family’s ordinance work was done on April 27, 1935.⁴³

Oliver’s Legacy

When pondering the legacy that Oliver hoped to leave behind after he died, Oliver wrote, “I have cherished a hope ... one of my fondest, that I might leave such a character, as those who might believe in my testimony, after I should be called hence, might do so, not only for the sake of the truth, but might not blush for the private character of the man who bore that testimony. I have been sensitive on this subject, I admit; but I ought to be so—you would be, under the circumstances, had you stood in the presence of John, with our departed Brother Joseph, to receive the Lesser Priesthood—and in the presence of Peter, to receive the Greater, and looked down through time, and witnessed the effects these two must produce,—you would feel what you

have never felt, were wicked men conspiring to lessen the effects of your testimony on man, after you should have gone to your long sought rest.”⁴⁴

In 1876 Oliver’s brother-in-law John Whitmer, one of the Eight Witnesses, paid this tribute, “I have never heard [Oliver] deny the truth of his testimony of the Book of Mormon under any circumstances whatever. Neither do I believe that he would have denied, [even] at the peril of his life; so firm was he that he could not be made to deny what he has affirmed to be a divine revelation from God.”⁴⁵

Later in life David Whitmer became frustrated with people stating that he and the other witnesses had denied their testimony (a claim that is still being made even today). Speaking of Oliver he stated, “Oliver never wavered in his testimony, and when he was on his death bed, I was there, with many of his friends, until he passed away. He bore the same testimony on his dying bed that he had always borne through life, and earnestly called upon all to cleave to the truth revealed through the Prophet Joseph, and to serve the Lord.”⁴⁶

Oliver and a Pervading Sense of Sadness

30 years after Oliver’s death, one of his law students from Ohio reminisced, “he was polite, dignified, ... courageous ... kind and friendly ... marked by the great amount of information his conversation conveyed ... musical voice. ... He was modest and reserved, never spoke ill of anyone, never complained.” He also noted “there was a certain degree of sadness that seemed to pervade his whole being.”⁴⁷ You have to wonder if this pervading sadness was a result of his futile attempt to find joy outside the Church. He described this time outside the “main channel ... of the Church” as wading in the “sloughs and bayous ... floundering in the mud.”⁴⁸

Conclusion

Oliver is a fascinating witness of the Book of Mormon. He had numerous experiences that solidified his testimony in the Book of Mormon. The Lord showed Oliver the plates and the work which Joseph was about to do before Oliver had even met Joseph. As the primary scribe he, with Joseph, was the first to hear the words of the Book of Mormon, the message of which filled his soul with “joy unspeakable.” He saw and handled the plates. He was a powerful speaker and missionary. This conviction to the Book of Mormon carried him through a period of crisis and he returned to his former faith.

“Then [John the Baptist’s] voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, ‘I am thy fellow-servant,’ dispelled every fear. We listened—we gazed—we admired! ‘Twas the voice of an angel from glory—’twas a message from the Most High! and as we heard we rejoiced, while his love enkindled upon our souls, and we were wrapt in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt? No where; uncertainty had fled, doubt had sunk, no more to rise, while fiction and deception had fled forever!” Oliver Cowdery

¹ *History of the Church* 1:39-41; Joseph said that he was “ordained a Priest after the order of Aaron” (Joseph Smith, Sermon, March 10, 1844, recorded by Wilford Woodruff in his journal, in Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898*, Typescript, ed. as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 241

² D&C 27:12; D&C 7:7; *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition (2005), 248-256, documents 40, 41, 68, 70

³ *History of the Church* 1:54-57

⁴ D&C 110:11-15

⁵ See Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:16; D&C 110:1-6; *The Savior in Kirtland*, 136

⁶ When Joseph and Oliver received the Aaronic Priesthood, Oliver declared, “The voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us” (*Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1, October 1834, 15); When the Three Witnesses were shown the plates by Moroni, they stated that a voice from heaven declared the translation to be correct. Martin Harris identified the voice as God’s or the Lord’s (see *Opening the Heavens*, 133-140 documents 46, 60, 63, 64, 65)

⁷ Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young, 16 April 1848

- ⁸ Scott H. Faulring, "The Return of Oliver Cowdery," *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, (FARMS publishing, 2000) as retrieved from scholars.archive.byu.edu/mi/84 on 1/10/24
- ⁹ For further details and quotes about the persecution see pages 32-33 herein
- ¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *Enhanced and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 181-82, 184
- ¹¹ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:16
- ¹² *Times and Seasons*, 2:201
- ¹³ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Explaining Away the Book of Mormon Witnesses," <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2004/explaining-away-the-book-of-mormon-witnesses> as retrieved 12/13/2022
- ¹⁴ *Deseret Weekly*, 23 March 1889, 391; see also *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff*, 104-06 for additional information on Oliver's loss of power when he left the Church.
- ¹⁵ History of the Church 1:118
- ¹⁶ D&C 32:2, 3
- ¹⁷ H. Dean Garrett, "Ziba Peterson: From Missionary to Hanging Sheriff," 29
- ¹⁸ Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, 48
- ¹⁹ Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, 57
- ²⁰ William E. McLellin's Lost Manuscript (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2012), 166-67
- ²¹ General Charge to the Twelve, 21 February 1835, *History of the Church* 2:195-96; See Joseph Smith Papers, "Minutes and Blessings," *Documents*, 4:244
- ²² See Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:258, given just 5 years after the death of Oliver Cowdery; Seymour B. Young, LDS Conference Report, April 1921, 114-116; George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 22:254; For additional information and commentary on the courtroom confession see Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witness*, 57-60
- ²³ See *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay*, 87
- ²⁴ *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 110
- ²⁵ See John W. Welch, "Oliver Cowdery's 1835 Response to Alexander Campbell's 1831 'Delusions,'" *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter Day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, (FARMS publishing, 2000) as retrieved from scholars.archive.byu.edu/mi/84 on 1/10/24
- ²⁶ "Testimonies of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris," *Millennial Star* 21 (20 August 1859), 544 as retrieved from <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/23388> on 1/9/2024
- ²⁷ D&C 6:21, 22
- ²⁸ See *Document History of the Church*, 1:35
- ²⁹ Oliver did not accompany Orson Hyde to Jerusalem. See *History of the Church* 5:368; Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 2:370 and footnote 957
- ³⁰ See *History of the Church* 6:613; see also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, (1954), 1:140; Willard Richards, "Journals," volume 10, 1844 March-August, page 37 time 11:30 as found on <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e6806f34-eb9a-41c6-8a59-2a1f428b0c81/0/36> as retrieved 1/10/24
- ³¹ See Scott H. Faulring, "The Return of Oliver Cowdery," *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter Day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, (FARMS publishing, 2000) as retrieved from scholars.archive.byu.edu/mi/84 on 1/10/24
- ³² Oliver was hampered by chronic lung infections. He had great desires to go to Utah with the main Saints. While living in Iowa he wrote to a friend, "I am poor, very poor" (Huntington Library Letters, Microfilm #11 as found in Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery, Second Elder and Scribe*, (1962), 206
- ³³ "Testimonies of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris," *Millennial Star* 21 (20 August 1859), 544 as retrieved from <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/23388> on 1/9/2024
- ³⁴ Testimony of Jacob Gates as quoted in Larry C. Porter, "The Testimony of Oliver Cowdery," *Ensign*, December 1996
- ³⁵ Oliver and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery had 6 children, of which only one survived, Maria Lousia Cowdery
- ³⁶ Reported in Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt interview with David Whitmer, 7-8 September 1878, see *Millennial Star*, XI, 774
- ³⁷ David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, (1887), 8-9
- ³⁸ Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion, 128; See Scott H. Faulring, "The Return of Oliver Cowdery," *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter Day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, (FARMS publishing, 2000) as retrieved from scholars.archive.byu.edu/mi/84 on 1/10/24
- ³⁹ See Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 63
- ⁴⁰ Letter to David Whitmer dated 8 March 1887 as quoted in Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 63
- ⁴¹ Letter of Lucy Cowdery Young, 7 March 1887
- ⁴² *Millennial Star*, 27:59
- ⁴³ See Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery: Second Elder and Scribe*, 209
- ⁴⁴ Scott H. Faulring, "The Return of Oliver Cowdery," (FARMS publishing, 2000) as retrieved from scholars.archive.byu.edu/mi/84 on 1/10/24
- ⁴⁵ Letter to Mark H. Forscutt, 5 March 1876, holograph found in the Community of Christ Church Archives as found in Richard L. Anderson, "Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 55
- ⁴⁶ David Whitmer interview with James H. Hart, 10 March 1884, *Deseret News* (18 March 1884)
- ⁴⁷ William Lang as quoted in Jeffery N. Walker, "Oliver Cowdery's Legal Practice in Tiffin Ohio," *Days Never to be Forgotten: Oliver Cowdery*, BYU Church History Symposium, 2009, 305
- ⁴⁸ See *Journal of Discourses* 13:335

Witness #3

David Whitmer, The Most Interviewed Witness

January 7, 1805 to January 25, 1888 (83 Years)

Biographical Sketch. David was raised in a deeply religious family, which soon became staunch supporters of Joseph. David was likely the fifth person baptized into the Church in June 1829.¹ He was one of the original 6 charter members of the Church on April 6, 1830. He moved to Jackson County Missouri, where he led the Church. He was driven from Zion, Jackson County, but stayed in Missouri and became the president of the Church in Missouri. In 1835 he was appointed the general agent of the Literary Firm. Sadly, he broke from the Church in 1838 and was excommunicated. He settled in Richmond Missouri where he operated a livery and stable business, was elected to the Richmond City council several times and served as mayor.² He was described by Richmond Citizens as a man “upright in his dealings with all men and just toward all” and “very highly and generally respected.”³ In 1875 David formed a short-lived Church called the Church of Christ (Whitmerites).

The Most Interviewed Witness

David Whitmer was just 24 years old when Moroni showed him the plates. He died in January 1888, just 3 weeks after his 83rd birthday. For nearly 60 years he bore witness after witness of the Book of Mormon. He gave at least 72 recorded interviews.⁴ David recalled, “I have been visited by thousands of people, believers and unbelievers, men and ladies of all degrees, sometimes as many as 15 in one day, and [I] have never failed in my testimony. And they will know some day that my testimony is true. I had a mob of 400 to 500 surrounding me at one time demanding that I should deny my published statement in the Book of Mormon; but the testimony I bore made the mob tremble before me. I have heard the voice of the Angel just as stated in said book and the engravings on the plates were shown to us, and we were commanded to bear record of them; and if they are not true, then there is no truth, and if there is no truth there is no God; if there is no God then there is no existence. But there is a God and I know it.”⁵ All who came to interview him knew that “he fully believes he saw and heard just as he said he did.”⁶

David Whitmer testified that Moroni showing the plates was real and not deception by Joseph. David boldly declared, “I saw the angel of God, I heard his voice, hence I know of a truth.”⁷ “I know Joseph was a prophet of God, and he translated the Book of Mormon by the inspiration of God.”⁸ “I was not under any hallucination, nor was I deceived! I saw with these eyes and heard with these ears! I know whereof I speak.”⁹ “It was no delusion.”¹⁰ “I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking his hand upon the bed beside him), and I heard the voice of the Lord as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life declaring that [the plates] were translated by the gift and power of God.”¹¹ “My testimony in the Book of Mormon is true; I can't deviate from it.”¹² “That book is a true record; it is the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, translated by the gift and power of God, through Joseph Smith.”¹³ “My testimony to the world is written concerning the Book of Mormon, and it is the same that I gave at first and it is the same as shall stand to my latest hour in life, linger with me in death and shine as gospel truth beyond the limits

“[David], seek to bring forth and establish my Zion. Keep my commandments in all things. And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all gifts of God.” Jesus Christ

of life ...”¹⁴ “[O]ur testimony is true. And if these things are not true, then there is no truth; and if there is no truth, then there is no God; and if there is no God, there is no existence. But I know there is a God, for I have heard his voice and witness the manifestation of his power.”¹⁵

Another facet of his testimony is that anyone can gain the same testimony through reading the Book of Mormon. He put forth this invitation, “Remember that prejudice is not of God. It is the spirit that hastily condemned and stoned the prophets of God in all ages past. So beware, and look well to your own heart, that Satan does not blind your understanding to the truth. If you are open to investigation and conviction, I pray you to read the Book of Mormon with a prayerful heart. All persons who are spiritual, having a fair understanding of the scriptures, how they can read that Book and reject it, is very strange indeed. The Book carries conviction with it. The wise men of this world could never write a book like it. Anyone without prejudice, who is honestly seeking for truth, can see the finger of God in that book. It makes plain the doctrines which are so obscure in the New Testament, and over which the religious world is divided.”¹⁶

David Whitmer had concerns and biases about Joseph’s leadership. These issues with Joseph are reflected in the next quotation and should be noted, but ponder the full power of the quotation and its implications. David reported, “Joseph Smith drifting into error after translating the Book of Mormon, is a stumbling block to many, but only those of very weak faith would stumble on this account. Greater abominations are recorded of David in the Bible, than recorded today of Joseph Smith; but do you reject the Psalms on this account? Do you reject the Proverbs because Solomon was a polygamist? Stop and think, you who are hasty to condemn. If you desire to know whether or not the Book of Mormon is true, read the book and investigate it, for Christ has promised that he who seeks in the right way shall find the truth of all things. We are commanded to prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”¹⁷

David Hears of the Plates in Palmyra

Like Oliver, David Whitmer’s first exposure to the Book of Mormon came from the persecution in Palmyra. He traveled to Palmyra on business trips in 1828. Initially David dismissed the stories of Joseph and the “Gold Bible” as what he called “idle gossip.”¹⁸ While there he met Oliver Cowdery and the two became quick friends. The small town was abuzz with the stories of Joseph and the Gold Plates. Joseph recorded that “The excitement ... and rumor with her thousand tongues was all the time employed circulating falsehoods about my ... family, and about myself. If I were to relate the thousandth part of them, it would fill up volumes. The persecution became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester and going with my wife to Susquehanna County.”¹⁹ David recalled, “A great many people in the neighborhood were talking about the finding of certain golden plates by one Joseph Smith, jr., a young man of that neighborhood. Cowdery and I, as well as others, talked about the matter. ... Cowdery said he was acquainted with the Smith family and he believed there must be some truth in the story of the plates, and that he intended to investigate the matter.” After “conversations with several young men who said that Joseph Smith had certain gold plates,” David concluded, “These parties were so positive in their statements that I began to believe there must be some foundation from the stories then in circulation.”²⁰ Martin recalled that “the excitement in the village [of Palmyra] upon the subject [of the plates] had become such that some had threatened to mob Joseph, and also to tar and feather him. They said he should never leave [Palmyra] until he had shown them the plates.”²¹ Amid this hostility David determined to investigate and proceed on faith.

David's first experience with the prophetic and visionary abilities of Joseph came at a time when Joseph and Oliver needed David. After leaving Palmyra, Joseph and Oliver moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania where they translated about 70% of the Book of Mormon. Initially Joseph's father in law was open to allowing the Smiths to live on his property as long as Joseph agreed to give up treasure seeking and "glass looking." Eventually the relationship was strained when Joseph refused to show the plates to members of the Hale family and as persecution intensified Joseph felt a necessity to leave but did not have anywhere to go. Oliver wrote to David requesting that he and Joseph be allowed to live at the home of his father, Peter Whitmer, Sr. David asked his father who stated that there was too much to do on the farm to get Oliver and the Smiths. Miraculously their fields were plowed and fertilized. David recalled that the work was done "just as I would have done it myself."²² David stated that "[this] was a witness to me."²³ Peter Whitmer Sr., David's father, replied, "There must be an overruling hand in this, and I think you had better go down to Pennsylvania as soon as your plaster of paris is sown."²⁴ That too was miraculously done and David set out. Just before David arrived in Harmony, Joseph and Oliver went out to meet him. Joseph informed Oliver of David's travels, where he slept and ate, in great detail. Before David arrived in Harmony Joseph and Oliver met him en route and David confirmed all the details Joseph had told to Oliver.

They quickly arranged all their belongings, loading the wagon David had brought. Emma said goodbye to her family, never to see them again and they set off for Fayette. As they traveled David recorded that a "very pleasant, nice looking man" appeared with "a sort of knapsack on his back, and something was in it which was shaped like a book." He declined a ride stating he was heading to "Cumorah" and vanished from view. Joseph identified the traveler as Moroni. David described him as "about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches and heavy set, ... His face was as large. He was dressed in a suit of brown, woolen clothes; his hair and beard were white."²⁵

David Whitmer in Missouri

In 1831 Joseph called an additional 11 missionary companionships to aid Oliver, Peter Whitmer Jr., Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson in Independence Missouri. He called Hyrum Smith to go with John Murdock, Reynolds Cahoon to go with Samuel H. Smith and Harvey Whitlock to go with David Whitmer. Joseph soon joined them in Independence, making 6 witnesses of the Book of Mormon on one mission. Sadly, neither David nor his companion left details. What we know about the missionary work of David and his companion Harvey comes from others. Harvey would expound a gospel principle and then David, as a special witness would arise and bear testimony that he had "seen an angel who made known the truth of the record to him."²⁶ This testimony of David made a lasting impression on William E. McLellan; he recalled, "I saw [David Whitmer in] June 1879, and heard him bear his testimony to the truth of the book as sincerely and solemnly as when he bore it to me in Paris Ill. in July 1831. I believed him then and still believe him."²⁷

In 1831 he rejoiced in the city of Zion that should be established in Jackson County, but 2 years later he, with 5 others, offered their lives as a ransom to spare his beloved Saints.²⁸ As a mob tore through the streets of Independence Missouri, they tarred and feathered Bishop Partridge and Charles Allen. They threw the printing press of W. W. Phelps into the street and scattered the type and supplies used to print the *Book of Commandments*. Then they tore down the building using hammers, crow bars and even bare hands.²⁹ They threatened the lives of any Saint, including young girls.³⁰ In this perilous time, David Whitmer and other leaders were taken

"No man ever lived here [in Richmond] who had among our people more friends and fewer enemies. Honest, conscientious and upright in all his dealings ... he made lasting friends who loved him to the end." *Richmond Citizen*

to the Independence town square at gunpoint. There is evidence that at that time David and others may have been tarred and feathered at this time as well. The mobbers pointed their cocked guns at the chests of these men and “threatening them with instant death, unless they denied the book of Mormon and confessed it to be a fraud; at the same time adding, that if they did so, they might enjoy the privileges of citizens. David Whitmer, hereupon, lifted up his hands and bore witness that the Book of Mormon was the Word of God.”³¹

David later recalled, “The testimony I gave to that mob made them fear and tremble, and I escaped from them. One gentleman, a doctor and unbeliever, told me afterwards that the bold and fearless testimony born on that occasion, and the fear that seemed to take hold of the mob had made him a believer in the Book of Mormon.”³²

David Excommunicated

Sadly, David withdrew his membership and was excommunicated in 1838. David’s testimony of the Book of Mormon, ironically, was a reason for his withdrawal/removal from the Church. As the Church expanded, new priesthood offices and quorums were organized, which David viewed as deviations from the original Church. Additionally, expansion brought on new concerns for David as the Church purchased lands and communities and taught laws concerning consecration, tithing, and finances. He had concerns with new revelations, specifically the Word of Wisdom. He viewed these things as deviations from what he called the “primitive church” and drifting into error, believing that the Book of Mormon and the Bible “contained God’s laws in completeness.”³³ David just couldn’t make amends with the changes that Church growth brought with his ideals of the Church in the beginning. He later reflected, “I hung on in patience trusting that everything would eventually be put right,”³⁴ but sadly for him the Church progressed to accommodate the needs of growth. He also had severe concerns with Joseph’s leadership.

Apostle George Q Cannon visited the Whitmer family in 1885 in Richmond Missouri. He found that “[the Whitmer family] stands clinging to the Book of Mormon and its contents, believing it and looking for the day when all who believe ... will be united with the house of Israel as the Book [of Mormon] promises.”³⁵

David’s Testimony Challenged

As a Witness to the Book of Mormon David often faced scrutiny and misrepresentation which frustrated David. He said, “I have been imposed upon and misrepresented so many times by persons claiming to be honorable newspaper men that I feel a delicacy in allowing my name to come before the public in newspaper print again.”³⁶ John Murphy published a version of an interview he had with David, portraying the experiences of the Three Witnesses as a “delusion or cunning scheme.” Murphy claimed David could not describe Moroni and likened his experience to “impressions” rather than real experiences. David responded, “It having been represented by one John Murphy, ... that I, in a conversation with him last summer, denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the BOOK OF MORMON. To the end, therefore, that he may understand me now, if he did not then; and that the world may know the truth, I wish now, standing as it were, in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God, once and for all to make this public statement: That I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with that Book, as one of the three witnesses. Those who know me best, well know that I have always adhered to that testimony. And that no man may be misled or doubt my present views in regard to the same, I do again affirm the truth of all of my statements, as then made and published. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear; it was no delusion!”³⁷

On another occasion, David, while lifting his eyes toward heaven declared, "AS MY TESTIMONY STANDS, SO IT IS; I HAVE NOT, NOR WILL I DENY IT"³⁸

"I saw [the angel] myself and gazed with awe on the celestial messenger and heard him say, 'Blessed is the Lord and he that keeps his commandments.' Then, as he held the plates and turned them over with his hands so that we could see them plainly, a voice that seemed to fill all space was heard, saying: 'What you see is true. Testify to the same.' Oliver Cowdrey and I, standing there, felt, as the white garments of the angel faded from view, that we had received a message from God, and we have so recorded it. [A short time] later the same angel appeared to Martin Harris while he was in company with [Joseph] Smith, and placed the same injunction upon him. He described the sight and his sensations to me, and they corresponded exactly with what I had seen and heard."³⁹

One challenge that David addressed is the question of whether the Three Witnesses physically saw the plates. He said, "I have been asked if we saw those things with our natural eyes. Of course they were our natural eyes. There is no doubt that our eyes were prepared for the sight, but they were our natural eyes, nevertheless."⁴⁰ He further clarified that though their experiences were spiritual in nature they beheld with their physical, natural senses. He said, "Of course we were in the spirit when we had the view [of the plates] for no man could behold the face of an angel, except in spiritual view, but we were in the body also, and everything was as natural to us as it is at any time."⁴¹

David described in detail the great light that accompanied the experience he, Oliver, and Joseph had when Moroni showed them the plates. He described, "It was not the light of the sun, nor like that of a fire, but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away round us, I cannot tell how far, but in the midst of this light about as far off as [John C. Whitmer] sits, there appeared, as it were a table with many records or plates upon it, besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the sword of Laban, the directors, and the interpreters. I saw them just as plainly as I see ... and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declare that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God."⁴²

David Bears His Final Testimony

The Sunday before David passed, he called his family together. He insisted that his doctor verify that he was in his right mind. Then David spoke to his family, saying, "I want to give my dying testimony. You must be faithful in Christ. I want to say to you all that the Bible and the record of the Nephites (the Book of Mormon) are true, so you can say that you have heard me bear my testimony on my deathbed. All be faithful in Christ and your reward will be according to your works. God bless you all. My trust is in Christ forever, worlds without end. Amen."

The next day he called all those present to his bedside and told them "that he had seen another vision which reconfirmed the divinity of the Book of Mormon, and said that he had seen Christ in the fulness of his glory and majesty, sitting upon his great white throne in heaven waiting to receive his children."⁴³

David and the Printer's Manuscript

When Oliver Cowdrey passed away in 1850, a printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon passed to David Whitmer who guarded it until his death in 1880. Apostles Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith visited David in Richmond Missouri asking to "barter" to obtain the manuscript. David refused, stating, "Oliver charged me to keep it, and Joseph said my Father's house should 'keep

"I speak unto you ... David Whitmer ... for ye are called even with the same calling with which [Paul mine Apostle] was called. Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. ... Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people. And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people and bring save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" Jesus Christ

the Records.' I consider these things sacred and would not part with, nor barter them for money."⁴⁴

The next day they attempted again, but David again refused. Elders Pratt and Smith concluded, "We found that nothing would move him on this point. The whole Whitmer family are deeply impressed with the sacredness of this relic. And so thoroughly imbued are they with the idea and faith that it is under the immediate protection of the Almighty, that, in their estimation, not only is the [manuscript] itself safe from all possible contingencies, but that it is a source of protection to the place or house in which it may be kept, and, it may be to those who have possession of them."⁴⁵

Conclusion

David bore a consistent testimony, though some minor differences in the story are attributed to David. He bore testimony that he saw the plates in a real and physical manner. He testified that he saw Moroni. He testified that Joseph did translate the Book of Mormon by the gift of God. So deeply was this testimony engrained in his being that he had difficulty accepting any additional revelation. Like Martin and Oliver, David spent his last breath bearing testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Tad R. Callister said, "With passion and consistency—never wavering—David Whitmer reaffirmed his testimony again and again and again. To suggest he denied his testimony is a 24-carat falsehood. It is fabrication of the highest order. David had multiple opportunities to deny or dilute his testimony but he never did chose to do so. Why? Because he saw what he saw, and heard what he heard just as he testified on numerous occasions during his life."⁴⁶

"A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men ... Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap let him thrust in his sickle with his might and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the Kingdom of God. Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God." Jesus Christ

¹ *History of the Church* 1:51

² Largey, *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, 678

³ *Chicago Tribune*, 15 December 1885; Omaha Herald, 17 October 1886 as found in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 179, 205

⁴ See Daniel C. Peterson, "Review of David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness (1991), Editor Lyndon W. Cook," Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 5/1 (1993), 113

⁵ Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 79; Proctor and Proctor, Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, 206 footnote 3; Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 95-96

⁶ Memoirs of Joseph Smith III as cited in Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 88

⁷ William E. McLellin's *Lost Manuscript*, 165-66

⁸ Interview conducted on January 15, 1882, as found in the *Saints' Herald* 29 (March 1, 1882): 68

⁹ Memoirs of Joseph Smith III, as found in Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 88

¹⁰ David Whitmer, A Proclamation, as found in Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 87

¹¹ Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith Interview, 1878 as found in *Early Mormon Documents* 5:44 as retrieved from https://archive.org/details/volume-5_202011/page/43/mode/2up?view=theater on 1/17/24

¹² Interview with E. C. Briggs and R. Etzenhouser at Richmond, Missouri, April 25, 1884. *Saints' Herald*, Volume 31, 396

¹³ *Deseret Evening News*, 10 April 1872 as found in *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:218

¹⁴ David Whitmer to Mark H. Frorscutt, 2 March 1875, as found in *Early Mormon Documents* 5:219

¹⁵ Letter of James Hart to the Deseret News, 23 August 1883 as cited in Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 82

¹⁶ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (1887), 14

¹⁷ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (1887), 4

¹⁸ Lyndon W. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, 60

¹⁹ *History of the Church* 1:19

²⁰ Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 60

²¹ See Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 159 footnote 5; see also interview with Joel Tiffany, 1859, in "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffanys Monthly* (August 1859): 163-70 as found in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:309

- ²² Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith Interview, 1878 as found in *Early Mormon Documents* 5:44 as retrieved from https://archive.org/details/volume-5_202011/page/43/mode/2up?view=theater on 1/17/24
- ²³ Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith Interview, 7-8 September 1875 as found in Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 51
- ²⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 192-95
- ²⁵ Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith Interview, 1878 as found in *Early Mormon Documents* 5:44 as retrieved from https://archive.org/details/volume-5_202011/page/43/mode/2up?view=theater on 1/17/24
- ²⁶ Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, *The Journal of William E. McLellin*, 29
- ²⁷ See Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, *The Journal of William E. McLellin*, 49 note 3
- ²⁸ *History of the Church* 1:411-12
- ²⁹ B. H. Roberts, *The Missouri Persecutions*, 85
- ³⁰ At this time 15 year old Mary Elizabeth and her 13 year old sister Caroline rushed into the pile of manuscripts of the Book of Commandments and saved as many as they could. They hid in a corn field as the mob searched, cursing and threatening to kill the girls. See Autobiography of Mary E. Lightner, *The Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 17 (July 1926), 193-205; see also Mary Elizabeth Rollins: A Young Girl Strong and Courageous as retrieved from history.churchofjesuschrist.org
- ³¹ John P. Greene, Facts relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons or Latter Day Saints, from the State of Missouri under the Exterminating Order (1839), 17
- ³² See Richard L. Anderson, "The Most Interviewed Witness," *Improvement Era*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (May 1969), 79 as retrieved from https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/anderson/2018-08-13/richard_lloyd_anderson_ie_72.5_the_most_interviewed_witness_may_1969.pdf on 1/15/24
- ³³ See Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, xviii-xx. David questioned the additional offices of the Church, the angelic ordination to the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods of Joseph and Oliver by John the Baptist, Peter, James claiming the stories "were got up" to usurp power and control. He also claimed the stories of the Priesthood restoration were "nothing but a trumped up yarn" and the Pentecostal events at the Kirtland Temple dedication were "a grand fizzle;" he was present and said he saw nothing. (This claim contradicts Joseph's account that "presdt David Whitmer also saw angels in the house [during the Kirtland Temple dedication]" and George A. Smith's report that DW had told him that he saw "three angels" during the meeting held later that night, (JSP, *Journals*, 1:211 see fn 440). He even went on to say that the martyrdom of Joseph "was conclusive evidence of [Joseph's] falling from grace as it was in direct conflict with what had been promised by the Lord on condition of his remaining faithful." (Omaha Herald, 10 Oct 1886 as found in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 204-05). These claims on priesthood ordination are countered by Oliver Cowdery, David's friend and brother in law. He declared, "we received under his (John the Baptist) hand the holy priesthood" (Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, 7 Sept 1834, *Latter Day Saint Messenger and Advocate*, Oct 1834, 15-16) and "upon this head has Peter, James, and John laid their hands and conferred the Holy Melchizedek priesthood" (David H. Cannon Autobiography as quoted in *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 81). He made numerous similar statements.
- ³⁴ Omaha Herald, 10 October 1886 as found in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 205
- ³⁵ George Q. Cannon Interview, 27 February 1884 as found in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 109
- ³⁶ Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 59
- ³⁷ "A Proclamation," 1881; see also *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, (1887), 8-10
- ³⁸ *Saints' Herald* 21, 15 September 1874, 564
- ³⁹ Unidentified interview found in an unidentified newspaper clipping as found in *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:134; "this apparition" replaced with "the angel" and "Two or three days later" replaced with "A short time;" changes made to clarify and replace misinformation.
- ⁴⁰ Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 192-93
- ⁴¹ Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 247
- ⁴² Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith Interview, 1878 as found in *Early Mormon Documents* 5:44 as retrieved from https://archive.org/details/volume-5_202011/page/43/mode/2up?view=theater on 1/17/24
- ⁴³ "An Old Citizen Passes Away," *Richmond Conservator*, 26 January 1888 as found in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 226
- ⁴⁴ "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Millennial Star*, December 9, 1878, 773
- ⁴⁵ Scott C. Esplin, "'A History of All the Important Things' (D&C 69:3): John Whitmer's Record of Church History," *Preserving the History of the Latter-Day Saints*, 58
- ⁴⁶ *A Case for the Book of Mormon*, 197-98

Witness # 4

Martin Harris, “I wish that I Could Bear my Testimony to the Whole World”¹

May 18, 1783 to July 10, 1875 (91 Years)

Biographical Sketch. As a child Martin moved with his family to Swift’s Landing, later renamed Palmyra. He married Lucy in 1808 and enlisted in the 39th New York State militia in the War of 1812. By the time he became acquainted with Joseph, Martin Harris was already a respected farmer. One neighbor recalled Martin as “an industrious, hard-working farmer, shrewd in his business calculations, frugal in his habits, and ... a prosperous man in the world.”² He had amassed a 320 acre farm in Manchester. When the rumors and slanders of young Joseph circulated around Palmyra, Martin initially felt apprehensions. However, Martin gave Joseph \$50 to assist in the work of translation. He led the Manchester Branch of the Church to Kirtland Ohio and served on the Kirtland Ohio High Council.

Often Martin is criticized and often unfairly characterized as religiously unstable. Before his baptism he was associated with the Quakers, the Universalists, the Restorationists, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians. He was baptized into the LDS Church on April 6, 1830. He then associated with the Church of Christ (Warren Parrish Movement), rebaptized into the LDS Church in 1842, Shakers in 1844, James Strang’s Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in 1846, William E. McLellin’s Church of Christ in 1847, William Smith’s Church in 1855, and baptized a third time in Salt Lake City into the LDS Church. Because of this Martin has been characterized by members and nonmembers as unstable. If that is true, then it reinforces his consistency as a Witness of the Book of Mormon. He never waffled or waived in his testimony of the Book of Mormon. After his excommunication he seems to be searching for religious movement that could bring the joy he had found in the LDS Church. With the exception of the Shakers, every religion Martin associated with accepted the Book of Mormon and/or were his former friends in the Gospel.

“I never did leave the Church, the Church left me”

In 1869, 32 years after Martin Harris had left the Church he was asked how he could bear such a powerful testimony of the Restoration and still have left the Church? He responded, “I never did leave the Church, the Church left me.”³ Initially this statement seems very odd. If the Church meant so much to Martin, why did he not go *with* the Saints? However, in studying the complexities of Martin’s life we begin to understand the depth of the statement. In it we see a deep abiding testimony of the Restored Gospel. We see a witness who stuck to his testimony. He never left the Church; it was part of who he was. But sadly, we also see a sense of abandonment and the pain and hurt he felt throughout his life as the Church left him. When we study his life we see both aspects, a deep commitment and a deep hurt. When we study Martin’s life we need to keep this dichotomy in mind. Martin recollected, “things were alright then. I was honored while the Church was [in Kirtland], but now things are different.”⁴

“No one contributed more financial support in the infancy of the Church than Martin Harris, and few received such severe chastisements or varied callings from God.” Susan Easton Black

Martin as a Distinct Witness

As a Witness to the Book of Mormon, Martin has 3 distinctions: 1) He is the only witness to bear testimony of the Book of Mormon outside of North America, 2) He is the only witness to come to Utah and see what the Saints had become in the Rocky Mountains, and 3) he is the only Witness that a prophet prophesied would return to the Church. In 1869, about a year before Martin came west Brigham Young said, "Rest assured, Martin Harris will be here [in Utah]." ⁵

Martin's Witness

Martin was interviewed over 50 times ⁶ with over 100 documented sources documenting a consistent and powerful testimony. ⁷ His testimony, consistency born, testified of the reality of Moroni and the Plates and that he experienced these events with his senses. He would often gesture to his eyes, ears or hands and state that he had *seen* Moroni and the plates, he had *heard* the voice from heaven, and *handled* the plates. ⁸ He would point to an object, the sun shining, ⁹ a chopping block, an ax head, his hand or an apple tree and then insist that just as plainly as they see the object he saw the plates. ¹⁰ A group of teenagers in Clarkston Utah challenged Martin as to whether he truly saw the plates. Martin said, "Just as plainly as you see that chopping block, I saw the plates; and sooner than I would deny it I would lay my head upon that chopping block and let you chop it off." ¹¹ He similarly stated, "I would rather have my right arm cutoff than deny the knowledge of the Book of Mormon." ¹²

Another aspect of Martin's testimony is an emphasis that because of his experiences with Moroni and the plates he did not believe, but knew. ¹³ "I know what I know. I have seen what I have seen, and I have heard what I have heard. I have seen the gold plates. ... An angel appeared to me and others..." ¹⁴ Martin declared, "It is not a mere belief, but a matter of knowledge. I saw the plates and the inscriptions thereon. I saw the angel, and he showed them unto me." ¹⁵ "He told [two nonmember visitors] that he knew [the Book of Mormon] was true and that [he] was past believing." ¹⁶ In Clarkston he again declared, "No, I don't believe anything about it. Knowledge supersedes belief. I know it is true. I saw the angel and saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated and heard the voice of God declare it was translated correctly." ¹⁷

A third aspect of his testimony are the actions he took to ensure the publication of the Book of Mormon. In 1828 Martin took copies of the characters to scholars in New York. He borrowed the Book of Mormon manuscripts to show his wife and a few other relatives the fruits of his and Joseph's work in hopes that it would pacify his wife and strengthen their resolve in the work. He sold 151 acres of his farm for \$3,000 to meet the steep printing demands of the publisher E. B. Grandin when locals from Palmyra threatened to boycott the Book of Mormon. Due to inflation the \$3,000 in 1829 would be equivalent to \$67,000 today and when the economy of Palmyra in 1830 is taken into account the sum of \$3,000 becomes as high as \$1.6 million. ¹⁸

Martin summed up his conviction in these words, "I might as well doubt my own existence as to doubt the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon or the divine calling of Joseph Smith." ¹⁹

Being from the Palmyra area, Martin too heard the rumors and slanders of Joseph, his visions and his "gold Bible," yet he felt a determination to investigate fully the matter of the plates.

Martin Bears Testimony that His Experience as a Witness was Physical

As with all of the official witnesses, Martin was questioned to see if he would provide the naysayers with any information that could be interpreted as fraud, deception, or even a "spiritual" experience rather than a tangible, physical experienced with the natural sense. On one occasion,

when Martin was asked if the Three Witnesses actually saw the angel and the plates, Martin held up his right hand and asked, "Gentlemen, do you see that hand? Are you sure you see it? Or are your eyes playing you a trick or something? No. Well as sure as you see my hand so sure did I see the angel and the plates. Brethren, I know I saw and heard these things, and the Lord knows I know these things of which I have spoken are true."²⁰

Martin's Book of Mormon Conviction Led to Family Problems

Because of Martin's involvement in the restoration, family problems arose. When Martin's wife and daughter came home from the Smiths residence and he questioned them thoroughly. Joseph allowed them to heft the box containing the plates. Within a day or two he went to visit the Smiths and found Joseph was gone. He interviewed all of the Smiths to see if their stories all matched. When Joseph returned Martin also questioned him. "I told [Joseph] I wished him to be very careful about these things. ... if it is the devil's work I will have nothing to do with it; but if it is the Lord's, you can have all the money necessary to bring it before the world." Joseph allowed Martin to heft the box containing the plates. Martin left at 11 o'clock at night and arrived home at midnight. Martin stated, "I retired to my bedroom and prayed God to show me concerning these things, and I covenanted that if it was his work and he would show me so, I would put forth my best ability to bring it before the world. He then showed me that it was his work, and that it was designed to bring in the fullness of his gospel to the gentiles to fulfill his word ... He showed this to me by the still small voice spoken in the soul. Then I was satisfied that it was the Lord's work, and I was under a covenant to bring it forth."²¹

Shortly after Martin gave Joseph \$50 to aid in moving to Harmony due to the intense persecution. Joseph recorded in the 1832 draft of his history that "because of [Martin's] faith and this righteous deed [of giving \$50] the Lord appeared unto him in a vision and shewed unto him his marvelous work which he was about to do and he immediately came to Susquehanna and said that the Lord had shown him that he must go to New York with some of the characters [from the plates.]"²²

Martin continued to honor that covenant and sacrificed a great deal to scribe for Joseph. He missed his daughter's wedding in May 1828.²³ He also missed an early planting season costing him in lost profits. This bewildered Martin's friends who viewed him as a level headed individual up until he began his association with the younger Joseph Smith and his visions. One stated his disbelief that Martin would "abandon the cultivation of one of the best farms in the neighborhood," to write for Joseph, something this man felt was a "change [of] all his habits of life from industry to indolence (laziness) and general shiftlessness (lack of ambition), was truly phenomenal."²⁴ Martin likely felt pressure to prove that the translation was noble and that Joseph was not trying to dupe or swindle him out of his money.

Even before Martin thought of mortgaging a portion of his farm for \$3,000 to pay for the publication of the Book of Mormon, Lucy Harris suspected Joseph of attempting to swindle her husband. She brought a legal suit against Joseph for trying to deceive the people. Martin knew he would be called on to testify at the legal proceedings and sought advice from Joseph. Joseph received D&C 5 in which the Lord testified that He had given the plates to Joseph Smith and forbidden him from showing the plates to others.²⁵ For Martin that was enough. Before seeing the plates, Martin defended and testified of Joseph's integrity and honesty in a legal court.

Joseph was cleared when Martin declared in court under oath, "I can swear that Joseph Smith has never got one dollar from me by persuasion ... I have never seen in Joseph Smith, a

"[Martin] was considered an honest, industrious citizen by his neighbors [in Palmyra]." Martin's Palmyra Neighbor

disposition to take any man's money without giving him a reasonable compensation in return. And as to the plates which he professes to have, gentlemen, if you do not believe it, but continue to resist the truth, it will one day be the means of damning your souls."²⁶

Martin Visits New York

In 1828 Martin Harris took copies of the Book of Mormon characters to the most brilliant minds available at the time in New York. Some see this episode in Church history as a skeptical Martin seeking an additional witness from God that the work was Divine. Others see the opposite, a gullible Martin seeing a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy that really wasn't there. However, Joseph recorded that because of Martin's faith and works the Lord appeared to him in vision showing the "marvelous work which He was about to do" and that "[Martin] must go to New York City with some of the characters ..."²⁷ Martin went to New York and spoke with the scholars because he was told to go to New York!

He visited Palmyra native Luther Bradish. Martin and Bradish likely knew each other very well.²⁸ Additionally, Bradish had lived in Egypt as a special government agent and had likely encountered ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, making him a good starting point. He then visited a young scholar named Samuel Mitchell. Eventually, Mitchell would become one of the greatest minds. He was noted as a man with "a taste for ... new discoveries," "a chaos of knowledge," a "stalking library," the "oracle of New York," and "the Congressional Dictionary."²⁹

And he visited Charles Anthon, a linguist who knew Greek, Latin, German, and French, but probably very little Egyptian and/or Hebrew. Anthon "stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian, ... that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyria, and Arabic, ... that they were true characters and that the translation of such of them that had been translated was correct." He even wrote a note "certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters." Anthon then asked Martin to bring the plates so he could translate them. Martin informed Mitchell that a portion was sealed. Mitchell informed him that he could not read a sealed book and tore up the note.³⁰ This experience fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of 2,500 years.

This experience with the New York scholars reinforced Martin's testimony in the plates before he had the privilege of seeing the plates as one of the Three Witnesses. In 1870 Martin wrote, "I do say that the angel did show to me the plates containing the Book of Mormon. Further, the translation that I carried to Professor Anthon was copied from the plates; also, that the professor did testify to it being a correct translation, I do firmly believe and do know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God; for without I know he could not have had that gift, neither could he have translated the same. I can give, if you require it, one hundred witnesses to the proof of the Book of Mormon."³¹

Another testimony strengthening event was the loss of the 116 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript. Martin had the privilege of scribing the Book of Lehi. Having spent the days writing the prophetic words of Lehi, Martin developed a great abiding testimony of the work. However, his wife Lucy did not share the same zeal. In hopes of convincing Lucy Martin petitioned Joseph 3 times to loan him the manuscript. After being told no twice by the Lord, Joseph was told he may allow Martin to take the manuscript if Martin covenanted to only show select people.³² However, through carelessness the manuscript was lost. Martin tore apart the house looking for the lost manuscript, even ripping open beds and pillows but could not find it anywhere. He was supposed to return to Harmony with the manuscript but did not return.

"... still he was subjected to many scoffs and rebukes, all of which [Martin] endured with meekness becoming a better cause." Rochester Daily Democrat Newspaper

During this time Emma had a dangerous labor and delivery of their first child. They named him Alvin and he died shortly after birth. Emma was extremely sick, teetering on the edge of death. As Emma got better she urged Joseph to travel to Manchester. Exhausted from physical exertion during the 250+ mile journey with little food and no sleep and mentally exhausted from the loss of his son, the illness of his wife and the uncertainty of the safety of the manuscript Joseph needed to be carried last 4 miles to his parents' house by a stranger. The next morning the Smiths sent for Martin at 6 am. Expecting him to come quickly they set out breakfast. Walking very slowly he arrived at 12 and sat on the fence with his hat drawn over his eyes for a long time. Lucy Mack Smith recorded that Martin "pressed his hands upon his temples, and cried out in tones of anguish, 'Oh, I have lost my soul. I have lost my soul.'" Joseph "wept and groaned walking the floor continually ... weeping and grieving like a tender infant." He expressed concern that this news would devastate Emma in her poor health and that he dared not go before the Lord with such a tale. Lucy continued that their house was filled "with our sobs and groans and the most bitter lamentations."³³

In this time when "the heavens seemed clothed in blackness" Martin confronted his wife about losing the manuscript. Many have since accused Lucy Harris as the main culprit and instigator, including Joseph's mother Lucy Mack Smith. Lucy also blamed Martin for being careless with the manuscript and "passing by his oath, he showed [the manuscript] to any good friend that happened to call on him."³⁴ However, Joseph accepted responsibility. He claimed, "All is lost, is lost! What shall I do? / have sinned. It is / who tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which / had no right to ask, as / was [instructed differently] by the angel."³⁵ Martin was no longer permitted to scribe for Joseph.³⁶ Moroni took the plates and Urim and Thummim back and Joseph did not translate for about 9 months.

This event strengthened Martin's testimony of the plates and the Book of Mormon for 3 reasons. First, Martin learned just how serious the work of translation was. For their carelessness the consequence was steep. Similarly, he learned first hand the lengths that the adversary would go to hinder the translation.³⁷ Third, he also learned that God, thousand of years before had made provisions for the loss of the Book of Lehi by instructing Nephi to make an abridgement of his father's record.³⁸

Martin Testifies in Kirtland

Martin first testified in the Kirtland area in 1831. His message was the Book of Mormon and the ministering of angels. He boldly declared that if they would accept the Book of Mormon they would see Christ and if they rejected it they would be damned.³⁹

After his excommunication in December 1837 Martin remained in Kirtland and became the self appointed caretaker of the Kirtland Temple. Martin anticipated the time when the Saints would return to Jackson County and build up the City of Zion.⁴⁰

During the turmoil surrounding the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society, many meetings were held (even in the Kirtland Temple) attacking Joseph. In one such meeting attended by Martin former leaders attacked the Book of Mormon as "nonsense." "Martin Harris," true to his calling as a Book of Mormon Witness, "then bore testimony of its truth and said all would be damned if they rejected it."⁴¹

On one occasion several of Martin's acquaintances in Kirtland attempted to get him drunk enough, hoping he would deny the Book of Mormon and his testimony. When they determined he had enough wine to drink they said, "Well, now, Martin, we want you to be frank and candid

"His testimony of the Book of Mormon was ridiculed by unbelievers as superstition, but he did not reach such certainty easily, for no witness required more evidence for his faith. This successful farmer ... was a seasoned trader, fully aware of possible deception in a business transaction or religious experience." Richard Lloyd Anderson

with us in regard to this story of your seeing an angel and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon that are so much talked about. ... Do you really believe that you did see an angel, when you were awake? 'No," replied Martin, "I do not believe it.' The crowd was delighted, but soon ... Martin true to his trust, said, 'Gentlemen, what I have said is true, from the fact that my belief is swallowed up in knowledge; for I want to say to you that as the Lord lives I do know that I stood with the prophet in the presence of the angel, and it was the brightness of day.'"⁴²

Martin Testifies in England

Martin served numerous missions. With a burning testimony of the Book of Mormon he and his brother Emmer baptized over 100 individuals in a few weeks in Pennsylvania. His brother reported, "We find no end to the call for our labors" as missionaries. Their mission was prolonged when Martin was arrested, posted bail, and waited for trial.⁴³

After the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum in 1844, certain individuals claimed authority to lead the Church, including a recent convert named James Strang. Though only a member for about 4 months, Strang gained substantial support. Strang felt that a mission to England to correct the traditions of what he called the "Brighamites" was critical for his success as a Church. He called a number of individuals, but only Martin, his companion Lester Brooks, and another Strangite elder actually traveled to England. In 1829, Martin had prophesied that the Book of Mormon would be preached in England and he was eager to go himself.⁴⁴

While in England, Martin rented a meeting hall for the purpose of defaming the LDS Church as a Book of Mormon Witness. However, Martin reported, "I can tell you of nothing which occurred until [after speaking] I found myself surrounded by those Saints, who, with streaming eyes and broken utterances, were thanking me for the glorious manner in which I had defended the faith, and the powerful testimony I had borne to the truth of the work." While in England Martin continued to bear testimony "that [the] Book of Mormon is the Book of God." At an LDS meeting in Birmingham England, Martin asked permission to preach, but was denied. He went out into the street and preached as the meeting was dismissed. He declared, "Do you know that is the sun shining on us? Because as sure as you know that, I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, and that he translated that book by the power of God." As the mission progressed Martin distanced himself from the Strangites and according to one individual, even denied being sent by Strang and tried to associate with the Saints.⁴⁵ In response to Martin's presence LDS apostles printed an article denouncing Martin Harris. Within two months the Strangite mission to England, which was intended to last a year and a half, had ended for Martin and he was back in the United States.⁴⁶ It appears that Martin was too *Latter Day Saint* for the Strangites, but too *apostate* for the Latter Day Saints. He couldn't find a footing in either church.

11 years later Martin still held a desire to preach in England. An LDS missionary heading to England visited Martin in Kirtland in 1855. The 72 year old Martin was ill and bedridden, but enlivened when bearing testimony of the Book of Mormon. "I know that the plates have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice declared it unto us. . . . And as many of the plates as Joseph Smith translated I handled with my hands, plate after plate." He got up, ate and spent the day with this missionary. He pleaded, "Just let me go with you to England. ... You do the preaching and I will bear testimony to the Book of Mormon, and we will convert all England."⁴⁷

When asked if he traveled to England to "lecture against 'Mormonism,'" Martin emphatically stated, "No, I did not. No man heard me in any way deny the truth of the Book of

Mormon, the administration of the angel that showed me the plates; nor the aggrandization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ...”⁴⁸

Martin Testifies in Utah Territory

The Church moved to Nauvoo and then on to Utah, and Martin remained in Kirtland. After 10 years of waiting for Martin to take her to Utah, his wife Caroline, a niece of Brigham Young took their 4 children to Utah leaving Martin in Kirtland. The trip was arduous. Caroline gave birth to their 5th child, hemorrhaged and nearly died. The Harris family arrived in Utah in 1859.

Though the Church had moved to Utah, Martin still adhered to most of the tenets and doctrines of the Church. Martin told an 1860 census agent that his occupation was “a Mormon preacher.”⁴⁹ 11 years later, Martin’s desire to see his children and Caroline was stronger than his pride. He informed LDS missionaries of his desire, but stated that he was too poor to make the journey.

Brigham Young noted the great contribution of Martin Harris in the early years of the Church and expressed a great desire to bring Martin to Utah. He said, “Send for him: Yes, even if it were to take the last dollar of my own. Martin Harris spent his time and money freely when one dollar was worth more to the Church than one thousand dollars is now.”⁵⁰ Brigham then gave \$25. \$200 was raised, bringing Martin to Utah.⁵¹

When Martin came to Salt Lake City he looked at the temple being constructed, the vast homes sprawling across the valley and marveled, “Who would have thought the Book of Mormon would have done all this.”⁵²

Martin Harris was baptized for a third time⁵³ on September 17, 1870 at the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. He was confirmed a member of the Church by Apostles Orson Pratt, acting as mouth with John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith, and George A. Smith. He was then baptized for a number of his ancestors and confirmed by proxy by Joseph F. Smith with the other Apostles also present.⁵⁴

During the 6 weeks Martin was in Salt Lake City Martin had numerous opportunities to bear testimony of the Book of Mormon to the Saints. He gave two speeches at the Salt Lake Tabernacle and spoke at numerous wards. Utah editors and writers interviewed him and numerous visitors visited with him, including President Brigham Young.

Even in his old age Martin Harris is noted for his deep commitment to the Book of Mormon. An acquaintance of Martin Harris noted, “Martin Harris is some over 89 years of age, and still he carries the book of Mormon under his arm, and testifies to all great and small, ‘I am Martin Harris ... and I know the book of Mormon to be verily true. And although all men should deny the truth of that book, I dare not do it. My heart is fixed. O God, my heart is fixed! I could not know more truly or certainly than I do.’”⁵⁵

Many Saints recalled that bearing testimony of the Book of Mormon would energize and enliven Martin. His health and strength would be renewed by bearing witness of the Book of Mormon.⁵⁶ It was said by those who knew Martin that “the mere mention of the Book of Mormon put new life into him.”⁵⁷

Just hours before his death Martin would bear this powerful testimony: “The Book of Mormon is no fake. I know what I know. I have seen what I have seen and I have heard what I have heard. I have seen the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon is written. An angel appeared to me and others and testified to the truthfulness of the record, and had I been willing to have perjured myself and sworn falsely to the testimony I now bear I could have been a rich

“He [Martin Harris] is honest and sincerely declares upon his soul’s salvation that the book [of Mormon] is true and was interpreted by Joseph Smith ...” William W. Phelps

man, but I could not have testified other than I have done and am now doing for these things are true.”⁵⁸

Martin Harris was buried with a Book of Mormon in his right hand and the Doctrine and Covenants in his left hand in Clarkston, Utah. He left a faithful legacy of bearing testimony. One man recalled hearing Martin bear testimony, “I know it is true.” The man recorded that “while Martin Harris was bearing his testimony, I have never had such a feeling go over me from my head to my feet. I have never had such a feeling in my life, and I knew that Martin Harris was bearing a faithful testimony.”⁵⁹ Ole Jensen similarly recorded, “When I think of the day I stood before Martin Harris and saw him ... and hear[d] his testimony, the feeling that thrilled my whole being, I can never forget or express the joy that filled my being. Never can I forget or express the joy that filled my soul.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

Martin Harris was a faithful and certain witness of the Book of Mormon. He clung to the truths he knew throughout his life. When questioned and challenged about his testimony of the Book of Mormon, he hung on to the numerous evidences he had seen and experienced through thoughtful and methodical investigation. His first wife Lucy and daughter had lifted the box containing the plates and Martin had interviewed them. He interviewed each member of the Smith family separately to see if their stories matched. He prayed in fervent prayer and committed to give all financially if it were the work of the Lord. In response he was shown the truthfulness of it by the Lord. He saw the stone box, Moroni, plates, breastplate, Liahona, and the sword of Laban. He lifted the plates covered and even turned the pages. He had the Lord, through revelation to Joseph, tell him that Joseph had the plates and that the translation of them was true. He had a linguist scholar declare that the characters copied from the plates were true characters. He heard the words of the Book of Lehi during the translation process. He saw the translation of the plates firsthand. Martin saw the devastation that resulted from the loss of the manuscript and felt the weight of it.

Because of this conviction he was willing to support the publication of the Book of Mormon. He sacrificed early family relationships and business and finances to support Joseph. He bore a powerful testimony throughout his life. He emphatically and often declared that he knew the Book of Mormon to be the word of God and that deny the book of Mormon would bring damnation to anyone who dared denounce it.

“When I thoroughly examine a subject and settle my mind, then higher evidence must be introduced before I change. I have set to my seal that the Book of Mormon is a true, divine record and it will require more evidence than I have ever seen to ever shake me relative to its purity I have read many ‘Exposes.’ I have seen all their arguments. But my evidences are above them all! ... When a man goes at the Book of M. he touches the apple of my eye. He fights against truth—against purity—against light—against the purist, or one of the truest, purist books on earth. I have more confidence in the Book of Mormon than any book of this wide earth! ...” William E. McLellin

¹ Affidavit of John E. Godfrey, June 2, 1933 as found in Richard L. Anderson, “The Certainty of the Skeptical Witnesses,” *Improvement Era*, vol 72, no 3, 67

² See Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, “For the Sum of Three Thousand Dollars,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2005), 7.

³ William H. Homer Jr., “‘Publish It Upon the Mountains’: The Story of Martin Harris,” *Improvement Era*, July 1955, 505

⁴ William H. Homer Jr., “‘Publish It Upon the Mountains’: The Story of Martin Harris,” *Improvement Era*, July 1955, 505

⁵ See William H. Homer Sr., “The Passing of Martin Harris,” *The Improvement Era*, March 1926, 471

⁶ Richard Lloyd Anderson, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2004/explaining-away-the-book-of-mormon-witnesses>, retrieved 12/13/2022

⁷ See evidencecentral.org/recency/evidence/martin-harris as retrieved on 9/30/2022

⁸ See William Waddoups, “Martin Harris and the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 26, no. 11 (September 1923): 980

⁹ See *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:314

- ¹⁰ See Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 116
- ¹¹ "Statement of Comfort Elizabeth Godfrey Flinders to N. B. Lundwell," September 1943 as cited in *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 116
- ¹² See *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:389
- ¹³ Extensive citations see footnote 17 from <https://evidencecentral.org/recency/evidence/martin-harris> as retrieved on 1/28/2024
- ¹⁴ Affidavit of George Godfrey, Oct. 29, 1921 as found in Richard L. Anderson, "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witnesses," *Improvement Era*, vol 72, no 3, 67
- ¹⁵ See *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 116
- ¹⁶ Autobiography of John Thompson, written 1922 as cited in Richard L. Anderson, "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witnesses," *Improvement Era*, vol 72, no 3, 66
- ¹⁷ Affidavit of Thomas Godfrey, July 2, 1933 as cited in Richard L. Anderson, "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witnesses," *Improvement Era*, vol 72, no 3, 66
- ¹⁸ "Martin Harris' Wallet is Donated to the LDS Church," 28 March 2009 as retrieved from ldsphilanthropies.org
- ¹⁹ William Harrison Homer, "The Passing of Martin Harris," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 29 (March 1926), 470
- ²⁰ See *Deseret News*, 2 October 1921, 6
- ²¹ Martin Harris, interview with Joel Tiffany, 1859, in "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffanys Monthly* (August 1859): 163-70 as found in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:309
- ²² Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:15
- ²³ Martin's daughter Lucy married Flanders Dyke on 8 May 1828 and announced in *The Wayne Sentinel*, 9 May 1828. See also Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages*, 59-60
- ²⁴ Stephen S. Harding, Letter to Thomas Gregg, February 1882 as found in *Revelations in Context*, 8
- ²⁵ D&C 5:1-4
- ²⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *Enhanced and Revised History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 190;
- ²⁷ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:15
- ²⁸ Richard E. Bennett, "A Very Peculiar Friend, Luther Bradish," *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, 67-68
- ²⁹ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 108
- ³⁰ Joseph Smith History 1:64-65
- ³¹ Letter to Mr. Emerson, Smithfield Utah, 23 November 1870
- ³² Martin's brother Preserve Harris, his parents Nathan and Rhoda Harris, and Lucy Harris' sister Mary Cobb
- ³³ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 160-66
- ³⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *Enhanced and Revised History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 169
- ³⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *Enhanced and Revised History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 166
- ³⁶ William Pinkerton Affidavit, 3 April 1934, Church Archives as cited in *Opening the Heavens: Divine Manifestation 1820-1844*, First Edition (2005), 140
- ³⁷ D&C 10:10-18
- ³⁸ 1 Nephi 1:17
- ³⁹ See "Martin Harris," *The Telegraph*, Painesville Ohio, 15 March 1831
- ⁴⁰ See Dennis A. Wright, "Caroline Young Harris, The Kirtland Wife of Martin Harris," in *Regional Studies in Latter day Saint Church History: Ohio and Upper Canada*, (2006), 111-13
- ⁴¹ Letter of George A. Smith to Josiah Fleming, March 30, 1838, Kirtland, Ohio as found in Richard L. Anderson, "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witnesses," *Improvement Era*, vol 72, no 3, 63
- ⁴² see Letter of Elder Edward Stevenson to the *Millennial Star* Vol. 48, 367-389. (1886) quoted in William Edwin Berrett, *The Restored Church* 57-58
- ⁴³ See *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 110; <https://doctrineandcovenantscentral.org/people-of-the-dc/emer-harris/> as retrieved on 3/9/24
- ⁴⁴ Daniel H. Ludlow, Editor, Rhett Stephen James, Author, "Martin Harris," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 576
- ⁴⁵ Stevenson, "One of the Three Witnesses," *Deseret News*, December 28, 1881, 763
- ⁴⁶ Robin S. Jensen, "A Witness in England: Martin Harris and the Strangite Mission," *BYU Studies Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 3, 78-98
- ⁴⁷ Statements of Elder David B. Dille as found in Richard L. Anderson, "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witnesses," *Improvement Era*, vol 72, no 3, 64
- ⁴⁸ Letter to H. Emerson, Smithfield Utah, January 1871
- ⁴⁹ See Dallin H. Oaks, "The Witness Martin Harris," Conference Report, April 1999
- ⁵⁰ See William H. Homer Sr., "The Passing of Martin Harris," *The Improvement Era*, March 1926, 471
- ⁵¹ See William H. Homer Sr., "The Passing of Martin Harris," *The Improvement Era*, March 1926, 471
- ⁵² Edward Stephens "The Three Witness to the Book of Mormon, no. III," *Millennial Star* 48 (7 June 1886), 290
- ⁵³ He had previously been baptized 6 April 1830 by Oliver Cowdery in Fayette NY and in November 1842 in Kirtland Ohio by LDS missionaries. His baptism in 1842 was part of a larger effort to put in order the Church in Kirtland and a number of former members were rebaptized at this time. 203 individuals were baptized in 4 days, including Martin. (see "Martin Harris, The Kirtland Years, 1831-1837," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35 (Fall 2002), 67)
- ⁵⁴ William H. Homer Jr., "'Publish It Upon the Mountains': The Story of Martin Harris," *Improvement Era*, July 1955, 507
- ⁵⁵ William E. McLellin's *Lost Manuscript*, 165-66
- ⁵⁶ For a discussion see *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 113
- ⁵⁷ *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:275-76
- ⁵⁸ Cited by George Godfrey, "Testimony of Martin Harris," from an unpublished manuscript copy in the possession of his descendants, quoted in Eldin Ricks, *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, (1971), 65-66.
- ⁵⁹ John E. Godfrey Affidavit, 2 June 1923, Logan Utah
- ⁶⁰ Ole A. Jensen, "Martin Harris Testimony of the Book of Mormon," Clarkston Utah, July 1875

The Eight Witnesses

After the Three Witnesses were shown the Plates, Breastplate, Urim and Thummim, Liahona and the Sword of Laban near the Whitmer farm in Fayette New York, in June 1829 Joseph and the rest of the Smith family returned to Manchester to arrange for the printing of the Book of Mormon. Shortly after, the Whitmers joined the Smiths in Manchester. Nephi had made provisions that the plates could be shown to “as many as seemeth him (the Lord) good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!”¹ In accordance Joseph invited his father, Joseph Smith Sr., his brothers Hyrum and Samuel, the Whitmer sons, Christian, Peter Jr., Jacob, John, and their brother in law Hiram Page to see the plates.

They went into the grove of trees now called the Sacred Grove on the Smith farm, “a place where the family were in the habit of offering up their secret devotions to God,”² and Joseph showed them the plates allowing them to hold the plates, turn over the leaves and look upon the engravings.

Shortly after, the Angel Moroni appeared to Joseph and Joseph returned the plates into his hand.³

That evening the Smiths held a meeting at their house in Manchester New York. The Three and the Eight Witnesses all bore testimony of the truthfulness of the work. The whole family including 13 year old Don Carlos testified of the truth.⁴

In October 1831 the Church held a conference in Orange Ohio. At the conference “the eleven witnesses to the Book of Mormon, with uplifted hands, bore solemn testimony to the truth of that book, as did the Prophet Joseph.”⁵

In addition to testifying that they saw the plates, hefted them, noted the engravings they also boldly wrote, “And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.”⁶

“As marvelous a book as it is, the Bible by itself has not sustained precise faith in the living lordship of Jesus Christ for as many people as once was the case. The Book of Mormon comes forth not only as a second witness, but in some respects a more powerful witness, “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ” Neal A. Maxwell

¹ 2 Nephi 27:14

² Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhances History of the Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 202

³ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhances History of the Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 203

⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhances History of the Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 203

⁵ “History of Luke Johnson. [By Himself,]” *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 26, no. 53 (December 31, 1864), 855.

⁶ Testimony of the Eight Witnesses

Witness # 5

Hyrum Smith, The Lord Loveth because of the Integrity of His Heart

February 9, 1800 to June 27, 1844, (44 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Hyrum showed promise as a youth and at the age of 11 years entered into the Moor's Indian Charity School, receiving the most formal education of any of the Smith children. Later he would serve on the Palmyra School Board which hired Oliver Cowdery

In April 1830 Hyrum was told, "Thy duty is unto the Church forever, and this because of thy family."¹ In 1831 Hyrum pledged "that all he had was the Lord's and he was ready to do His will continually."² Hyrum was likely the fourth person baptized in this dispensation in June 1829.³ He was the branch president over the Colesville New York branch in 1830-31. He was a counselor to Bishop Newel K. Whitney.

He loved the temple. He was part of the Kirtland Temple Committee that supervised construction and demonstrated great zeal in temple work. When Joseph showed the brethren the Temple site, Hyrum went to his parents' house, grabbed a scythe and was the first to clear the land. After the Lord chastised the Saints for not building the temple, Hyrum responded by grabbing a shovel and digging the foundation. He was the first to haul rock for the construction. He told his mother, "I am determined to be the first at the work" of building temples.⁴

He was the Second Counselor in the First Presidency in 1837. He was called as general Church patriarch in 1840. At the time of his martyrdom he was the Assistant President of the Church. He also served in a number of civic positions.

He was on the Nauvoo City Council in 1841. He was Joseph's vice mayor from 1842-43. He was the chaplain in the Nauvoo Legion. And was elected "Worship Master" in the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge.

He served numerous missions. While on a mission to Indiana, Hyrum's first wife, Jerusha Bardon died. He also lost his 2 year old daughter which was almost more than he could bear. Joseph wrote, "Thy name shall be written ... for those who come after thee to look upon, that they may pattern after thy works."⁵

Hyrum served on the Kirtland High Council. In September 1837 he was called as an assistant counselor to the First Presidency. In November 1837 he was called as the Second Counselor in the First Presidency. After the death of his father we also served as the general Patriarch of the Church in January 1841. He advertised patriarchal blessings every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday "during the entire day" and any other time "if urgent circumstances require it."⁶ At his calling the Lord promised, "That whoever he blesses shall be blessed, and whoever he curses shall be cursed; that whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. And from this time forth I appoint unto him that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph."⁷

Hyrum also served on the Nauvoo City Council, a regent on the University of the City of Nauvoo, a member of the Nauvoo Agricultural and Manufacturing Association, and a Chaplin and

"To those who have suffered bereavements I would drop the sympathetic tear, and would do all I could to comfort you in your distress, and would fain pour into your wounded souls, the oil of joy ... be faithful, maintain your integrity, let the principles of truth and righteousness get deep hold in your hearts, live up to those principles at all times" Hyrum Smith

general in the Nauvoo Legion. As Joseph Sr. lay ill and dying Hyrum asked his father to give a blessing to all his children. To Hyrum, his father said "You shall be firm as the pillars of heaven unto the end of your days."⁸

Hyrum Goes with Joseph to Return the Plates to Moroni

There is some indication that Hyrum went with Joseph and Oliver to return the plates. One man recorded in his personal journal Hyrum had told him that Joseph, Oliver, "Whitmer," and Hyrum went with Joseph to return the plates. They saw "an angel and a trunk. On that trunk lay a book of Mormon & gold plates, Laban's sword, Aaron's breastplate."⁹ If this journal entry is accurate then Hyrum too is a witness of the angel Moroni as well as the plates.

Hyrum's Experience with the Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript

Hyrum served as one of three scribes who copied the original Book of Mormon manuscript. Oliver Cowdery scribed the majority of the Printer's Manuscript and Hyrum filled in as relief for a small portion.

One Sunday evening, during the printing of the Book of Mormon, Hyrum felt impressed that something was wrong at the printing office. He gathered Oliver and the two went to the Grandin building and found a Mr. Cole working late. Hyrum discovered that Cole was printing excerpts from the Book of Mormon and confronted him about it. Neither Oliver nor Hyrum could prevail and Cole printed excerpts under the title of "Joe Smith's Gold Bible" in his newspaper, *Dogberry Paper on Winter Hill*. Joseph was called back and the matter was eventually settled.¹⁰

Strengthened the Church

Many of the early leaders of the Church joined after extensive conversations with Hyrum. Parley P. Pratt read the Book of Mormon all day and all night; sleeping and eating were a burden when he first read the Book of Mormon.¹¹ Feeling a desire to meet Joseph, Parley set off to Manchester, New York. Instead, Parley met Hyrum and the two "conversed most of the night" because "neither ... felt disposed to sleep." The coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the rise of the Church and the calling of Joseph by ministering angels were the topics they discussed.¹² Parley had preaching appointments he needed to fill, but immediately returned to Hyrum and "demanded baptism at his hand."¹³

William E. McClellin was forced to proclaim that the Book of Mormon was true and that he had found the true Church after a 4 hour conversation with Hyrum and an earnest prayer for God to direct him to the truth.¹⁴ After McClellin gave a lengthy sermon on the Book of Mormon, Hyrum then arose and "gave his evidence of the Book [of Mormon]."¹⁵

Not only were many brought into the Gospel because of Hyrum's testimony, but many Saints found comfort in it. A faithful member's resolve was strengthened after the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society by hearing Hyrum's testimony of the Book of Mormon. Hyrum testified that "he had but two hands and two eyes. He said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands." This testimony helped her put aside the apostates who disputed the Book and continue faithful.¹⁶ She also stated that Hyrum declared that he had seen the breastplate and gave a description of it.¹⁷

Hyrum Willing to Seal His Testimony with His Blood

After having suffered so greatly during the 6 months he was arrested in Independence, Richmond, and Liberty Jails, Hyrum wrote, "Having given my testimony to the world of the Book of Mormon, the renewal of the everlasting covenant, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven, in these last days ... I thought it might be strengthening to my beloved brethren, to give

"In this their greatest—and last—hour of need, I ask you: would these men blaspheme before God by continuing to fix their lives, their honor, and their own search for eternal salvation on a book (and by implication a church and a ministry) they had fictitiously created out of whole cloth?" Jeffery R. Holland

an account of my sufferings, for truth's sake and the state of my mind and feelings, while under circumstances most trying and afflicting nature ..."

"I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to (the plates), wherever my lot had been cast; and I can assure my beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself as ever I did in my life."¹⁸

In 1829, as Joseph and Oliver were finishing up the translation of the Book of Mormon Hyrum asked Joseph to inquire if the Lord's willed that he preach the Gospel. Hyrum was told, "Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men. But [for] now hold your peace; study my word which hath gone forth among the children of men, and also study my word which shall come forth ... [and] is now [being] translat[ed]..."¹⁹ Hyrum took this counsel to heart and made a lifelong pursuit of studying the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon.

As Hyrum rode out of Nauvoo toward Carthage Jail he read aloud verses from Moroni in the Book of Mormon. He read, "And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that He would give unto the Gentiles grace that they might have charity. And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me, if they have not charity, it mattereth not unto you, thou hast been faithful: wherefore thy garments are clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shall be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father. And now I . . . bid farewell unto the Gentiles; yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood."²⁰ Undoubtedly, Hyrum saw his own situation reflected in these verses written by Moroni.

During the evening before the Martyrdom Hyrum Smith read and commented from the Book of Mormon relating their own incarceration to the servants of God for the Gospel's sake. "Joseph bore a powerful testimony to the guards of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, restoration of the Gospel, the administration of angels, and that the kingdom of God was again established upon the earth."²¹ The next day, June 27th, the day of the Martyrdom "both Joseph and Hyrum bore a faithful testimony to the Latter-day work, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and prophesied of the triumph of the Gospel over all the earth, exhorting the brethren present to faithfulness and persevering diligence in proclaiming the Gospel, building up the Temple, and performing all the duties connected with our holy religion."²²

John Taylor memorialized the martyred Prophet Joseph and the Patriarch Hyrum. He wrote, "Hyrum Smith was forty-four years ... and Joseph Smith was thirty-eight ... and henceforward their names will be classed among the martyrs of religion; and the reader in every nation will be reminded that the Book of Mormon, and this book of Doctrine and Covenants of the church, cost the best blood of the nineteenth century to bring them forth for the salvation of a ruined world..."²³ So deep was Hyrum's testimony of the Book of Mormon, when faced with uncertainty, difficulty and the real possibility of death by violent means, Hyrum drew strength from the Book of Mormon.

Conclusion

Hyrum Smith faithfully witnessed the Book of Mormon. He testified in word and deed that the Book of Mormon came from God, offers support and comfort in difficult times, and can bless

The Lord Loveth [Hyrum Smith] Because of the Integrity of His Heart

the lives of Church members. As a witness of the Book of Mormon he was willing to suffer the fate of a martyr for the Book of Mormon.

"He lived so far beyond the ordinary walk of man, that even the tongue of the vilest slanderer could not touch his reputation. He lived godly and he died godly" John Taylor

"If ever there was an exemplary, honest, and virtuous man, an embodiment of all that is noble in human form, Hyrum Smith was its representative." John Taylor

"Brother Hyrum, what a faithful heart you have got! Oh may the Eternal Jehovah crown eternal blessings upon your head, as a reward for the care you have had for my soul!" Joseph Smith

"No mortal man who ever lived in this Church desired more to do good than did Hyrum Smith, the patriarch. I have it from the lips of my own sainted mother, that of all the men she was acquainted with ... she admired Hyrum Smith most for his absolute integrity and devotion to God, and his loyalty to the prophet of God." Heber J. Grant

¹ D&C 23:3

² *Far West Record Book*, 21

³ *History of the Church* 1:51

⁴ See "Hyrum Smith's Building of the Kirtland Temple," *An Eye of Faith: Essays in Honor of Richard O. Cowan*, 53

⁵ *History of the Church*, 5:108

⁶ See "The Brethren are Herby Notified ...," *Times and Seasons* 3, no 1, (15 November 1841), 585

⁷ D&C 124:93, 94

⁸ William Horne Dame Journal, 14 January 1855 as cited in Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhances History of the Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 434

⁹ Cameron J. Parker, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , (2004), 55.

¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhances History of the Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 217

¹¹ *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 37

¹² *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 38

¹³ *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 41

¹⁴ Jan Shipp & John D. Welch editors, *The Journals of William E. McClellin*, 33

¹⁵ Jan Shipp & John D. Welch editors, *The Journals of William E. McClellin*, 39

¹⁶ Sally Parker to John Kempton, August 26, 1838, in Janiece L. Johnson, "'The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling': Sally Parker's Weave," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005), 115

¹⁷ *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:466 as found on https://archive.org/details/volume-3_202011/page/465/mode/2up?view=theater on 2/18/24

¹⁸ "To the Saints scattered abroad," *Times and Seasons*, vol 1, no 2 (Dec. 1839), 23

¹⁹ D&C 11:21-22

²⁰ Ether 12:37-38

²¹ *History of the Church* 6:600

²² *History of the Church* 6:610

²³ D&C 135:6

Witness # 6, Samuel Harrison Smith, Faithful as the Sun

March 13, 1808 to July 30, 1844 (36 Years)

Biographical Sketch. If there is an unsung hero of the restoration it would be Samuel Harrison Smith. Samuel was just 2 years younger than Joseph. He was noted for his kindness and “great strength, far exceeding that of ordinary men, enabling him to do an unusual amount work.”¹ With this great strength he was able to take care of the Smith family enabling Joseph and Hyrum to accomplish their work.

Samuel visited Joseph in Harmony Pennsylvania to help Joseph with his farm shortly after the restoration of the priesthood. Joseph showed the manuscript and taught Samuel from the scriptures; Joseph and Oliver “labored to persuade” Samuel, but “he was not, however, very easily persuaded” until he went into the woods and “in sacred and fervent prayer ... obtained a revelation for himself.”² He was the third person baptized in this dispensation on May 24, 1829. He was one of the six charter members of the Church.

Samuel is credited with being the first missionary of this dispensation and served numerous missions. During a father’s blessing prior to his death Joseph Sr. praised Samuel, “By your faithfulness you have brought many into the Church. The Lord has seen your diligence and you are blessed, in that he has never chastised you ... and there is a crown laid up for you ...”³ His brother Don Carlos stated “He is as faithful as the sun” and his father said, “The just shall rise up and call thee a perfect man.”⁴ Through his efforts as a missionary, the John P. Greene family, the Youngs and Kimballs joined the Church.⁵ At the age of 29 he was the president of the Kirtland High Council and at age 33 he was a Bishop in Nauvoo.

He also served in civic responsibilities. He was elected as an alderman in Nauvoo in 1841⁶ and was appointed chairman of the Nauvoo City Improvement committee. He was a Justice of the Peace and a captain in the Nauvoo Legion. He was a member of the board of regents for the University of the City of Nauvoo.

Samuel married his sweetheart Mary Baily in 1834. In 1836 Samuel moved his family to Missouri where they became targets of persecution. In 1838 a mob carried Mary out of the house on a feather bed with their newborn child into the sleet and rain then the mob burned their house to the ground. After that Mary could not speak above a whisper until her death resulting from the mob violence in 1841. They had 4 children together. Shortly, he married Lavira Clark while on a mission and they had 3 children. After the death of Samuel, Lavira took the 7 children of Samuel and immigrated to Utah.

Samuel’s Conversion

Samuel’s conversion is quite remarkable. Samuel’s brother, William remembered, “We all had the most implicit confidence in what [Joseph] said. He was a truthful boy. Father and mother believed him, why shouldn’t the children. ... That father and mother believed his report and suffered persecution showed that he was truthful.”⁷ Supporting William’s claim, Lucy Mack Smith reported, “Joseph continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented an aspect as singular as any that ever lived upon the face of the earth—all seated giving the most profound attention to a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life ...”⁸ Joseph recorded a deeper conversion of Samuel than recorded by William’s recollection. Samuel went to Harmony to help Joseph with his farm. While there, Joseph and Oliver tried to convince Samuel of the truthfulness of the translation and the work the Lord was about to do. Joseph said “we labored to persuade [Samuel] ... He was not, however, very easily persuaded of these things, but after much inquiry and explanation he retired to the woods, in order that by secret and fervent prayer he might obtain ... wisdom ... to judge for himself.

⁹ After his baptism he, like Joseph and Oliver,¹⁰ was “filled with the spirit of prophecy and praise [and] ... uttered many sublime truths of which his mind up to that time had never received.”¹¹ He was the third person baptized in this dispensation.

Samuel the First Missionary

What sets Samuel apart is his zeal for missionary work in the early days of the Church despite not being eloquent. Orson Hyde, a mission companion described Samuel as “a man slow of speech and unlearned, yet a man of good faith and extreme integrity.”¹² A convert stated that “[Samuel’s] speech was more like a narrative than a sermon.”¹³ One commentator noted, “It is doubtful whether anyone exceeded Samuel Smith’s record of active missionary service during the earliest years of the latter-day Church. ... Scores of converts accepted the personal assurance of this plain spoken youth who had known the events of the restoration from the beginning.”¹⁴ He served at least 6 extensive missions lasting from a few weeks to a year. He had varied success; at times he was ridiculed and persecuted. On a mission with a former minister and recent convert Orson Hyde, Samuel recorded, “Never at any time did I doubt the work, for how could I doubt anything that I knew to be true.”¹⁵

Samuel’s patriarchal blessing given by his father Joseph Smith Sr. blessed him, saying, “By your faithfulness you have brought many into the Church. The Lord has seen your diligence and you are blessed in that he has never chastised you ... and there is a crown laid up for you which shall grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.”¹⁶ Samuel is credited with being the first officially called missionary for the Church and his early missionary work was instrumental in the conversion of the Youngs and the Kimballs.¹⁷

Samuel was spiritually sensitive. In November Samuel “heard a voice in the night that said, ‘Samuel, arise immediately, and go forth on the mission which thou wast commanded to take. . . .’ He arose from his bed and took what clothing he had in readiness, and set off without further delay.”¹⁸ He was called on a mission with William E. McLellin. On this mission Samuel blessed a badly burned child, who was healed “in so much that it did not even so much as blister.”¹⁹

Phineas Young recalled Samuel’s testimony, “There is a book, sir, I wish you to read ... It is revelation from God ... If you will read this book with a prayerful heart, and ask God to give you a witness, you will know the truth of this work ... I know this book to be a revelation from God, translated by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost and that my brother Joseph Smith, jun., is a Prophet, Seer and Revelator.”²⁰

Samuel Testifies of the Book of Mormon

While the Book of Mormon was being published in Palmyra a committee of three individuals, led by a local deacon approached Lucy Mack Smith, Hyrum Smith, and Samuel Smith asking them to see the manuscript and to deny the Book of Mormon. Hyrum asked if he had read the Book and “ask[ed] for a witness that the Book is true?” The minister replied that it was beneath him and he would not read it. Samuel took a different approach. He quoted Isaiah 56:9-11 which likens religious leaders to “beasts of the field,” blind and ignorant watchmen, “greedy dogs,” and “shepherds that cannot understand.” The committee understood Samuel’s meaning and they left “without ceremony.”²¹ Despite difficulty, hardship, loss, trouble and heaping persecution²² Samuel was able to firmly declare, “Never at any time did I doubt the work, for how could I doubt anything that I knew to be true?”²³

Conclusion

Samuel Smith is an unsung hero of the Restoration. Brigham Young stated that “Samuel saw some things” during the Restoration.²⁴ It is possible that he saw more that we know. He is an example of faithful gospel living. He exhibited a missionary zeal to share his testimony narrative of the Book of Mormon. He worked hard and took care of the family so that his older brothers could fulfill their divinely appointed missions in life. His obituary stated, “If ever there was a good man upon the earth, Samuel H. Smith was that person; in fact he was too good for this generation ... His labors in the Church from first to last carrying the glad tidings ... and finally his steadfastness as one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and many

saintly traits of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity shall be given him hereafter, as a man of God.”²⁵

*“Our kind and noble father had passed to the great beyond, to meet his martyred brothers and all the dear ones gone before him.”
His Daughter*

*“We would make the circuit of the room in a wild chase to see which would clamber first to his knee and get the first kiss, often all on his knee at once, then clamber down again and renew the chase; then when my little brother Samuel who was the youngest would become tired, we would have to give way to him, and my father [Samuel] would take him on his knee and sing him to sleep.”
His Daughter*

¹ See “Larene Porter Gaunt & Robert A. Smith, “Samuel H. Smith: Faithful brother of Joseph and Hyrum,” *Ensign*, August 2008, 44

² *History of the Church* 1:44

³ *History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 1958, 310

⁴ see Samuel H. Smith: Faithful Brother of Joseph and Hyrum, *Ensign*, August 2008

⁵ See Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 223-27; 244-45; 256-47 fn. 4

⁶ *Times and Seasons*, 1 February 1841, 287

⁷ *Deseret News*, January 20, 1894, 11

⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 111

⁹ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:295-97; *History of the Church* 1:44

¹⁰ Joseph reported, “No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery than the Holy Ghost fell upon him and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophesy when standing up I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church and many other things connected with the Church and with this generation of children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our Salvation. Our minds now being enlarged, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understanding” (Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:294-95)

¹¹ George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith* (1888), 65

¹² see “The History of Orson Hyde,” *Millennial Star*, 1864, vol. 16, 774

¹³ Daniel Tyler as quoted in Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 140

¹⁴ Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 139

¹⁵ Samuel Harrison Smith Journal, October 25, 1832

¹⁶ *History of the Church* 7:221

¹⁷ See *The History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, (1979), 169-170, 187-188

¹⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 294

¹⁹ *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 66

²⁰ “History of Brigham Young,” *Millennial Star* 25 (6 June 1863): 360-61 as found in *Unified by Faith*, 210

²¹ *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 212-13

²² Samuel received intense persecution because he was the prophet’s brother, a witness to the Book of Mormon, and because of his early Church activity. In Missouri he also was targeted because of his participation in the Gallatin political brawl and in the Battle of Crooked River (*United by Faith*, 225-26). His first wife, Mary Bailey, while ill in Missouri was carried out into the sleet and rain with her children on a bed and forced to watch the mob burn their house down while Samuel was away. She never spoke above a whisper nor recovered for 3 years and passed away.

²³ Samuel H. Smith Diary, 25 October 1832, 25 as found in *United by Faith*, 220

²⁴ *Journal of Discourses*. 17 June 1877

²⁵ *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 August 1844): 606

Witness # 7

Joseph Smith Sr., The First Patriarch

July 12, 1771 to September 4, 1840 (69 Years)

Biographical Sketch. He served on the Kirtland High Council and briefly as a counselor in the First presidency. He was set apart as the Church patriarch. He was honored and revered, giving nearly 400 patriarchal blessings.¹ At times these blessings healed the sick and afflicted.² One Manchester neighbor recalled that Joseph Sr. “was above average intelligence [and] ... that he bore the appearance of having descended from royalty.”³ His children also thought very highly of their father. William easily accepted Joseph’s stories because his father and mother so quickly and completely accepted. He remembered very well that when his father reached for his glasses the family knew it was time for family devotional.⁴ Joseph Jr. spoke very highly of his father. He declared, “I love my father and his memory; the memory of his noble deeds rest with ponderous weight upon my mind, and many of his kind and parental words to me are written on the tablet of my heart. Sacred to me are the thoughts which I cherish ... Let the memory of my father eternally live. ... With him may I reign one day in the mansions above.”⁵ Heber C. Kimball noted, “Father Smith was one of the most cheerful men I ever saw and was harmless as a child.”⁶ A “native cheery temperament”⁷ was passed to his son.

On December 18, 1833 Joseph Jr. gave the first patriarchal blessings and proceeded to ordain his father as the Patriarch. He likened his father to Adam. He revealed that three years before the death of Adam he gathered his righteous posterity and blessed them. The Lord appeared and “administered comfort to Adam.” “So shall it be with my father; he shall be called a prince over his posterity, holding the keys of the patriarchal priesthood over the kingdom of God on earth ... he shall sit in the general assembly of Patriarchs, even in the council of the Ancient of Days.” Joseph added additional praise, “Blessed of the Lord is my father, for he shall stand in the midst of his posterity and shall be comforted by their blessings when he is old ... and he shall be called a prince ...”⁸

Joseph Sr. and Organized Religion

The Joseph Smith Sr. family had been divided by religion on 3 separate occasions. The first came in 1802 when Lucy Mack Smith became so ill that the doctors had given up on her.⁹ With no other recourse, Lucy stated, “I then looked to the Lord and begged and pleaded that he would spare my life that I might bring up my children and comfort the heart of my husband.” That night she made “a solemn covenant with God that if he would let [her] live [she] would ... serve him to [her] best ability.”¹⁰ She continually looked for God’s church. She went “place to place” trying to “abide by [her] covenant.” At length she found a minister who would baptize her “free of membership” into any church.¹¹

When they moved back to Tunbridge Vermont, Lucy began attending Methodist meetings and Joseph Sr. went with her to “oblige” her. Joseph Sr.’s brother persuaded him to stop attending. Joseph told his wife Lucy that he felt it hardly worth their time to attend the meetings any longer because it was not benefiting them any and it was causing problems with their friends. Lucy stated, “I was considerably hurt by this, yet I made no reply.”¹²

And in 1820 Joseph Jr. had some desire to unite with the Methodists. Lucy and 4 children had united with the Presbyterians and Joseph Sr. and Alvin appeared to have kept apart from organized religion.

Despite all this, years before Joseph’s birth his grandfather Asael Smith declared, “It has been born in upon my soul that one of my descendants will promulgate a work to revolutionize the world of religious faith.” After reading the Book of Mormon, Asael declared “it is true” and that his grandson, Joseph Jr. “was indeed the Prophet, he had long known would be born into his family.”¹³

Joseph Sr. and September 22, 1823

Joseph Sr. was one of the first to embrace and accept Joseph's story. He was first exposed to the plates on the morning of September 22, 1823 and readily accepted. 17 year old Joseph was visited by Moroni 3 times during the previous night and he was exhausted from the intense and intellectual interview. Joseph's dad, thinking he was sick, sent his son to see his mother. As Joseph Jr. passed through a fence he collapsed. Moroni stood before Joseph Jr. again and asked, "Why did you not tell your father what I told you?" Joseph replied that he did not think his father would believe it. Moroni informed Joseph of the faith of his father, "He will believe every word you say to him."¹⁴ As Joseph related the visit of Moroni, his father "wept"¹⁵ and told him that it was of God and "not to fail in attending strictly to the instructions which he had received from this messenger."¹⁶

The day Joseph brought home the plates, he was frantic having just escaped 3 assailants who tried to take the plates by force. Joseph's thumb was dislocated¹⁷ and his left arm and both hands were bruised.¹⁸ However, Joseph could tell that his family, in particular his father and brother William wanted to see the plates. Joseph's father asked, "What, Joseph, can we not see them?" Joseph responded, "No ... For I was forbidden to show them until they are translated, but you can feel them." Joseph allowed his father and brother William to feel the plates through the pillowcase.¹⁹

Joseph Sr. and His Home

Not only was Joseph Jr., Hyrum, Samuel and William first prepared in the Smith home numerous other early leaders received some of their first preparations in the Smith home. Among these seeking guidance and assurance of the work were Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Edward Partridge, Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, Lorenzo Snow and others.

Joseph Sr. Witnesses of the Book of Mormon as a Missionary

Almost from the very beginning, long before 1830 Joseph Sr. testified of the Restoration and the Book of Mormon with his neighbors and family. They recalled visits to their homes, conversations in the street and in the Grandin Building and letters from Joseph Sr. testifying of the Restoration.²⁰

Joseph Smith Sr. was very supportive of his son Joseph. Joseph Sr. never sought to supersede the prophetic mission of his son Joseph. Lucy Mack Smith reported that one time Joseph Sr. stated, "Son, I am very interested in helping build the kingdom of God. As my prophet and leader tell me what the Lord would have me do." In response Joseph Jr. received section 4.²¹ The Lord instructed Joseph Sr. to fully throw himself into "the marvelous work ... the service of God" with "all your heart, might, mind and strength" with the promise that "ye may stand blameless before God." He is then given a list of characteristics to develop to make him qualified for the work and successful in the work. Throughout Joseph Sr.'s life he sought to live up to these characteristics.

Joseph Sr.'s first mission took him to New England to visit his family in the summer of 1830. His companion was his 15 year old son, Don Carlos. He found his parents and siblings excited to see him despite their father Aesel's rapidly declining health. After catching up with his family, Joseph steered the conversation toward the Book of Mormon. At this his brother Jesse arose in wrath, swearing if Joseph continued speaking of the Book of Mormon he would hew Joseph down with his own axe. Joseph Sr. had to discuss the Book of Mormon with his other family members in relative secret.

Joseph had encouraging results among most of his family. Joseph Sr.'s brother John reported that "[Aesel Smith,] his father received with gladness that which Joseph communicated; and remarked that he had always expected that something would appear to make know the true gospel. ... And father seemed to be very pleased with every word which [Joseph Sr.] said."

His brothers Silas and Asahel seemed open and encouraging to the Gospel. His brother John reported, "I was too pious at the time to believe one word of it." However, Joseph requested John to read the Book of Mormon and not condemn it. Joseph told him, "If you do not condemn it, you shall have a testimony of its truthfulness." John reported, "I fulfilled my promise, and thus proved his testimony to be true."²² Eventually Silas,²³ Asahel,²⁴ and John²⁵ were all baptized. His 92 year old mother, Mary Duty Smith

journeyed to Kirtland and expressed a desire to be baptized, but due to age and health concerns she died without baptism and is buried near the Kirtland Temple.²⁶ Even Joseph's difficult brother Jesse eventually joined the Church.²⁷ All through the missionary efforts and testimony of the Book of Mormon from Joseph Smith Sr.

In 1836 Joseph Sr. went on a mission to the eastern states with his brother John. Their focus again seemed to be on family members. They visited Lucy Mack Smith's brother and were treated kindly, but he did not accept the Gospel. They visited their sister Mary, but "she was unwilling to treat us [her brothers] even decently." Their oldest sister Priscilla was kind and received their testimony. However, their brother Jesse continued to antagonize. He issued a warrant for Joseph Sr's arrest for a supposed debt of \$12. Eventually, Jesse was given \$50 to liberate Joseph Sr. They traveled and strengthened a small branch that Heber C. Kimball had established.²⁸

Joseph Sr. Sent to Debtors Prison Because He Would not Deny the Book of Mormon

Lucy Mack Smith recorded an incident where Joseph Sr. testified of the restored truth. Hyrum was in Colesville New York and Samuel was traveling on a mission in the Fall of 1830. Joseph Sr. was extremely ill and resting at home when a man belonging to the Quaker religion came to collect a debt of \$14 (about \$300 today). Only having \$6 at that time, Joseph Sr. offered to pay what he had and the rest later. When the Quaker refused, Lucy Mack Smith offered a gold beaded necklace, which the man also refused. The Quaker stated that if the Smith family would burn the Books of Mormon, he would forgive the debt. As a witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Sr. and Lucy were not willing to do that. The religious Quaker called for the constable who was outside to arrest Joseph Sr. Despite being quite sick he was taken to jail. Joseph preached every Sunday during his 30 day imprisonment and when released from jail he baptized two of his fellow inmates.²⁹

Samuel Smith went to visit his dad immediately after returning from his mission. Samuel reported the following from his father. "Immediately after I (Joseph Sr.) left your mother, the men by whom I was taken commenced using every possible argument to induce me to renounce the Book of Mormon, saying, 'how much better it would be for you to deny that silly thing, than to be disgraced and imprisoned, when you might not only escape this, but also have the note back, as well as the money which you have paid on it. ... They went on in the same manner till we arrived at the jail, when they hurried me into this dismal dungeon. I shuddered when I first heard these heavy doors creaking upon their hinges; but then I thought to myself, I was not the first man who had been imprisoned for the truth's sake; and when I should meet Paul in the paradise of God, I could tell him that I, too, had been in bonds for the gospel which he had preached. And this was my only consolation."³⁰

Joseph Sr. worked in debtor's prison as a cooper for 30 days until he had earned enough money to pay the promissory note of \$14.

Conclusion

Joseph Smith Sr. died in September 1840. Joseph felt that his father had died as a direct result of the mob violence he experienced in Missouri.³¹ He died faithful to his testimony as a special witness of the Book of Mormon. At the time of his death Joseph Sr. bore this testimony, "I have never denied the Lord ... the Lord has often visited me in visions and dreams, and has brought me, with my family, through many afflictions, and I this day thank him."³²

"I have thought of my father ... who died by disease which was brought upon him through suffering by the hands of ruthless mobs. He was a great and a good man. The envy of knaves and fools was heaped upon him, and this was his lot and portion all the days of his life. He was of noble stature and possessed a high, and holy, and exalted, and virtuous mind. His soul soared above all those mean and groveling principles that are congenial to the human heart. I now say that he never did a mean act, that might be said was ungenerous in his life, to my knowledge." Joseph Smith

-
- ¹ Dennis Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 791
- ² For examples see "Joseph Smith Sr.," *United By Faith*, 19, 25, 26
- ³ See Hyrum and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet*, (1974), 1
- ⁴ "Statement by William Smith, Brother of the Prophet," *Deseret News*, 20 January 1894
- ⁵ History of the Church 5:125-26; Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 2:116
- ⁶ *Journal of Discourses*, 17 Feb. 1861, 8:351
- ⁷ Joseph Smith History 1:28
- ⁸ See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 38-39; D&C 107:53-55
- ⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 47-50
- ¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 48
- ¹¹ *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 47-50
- ¹² Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 58-59
- ¹³ See *Essentials in Church History*, (1979), 25 & David F. Boone, "A Most Remarkable Family: The Ohio Legacy of the Asael and Mary Duty Smith Family," *Regional Studies in Latter Day Saint Church History: Ohio and Upper Canada*, (2006), 4
- ¹⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 108-09
- ¹⁵ Joseph Smith's 1835 account in Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 1:89
- ¹⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 109
- ¹⁷ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 144
- ¹⁸ Katharine Smith Salisbury statement as found in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and Wonder*, (2015), 48
- ¹⁹ William Smith, "Sermon in the Saints' Chapel," Deloitte, Iowa, June 8, 1884, *Saints' Herald* 31 (1884): 643-44
- ²⁰ For a further discussion see "Joseph Smith Sr.," *United by Faith*, 8-9
- ²¹ See H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni and the Restoration: A Closer Look," *Scriptures for the Modern World* as retrieved from <https://rsc.byu.edu/scriptures-modern-world/moroni-restoration> on 3/8/24
- ²² John Smith Journal Quoted in the *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 230-33
- ²³ Silas was baptized in 1835 by Hyrum. He became a president of the Pittsfield Illinois branch from 1838 until his death in September 1839
- ²⁴ Asahel (sometimes spelled Aesel) was baptized by Apostle Lyman E. Johnson in June 1835. He was appointed to the Kirtland High Council in 1837 and the Iowa High Council in 1839. He was ordained a Patriarch in Nauvoo in October 1844.
- ²⁵ John was baptized in January 1832. He held numerous callings. He was a member of the Kirtland High Council in 1834 and the president of the Kirtland High Council in 1836. Appointed assistant counselor in the First Presidency in 1837. Member of the Kirtland stake presidency in 1838. He was the president of the Adam-ondi-Ahman in 1838. Appointed president of the Lee County Iowa Branch. Presided over Macedonia Illinois. Admitted into the Council of Fifty in 1844. He was sustained president of the Nauvoo State in 1844. Presided over the Salt Lake Stake 1847-48. Ordained a Patriarch in January 1849. Died in Salt Lake City 1854.
- ²⁶ See David F. Boone, "A Most Remarkable Family: The Ohio Legacy of the Asael and Mary Duty Smith Family," *Regional Studies in Latter-Day Saint Church History: Ohio and Upper Canada*, 5
- ²⁷ Jesse was baptized in October 1833. He participated in Zion's Camp in 1834 and died in 1834.
- ²⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 343-45
- ²⁹ *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 179-81, 186 (179-186)
- ³⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 238-39, 242-43
- ³¹ Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 2:116
- ³² Patriarchal Book # 1 as found in *United by Faith*, 30

Witness # 8

Hiram Page, "How can I deny What I Know to Be True"

1800 to April 12, 1852 (52 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Hiram Page was 5 years older than Joseph and had already married Catherine Whitmer when he became acquainted with the restored Gospel. In 1829 Hiram received revelations through the use of a seer stone, however, Joseph was alarmed at the revelations and prayed. In a revelation, Joseph was told that the revelations Hiram had received were not from God. To his credit Hiram humbled himself and abandoned the revelations through this seer stone. He moved from New York to Ohio and in 1832 moved to Zion and built up the church there. As one of the witnesses Hiram suffered a great deal in Missouri.

Hiram Page in Missouri

Hiram, like so many of the Saints, went with his family to Jackson County Missouri in hopes of building the City of Zion, the New Jerusalem. However, in 1833 Zion seemed more like an unrealized hope than reality. As relations with the original Missourians deteriorated to violence against the Saints in Jackson County and the surrounding areas the witnesses themselves were in great danger.

Though the Saints had been given until the spring of 1834 to leave the county, by November 1833 the Missourians were ready to force the Saints from the county. The mobbers attacked the Whitmer settlement on the Blue River, especially targeting the Witnesses.

The mobs of about 40 men chased Hiram Page into a home and surrounded the home and threatened to kill every "Mormon" unless Hiram Page came out. They commenced beating Hiram. One offered the ultimatum, "If you will deny that d-d book [of Mormon] we will let you go." Hiram responded with faith, "How can I deny what I know to be true?" They continued to beat Hiram. According to one mobber they "gave him 60 or 70 blows with hickory [sticks]." They continued to beat him and then asked again for him to deny his faith. Hiram Page would not. They continued until one mobber realized that Hiram was willing to die for his testimony and the mobber said, "I believe this d-d fool will stick to it [until] we kill him; let him go." One observer noted, that "[Hiram's] life was nearly run out. He was confined to his bed for a length of time. So much for a man who knows for himself. Knowledge beyond faith or doubt. It is a positive certainty." They then proceeded to beat 10 to 15 in the same way and then demolished their homes.¹

When former Apostle William E. McLellin desired to reconstitute a Church, he asked Hiram Page for support. In a letter McLellin asked for a statement from Hiram regarding his testimony as an Eight Witness. Hiram responded, "As to the Book of Mormon, it would be doing injustice to myself and to the work of God of the last days, to say that I could know a thing to be true in 1830, and know the same thing to be false in 1847. To say my mind was so treacherous that I had forgotten what I saw. To say that a man of Joseph's ability, who at that time did not know how to pronounce the word Nephi, could write a book of six hundred pages, as correct as the Book of Mormon, without supernatural power. And to say that those holy angels who came and showed

themselves to me as I was walking through the field, to confirm me in the work of the Lord of the last days—three of whom came to me afterwards and sang an hymn in their own pure language. Yea, it would be treating the God of heaven with contempt to deny these testimonies, with too many others to mention here.”²

Hiram Withdraws His Membership

Hiram, like most of his in-laws, the Whitmers, had deep concerns about Joseph’s leadership and an open cannon of revelation. Like David Whitmer, Hiram saw additional revelations as deviations from the Book of Mormon and the early Church. After leaving the Church Hiram longed for the time when the Church would be “built up according to the laws contained in the Bible, book of Mormon, and the covenants ... when the time cometh that the Lord will see fit to bestow the means as he did in the beginning, then Israel shall be as in days of old ...”³ 2 years before his death he wrote, “Our hearts are pained and our bowels yearn for those who will not receive truth and true wisdom, who want to be led by revelation instead of ... the Bible, book of Mormon and the Church Covenants.”⁴

He saw the Loss of the 116 pages, selling the Book of Mormon copyright in Canada,⁵ appointing land agents, and the law of consecration as errors and a violation of the command that Joseph should not have strength to labor in temporal affairs. Hiram reported, “[Joseph] wants to divide inheritances by revelation.”

He, like David Whitmer had concerns with additional priesthood offices like High Priest reasoning that only Christ is the Great High Priest.⁶

Hiram Remembered for His Faithful Witness

After Hiram's death in Excelsior Springs Missouri his son Philander Page noted, “I always knew my father to be true and faithful to his testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon until the very last. Whenever he had an opportunity to bear his testimony to this effect he would always do so, and seemed to rejoice exceedingly in having been privileged to see the plates and thus become one of the Eight Witnesses.”⁷ His nephew, John C. Whitmer similarly stated, “I was closely connected with Hiram Page in business transactions and other matters, he being married to my aunt. I knew him at all times and under all circumstances to be true to his testimony concerning the divinity of the Book of Mormon.”⁸

Conclusion

Hiram Page was a humble disciple of Christ. He loved the Book of Mormon deeply and was true to his charge as a witness of the Book of Mormon. He bore powerful testimonies through his actions and words throughout his life. He, like the rest of the Whitmers, stumbled when he failed to connect the divinity of the Book of Mormon to the divine calling of Joseph Smith as the Prophet, Seer and Revelator.⁹

“The Book of Mormon is Christ-centered. That is its essential feature, and that is the reason we are commanded to study it continually. We must use the Book of Mormon to bring us to Christ.” President Dallin H. Oaks

¹ Don Carlos Journal 30 September 1838 added as an extract in Joseph Smith Histories, 1838-1856, vol C-1, Addenda, p. 13 found as retrieved from <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-addenda/13>, 9/4/22;

Mitchell K. Schaefer, ed., *William E. McClellin's Lost Manuscript*, 166-67; Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 2:213 & footnote 35; Michael K. Shaefer, "William E. McLellin and the Book of Mormon Witnesses, *BYU Studies Quarterly*, vol 50, no 1, (2011), 109

² Hiram Page, letter to William E. McLellin, 30 May 1847 as found in Richard L. Anderson, "Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 53

³ Letter of Hiram Page to Oliver Cowdery, 2 October 1847 as retrieved from "Letters of Hiram Page," File in Special Collections at Utah State University, Logan Campus

⁴ Hiram Page Letter to William E. McLellin, 4 March 1848 as found in "Letters of Hiram Page," File in Special Collections at Utah State University, Logan Campus

⁵ Hiram Page was selected to travel with Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Knight, and Josiah Stowell to Kingston Canada to sell the copyright of the Book of Mormon for \$8,000 to alleviate the financial burdens of the Church. The men failed to find anyone with authority from Canada to purchase the copyright. They were then sent to New York City and again met with disappointment. By 1848 Hiram's view of this experience had soured and he listed the mission to sell the copyright of the Book of Mormon as evidence that Joseph had overstepped his bounds. For more information about the selling of the copyright see the Fair Mormon article as retrieved on 4/19/24

[https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Attempt to sell the Book of Mormon copyright in Canada](https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Attempt_to_sell_the_Book_of_Mormon_copyright_in_Canada)

⁶ Hiram Page Letter William E. McLellin, 2 Feb 1848 as retrieved from "Letters of Hiram Page," as found in Special Collections at Utah State University, Logan Campus

⁷ Andrew Jenson, Historical Record (1888), 7:614

⁸ Andrew Jenson Recollection of an interview in 1888 with the Whitmer family as found in *The Book of Mormon: History of the Witnesses, a Discourse Delivered by Elder Andrew Jenson, Assistant Church Historian, in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City September 22nd, 1907*, 15.

⁹ See Introduction to the Book of Mormon, last paragraph

Witness # 9

Christian Whitmer

January 18, 1798 to November 27, 1835 (37 Years)

Biographical Sketch. When Christian Whitmer began his association with Joseph he was a constable in Seneca County New York. He briefly scribed for Joseph. He served as an Elder Quorum president in Jackson County. When the Whitmer settlement on the Blue River was attacked in October and November 1833 the mobbers took Christian Whitmer at gunpoint and demanded that he tell them where the leaders were.¹ He did not betray the leaders. He became sick and died in 1835 while serving on the Clay County High Council. He did not have any children.

Christian Whitmer Introduction

Christian died in the early days of the Church. He did not leave any teachings or definitive statements about the Book of Mormon. However, he did serve missions and held various leadership positions and it can be assumed he testified of the Book of Mormon as a special witness in those assignments.

Perhaps indicating his witness, on the original hand written Testimony of the Eight Witnesses, it is Christian who appears to have been the first to sign his name to that testimony.²

Christian's Testimony Remains in Force After His Death

Oliver Cowdery, Christian Whitmer's brother in law wrote of Cristian and his brother Peter Whitmer Jr., "They were both included in the list of the Eight Witnesses in the book of Mormon, and though they have departed, it is with great satisfaction that we reflect, that they proclaimed to their last moments the certainty of their former testimony: The testament is in force after the death of the testator. May all who read remember the fact, that the Lord has given men a witness of himself in the last days, and that they have faithfully declared it till called away."³

Witness # 10

Peter Whitmer Jr., Missionary to the Native Americans

September 27, 1809 to September 22, 1836 (26 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Peter Whitmer jr. was likely the sixth person baptized in this dispensation.⁴ His brother David stated that Peter Jr. was one of the first 7 individuals ordained an Elder.⁵ At a conference in Hiram Ohio, Peter Jr. was "appointed to have inheritance in Zion for assisting Joseph Smith to bring forth the sacred writings, particularly the revelations."⁶ He settled in Jackson County Missouri and worked as a tailor. Business was successful and he hired teenaged Mary Elizabeth Rollins. As work increased, newly elected Lieutenant Governor Lilburn W. Boggs hired Peter to make a suit for his inauguration, which he did.⁷ In 1833 Peter was forced from his home in Jackson County and resided in a mosquito bog. When Zion's Camp arrived he offered

"The Book of Mormon is the greatest book in the world ... The Book of Mormon must be reenthroned in the minds of our people. We honor it by reading it, by studying it, by taking its precepts into our lives transforming them into lives required of true followers of Christ." President Ezra Taft Benson

aid.⁸ He was called to the Missouri High Council to fill the vacancy left by the death of his brother Christian. He became ill and died just a few days short of his 27th birthday. He had 3 daughters.

Peter Jr. and the Printer's Manuscript

Peter Whitmer Jr. acted as a scribe for Joseph during the time of translation.⁹ He also served as a protector of the printer's manuscript. Joseph had learned a valuable lesson from the loss of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript. He had Oliver, Hyrum and an unidentified scribe make a copy of the Book of Mormon manuscript. Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Hyrum Smith formed a committee to oversee the publication of the Book of Mormon. Lucy Mack Smith indicated that Peter Jr. served as a guard around the house to protect the manuscript and guarded Oliver and the manuscript to the printing office of E. B. Grandin, fulfilling a commandment of the Lord.¹⁰

Peter Jr.'s Witness as a Missionary

Peter was told, "For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto you. The thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. Amen."¹¹

Peter Whitmer Jr. was designated by the Lord to accompany Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt a recently baptized member with a burning testimony of the Book of Mormon and Ziba Peterson to bring the Gospel to the Native Americans. As a special witness to the Book of Mormon, one who had personally seen the plates and handled the plates, he and Oliver would bear testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and the Parley and Ziba would teach a principle of the Gospel. On this mission, they testified as Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Peter simply stated, "We declared the Book of Mormon."¹² Lyman Wight, a future apostle and a convert in Ohio recalled, "one (Oliver Cowdery) testified that he had seen angels, and one (Peter Whitmer, Jr.) that he had seen the plates, and that the gifts were back in the Church again."¹³ Their testimonies were instrumental in converting many in the Kirtland Ohio area. At a conference in Independence Missouri in October 1831 Peter declared, "Ever since I have had an acquaintance with the writing of God (the Book of Mormon) I have [seen] eternity with perfect confidence."¹⁴ The Book of Mormon provided Peter Jr. with a clear view of the eternity.

Peter Whitmer Jr. Conclusion

In Peter Jr.'s short life and his acquaintance with the Church and Joseph Smith he was instrumental in bringing forth the Gospel. He faithfully fulfilled every calling he was given. He died faithful in the Church having remained true to his charge as a witness.

"The Book of Mormon provides the fullest and most authoritative understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ to be found any where ... The truths of the Book of Mormon have the power to heal, comfort, restore, succor, strengthen, console and cheer our souls. My dear brothers and sisters, I promise you that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon every day, you will make better decisions—every day. ... the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your won questions and direction for your won life. I promise you that as you daily immerse yourself in the book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day, even the gripping plague of pornography and other mind-numbing addictions." President Russell M. Nelson

¹ See John Corrill to Oliver Cowdery, December 1833, *The Evening and Morning Star*, vol. 2, no. 2, (2 January 1834), 126 as found on <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/10040> as retrieved 12/26/23

² For the manuscript copy of the testimony of the eighth witnesses see <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/468>

³ Oliver Cowdery, "The Closing Year," *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 3 no. 3 (December 1836), 426

⁴ *History of the Church*, 1:44

⁵ See Susan Easton Black, "Peter Whitmer Jr." as found on <https://doctrineandcovenantscentral.org/people-of-the-dc/peter-whitmer-jr/> on 2/13/24

⁶ Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith as found in Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion, 680

⁷ Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner Autobiography, "Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine 17 (July 1926), 196

⁸ Life of Heber C. Kimball, chapter 9 find page number

⁹ See "Peter Whitmer Jr.," Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion, 679

¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, 204-5

¹¹ D&C 16:4, 6

¹² Peter Whitmer Jr. Journal, 13 December 1831 as found on <https://bhiroberts.org/records/4LyZub-0U3Z5d/peter-whitmer-jr-records-that-joseph-smith-received-a-revelation-and-that-peter-preached-from-the-book-of-mormon> as retrieved on 2/22/24

¹³ Lyman Wight Journal, Heman C. Smith to Joseph Smith III, May 16, 1882, *Saints' Herald* 29 (June 15, 1882), 192.

¹⁴ Far West Record Book, Minute Book Two, 12. "[seen]" was a blank in the original text; as found in <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/14> on 2/11/24

Witness # 11

Jacob Whitmer, “Always faithful and true”

February 2, 1800 to April 21, 1856 (56 Years)

Biographical Sketch. He married in 1825 and had 9 children. He was baptized on 11 April 1830. He received his elder’s license in 1837. He worked as a shoemaker.

Jacob Whitmer Introduction

Not much has been documented about Jacob, however, he remained faithful to his testimony of the Book of Mormon. He seems to have been quite reserved.

Jacob Remembered

Jacob Whitmer’s son declared, “My father, Jacob Whitmer, was always faithful and true to his testimony of the Book of Mormon, and confirmed it on his death bed.”¹ Hiram Page’s son was present when Jacob passed away and he too affirmed that Jacob “died in full faith of the divinity of the Book of Mormon.”²

In the Pioneer Cemetery in Richmond Missouri, near Oliver Cowdery’s grave,³ under the shade of a large tree is Jacob Whitmer’s grave. On his headstone is an open Book of Mormon next to a Bible with a rose, a testament to his witness of the Book of Mormon.

Witness # 12

John Whitmer, Writer and Keeper of a Regular History⁴

August 27, 1802 to July 11, 1878 (75 Years Old)

Biographical Sketch. John Whitmer was an early and almost immediate supporter of Joseph Smith once the Prophet came to his father’s home. He was likely the 7th person baptized in this dispensation.⁵ He scribed for Joseph during the Book of Mormon translation, the early stages of the translation of the Bible, and most of the manuscript revelations in the Book of Commandments.⁶ He was told that preaching repentance and bringing souls unto Christ would be of the greatest worth.⁷ He was instructed to devote his time to “studying the scriptures, and to preaching, and to confirming the Church at Colesville.”⁸ He was faithful to these callings until the time he was called as the first Church Historian and was instructed “to write and keep a regular history [of the Church].”⁹ He was also given a charge “over the revelations and commandments” of the Church, carrying them to Jackson County for publication. He was instructed “[to] continue in writing and making a history of all the important things ... concerning the Church.”¹⁰ Though initially hesitant at the new calling,¹¹ he took his calling as the Church Historian very seriously, writing a 96 page history.¹² After John left the Church,¹³ he refused to surrender his history.¹⁴ He settled in Far West Missouri until his passing. (This history passed through the Whitmer family into the RLDS church. It was part of the purchase of the Kirtland Temple and other documents and properties in 2024)

“My daily prayer is that the Lord will cleanse Zion of all the remaining wickedness that is on this Holy Land.” John Whitmer

John Whitmer as Scribe

When Joseph and Oliver came to Fayette to live on the Whitmer farm the family was very supportive. Joseph recorded that “John Whitmer, in particular assisted us very much in writing during the remainder of the work [of translation].”¹⁵ John Whitmer estimated that he wrote about 60 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript,¹⁶ giving him “especial pride and joy.”¹⁷

John indicated that Joseph used the Urim and Thummim attached to the breastplate. The words would appear and “remain in sight till correctly written, and mistakes of the scribe in spelling names were corrected by the seer [Joseph Smith] without diverting his gaze from the Urim and Thummim.”¹⁸

John Whitmer in Jackson County Missouri

In July 1833 John Whitmer was living in Independence Missouri. He, his brothers, and their families had come to Jackson County in 1831 to establish Zion. But, 2 years to the day after they had been commanded to build a temple in Jackson County, mobs had gathered. The mobbers tarred and feathered Bishop Edward Partridge, Charles Allen, and possibly others.¹⁹ 3 days later on July 23 1833 John Whitmer and 5 others offered themselves as ransom to protect the Saints from additional persecution.²⁰

John Whitmer Testifies of the Plates

In speaking of his experience as one of the Eight Witnesses, John declared, “I handled those plates; there were fine engravings on both sides.”²¹

John was asked by Heman Smith, an apostle for the RLDS²² Church, to give some particulars as a witness to the Book of Mormon. John wrote, “As for giving all the particulars that I know of the Book of Mormon, could not be written on one sheet of paper; therefore permit me to be brief. ... I conclude you have read the Book of Mormon, together with the testimonies that are thereto attached; in which testimonies you read my name subscribed as one of the Eight Witnesses to said Book. That testimony was, is, and will be true henceforth and forever. Respectfully Yours, John Whitmer.”²³

In 1836 when John Whitmer stepped down from editor of the *Saints' Messenger and Advocate* he wrote, “It may not be amiss in this place, to give a statement to the world concerning the work of the Lord, as I have been a member of the church of Latter Day Saints from its beginning; to say that the Book of Mormon is a revelation from God, I have no hesitancy; but with all confidence have signed my name to it as such; ... I desire to testify to all ... that I have most assuredly seen the plates from whence the Book of Mormon is translated, and that I have handled these plates and know of a surety that Joseph Smith, jr. has translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God, ... therefore, know ye, O inhabitants of the earth, wherever this address may come, that I have in this thing freed my garments of your blood, whether you believe or disbelieve the statements of your unworthy friend and well-wisher.”²⁴

During one interview John reported “that testimony [as recorded in the Book of Mormon] is true.” When asked if he held the plates and handled them with his hands, John responded, “I did so!” He described the plates as “very heavy,” the leaves were “8 X 6 or 7 inches,” engraven on both sides,” and held together by “3 rings, each one in the shape of a D with the straight line toward the center.” John declared, “[Joseph] handed [the plates] uncovered into our (Eight Witnesses) hands, and we turned the leaves sufficiently to satisfy us.”²⁵

“although the enemy has accomplished his design of demolishing the Printing establishment [in Jackson County] they cannot demolish the design of our God, for his decrees will stand & his purposes must be accomplished, notwithstanding the rage of Satan.” John Whitmer

John Whitmer Testifies in Missouri in 1839

In April 1839, just a few weeks before the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were to leave from the Far West Temple site for their mission to England the last few Saints were being assisted out of Missouri. The Saints had suffered a great deal during the Missouri Conflicts of 1838 including the Battle of Crooked River, Hawn's Mill, the Extermination Order of Governor Boggs, and had been driven from Missouri in the dead of winter. Theodore Turley remained in an office assisting the last few saints out of Missouri. 8 individuals, including the excommunicated John Whitmer²⁶ came into the office threatening that if the Twelve tried to fulfill the revelation of departing from the Far West temple site on 26 April 1839 they would be murdered. Turley responded by calling upon John Whitmer as a witness of the Book of Mormon. He accused him of stating that Joseph and the Book of Mormon were true and then turning against his previous testimony. When Whitmer asked, "Do you hint at me?" Turley responded, "If the cap fits you, wear it! All I know is that you have published to the world that an angel did present those plates to Joseph Smith."

John Whitmer, who intended to warn the Twelve Apostles they would be murdered and had come with known persecutors of the Church bore this testimony, "I now say, I handled those plates. There were engravings on both sides. I handled them." He then described the plates and acknowledged "they were shown to me by a supernatural power."²⁷

John Whitmer Concludes his Testimony

John was the last survivor of the Eight Witnesses. He, like his brother David, had many opportunities to bear testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon. One neighbor recorded, "Old Father John Whitmer told me last winter, with tears in his eyes, that he knew as well as he knew he had an existence that Joseph translated the ancient writing which was upon the plates which he saw and handled."²⁸

In 1876 John declared that he had never heard any of the 3 or 8 witnesses ever deny their testimony of the Book of Mormon. He added, "Our names (the Three and the Eight Witnesses) have gone forth to all nations, tongues and people as a divine revelation from God. And it will bring to pass the designs of God according to the declaration therein contained ..."²⁹ "That testimony was, is, and will be true, henceforth and forever." "It is the same as it was from the beginning, and it is true. ... I have never denied my testimony as to the Book of Mormon, under any circumstances whatever."³⁰

He also clarified that the plates were "as material as anything can be,"³¹ they physically existed.

John Whitmer Conclusion

John Whitmer aided Joseph in the early days of the Church. He took particular care to fulfill his callings, even when he felt inadequate to do so. Once he was convinced of truth from God he pressed forward with firmness. He faithfully testified of the Book of Mormon.

"His actual handling of the plates is the only plausible explanation for the seriousness with which this conservative farmer shared his testimony with Mormon visitors and non-Mormon associates. One may surely rely on his ability to report whether or not he lifted the plates and handled a metal object of substantial weight." Richard Lloyd Anderson

¹ Letter of Andrew Jenson to *Deseret News* (13 September 1888) from Richmond Missouri; *Deseret News* 17 September 1888

² See Andrew Jenson, *Historical Record*, 614

³ In November 1911 a large monument was placed over the location of Oliver Cowdery's burial site. (see Curtis Ashton, "The Whitmer Family in Missouri," 18 March 2019 as found on <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/historic-sites/missouri/the-whitmer-family-in-missouri?lang=eng> as retrieved on 1/24/24

⁴ D&C 47:1

⁵ Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 3:460

⁶ Largey, *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, 678

⁷ D&C 15:6

⁸ D&C 26:1

⁹ D&C 47:1

¹⁰ D&C 69:3

¹¹ When Joseph asked him to keep the history of the Church John recorded, "I would rather not do it," but agreed if God asked him to through Joseph. Joseph did and received D&C 47 which proved direction and comfort. (see *Revelations in Context*, 113).

¹² See *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, 678

¹³ John Whitmer ended his history with his separation from the Church and this heartfelt statement, "Therefore I close the history of the church of Latter Day Saints, hoping that I may be forgiven of my faults, and my sins be blotted out and in the last day be saved in the kingdom of God notwithstanding my present situation." ("John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847," 85). He later added to this history.

¹⁴ His history passed from John to David Whitmer then to the RLDS (Community of Christ) Church. In 1974 the LDS Church obtained a microfilmed copy.

¹⁵ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories* 1:308 drafts 1 & 2; *History of the Church* 1:49

¹⁶ *Saints' Herald* 26, (15 December 1876), 307b

¹⁷ "Synopsis of a Discourse Delivered at Lamoni Iowa," *The Saints Herald*, (15 December 1879), 370

¹⁸ Synopsis of a Discourse Delivered at Lamoni, IA," *Saints Herald*, (15 December 1879), 370

¹⁹ Greene, John P, *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons or Latter Day Saints, from the State of Missouri under the Exterminating Order* (1839), 17.

²⁰ Edward Partridge, Isaac Morley, John Corrill, W. W. Phelps, and Sidney Gilbert

²¹ B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 3:307–8

²² Currently called the Community of Christ Church headquartered in Independence Missouri

²³ John Whitmer letter to Heman Smith, dated December 11, 1876 as found in Early Mormon Documents, 5:244 and electronically retrieved 9/6/22 from https://archive.org/details/volume-5_202011/page/243/mode/2up

²⁴ John Whitmer, "An Address to the Patrons of the Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate" (March 1836) As retrieved from <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/1205> on 9/6/22

²⁵ *Deseret News*, 6 August 1878; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 5:247–49 Letter, Far West, Missouri, 11 December 1876

²⁶ Excommunicated March 1838

²⁷ See *History of the Church* 3:306-07

²⁸ "Myron Bond Letter," *Saints' Herald*, August 15, 1878, 254

²⁹ Letter to Mark H. Forscutt, 5 March 1876, holograph found in the Community of Christ Church Archives as found in Richard L. Anderson, "Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 55

³⁰ See Richard Lloyd Anderson "Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Maxwell Institute, Volume 14, Issue 1, pages 18-31, 2005

³¹ P. Wilhelm Poulson Interview, 31 July 1878, as found in *Document History*, 453

Twelve Formal Witnesses Conclusion

After a visit to see his old friend John Whitmer, William E. McLellin wrote, “Now I would ask what will I do with such a cloud of faithful witnesses, bearing such a rational and yet solemn testimony? These men while in the prime of life, saw the vision of the angel, and bore their testimony to all people. And eight men saw the plates, and handled them. Hence these men all knew the things they declared to be positively true. And that too while they were young, and now when old they declare the same things.”¹

The apostate McLellin asks a very poignant and interesting question, what are we to do with these 12 witnesses? With the exception of Martin Harris (46 years) and Joseph Smith Sr. (52 years old), they were all young men when they saw the plates and were called to witness its truthfulness. They bore powerful, consistent and unequivocal testimony throughout their entire lives, even in perilous circumstances. There is no known credible statement in which they denied their testimony. They sacrificed financial security, comfort, political and civic offices, and their safety and the safety of their family because they would not deny their testimony. Their reputations were sullied. Being leaders in the Church they were exposed to criticism from anti-Mormons, as well as Church members.

So, what do we do with, as William E. McLellin called, “a cloud of faithful witnesses, bearing such a rational and yet solemn testimony?” Some seek to explain away the Witnesses as dupes, deceived, delusional, or weak minded. Some make misleading claims trying to discredit their testimony. Yet, when we study and read their lives and their testimonies we see consistent and rational conviction.

Informal Witnesses Introduction

In addition to the 12 witnesses that were commissioned to bear witness of the Plates, others were informally witnessed of the Book of Mormon plates. 14 other individuals had varying experiences with the plates making a total of 26 witnesses to the plates. Some saw the plates covered only with a thin cloth which allowed them to trace the outline of the plates or lift individual pages. Others were permitted to lift a have box and trust Joseph when he told them the plates were inside. Others saw the plates or a small portion of the plates.

Of the 26 witnesses 7 were shown the plates by the Angel Moroni. 16 saw the plates uncovered whole 12 saw the plates covered with a thin cloth. 18 lifted or “handled” the plates. 8 lifted the wooden box containing the plates. 6 recorded hearing the metallic sound or “jink” of the plates. 10 saw additional Nephite relics like the breastplate, sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, Liahona, and/or the box in which the plates were buried at the Hill Cumorah by Moroni. 13 served official missions for the Church. 22 of the 27 witnesses of the plates were baptized.

¹ William E. McLellin's *Lost Manuscript*, 167

Witness # 13

Mary Musselman Whitmer

the Fourth Witness to the Book of Mormon

August 27, 1778 to January 1856 (77 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Mary M. Whitmer was born in Germany and emigrated to Pennsylvania. She married Peter Whitmer Sr. Together they had 8 children, 5 boys and 3 girls. The Whitmers were early and stalwart supporters of Joseph Smith. All 5 boys became witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates. 2 of the 3 daughters married witnesses of the plates. She passed away firmly believing in the divinity of the Book of Mormon.

Mary Sees Moroni and the Plates

When Joseph, Emma, and Oliver moved into the comfortable home of the Whitmers much of the additional duties fell upon Mary Whitmer.

Her son, David Whitmer recorded, “One evening, (after having done her usual day’s work in the house) she went to the barn to milk the cows; she met a stranger carrying something on his back that looked like a knapsack. At first, she was a little afraid ... but he spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone and began to explain to her the nature of the work which was going on in her house. She was filled with unexpressible joy and satisfaction. He then untied the knapsack and showed her a bundle of plates ...”¹

The angel Moroni told her, “You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil; it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.”²

“This strange person turned the leaves of the plates over, leaf after leaf, and also showed her the engravings upon them; after which he told her to be patient and faithful in bearing her burden a little longer, promising that if she would do so then she would be blessed and her reward would be sure, if she proved faithful to the end. The personage vanished with the plates ... she was a firm believer in the Book of Mormon until the day of her death.”³

“From that moment on [she] was enabled to perform her household duties with comparative ease, and she felt no more inclination to murmur because her lot was hard.”⁴

According to the granddaughter of the widowed wife of Christian Whitmer⁵ she heard her grandma often state that Mary was frustrated with the extra work *and* Joseph and Oliver not helping out and that she was about to ask them to leave. Moroni’s visit may have been to support Mary Whitmer and also to intervene in behalf of Joseph and Oliver.⁶

Mary and the Translation of the Book of Mormon

Not only was she shown the plates, but also had a front row seat to the translation process herself. A girl was living with the Whitmers at the time of the translation later reported that on several occasions Joseph and Oliver would come down from translating and “they looked so exceedingly white and strange.” She asked Mother Whitmer the reason and Mary testified that “the power of God was so great in the room that they could hardly endure it; at times angels were in the room in their glory which nearly consumed [Joseph and Oliver].”⁷

“There must be an overruling hand in this and I think you had better go down to Pennsylvania [and bring Joseph and Oliver to our home.]” Peter Whitmer, Sr.

Mary Whitmer Conclusion

Mary Whitmer is an interesting witness of the plates. Because of her experience with Moroni and the plates she is often called the “fourth witness.” Her witness of the plates came in a time when she most needed support and strength. The witness came, strengthening her resolve and lifting the burden.

“Upon our arrival, we found Mr. Whitmer’s family very anxious concerning the work, and very friendly toward ourselves. They continued so, boarded and lodged us according to arrangements.” Joseph Smith

¹ Jenson, *The Historical Record*, October 1881, 621, as told by John C. Whitmer, grandson of Mary Whitmer. “Unexpressible” is in the original document

² *Millennial Star*, 40:772 [9 December 1878]

³ Jenson, *The Historical Record*, October 1881, 621

⁴ Jenson, *Biological Encyclopedia*, 1:283

⁵ Christian married Anna Schott. They were Childless when Christian died in 1836 in Missouri. Anna remarried and had children with her second husband.

⁶ See <https://witnessesofthebookofmormon.org/other-witnesses/mary-musselman-whitmer/another-account-of-mary-whitmers-viewing-of-the-golden-plates/> as retrieved 3/10/24

⁷ Sarah Heller Conrad as recorded by Oliver B. Huntington (1897) as recorded in *History of the Life of Oliver B. Huntington*, as recorded in *Opening the Heavens*, p. 133 document 111

Witness # 14

Lucy Mack Smith Testifies until her Lungs are Almost Destroyed

July 8, 1775 to May 14, 1856 (80 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Lucy Mack Smith was a highly religious woman and a mother of faith. Joseph honored his mother, “My mother also is one of the noblest and best of all women.”¹ “Blessed is my mother, for her soul is filled with benevolence and philanthropy ... and she shall be comforted in the midst of her house and shall have eternal life.”²

The history of the Smith family relates 3 instances when religion divided the family and the hurt feelings this caused to Mother Smith. In 1802 Lucy became very ill and the doctors pronounced that she would die. Lucy made “a solemn covenant to God” that if he spared her life she would serve Him. She was miraculously healed and sought God, but could not find a religion that satisfied her. At length, while her husband stayed away from Church, Lucy found a minister who would baptize her without requiring her to join any particular religion.³ In 1803 Lucy prevailed on Joseph Sr. and they attended Methodist meetings until his father and brother Jesse discovered they were attending Church and insisted that Joseph Sr. read Thomas Paine’s *In the Age of Reason* “until he believed it.” The book was critical of organized religion as a “human invention, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”⁴ At their urging Joseph Sr. “requested” Lucy to stop attending. Though she didn’t say anything to her husband she was “very much hurt.”⁵ Then again in 1820 Lucy, Hyrum (age 20), Samuel (age 12), and Sophronia (age 17) united with the Presbyterians, Joseph Jr. (age 14) felt some desire to unite with the Methodists, while Joseph Sr. refused to attend “either for [Lucy’s] gratification or any other persons,”⁶ and Alvin (age 22) seem to have stayed out of organized religion.⁷

Lucy and the Early Church

Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph’s mother, was present at many events of early Church History. After the First Vision Lucy asked if he was alright and Joseph responded, “I am well enough, I have learned for myself.”⁸ She was there when Joseph and Emma returned with the plates from the Hill Cumorah. She was there when the Three Witnesses returned to the Whitmer Farm in Fayette, New York. She was there when the Eight Witnesses returned to the Smith home in Manchester, New York. She was present during the publication of the Book of Mormon and even stored the printer’s manuscript wedged under her bed at night.

As a particularly special eyewitness of the Restoration Lucy was often called upon to talk with the Saints. Just about 7 months after the Martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, Lucy began a written narrative of her experiences with Joseph and the Restoration. She had been asked to relate the events of the Restoration as she had seen them unfold. This took a toll. She wrote to her son William, “I have told over many things pertaining to these matters of different persons ... indeed [I] have almost destroyed my lungs.”⁹

Lucy’s Experience with the Plates

Lucy paints the restoration as a family affair. For the four years Joseph was tutored by Moroni and additional angels, Joseph Sr. and Lucy would get the kids together and Joseph would

“My mother, who was a very pious woman and much interested in the welfare of her children, both here and hereafter, made use of every means which her parental love could suggest, to get us engaged in seeking for our soul’s salvation”
Joseph Smith

teach his family. Lucy expressed a heightened anxiety to prepare Joseph to receive the plates. She recorded, "We were afraid that he might utterly fail in obtaining the Record through some neglect on his part. We, therefore, doubled our diligence in prayer and supplication to God, in order that he might be more fully instructed in his duty and preserved from all the wiles and machinations of him 'who lieth in wait to deceive.'"¹⁰

Lucy continued, "He proceeded to relate further particulars concerning the work which he was appointed to do, and received them joyfully, never mentioning them except among ourselves ... From this time forth Joseph continued to receive instruction from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening, for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented an aspect as singular as any that ever lived ... all seated in a circle, father, mother, sons and daughters and giving the most profound attention to a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life."¹¹

Joseph's brother William remembered the times Joseph had taught the family. He recalled, "The whole family were melted to tears, and believed all [Joseph] said."¹²

Lucy sees the Nephite Relics

Lucy Mack Smith, the Prophet's mother, is a unique witness to the Restoration. In her memoir, Lucy often mentions the plates or "record" and the box that protected them. Though there is no primary account, there is also some indication that she saw the plates.¹³ A neighbor recalled that Lucy had "hefted and handled the plates," and that she believed Lucy because of her honesty and integrity.^{14 15}

She also saw additional artifacts. Joseph passed Lucy the Interpreters or the Urim and Thummim. Lucy recorded, "[I] took the article in my hands and examining it with no covering but a silk handkerchief, found that it consisted of two small three cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows connected with each other in much the same way that old fashioned spectacles are made."¹⁶

Lucy also provides valuable information about the use of the Urim and Thummim. She stated that Joseph would carry it with him wherever he went and that by using it Joseph could tell if the plates were in any danger.¹⁷ As Joseph experimented with Urim and Thummim he marveled. Lucy stated that in receiving the Urim and Thummim, Joseph had received "the key" for translating the plates. He stated, "I can see anything; [the Urim and Thummim] are marvelous."¹⁸

She also saw the breastplate. As Joseph was packing the artifacts he passed Lucy the breastplate. She said "it was wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief, so thin I could see the glistening metal and ascertain its proportions without any difficulty. It was concave on one side and convex on the other and extended from the neck downward as far as the center of the stomach of a man of extraordinary size. ..." ^{19 20}

Lucy Testifies to Presbyterian Church Leaders in Palmyra

In 1830 a Deacon and 2 fellow Presbyterians of Palmyra approached Lucy, Hyrum and Samuel pressing them about the plates, Lucy responded, "We have not got any gold bible neither have we ever had any thing of the kind, but we have a translation of some gold plates which was sent to the world to bring the plainness of the Gospel and to give the children of men a history of the people ..." She continued, "I then proceeded to give them the substance of what is contained in the Book of Mormon, particularly the principles of religion which it contents. I endeavored to

show them the similarities between these principles and the simplicity of the gospel taught by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.”

When they pressed her about the Book of Mormon manuscript and asked Lucy “to never ... proclaim anything about [the plates],” Lucy emphatically declared the truth of the Book of Mormon and her conviction to die for her testimony. She responded, “Even if you should stick my body full of [bundles of wood] and burn me at the stake I would declare that Joseph has that record and that I know it to be true as long as God gave me breath.”²¹

Lucy Testifies as she Travels with the Saints

In April 1831 Lucy Mack Smith led a group of 80 Saints from the Fayette New York Branch in a move to Kirtland Ohio. As they passed along the Erie Canal by boat, Mother Smith had an experience similar to Nephi. Her group was “murmuring and grumbling,” “engaged in warm debate,” and the young female Saints “were flirting, giggling, and laughing with the gentlemen passengers.” Because of their conduct they faced an ice blockage rather than a tempest. She reminded them that they were “to come out from the world for the purpose of serving God at the expense of all earthly things.” She spoke “against [their] own unwise and improper conduct.” She questioned, “[If] you profess to put your trust in God, then how can you feel to murmur and complain as you do?” “Where is your faith? Where is your confidence in God? ... And suppose that all the Saints here should lift their hearts in prayer to God, that the way might be opened before us, how easy it would be for him to cause the ice to break away, so that in a moment we could be on our journey!”

As she was instructing the Saints in their charge, a man called out from the shore, “Is the Book of Mormon true?” She replied, “That Book was brought forth by the power of God and translated by the same power, and if I could make my voice sound as loud as the trumpet of Michael the archangel, I would declare the truth from land to land and from sea to sea, and echo it from isle to isle until everyone of the whole family of man was left without excuse ... I would sound in every ear that he has again revealed himself to man in these last days and set his hand to gather his people together ... God is now going to do a work upon the earth for the salvation of all who believe it ... and man cannot hinder it.”

After bearing such a powerful testimony of the Book of Mormon, her desire to share it with the world, and its influence upon the earth she turned to her own company and exhorted them to faithful prayer and safe passage. As they left the wharf an observer declared they would sink, but because of her faithful exhortation and the faith of the saints on the boat they were able to make safe passage.²²

On another occasion Lucy’s testimony opened the way for others to preach the Gospel. She accompanied Hyrum and other missionaries on a boat for Detroit. The missionaries debated whether they should preach on the passage. They determined not to preach. Hyrum, knowing his mother, believed she would testify and “if a difficulty arose the elders should assist her out of it.” As they traveled Lucy would read her Book of Mormon in a common area. One day she was asked about it by an interested lady. Lucy taught her about the Book of Mormon. The lady was fascinated and wanted a copy to take to her husband who was on a mission among the Native Americans. A well-dressed woman overheard the conversation and confronted Lucy stating, “They say [Joe Smith] is a Mormon prophet, but it is nothing but deception and lies.” The woman’s embarrassed husband ushered her out. This encounter piqued the interest of the passengers and the missionaries preached most of the time, except while they slept. “The impression upon

“I was five years old when we started from Nauvoo. ... We bid goodbye to our dear old feeble grandmother [Lucy]. I can never forget the bitter tears she shed when she bode us goodbye for the last time in this life. She knew it would be the last time she would see her [son Hyrum’s] family.” Martha Ann Smith, daughter of Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith

Lucy Mack Smith Testifies

the minds of the passengers was very favorable, and we could have disposed of a quantity of Books [of Mormon], but [regrettably] we had none.”²³

Lucy Mack Smith Conclusion

Lucy had a front row seat to the restoration of the Gospel and was present for nearly every early experience of Joseph Smith. She was blessed to see the Nephite relics and frequently bore testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon. Because of this testimony, she opened the door for the preaching of the Gospel. She is an example of a woman filled with a burning testimony and the faith to act.

“I feel the Lord will let Brother Brigham take the people away. Here, in this city [Nauvoo], lay my dead; my husband and children; and if it so be the rest of my children go with you (and would to God they may all go[to Utah]), they will not go without me; and if I go, I want my bones brought back in case I die away, and deposited with my husband and children.” Lucy Mack Smith

Do you not know that you are the mother of as great a family as ever lived upon the earth? Joseph Smith Sr.

¹ Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 2:116

² *History of the Church*, 1:466

³ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 47-50

⁴ *Age of Reason*, 4

⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 58

⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 121

⁷ Joseph Smith History 1:7, 18

⁸ Joseph Smith History 1:20

⁹ Letter to William Smith, 23 January 1845 b

¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 123-24

¹¹ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 111

¹² See Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, “A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process,” *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 138-39

¹³ See *Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 139

¹⁴ *Investigating the Witnesses*, 25

¹⁵ A source written in 1843 states that Lucy bore testimony, “I have seen and handled the golden plates. They are about eight inches long, and six wide; some of them are sealed together and not to be opened, and some of them are loose. They are all connected by a hole which passes through a ring at the end of each plate, and are covered with letters beautifully engraved” (Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged, (London, UK: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1843), 27). If true, that is a remarkable statement. Skepticism may arise because Lucy Mack Smith makes no mention of seeing the plates, but mentions seeing the breastplate and the urim and Thummim and because Caswell makes many errors in the article as a whole. Where there is evidence that she did not “heft” the plates, in the Church’s essays on Church History affirms “that she hefted the plates and handled the Urim and Thummim. (See Sarah Bradford Parker letter to John Kempton, Aug. 26, 1838 as found in “Lucy Mack Smith,” Church History Topic as retrieved from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/lucy-mack-smith?lang=eng> on 2/18/24)

¹⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 139; see also page 145; see also Daniel C. Peterson, “Not Joseph’s, and Not Modern,” *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 209-10

¹⁷ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 139

¹⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*,

¹⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 148-49

²⁰ An anti-Mormon writer Henry Caswell visited Nauvoo and recorded that Lucy Mack Smith stated, “I have myself seen and handled the plates; they are about eight inches long, and six wide, some are sealed together and they are not to be opened and some of them are loose. They are connected by a ring that passes through a hole at the end of each plate and are covered with letters beautifully engraved” (*The City of the Mormons’ or 3 Days in Nauvoo, in 1842*, 26-27). I am skeptical of this statement because the author is a known anti-Mormon and clearly made egregious errors for the sake of selling articles and Lucy Mack Smith does not record anything about having seen the plates, but does mention seeing and handling the breastplate and the Interpreters.

²¹ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Expanded History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 212

²² *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 268-70

²³ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 289-90

Witness # 15

Josiah Stowell (Stoal) Sees the Plates

March 22, 1770 to May 12, 1844 (73 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Josiah Stowell was an early supporter of Joseph Smith. Perhaps hearing of his abilities, Josiah employed Joseph as a laborer to find an old Spanish mine in the Susquehanna Pennsylvania area. His men boarded at the house of Isaac Hale. There, Joseph first met Emma. At length Joseph persuaded Josiah to abandon the effort. Josiah Stowell was baptized in 1830. However, he did not follow the Saints to Kirtland in 1831 and died in Smithboro New York in 1844.

Josiah Stowell and September 22, 1827

Evidently knowing of Joseph's intended visit to the Hill Cumorah and his interview with Moroni, Josiah Stowell and Joseph Knight Sr. visited the Smiths in Manchester. The morning of September 22nd when Joseph returned with Emma from the Hill Cumorah Joseph related some details about his experience. He did not immediately bring home the plates but hid them in a birch tree. He carefully cut the bark and hollowed out a hole large enough to hide the plates.¹ He seemed to be impressed with the Urim and Thummim. David Whitmer² recorded that when Joseph first looked through the Urim and Thummim he had "his entire past history revealed to him." Joseph Knight Sr. recorded that Joseph exclaimed "[the Urim and Thummim] is ten times better than I expected ... I can see any thing; they are marvelous." Lucy Mack Smith stated that through the Urim and Thummim "the angel [Moroni] showed him many things which he saw in vision."³

Josiah Sees the Plates

As Joseph Smith brought the plates from their hiding place to the safety of the Smith Farm he was attacked 3 times. According to Stowell Joseph arrived bruised and handed the plates wrapped in a cloth to Stowell through an open window. As he took them Stowell claimed a corner was uncovered and he saw the plates, that they "resembled a stone of a greenish caste."⁴

An acquaintance of Josiah wrote to Joseph Smith stating the Josiah wanted to come to Nauvoo. She recalled, "If I understood him [Stowell] right he is the first person⁵ that took the Plates out of your hands, the morning you brought them in & he observed blessed is he that seeth & believeth & more blessed is he that believeth without seeing & says he has seen & believed. He seems anxious to get there [Nauvoo] to renew his covenant with the Lord."⁶ He may have also seen the breastplate.⁷

Witness # 16

Luke Johnson Shown the Plates by "the Angel of God"

November 3, 1807 to December 8, 1861 (54 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Luke Johnson was one of the first to embrace the Gospel in the Kirtland area. He and his brother were selected by the 3 Witnesses as an original member of the first

Quorum of the Twelve apostles. In December 1836 he purchased 2,000 shares in the Kirtland Safety Society. Sadly, he was excommunicated in 1838 as a result of his losses in the bank's failure. Though he was outside of the Church he still aided the Smiths. Joseph Sr. was arrested on false charges and held in the court house to await trial. Luke unlocked the window allowing Father Smith to escape while he went to the courtroom and told entertaining stories.⁸

He rebaptized by his brother in law Orson Hyde in Nauvoo in March 1846. He traveled west with Brigham Young's vanguard company in 1847. He settled in Toole Utah and became a Bishop.⁹ Though his family were stalwart supporters of Joseph, Luke was the only member of his family who rejoined the Church and died faithful in the Gospel.

Luke Johnson shown the Plates by an Angel

Brigham Young taught that Luke Johnson "one of the Quorum of the Twelve—a young man full of faith and good works, prayed and the vision of his mind was opened, and the angel of God came and laid the plates before him, and he saw and handled them, and saw the angel, and conversed with him as he would with one of his friends ..."¹⁰

"I have stopped by the wayside and stood aloof from the work of the Lord. But my heart is with this people. I want to be associated with the saints, go with them into the wilderness, and continue with them to the end." Luke Johnson

¹ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 137, 142-44

² David Whitmer was not present when Joseph returned home on September 22, 1827. David did not become acquainted with Joseph until the summer of 1829.

³ For all three quotes see *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, First Edition, 275

⁴ See BYU Sperry Symposium, *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 48-49

⁵ William Smith stated that Joseph Sr. received the plates from Joseph; Martin Harris stated that Lucy Mack Smith first took the plates.

⁶ Letter Martha Campbell, 19 December 1843, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed Feb. 7, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-martha-campbell-19-december-1843/1>

⁷ See *Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 49

⁸ "History of Luke Johnson," *Millennial Star* 26 (1865), 6

⁹ *Joseph Smith Papers*, Biographies reports Luke as a Bishop at St. Johns, but Wilford Woodruff stated he was appointed as Branch President (*Wilford Woodruff Journals* 4:431).

¹⁰ 5 June 1859, "Want of Governing Capacities Among Men—Elements of the Sacrament—Apostasy, Etc.," *Journal of Discourses* 7:164

Witnesses # 17 & 18

Lucy Harris and her Daughter

Lucy Harris, May 1, 1792 to Summer 1836 (44 Years)

Lucy Harris Introduction

Lucy Harris is most known for her antagonism toward Joseph and her efforts to thwart the progress at every available moment. This seemed to have been compounded by Lucy's partial hearing loss. Tension between Martin and Lucy reached the boiling point when Martin lost the 116 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript. Martin (and others including Lucy Mack Smith) blamed Lucy Harris for the loss of the pages.¹ Many are surprised to learn that despite her antagonism for Joseph Lucy had ample opportunity and experiences that pointed her toward the divinity of the Book of Mormon and Joseph's prophetic mission, she just misinterpreted them.

Lucy Harris Interrogates Joseph

Lucy Harris, the first wife of Martin Harris, and her daughter came to the Smith Home requesting to see the plates and then she would lend financial assistance to Joseph. Joseph of course declined to which Lucy Harris responded, "Now, Joseph are you not telling me a lie? Can you look me full in the eye, and say before God that you in reality found a Record as you pretend?" Joseph replied that he had received the plates as he had previously stated. Lucy Harris replied, "If I can get a witness that you speak the truth, I will believe all you say about the matter and I shall want to do something about the translation—I mean to help you [in] any way."

The next morning Lucy related a dream she had received. "She said that a personage appeared to her, who told her, that as she had disputed the servant of the Lord [Joseph Smith], and said his word was not to be believed, and had asked him many improper questions, she had done that which was not right in the sight of God. After which he said to her, 'Behold, here are the plates, look upon them and believe.'" So convincing was the dream that she gave Joseph \$28 that she had received as a gift from her mother.²

Later he did allow Lucy Harris and her daughter to lift the wooden box that held the plates. Martin Harris recalled that his "daughter said, they were about as much as she could lift ... My wife said they were very heavy."³

Lucy in Harmony Pennsylvania

Shortly after Joseph and Emma moved from the Smith farm in Manchester New York to Harmony Pennsylvania onto the Hale farm.

She was enraged that Martin went without her to New York with the Book of Mormon characters. She accompanied the Smiths to visit Joseph and Emma in Harmony with the intention of never leaving until she had seen the plates. She ransacked the home searching causing Joseph to take the breastplate and plates elsewhere. When she could not see the plates she then went from house to house "bewailing the deception Joe Smith was practicing upon the people" and claiming he was trying to take her money. She even took any valuables from her home and left them at the homes of her friends.⁴ The motivation behind Martin borrowing the 116 pages of manuscript was so that Lucy could read it, believe in the work being done, and be pacified. With limited evidence, many, including Lucy Mack Smith, pointed to Lucy as the culprit

"The Book of Mormon is the best guide to learn how well we are doing and how to do better." President Henry B. Eyring

when the manuscript went missing. Lucy Harris accused Joseph of swindling Martin out of his money by deception and took a lawsuit against him.⁵

Lucy Harris and the Civil Lawsuit Against Joseph

In the summer of 1829 what little support Lucy Harris had given to Joseph was replaced with deep seeded fears that Joseph was deceiving Martin and the people. She had seen the plates in a dream and hefted the box containing the plates, but Lucy wanted more substantial evidence that Joseph had the plates. She feared that Joseph was using the story of the gold plates to continue bilking Martin of his time drawing his attention away from the farm, their livelihood, and that Martin would continue to offer financial support.

By May or early June 1829 Lucy filed a vexatious lawsuit against Joseph accusing him taking money through deception. Things went well for Lucy during the trial. The first witness testified that Joseph had told him the box contained nothing but sand. The next witness testified that Joseph told him the box contained lead. Next Lucy's affidavit was read, which claimed that Joseph's only intention in telling the story of the gold plates was to gain possession of the Harris farm and that the stories related by Joseph were not real. However, when the judge heard the testimony of Martin Harris the judge asked for the transcript of the court proceedings, tore it up, and told them to go home and not to trouble him any more with the matter.⁶

The Harris's Conclusion

Lucy and her daughter had many early experiences that would have witnessed the truthfulness of the work. Lucy and her daughter lifted the box containing the plates and felt its weight. Lucy had a dream or vision in which she was shown the plates by an angel. She is one of a few people who had read the manuscript of the Book of Lehi. Yet, sadly, fear and doubt overpower these experiences and Lucy become antagonistic.

"I implore each of us to prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon each day. As we do so, we will be in a position to hear the voice of the spirit, to resist temptation, to overcome doubt and fear, and to receive heaven's help in our lives." President Thomas S. Monson

¹ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 82-87 for details of the lost pages of manuscript and Lucy Harris's possible involvement.

² Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, (1979), 116-17; see also Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 111-12 as retrieved from <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/16415> on 12/22/23

³ BYU Sperry Symposium, *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 52-53

⁴ Proctor and Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 156-57

⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 155-8, 160, 171, 189-90

⁶ Proctor and Proctor, *Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 189-91

Martin Harris

Witnesses Before Being a Three Witness

It also seems fitting to relate a few experiences of Martin with the plates as they relate to his first wife Lucy. Before the privileged of being shown the plates by Moroni, Martin Harris had numerous experiences with the Book of Mormon. Unlike his first wife, these experiences gave Martin strength.

After his first wife, Lucy, and their daughter had lifted the plates, Martin went to the Smith home in Manchester. He found that Joseph was not home at the time, but interrogated Emma, Joseph's parents and his siblings. He said, "I talked with them separately, that I might get the truth of the matter." He talked with each family member "about the plates ... to see if their stories agreed, and I found that they did agree."¹ This experience helped strengthen his resolve to support Joseph.

In an interview in 1853 Martin stated, "Did I not at one time hold the plates on my knee an hour and half whilst in conversation with Joseph, when we went to bury them in the woods, that the enemy might not obtain them? Yes, I did. And as many of the plates as Joseph Smith translate I handled with my hands, plate after plate."²

On another instance Martin was also allowed to lift the plates. He stated that his wife said "[the plates] were very heavy" and his daughter had "said [the plates] were about as much as she could lift." Martin then hefted the plates and stated, "I knew by the heft that they were lead or gold and I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead."³

In addition, Martin also carried the copy of Book of Mormon characters to scholars in New York City, a trip that Lucy wanted to accompany him. He wanted to convince Lucy of the truthfulness of the work and subsequently felt the weight of the lost 116 pages of manuscript. Lucy feared that Joseph was seeking to swindle Martin's money. Perhaps these suspicions seemed founded when Martin mortgaged a portion of his industrious farm as collateral to ease the publishers fears during a Palmyra boycott of the Book of Mormon. Ultimately, as Lucy's skepticism increased and Martin's desire to support the Book of Mormon increased the two were at odds. The two separated and Lucy died in 1836 at the age of 44 years.

Oliver Cowdery Shown the Plates by the Lord

Oliver Cowdery also had early experiences with the plates in the Palmyra area. Oliver boarding with the Smith family in Manchester is significant for a few reasons. First, it provided opportunity for Oliver to get familiar with David Whitmer. As time passed in Harmony Pennsylvania, Joseph's relationship with his father in law, Isaac Hale, had worn thin. Hale was about to turn Joseph and Oliver "out of doors" and Oliver petitioned David Whitmer for help.

The second significant reason is that Oliver was introduced to the rumors that had circulated about Joseph and his family. Rather than deter Oliver, these stories and rumors piqued his interest. He immediately began to petition "Father Smith" about the visions and revelations of

"behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder. ... And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity; and out of darkness." Isaiah speaking Messianically

Joseph and the plates. Though initially apprehensive, the Smiths opened up to Oliver. Joseph recorded that the “Lord appeared unto a young man by the name of Oliver Cowdery and showed unto him the plates in a vision and also the truth of the work and what the Lord was about to do through me, his unworthy servant.”⁴ This strengthened Oliver’s resolve and he determined to visit Joseph in Harmony and see what he could do to further the work of translation.

“While I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy [of] ... the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness ... And now, behold, when I had thought this, I could remember my pains no more ... and oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!”
Alma the Younger

¹ Interview by Joel Tiffany as found in *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 26; see also page 33 footnote

² Interview with David B. Dille, “Additional Testimony of Martin Harris (one of the Three Witnesses) to the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” *Millennial Star* 21 (20 August 1859), 545; see also *Opening the Heavens*, 133

³ Interview with David B. Dille, “Additional Testimony of Martin Harris (one of the Three Witnesses) to the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” *Millennial Star* 21 (20 August 1859), 545; see also *Opening the Heavens*, 133

⁴ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:16

Witness # 19

“Old Mr. Beaman” Lifts the Plates

May 22, 1775 to November 13, 1837 (62 Years)

Biographical Sketch. “Old Mr. Beaman” was Alvah Beaman, or “father Beaman” as he was known. He lived in Avon, New York and was acquainted with the Smiths during the early restoration. He was baptized in 1831 and moved to Kirtland, Ohio. He was called as the president of the Kirtland Elders’ Quorum. He died in 1837. He had three daughters. One daughter became a plural wife of Joseph Smith and then Brigham Young. Another married Erastus Snow, an Apostle. And the third married one of Joseph’s bodyguards who eventually became a Bishop. All three came to Utah with the main body of the Saints.

Alva Beaman Helps Joseph

Martin Harris stated that “Old Mr. Beman” told him that he lifted the plates while in the box and that “he heard them jink, but was not permitted to see them.”¹

Parley P. Pratt recorded that “[Alvah] had been intimate with Joseph long before the first organization of the Church; had assisted him to preserve the plates of the Book of Mormon from the enemy, and had at one time had them concealed under his own hearth.”² Church meetings were held at the Beaman residence in New York.³

Alvah’s daughter Mary Adeline Noble stated, “As soon as it was noised around [Palmyra] that there was a golden Bible found ... the minds of the people became so excited and it arose at such a pitch that a mob collected together to search the house of Father Joseph Smith to find the records[. My father was there at the time and assisted in concealing the plates in a box in a secluded place where no one could find them although he did not see them.”⁴

Martin Harris related on another occasion, “when [the plates] were taken from [the Smith’s cooper’s shop], they were put into an old ... box. Old Mr. Beman sawed off the ends, making the box the right length to put them in, and when they went in he said he heard them jink...”⁵

Father Beaman remained a faithful friend to Joseph and a faithful Church member throughout his life. He briefly moved from New York to Kirtland until preparations could be made for him to move to Zion, Jackson County Missouri at the advice of Joseph.⁶ He was appointed to the High Council in Zion and then became the President of the Elders Quorum in Zion.⁷ Joseph asked him to select individuals for a second quorum of the Seventies and he provided Joseph with a list of 70 elders.⁸ Alvah Beaman died faithful in the Church.⁹

“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” Jesus

¹ *Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 53

² *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 117-18

³ *History of the Church* 2:43-44

⁴ Mary Adeline Noble reminiscence, circa 1836, in Joseph B. Noble reminiscences as found on <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6348ef28-c351-40f7-8f92-bc78bbb93ddc/0/22> page 23 as retrieved on 2/7/24

⁵ Joel Tiffany Interview, “Mormonism—No. II,” Tiffany’s Monthly 5 (August 1859), 167

⁶ *History of the Church* 2:307, 316

⁷ *History of the Church* 2:367, 370

⁸ *History of the Church* 2:388, 391

⁹ *History of the Church* 2:526

Witness # 20

Katharine Smith Lifts the Pages of the Plates

July 28, 1813 to February 2, 1900 (86 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Katharine is the daughter of Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith. She was 7 years old at the time of the first vision and grew up experiencing the Restoration. She was the last surviving sibling of Joseph Smith and was often visited by inquirers, converts and news reporters. She was noted for her vivid memory despite her age.

In 1831 she migrated with the Fayette Branch to Kirtland Ohio. Due to the testimony and faith of her mother the group experienced many miracles. She married an enthusiastic convert and young lawyer named Jenkins Salisbury. Jenkins marched in Zion's Camp and eventually became a member of the original Quorum of the Seventy in 1835. They moved to Far West Missouri and then to Nauvoo.

Because Katherine was Joseph's sister her family became targets of persecution. They had threatening notes left tacked to their door. Her children were persecuted. Her youngest son, Frederick reported that the other kids would throw away his lunch and his at him. It became so bad he reported, "I had not obtained an education on account of the persecution."¹ Solomon, another son, recalled, "I received the most ill treatment; there I was called a Mormon, boycotted, abused, slandered. I received no invitations to parties of any time ... I was an outcast."² Frederick and Lucy were fired at by two men. A bullet grazed Frederick's neck and another struck Lucy's braid. After the two men were acquitted Alvin, Katherine's 2nd son attempted defend his siblings. Alvin approached one of the men and during the fight Alvin was stabbed in the arm, chest and forehead. He died shortly after.³

Katharine and September 1827

Katharine, Joseph's younger sister, was 14 years old when Joseph brought home the plates. As such she was an eyewitness to many key events of Church history. She stated that on the day Joseph brought the plates home in 1827 he passed them to her⁴ and she helped him set the plates on the table.⁵

Katherine later told of the disappointment she felt when Joseph brought home the plates and the joy of reading the Book of Mormon. She wrote to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ (RLDS) church's Newspaper saying, "We had supposed that when he should bring [the plates] home, the whole family would be allowed to see them, but he said it was forbidden of the Lord. They could be seen only by those who were chosen to bear their testimony to the world. We had therefore to be content until [the plates] were translated and we could have the book to read. Many times when I have read its sacred pages, I have wept like a child, while the Spirit has borne witness with my spirit to its truth."⁶ Despite having seen the covered plates, lifted its' pages through the cloth, and lifted the plates, her testimony was based upon the Holy Ghost testifying to her if the truthfulness of the plates.

Katharine recorded that once Joseph saw Moroni "our house was searched all around; and our field and our wheat stack were searched. The mob was around our house nearly every night ... until we went to Pennsylvania we had to keep watch for the enemy."⁷

Young Katharine and the Plates

Katharine, being 8 years younger than Joseph grew up in the persecution of Palmyra. Though Joseph had counseled the family not to tell people about the plates, 14 year old Katharine showed Caroline Rockwell, a close friend, the locked chest containing the plates and the place where the plates were hidden.⁸

On one occasion she was cleaning when she saw the plates covered on the table. She picked up the "package" and "rippled her fingers up the edge of the plates and felt that they were metal plates and

"The Lord has been operating for centuries to prepare the way for the coming forth of ... that Book [the Book of Mormon] from the bowels of the earth, to be published to the world, to show to the inhabitants thereof that he still lives, and that he will, in the latter days, gather his elect from the four corners of the earth. . . . The Lord has dictated and directed the whole of this, for the bringing forth, and establishing of his Kingdom in the last days." Brigham Young

heard the tinkle of sound that they made.”⁹ She also testified that she lifted the covered plates on multiple other occasions.¹⁰

On another occasion Katharine heard a commotion outside and opened the door just as Joseph burst through. He told her to “take these [plates] quickly and hide them.” Not sure what to do, she took the plates and jumped into a bed with her 24 year old sister Sophronia. They pulled the covers over the plates and pretended to be asleep. When the mob entered the room they did not disturb the girls with the plates between them.¹¹

Katharine Smith Conclusion

Because she was Joseph’s sister Katharine had many experiences that most early Saints did not have. She had multiple experiences with Joseph, visions, and the plates. She lifted the plates 3 times. Yet, despite all these experiences her testimony was based on the hours she spent reading and the Holy Ghost confirming to her of its truthfulness.

Witness # 21

Sophronia Smith Hides the Plates

May 16, 1803 to July 22, 1876 (73 Years)

Biographical Sketch. Sophronia was baptized probably in 1830. Sophronia married her first husband, Calvin Stoddard and moved to Macedon Ohio. In early 1830s Joseph and others made the Stoddard home somewhat of a mission headquarters for the area preaching and baptizing in their home and in the area. Calvin’s church activity would vacillate until his death in 1836. As a single mother she lost 20,000 shares in the Kirtland Safety Society. Sophronia married a new convert named William McCleary in 1838. In 1847 Sophronia’s second husband was determined to follow Brigham and the Twelve to Utah. However, while Sophronia and the children were in Iowa William McCleary returned to Nauvoo and passed away unexpectedly leaving Sophronia stranded. She bounced from place to place and eventually passed away in Eastern Hancock county Illinois.

Though, as a Smith she had many opportunities to experience the Restoration, the only reported experience of Sophronia with the plates was when Joseph heard a commotion outside the Smith home in Manchester NY. Joseph asked Katherine to take the plates and hide them. Katherine ran to the bedroom off the kitchen of the Smith home and jumped into bed with her older sister Sophronia. They pulled the covers over the plates and pretended to sleep. The mob came into the room but did not disturb the two girls.

Witness # 22

William Smith Thumbs Through the Plates

March 13, 1811 to November 13, 1893 (82 Years)

Biographical Sketch. In 1820 Joseph was partial to the Methodists and Lucy, Sophronia, Hyrum and Samuel Harrison were proselyted to the Presbyterians,¹² William reported staying aloof “paying no attention to religion of any kind, for which I received frequent lectures from my mother and brother [Joseph].”¹³ William was baptized by David Whitmer and confirmed by Oliver Cowdery in June 1830. He participated in Zion’s Camp and was ordained a member of the original Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹⁴ He was appointed General Patriarch of the Church in May 1845. In 1842 William defeated anti-Mormon Whig candidate Thomas Sharp from Warsaw for the Hancock County seat in the Illinois House of Representatives. He

associated with a few religions after his excommunication, including James Strang, Lyman Wight, Martin Harris, brief stints with the LDS church before joining the RLDS church.

William was remembered as “well built and of a powerful physique, standing 6 foot 3 in his stocking feet”¹⁵ and “a man of unusual size and strength,”¹⁶ even in his old age.¹⁷ William enjoyed much success [in preaching] because of his dazzling manner of speech.”¹⁸ William’s son noted his remarkable preaching skill. He recalled, “[my father] was a forceful preacher of righteousness, and my heart was made to burn within me whenever I heard a discourse delivered by him.”¹⁹ And throughout his activity in the Church he was frequently called on to preach and had great success as a missionary. Despite a nonreligious disposition as a youth²⁰ William was always “studying on religious subjects and writing down his thoughts and experiences.”²¹

William was marked by openness toward African Americans. Leading up to the Civil War, William ordained two individuals to the Melchizedek Priesthood and left one in charge of the Boston Branch. He was a proponent for ordaining African Americans to the priesthood. He said, “The Constitution of these United States makes no distinction in the human family; all men are born free and equal and in the pursuit of happiness are free and equal. Inspiration has pronounced this to be a just law. ... If such are the facts founded upon a just law, by what authority have we the right to say that a colored man has no right to be ordained to all the powers of the priesthood, necessary for the building up the church of Christ in any part of the world, among any race of people, whether black or white.”²²

Though at times he had a strained relationship with Joseph and his brothers William was heartbroken at the news of the martyrdom. He said, “I am but a youth and alone and who will be my friend here on earth.”²³

Joseph Brings the Plates Home

Joseph’s younger brother William also had a front row seat to the Restoration. William recorded that when Joseph related the instruction of Moroni to his family, “the whole family was melted to tears and believed all he said.”²⁴ William was just 16 years old when Joseph brought home the plates.

The day Joseph brought the plates home he handed them to Katharine and she helped him place the plates on a nearby table. Joseph was frantic having been accosted by three different assailants, but he could tell that his father and William wanted to look at the plates. In a sermon William reported, “Father said, ‘What, Joseph, can we not see them?’ ‘No. ... I intend to be faithful this time. For I was forbidden to show them until they are translated, but you can feel them.’ We handled them and could tell what they were. They were not quite as large as this Bible. Could tell whether they were round or square. Could raise the leaves this way (raising a few leaves of the Bible before him). One could easily tell that they were not a stone, hewn out to deceive, or even a block of wood. Being a mixture of gold and copper, they were much heavier than stone, and very much heavier than wood.”²⁵

William stated that at the time their father, Samuel and Hyrum also hefted the plates while covered with a “tow frock,” “We did not care to have him break the commandment and suffer as he did before. We all had the most implicit confidence in what he said. He was a truthful boy. Father and mother believed him, why should not the children? I suppose if he had told crooked stories about other things, we might have doubted his word about the plates, but Joseph was a truthful boy. That father and mother believed his report and suffered persecution for that belief, shows that he was truthful. We never doubted his word for a moment.”²⁶

William Talks about the Translation

William stated that on the day Joseph received the plates he also received the Urim and Thummim. Joseph would place the stones in a hat “to exclude the light.” “The plates [were] lying near by covered up.” He would use one eye at a time which would help Joseph translate for longer periods of time. Joseph “read off the translation, which appeared in the stone by the power of God.” “And thus, letter by letter, word by word, sentence by sentence, the whole book was translated.”²⁷

“By all accounts, William was a complex person who wrestles with insecurities and fits of passion that sometimes overrode his noble desires and family loyalty. But I also began to discover his vast contributions to the upbuilding of Mormonism, including his missionary success, his persuasiveness as a gifted orator, his propensity to accurately portend the future, and his charismatic leadership.” Kyle R. Walker, *Author of William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet*.

William Testifies of the Plates

Later in life William wrote that he had “hefted the plates as they lay on the table” and “had thumbed through the cloth and ascertained that they were thin sheets of metal.”²⁸ He also stated, “I was permitted to lift them as they laid in a pillowcase; but I could not see them, as it was contrary to the commands he had received.”²⁹ He estimated that the plates weighed about 60 pounds³⁰ and that they were bound with rings on the back.³¹

“...the translation of the record as found by the brother as stated, is also true, and in no other way did Joseph Smith compile, or compose the Book of Mormon only as stated by the gift and power of God. The story that Joseph Smith made up his revelation of the Book of Mormon out of a romance written by one Solomon Spaulding, like many other falsehoods told on the character of the Prophet, by the deceitful and lying stupidity of the people of the age in which we live, must fall to the ground with the rest of their refuse of lies.”³² William gave extensive description of the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate indicating that he possibly saw the artifacts, though he also shed doubt as well.³³

At times Joseph and William had a strained relationship. However, William remembered having a believing heart from the very beginning of the restoration, even if his actions always didn’t reflect his dedication. He recalled, “I always believed he was a servant of God, ever since his statement [about Moroni’s visit].”³⁴ He further reminisced, “I fully believed all the circumstances as I have related them, with regard to the visions and revelations which my brother Joseph said he had received and seen; being young and naturally high spirited, I did not see the necessity of yielding obedience to the requirements of the gospel.”³⁵

William Smith Conclusion

As a member of the Smith family, William witnessed many early events in Church History. He grappled with being the brother of a Prophet and didn’t always see eye to eye.³⁶ However, he provided some information relevant to the restoration. He serves as a witness that the plates were real and that Joseph truly did have the plates.

¹ Frederick V. Salisbury to Audentia Anderson, 2 June 1930 as found in *United by Faith*, 329

² Solomon J. Salisbury, “Old Nauvoo Days Recalled,” 155

³ See *United by Faith*, 331

⁴ See “The Three Sisters of Joseph Smith,” *Saints Herald*, 11 January 1954, 12

⁵ *The Saints* 1:41

⁶ Letter of Katherine Salisbury, 10 March 1886, *Saints’ Herald* 33, (1886), 260

⁷ Mary Salisbury Hancock, “The Three Sisters of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Saints’ Herald*, 11 January 1954, 36

⁸ Caroline Rockwell was the sister of Orrin Porter Rockwell. See *United by Faith*, 313, 341 footnote 19

⁹ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 53

¹⁰ Kyle Walker, “Katherine Smith Salisbury’s Recollections of Joseph’s Meeting with Moroni,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002), 6 and footnote 5

¹¹ Mary Salisbury Hancock (Katharine’s Granddaughter), “The Three Sisters of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *The Saints’ Herald*, 11 January 1954):36

¹² Joseph Smith History 1:7, 8

¹³ *William Smith on Mormonism, A True Account of the Book of Mormon*, Lamoni Iowa, 1883, 10

¹⁴ Joseph and William had a tenuous relationship most of their lives. Joseph stated, William was like a “fierce lion [who] in the pride of his heart ... will neglect the more weightier matters until his soul is bound down with sorrow” (HC 1:467). They experienced strife (HC 2:338-44; JSP J1:129-135; HC 2:294-98; 2:334-35). Oliver Cowdery later recalled that he, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris had selected Brigham’s brother Phineas Young as a Twelve Apostle, but had selected William at the “urgent request of Joseph (see Historical Introduction, *Minutes, Discourse, and Blessings, 14-15 February 1835*, as found on Josephsmithpapers.org). David Whitmer stated that “Joseph insisted that his brother William Smith should be put in [the Quorum of 12 Apostles] as it was the only way which he could be saved” (Zenas Gurley, “Questions Asked of David Whitmer,” 14 January 1885

¹⁵ See William’s son Edson Don Carlos statement in *Unity by Faith*, 251

¹⁶ Lucy Mack Smith statement as found in *Unity by Faith*, 263

¹⁷ Discussion as found in *Unity by Faith*, 288

¹⁸ *Unity by Faith*, 263

¹⁹ *Unity by Faith*, 287

²⁰ *Unity by Faith*, 248

²¹ *Unity by Faith*, 288

²² “Extracts from Letters,” *The Saints’ Herald* 39, no 4

²³ *Unity by Faith*, 272

²⁴ *William Smith on Mormonism, A True Account of the Book of Mormon*, Lamoni Iowa, 1883,9

²⁵ William Smith, “Sermon in the Saints’ Chapel,” Deloitte, Iowa, June 8, 1884, *the Saints’ Herald* 31 (1884): 643-44

²⁶ “William Smith’s Story Concerning the Plates of the Book of Mormon,” *The Instructor*, vol 75, no 1, (January 1940), 6

²⁷ See James Murdock, “The Mormons and their Prophet,” *Hartford and New Haven Connecticut Congressional Observer* 2, 3 July 1841:1; “William Smith on Mormonism,” 80; “The Old Soldier’s Testimony,” 1 May

²⁸ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, (2015), 53

²⁹ See Jeffry Marsh, *The Eyewitness History of the Church*, (2005) 143

³⁰ P. Wilhelm Poulson to the editors of the Deseret News, 31 July 1878, Deseret News, 6 August 1878

³¹ Interview of William Smith with E. C. Briggs and J. W. Peterson, *Zion’s Ensign*, 13 January 1894, 6

³² William Smith on Mormonism, *A True Account of the Book of Mormon*, Lamoni Iowa, 1883, 28

³³ See Early Mormon Documents, 1:508-09; William describes the artifacts in great detail as if he had first hand experience.

³⁴ “William B. Smith, Experience and Testimony,” *Saints Herald* 30 (9 June 1883), 388

³⁵ *William Smith on Mormonism*, 10, 15 as found in *United by Faith*, 250

³⁶ Joseph noted in a blessing that William was like a “fierce lion” and that in “the pride of his heart” he will neglect the weightier things of the Gospel (*JSP Journals* 1:23-24). In December 1835 William held a “debate” in his home. As the debate escalated into contention Joseph asked for it to stop, which offended William and set in motion ill feelings for several weeks that arose to a physical altercation. William attacked Joseph while he was taking off his coat. The altercation left Joseph unable to put on his own coat. The ill feelings were finally resolved in a family meeting held on New Year’s day 1836. To further complicate the matter, when other apostles were censured for their actions (Orson Hyde in particular) they viewed their chastisement harsher than Williams and the William received special treatment by Joseph and the other apostles. (see *History of the Church* 2:295-98; 2:334-35; Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 1:77-81; 1:120-121, 124, 125, 128, 130-134, 141).

Witness # 23

Emma Smith's Experiences with the Plates

July 10, 1804 to April 30, 1879 (74 Years Old)

Biographical Sketch. Emma was the 7th of 9 children born to Isaac and Elizabeth Hale. Isaac was an industrious man and had built wealth as a merchant, hunter, exporter and inn keeper. Emma was well educated and later taught school. She first met Joseph in 1825 while Joseph boarded at the Hale home. They courted for several months, but due to Joseph's lack of resources and education Isaac Hale did not approve. Joseph and Isaac's relationship was further strained by rumors of Joseph's treasure hunting and stories of revelation through peep stones. They eloped in January 1827. Emma has been characterized by a "quick wit and pleasant personality," "intelligence," "fearless integrity," "kindness of heart," "benevolent," "motherly in nature to young people," "very high spirited," "courage," "patience," "commanding presence," and an "innate refinement."¹ Joseph often referred to "[his] affectionate wife [Emma]."

Emma's marriage to Joseph was marked by difficulty and hardship. She was baptized in Colesville NY in June 1830. Joseph had dammed a small creek. However, a mob collected and broke down the dam in the night. Joseph awoke early and dammed the creek again. As Emma and 12 others were being baptized a mob harassed the Saints. The persecution increased forcing the small group to retreat to Joseph Knight Sr's home. Before Joseph could confirm Emma and the others he was arrested to protect his life. Joseph endured 46 lawsuits,² was arrested 42 times,³ and was involved in 200 criminal cases as a judge, defendant or prosecutor.⁴ Emma endured it all with Joseph and then had to pick up the pieces. During their 17 year marriage Emma moved 18 times and lived in 13 different homes.⁵ In 1831 she left Harmony PA. She said goodbye to her mother, father and siblings, never seeing them again. She was pained to leave her family and often wrote in hopes that they would soften toward the Church and join her. She gave birth to 9 children and the Smiths adopted 2 more children. Of the 11 children 6 died 14 months or younger. She will outlive another son.

A woman who served in Emma's home recalled that she would sit and look toward the Mississippi River at sunset with tears in her eyes. No one offered comfort because no one knew how to touch the depth of her sadness. One granddaughter recalled that Emma would smile with her lips, but her brown eyes never smiled. When Emma's granddaughter asked her mother Emma's granddaughter was told, "because she has a deep sorrow in her heart."⁶ A few days before Emma's death Joseph appeared in vision and invited her, "Emma, come with me, it is time for you to come with me." Emma followed him through the different rooms of an "beautiful mansion." Joseph showed her Don Carlos, a son she had lost. Emma wept with joy and yearned for her other children who she had lost. Joseph urged, "Emma, be patient and you shall have all your children." Then the Savior appeared by her side. Emma's last words in life were, "Joseph! Joseph! Joseph! I am coming."⁷

Despite these hardships Emma was involved in the Church. In July 1830 Emma was instructed by the Lord to "make a selection of sacred hymns." She was "ordained ... to expound scripture and to exhort the Church according as it shall be given thee by the Spirit." Emma was informed that she is "an elect lady, whom I have called."⁸ On March 17, 1842 Emma became the first relief society president. On that occasion Joseph instructed "concerning the Elect Lady, and showed that the elect meant to be elected to a certain work ... and that the revelation (D&C 25) was then fulfilled by Sister Emma's election to the presidency of the Society, she having previously been ordained to expound the Scriptures."⁹

Introduction

Emma was uniquely positioned in the Restoration. As the Prophet's wife she shared many highly spiritual experiences with Joseph that undoubtedly strengthened her testimony of Joseph and the

"Many are the reverberations of my mind when I contemplate for a moment the many scenes we had been called to pass through. ... [Yet] she is here ... undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affection Emma." Joseph Smith

restored Gospel. However, she also endured many hardships as the Prophet's wife. She saw the limitations of her husband but also saw the Lord utilizing Joseph to accomplish His work.

Emma related how Joseph could not pronounce the word Sariah at first. Joseph had to spell it out and Emma pronounced it. On another occasion he stopped translating as he read about the walls around Jerusalem. Emma remarked, "He had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls."¹⁰

Throughout it all Emma had experiences with the plates though she never saw the plates uncovered. Reflecting on her involvement in the early days of the Restoration, Emma concluded, "Though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired and was present during the translation of the plates, it was marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder' as much so as to anyone."¹¹ She saw his lack and it strengthened her testimony in the Book of Mormon. She declared, "It would have been improbable that a learned man could [translate]; and for one so ignorant and unlearned as [Joseph] was, it was simply impossible."¹²

Bring the Right Person

According to Joseph Knight, Joseph Smith Sr. and Katherine Smith Salisbury on the first visit of Joseph with Moroni on the Hill Cumorah in 1823, Joseph asked when he would receive the plates. Moroni's response was that if he brought the right person with him the following year then he would receive the plates. Joseph then asked the identity of the "right person," and was told that it was Alvin. Just under a month later Alvin died on 17 November 1823, causing confusion for Joseph. In 1824 Joseph was again informed that he would receive the plates the following year if he brought the right person. Joseph asked who the right person was, and was told that "the person would be made known to him at sight." In 1825, while working for Josiah Stowell Joseph was first introduced to Emma while boarding at the Hale home. When he saw Emma he understood that she was to accompany him to the Hill Cumorah.¹³ They were married in January 1827 and moved to the Smith farm in Manchester.

Just after midnight on Sep 22, 1827 Emma and Joseph went to the Hill Cumorah. While Joseph went to retrieve the plates from Moroni, Emma knelt and prayed. Joseph hid the plates in a hallowed out tree and returned home in the early morning. During her patriarchal blessing Joseph Sr. blessed Emma, "Thou shalt ever remember ... thy God in permitting thee to accompany my son when the angel delivered the record of the Nephites to his care."¹⁴

Emma as Book of Mormon Scribe

In speaking of her experiences as a scribe Emma stated, "I frequently wrote day after day, sitting at the table close by him ... dictating hours after hour with nothing between us."¹⁵ Emma was Joseph's first scribe and from the above mentioned quotations she scribed for a significant portion of the lost 116 pages of manuscript. Emma reinforced that there was no blanket or covering between Joseph and herself.

When her son Joseph III interviewed her, she definitively stated, "He had neither manuscript nor book to read from ... If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me."¹⁶ Joseph III was so convinced by his mother's sincerity that he stated, "the larger part of this labor (the translation) was done in her presence, and where she could see and know what was being done; that during no part of it did Joseph Smith have any [manuscript] or book of any kind which to read, or dictate, except the metallic plates, which she knew he had."¹⁷

She also explained the way the plates were translated. "When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. ... when he stopped for any purpose of time he would, when he commenced again, begin where he left off without any hesitation ..."¹⁸ On another occasion she said, "I know Mormonism to be the truth; and I believe the Church to have been established by divine direction. I have complete faith in it. In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day;

"What transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand on that night, my beloved Emma ... even the wife of my youth: and the choice of my heart." Joseph Smith

often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.”¹⁹

Emma also expounded on what stones were used during the translation. She told a friend, “Now, the first part my husband translated ... by use of the Urim and Thummim and that was the part that Martin Harris lost. After that he used a small stone, not exactly black, but was rather a dark color.”²⁰

Even after the Lord sent Oliver to scribe for Joseph Emma still observed the translation and continued to have experiences with the plates. Emma recorded that “Oliver Cowdery and [Joseph Smith] wrote in the room where I was at work.”²¹ She observed the way Oliver and Joseph worked and the progress of the translation.

Emma’s accounts of the translation of the plates are undervalued. She experienced the translation process unlike any other. She was both an “active participant” and an active observer; she saw the translation process as a scribe and as the wife of the prophet. Her statements reinforce many key elements. She confirmed that Joseph was uneducated and that the translation of the plates was so far beyond Joseph’s ability that she declared that “The Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it.” There was nothing between Joseph and his scribe. Joseph used the Urim and Thummim and also a small dark seer stone, which Joseph placed in a hat and pulled it close to block out the light. Joseph would dictate for long hours. When interrupted he could resume right where he left off without aid of any kind. “This was a usual thing for him to do.” He would spell difficult words. He would correct the scribe if the transcription was not written correctly without any view of what was written. This well educated, detail oriented, and wonderful witness of the Restoration testified, “I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired ... for one so ignorant and uneducated as he was, it was simply impossible.”²²

Emma’s Experience with the Plates

Emma is a very interesting witness to the Book of Mormon. As the Prophet’s wife, Emma had the greatest access and experiences with the plates in the early days. Despite this access the word of Joseph seemed to have been enough for her. Emma said, “the plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment” wrapped in a cloth.²³ “I moved [the plates] from place to place on the table as it was necessary to do my work.”²⁴ She also stated that the plates were stored in a box under their bed for months.²⁵ Joseph III stated, “My mother [Emma] told me that she ... would lift and move [the plates] when she swept and dusted the room and furniture.”²⁶

Despite having the ease of access to the plates Emma never felt to look upon the plates. She did state that she had felt the plates one time as they were on the table. She said, “I knew [Joseph] had them, and was not specially curious about them. ... I did not attempt to handle the plates, other than I have told you, nor uncover them to look at them. I was satisfied that it was the work of God, and therefore did not feel it to be necessary to do so.”²⁷ Despite the ease of access she affirmed “[I] never felt at liberty to look at them.”²⁸ When Joseph III asked if Joseph forbid his mother from “examining the plates” Emma responded, “I don’t think he did. I knew he had them, and wasn’t specifically curious about them.”²⁹

On the one occasion she felt the plates she stated, “I once felt of the plates as they lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable as thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb.”³⁰

Joseph III reported that Emma “had no doubt” that Joseph had the plates.³¹ She knew this because she saw the covered plates, moved them from place to place as she cleaned, and listened as Joseph dictated the words of the plates. That seemed to be enough for her.

Emma Testifies of the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon

Aside from his mother, there was no one who could have known Joseph and associated with him as intimately as Emma Smith.

Joseph III asked his mother, “what is your belief about the authenticity, or origin of the Book of Mormon?” Her response to that question is a firm statement in the divine origins of the Book of Mormon.

“I desire with all my heart to honor and respect my husband ... ever to live in his confidence and by acting in unison with him retain the place which God has given me by his side.” Emma Smith

Emma responded, “My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscript unless he was inspired; for when [I was] his scribe, your father would dictate hour after hour; and after returning after meals, or after interruptions he would at once begin where he had left off, without seeing the manuscript or without having any portion of it read to him. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and for one so ... unlearned as he was it was simply impossible. Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well worded letter, let alone dictate a book like the Book of Mormon, and though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translating of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, ‘a marvel and a wonder’ as much so as to anyone else.”³²

Emma Conclusion

Emma is often criticized for a few inconsistencies toward the end of Joseph’s life and the decades following. However, to criticize her ignores the nearly 2 decades of faithful Church service and strengthening support for her husband Joseph Smith. Not even our current prophet and his wife can grasp what Joseph and Emma passed through because their experiences have been so different. Rather than criticize her shortcomings, we should honor and revere her contributions.

Emma is an invaluable witness of the restoration. She had an intimate knowledge of Joseph’s shortcomings and inadequacies, yet she saw the work progressing. Emma, seeing both sides declared, “I have not the slightest doubt”³³ of the divinity of the work.

“I have never seen a woman in my life, who would endure every species of fatigue and hardship, from month to month, and from year to year, with that unflinching courage, zeal, and patience, which she has always done. ... She has been tossed upon the ocean of uncertainty. ... She has breasted the storms of persecution, and buffeted the rage of men and devils, ... which have borne down almost any other woman.” Lucy Mack Smith

¹ See “Why Did Emma Smith opt to Stay In Nauvoo?,” *Deseret News Online*, 20 August 2009 as retrieved on 6 May 2024

² Discourses of Brigham Young, 466, 468

³ James A. Cullimore, “Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet,” *BYU Devotional*, 4 January 1977

⁴ FAIR Latter Day Saints, Joseph I. Bentley, *Legal Trials of the Prophet: Joseph Smith’s Life in Court*

⁵ See “Why Did Emma Smith opt to Stay In Nauvoo?,” *Deseret News Online*, 20 August 2009 as retrieved on 6 May 2024

⁶ See Gracia N. Jones, “My Great-Great Grandmother, Emma Hale Smith,” *Ensign*, August 1992

⁷ Emma’s last words were “Joseph! Joseph! Joseph!” Joseph III reported that her final words were, “Joseph, I am coming.” See *Emma and Joseph, their Divine Mission*, 343

⁸ D&C 25:3, 7, 11

⁹ *History of the Church* 4:552-3; see also <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourses-17-march-1842/4#full-transcript> as retrieved 5/7/2024

¹⁰ Edmund C. Briggs interview of Emma Smith, “A Visit to Nauvoo, 1856,” as found in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, First Edition, 129

¹¹ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 65

¹² Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

¹³ See *Joseph Knight Reminisce*, 2; “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith,” *Historical Magazine (second series)*, vol 7, 307; “Katharine Smith Salisbury’s Talk,” *Kansas City Times*. Original sources as retrieved on 2/21/24 as found on <https://www.fullerconsideration.com/sources.php?cat=GP-TRP>

¹⁴ *Patriarchal Blessing Book*, Book 1, 4-5

¹⁵ An interview with Emma Smith by Joseph Smith III, as found in *The Coming forth of the Book of Mormon*, ____

¹⁶ Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

¹⁷ Joseph Smith III to James T. Cobb, 14 February 1879 as found in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, First Edition, 132

¹⁸ Edmund C. Briggs interview of Emma Smith, “A Visit to Nauvoo, 1856,” as found in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, First Edition, 129

¹⁹ Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

²⁰ Written 27 March 1870, the original letter is located in the Emma Smith Papers in the Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence Missouri; see *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, First Edition, 129

²¹ Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

²² Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

²³ Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

²⁴ Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

²⁵ See *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 54

²⁶ *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:546-47

²⁷ "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 290

²⁸ *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 54

²⁹ Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

³⁰ "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 290

³¹ Joseph Smith III to Mrs. E. Horton, 7 March 1900 as found in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, First Edition, 132

³² *The Saints Advocate*, October 1879

³³ Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90

Witness # 24

Isaac Hale Hefts the Box Containing the Plates

March 21, 1763 to January 11, 1836

Biographical Sketch. Isaac was a wealthy man. He was a tavern and inn keeper, merchant, farmer, and und hunter. Utilizing the Susquehanna River to ship meats and merchandize to Philadelphia and Baltimore he became a man of notoriety in the area.

Isaac Hale and Joseph Smith, Jr.

Joseph and Isaac Hale had a very strained relationship for two reasons. First, the Hales became acquainted with Joseph under unique circumstances. Joseph had been employed by Josiah Stowell as a laborer. Stowell heard of an old Spanish mine in the area and he employed Joseph and others to dig for the buried treasure. Joseph had gained a reputation as a “gold digger” because of this work. They boarded at the Hale farm and Emma’s father did not approve of the work or the reputation Joseph had gained. Also, Joseph and Emma eloped which strained the relationship of Joseph and Isaac Hale further. Hale felt that Joseph had “carried off” his daughter and married her without his permission.¹

Joseph and Emma move to Harmony Pennsylvania

A year into their marriage Joseph and Emma moved onto the Hale property to escape persecution in Palmyra that had increased due to the Gold Plates for the peace and quiet along the Susquehanna River. Hale wanted to see the plates in order to put his mind at ease. Joseph could not allow him to look on the plates, but allow him to hold the box containing the plates. With skepticism Hale recorded, “I was allowed to feel the width of the box, and they gave me to understand that the book of plates was then in the box—into which, however, I was not allowed to look.” Sadly this experience did little to ease the tensions. Because Joseph used the Urim and Thummim to translate, an activity that was similar to treasure seeking in the mind of Isaac Hale, Joseph was required by Hale to remove the plates from his house and they were hidden in the woods. When Hale asked if he could see the plates he was told that he could not. Hale asked Joseph who could see the plates and Joseph reportedly responded “a little child,” meaning those who had faith and humility as a little child. This answer offended Hale who declared, “I considered the whole of it a delusion and advised them to abandon it.” He became more embittered and resolved, “I conscientiously believe ... that the whole ‘Book of Mormon’ is a silly fabrication of falsehood and wickedness, got up for speculation (getting rich quick by deception) and with a design to dupe the credulous and unwary—and in order that the fabricators might live upon the spoils of those who swallow the deception.”^{2 3}

Things deteriorated to the point that Joseph recorded, “my wife’s father was about to turn me out of doors and I had not where to go and I cried unto the Lord that he would provide for me to accomplish the work whereunto he had commanded me.”⁴ Oliver rekindled his friendship with David Whitmer, whom he had met while boarding with the Smiths in Manchester New York. And they moved to Fayette New York on the Whitmer farm.

“I would that ye should come unto Christ who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him.” Nephi

Witness #25, Joseph McKune Sr.

June 16, 1792 to August 25, 1861

Biographical Sketch. Joseph McKune was a resident of Harmony Pennsylvania, neighbor to the Hales and relative of Isaac Hale. He was familiar with Joseph and Emman during the time they lived on the Hale family property.

His grandchild reported, “My grandfather was once privileged to take in his hands a pillowcase in which the supposed saintly treasure [the Book of Mormon] was wrapped and feel through the cloth that it had leaves. From the size and weight of the book, Mr. McKune supposed that in dimensions it closely resembled an ordinary Bible in print of those days.”⁵

Like Isaac Hale, this experience did little to produce the faith necessary for Joseph McKune to be baptized and join the Church.

"And if men will come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be bumble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them." Ether

¹ “Joseph Smith’s Susquehanna Years,” *Ensign*, February 2001

² Isaac Hale Statement as found in *The Susquehanna Register and Northern Pennsylvanian*, May 1, 1834 as found on <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/856> as retrieved on 12/22/23

³ Isaac Hale’s son Alva similarly stated, “He (Smith) was deceived himself but did not intend to deceive others;—that he intended to quite the business, (of peeping) and labor for his livelihood.” That afterwards, Smith told him, he should see the plates ... and accordingly at the time specified by Smith, he (Hale) “called to see the plates, but Smith did not show them ... He further states that he knows Joseph Smith Jr. to be an imposter, and a liar, and knows Martin Harris to be a liar likewise.” (See Eber Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 268 as found in *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition, 165-66)

⁴ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:16

⁵ *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:355 and footnote 33

Witness #26

Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery, A Cheerful Observer of the Translation

January 22, 1815 to January 7, 1892

Biographical Sketch. On April 18, 1830 15 year old Elizabeth was baptized; she was one of the first baptisms. In 1832 Elizabeth and Oliver Cowdery were married by Parley P. Pratt. They had 6 children, but, sadly only one daughter, Maria Louise lived to adulthood. Elizabeth was described by David Whitmer's great granddaughter as "sympathetic, practical, resourceful and a fountain of fun."¹ As the wife of Oliver Elizabeth faced initial scrutiny as the wife of a Church leader, then persecution in Missouri by local ruffians, and eventually great difficulty from Church members as the Whitmers withdrew their membership, many times being driven from her home. She lived with her siblings until Maria married. Elizabeth lived with her daughter until her death. Elizabeth and her daughter died within days of each other.

Introduction

Though Elizabeth never stated that she saw, lifted or interacted with the plates she is included as a witness for 3 reasons. First, when Joseph arrived at the Whitmer farm in Fayette, Elizabeth was 14 years old. She was very aware of what was transpiring in her home. She was old enough to understand the importance of the work. Second, she witnessed the translation process firsthand and was in awe of it. Third, she was closely associated with the 3 and 8 Witnesses. Her brother David was one of the 3 Witnesses. Her brothers Christian, Peter Jr., Jacob Whitmer, and John Whitmer were 4 of the 8 Witnesses. She married Oliver Cowdery, one of the 3 Witnesses. Hiram Page married her sister and was one of the 8 Witnesses. And her mother was shown the plates by an angel. Combined these make Elizabeth a very important witness of the Restoration and the Book of Mormon.²

Elizabeth, A Cheerful Observer

William E. McLellin traveled to Richmond Missouri in 1870. McLellin obtained written statement from Elizebeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery stating, "I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner of Joseph Smith's translating the book of Mormon. He translated the most of it at my father's house. And I often sat by and saw and heard them translate for hours together. Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light, and then [read the words?] as they appeared before him."³ Emma Smith similarly stated that she scribed for Joseph "hour after hour with nothing between us."⁴

"[W]e marvel that the Prophet Joseph Smith worked completely without referring to any other sources. None of the twelve people who either participated or merely observed mentioned Joseph's having any reference materials present. (The twelve people were Emma Smith, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, David Whitmer, William Smith, Lucy Mack Smith, Michael Morse, Sarah Hellor Conrad, Isaac Hale, Reuben Hale, and Joseph Knight Sr.) Since the Prophet dictated openly, these individuals would have been aware of any suspicious behavior or procedures." Elder Neal A. Maxwell

¹ See Ronald Romig, "Elizabeth An Whitmer Cowdery: A Historical Reflection of her Life," *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 329

² See Ronald Romig, "Elizabeth An Whitmer Cowdery: A Historical Reflection of her Life," *Days Never to be Forgotten*, 333

³ William E. McLellin, "My Dear Friends," 15 February 1870 as found in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844*, first edition, 165

⁴ Joseph Smith III, "The Last Testimony of Sister Emma," 289

Conclusion of Informal Witnesses

For Emma Smith, Katherine Smith and William Smith it was enough to see the shape under a cloth. For Martin Harris, it was enough to heft a box which Joseph said contained the plates to thrust himself fully into the work of translation, even at great personal, financial and familial expense. For Mr. Alvah Beaman hefting the plates was enough to win his support of Joseph throughout his life.

Sadly, for Emma's father and brothers they could not reach that necessary childlike faith. When Isaac Hale hefted the box he became more skeptical and more cynical of Joseph, questioning not only the means by which the Book of Mormon was translated but also the motivation of translation.

I included Isaac Hale, the father of Emma, as a witness to the Book of Mormon, not because he faithfully promoted the Book, but because we can learn a valuable lesson from his experience with the unseen plates hefted in a box. It is not so much about the experience itself that brings us in contact with the Book of Mormon as it is our response to that experience. For Emma, Katherine, William, and so many of us it is enough to heft the plates by reading the pages of the Book of Mormon. However, for Isaac Hale and others their physical sight, or lack thereof, prevents their spiritual eyes from seeing. They adopted a "seeing is believing" attitude.

We too are faced with a similar predicament. We take the Book of Mormon in our own hands and read its pages. For many, studying its pages is enough to convince us of its truthfulness.

The Book of Mormon is Christ centered. By careful study we too can feel the witness of the Holy Ghost helping us see the divinity of the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery was told that the greatest witness we can have is a witness from God.

Through deep, meditative study of the Book of Mormon we can understand the doctrine of salvation better, we can learn deeper and more fully about the Book of Mormon, and we can draw closer to our Heavenly Father in knowledge and characteristics. I thank our Father in Heaven for this divine book.

Witnesses of Moroni

Moroni is a key figure in the end of the Book of Mormon. Though he lived thousands of years ago he was also an integral figure in the Restoration as well.

Before we discuss Moroni as a witness of the plates, a dive into the existence of Moroni is essential. He wrote and abridged on the plates. He delivered the plates to Joseph. He was a real person. 16 individuals had some experience with Moroni. Below is a brief summary of their experiences.

1. Joseph Smith

Much has already been written about Joseph's experiences with Moroni. The number of times Moroni appeared to and taught Joseph is impossible to know because Joseph never kept exact records of his divine appearances. However, one historian documented at least 22 times Moroni appeared to Joseph.¹

2. Oliver Cowdery, 3. Martin Harris, and 4. David Whitmer, July 1829

As the Three Witnesses they too saw Moroni. The experiences of these have been documented already.

Joseph, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer, June 1829

David Whitmer had come to help Joseph and Emma² move to the Whitmer farm in Fayette New York. Oliver had been working with Joseph on the translation and living with the Smiths in Harmony Pennsylvania. However, persecution and animosity had arisen between Emma's family and Joseph. As they traveled "in the middle of the prairie, all of a sudden, there appeared a man walking along the road, and David said he raised his hat and rubbed his brow as if he were a little warm and said good morning to them and they said good morning." Oliver and David wondered where he had come from. David said that he "was carrying something of considerable weight." Joseph told Oliver and David to ask him if he would like a ride. The man responded, "No, I am just going over to Cumorah." David said, "Cumorah? What does that mean? ... I thought I knew this country all around here, but I never heard of Cumorah..." When David looked back on the man he had vanished. Joseph informed Oliver and David that the man was Moroni and they had a good long talk about it when they arrived in Fayette.³

David Whitmer described Moroni as "a very pleasant nice looking old man. ... He was about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches tall and heavy set, his face was as large; he was dressed in a suit of brown woolen clothes; his hair and beard were white ..." ⁴

5. Mary Musselman Whitmer, June 1829

With the arrival of Joseph, Emma, and Oliver Mary Whitmer's work increased considerably. She often felt tired and overworked. Her grandson recorded that the Angel Moroni appeared as she went to milk the cows in the evening. He told her that if she continued faithful she would be blessed. She was filled with "unexpressible joy and satisfaction." He then showed her the plates and turned over the plates, "leaf by leaf" and showed her the engraved characters. He then vanished. This experience strengthened her resolve to take care of the temporal needs of the Smiths and Oliver Cowdery.⁵

6. Lucy Harris, Fall 1828

Martin Harris' first wife also had the privilege of seeing Moroni. She was worried that Martin was being swindled out of money and that he was not attending to his duties on the farm.

"Every Latter-Day Saint should make the study of this book a lifetime pursuit. Otherwise he is placing his soul in jeopardy and neglecting that which could give spiritual and intellectual unity to his life." President Ezra Taft Benson

Martin Harris became so committed to the work of translating that he even missed his daughter's wedding.⁶ Lucy was concerned and often bitterly and actively impeded the work of translation.

One night, she asked Joseph if he was telling a lie about the plates and if he would swear before God that he truly had them. When he responded that he did have the plates she stated that if she could get a witness she would believe and that she would help with the translation.

That night she went to bed and Moroni appeared and reprimanded her for "disputing the servant of the Lord." He showed her the plates with the charge to "look upon [the plates] and believe." She arose and went to the Smiths and "described the record minutely." She then gave Joseph \$28.⁷ Sadly, this conviction did not last and she pursued every means to defame and prevent Joseph from his work.

7. W. W. Phelps, 8. Rhoda and 9. John P. Greene⁸

Evidently, W. W. Phelps often related a story of seeing Moroni, which brought tears to his eyes. While traveling to Far West, W. W. Phelps became lost and slept out on the prairie. He was hungry and his horse needed water. As he traveled he came across a 2 pieces of bread, heavily buttered wrapped in a white linen cloth held together with 6 pins. A man suddenly appeared and guided W. W. Phelps' horse to water and gave him directions to Far West.

Once W. W. Phelps arrived in Far West Joseph asked him if anything out of the ordinary had happened. Phelps related the story. John P. Green was present and related that an older man had approached his house as he and his wife Rhoda⁹ were sitting down for lunch. His wife had just buttered 2 pieces of bread. Rhoda asked if the older gentleman was hungry. He man responded that he was fine, but that he had a friend who was in need of food. Rhoda wrapped up the bread in a white linen cloth with 6 pins and gave the man the package.

Upon hearing both men relate their experiences, Joseph smiled and exclaimed, "And you didn't know that that was Moroni!"¹⁰

10. Heber C. Kimball, June 1868

The night before he died President Heber C. Kimball saw the Angel Moroni. A friend reported, "At family prayers, just a little while before his [Heber C. Kimball] death, he remarked that the angel Moroni had visited him the night before and informed him that his work on this earth was finished and he would soon be taken." Heber died June 22, 1868.¹¹

11. Oliver Granger, 1836

His daughter recorded that shortly after hearing the missionaries preach Oliver Granger's mind became "exercised." As he pondered the Book Oliver Granger received a visit from Moroni telling him the Book of Mormon was true and to kneel and pray. Oliver knelt with Moroni and another angel. He was instructed to repeat the words of the prayer as Moroni stated them. Moroni told him that he could ask anything and it would be granted. Oliver asked "to know when he was approved of God. This "sign" lasted until his death as he prayed.¹²

12. Hyrum Smith, July 1829

According to a journal entry by a faithful member Hyrum Smith went with Joseph and Oliver Cowdery to the Hill Cumorah when they went to return the plates to the angel Moroni.¹³

13. Harrison Burgess, date unknown

While speaking to a congregation he bore testimony that he knew the Book of Mormon was true. "The next day Something seemed to whisper to me, 'Do you know the Book of Mormon is true?' My mind became perplexed and darkened, and I was so tormented in spirit that I left my work and returned into the wood. The misery and distress that I there experienced cannot

"The first visitation of Moroni came in answer to prayer. So came the First Vision. The Lord is ready to give, but he requires that his children ask. It would not be natural or wise to force blessings on anyone. The power of prayer is inestimable." Elder John A. Widstoe 101

be described. The tempter all the wiles seemed to say, ‘Do you know the Book of Mormon is true?’ “I remained in this situation for two hours. Finally, I resolved to know by exercising faith similar to ... the brother of Jared ... whether I had proclaimed the truth or not, and commenced praying to God of heaven for a testimony ... Suddenly, a glorious personage appeared clothed in white stood before me and exhibited to my view the plates from which the Book of Mormon was taken.”^{14 15}

14. John Taylor, date unknown

John Taylor was a highly spiritual individual who reported that “often when alone and sometimes in company, I heard sweet, soft, melodious music as if performed by angelic or supernatural beings.” A biographer recorded, “when but a small boy he saw, in vision, an angel in heaven, holding a trumpet to his mouth, sounding a message to the nations. The impact of this vision, he didn’t understand until later in life.”¹⁶ The angel in heaven that John Taylor saw matches the Angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation, tribe, language and people.”¹⁷ This angel is generally accepted as Moroni.¹⁸

15. Luke Johnson, date unknown

Brigham Young testified that Luke Johnson saw in vision “the angel of God” and was permitted to see the plates and handle them. “He conversed with him [Moroni] as he would with one of his friends.”^{19 20}

16. Zerah Pulsipher, Date Unknown (possible)

While he was thrashing wheat in his barn Zerah saw a light which caused him to stop his work. A few minutes later he saw another light and then saw “the angels with the Book of Mormon in their hands in the attitude of showing it to me saying, ‘This is the great revelation of the last days which all things spoke of by the prophets must be fulfilled.’”²¹ “The vision was so open and plain that I began to rejoice exceedingly so that I walked the length of my barn crying, ‘Glory, Hallelujah to the God and the Lamb forever.”²² In General Conference, “Elder Zerah Pulsipher ... bore a testimony of having seen a vision when an angel appeared unto him, having a Book of Mormon in his hand.”²³ Though he doesn’t give clear indication that Moroni was present, Zerah at least had an experience with angels and the Book of Mormon.

Witness # 27

Moroni, “I ... Will Not Deny the Christ, Wherefore, I Wander”

Biographical Sketch. Moroni was born in the middle of the 4th century bc. He entered a military career and commanded perhaps as many as 10,000 soldiers.²⁴ Because Moroni would not deny his testimony of Jesus Christ he was forced to wander alone for 16 years until his death.²⁵ He possibly dedicated various sites for temples in the United States.²⁶

Moroni is a “glorified, resurrected being.”²⁷ Though Joseph was tutored by numerous angels throughout his lifetime, Moroni seems to be his main teacher and instructor; this is especially true in his formative years. Joseph was visited at least 22 documented times by

“O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss. O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!”
Mormon

Moroni.²⁸ The Lord stated “I have sent [Moroni] unto you [Joseph Smith] to reveal the Book of Mormon ... to whom I have committed the keys of the record of the stick of Ephriam.”²⁹

Introduction

We often do not think of Moroni as a witness to the Book of Mormon, yet he testified of the Book of Mormon in two different dispensations. One of the last things Moroni did after reading the countless plates and histories of the Nephites, was to engrave the title page to the Book of Mormon. He lays out the purpose of the Book of Mormon and the inclusion of the plates of Ether. 1) to show the great things that the Lord has done, 2) to know of the covenants of the Lord, 3) that we are not cast off forever, and 4) to know that Jesus is the Christ and that he will manifest himself to all nations.

The last verse of the Book of Mormon, written by Moroni states, “And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah.”³⁰

Moroni Teaches Joseph

Because Joseph lacked formal education he was tutored by Moroni. As Joseph F. Smith stated, “[Joseph] was taught by Moroni. He received his education from above, from God Almighty, and not from man-made institutions.”³¹ Moroni quoted numerous scriptures. In 1823 Moroni appeared 5 times to 17 year old Joseph in answer to his earnest prayer to know his state and standing before God. He largely reiterated the same message with variations and additions each time. Joseph listed 5 scripture blocks but declared, “He quoted many other passages of scripture and offered many other explanations which cannot be mentioned here.”³²

Between Joseph’s and Oliver’s accounts we know that Moroni quoted and taught from over 30 passages of scripture dealing with the last days. Topics include the physical scattering of Israel and the spiritual scattering or apostasy of Israel, a raising up of an ensign to gather the people spiritually and physically, Christ and His mission, the Last Days and the Second Coming, and the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith.³³

4 years later on September 22 1827, just after midnight Joseph was given charge over the plates. He was told by Moroni, “While [the plates] were in my hands, I could keep them, and no man had power to take them away, but now I give them to you. Beware, and look well to your ways, and you shall have power to retain them until the time for them to be translated.”³⁴

Reiterating this point, the Lord told Joseph that Moroni was sent to “reveal the Book of Mormon, [which] contains the fulness of my everlasting Gospel, to whom I have committed the keys of the record of the stick of Ephriam.”³⁵

The Plates ... are of no Worth, Because of the Commandment of the Lord”

Counsel to the Modern Day Seer

Even as Moroni began abridging the history of the Nephites he could tell the value and worth of the plates would be in the “record,” or words, doctrines, and messages contained therein, not the monetary value of the plates. In the book of his father he recorded, “the plates thereof are of no worth, because of the commandment of the Lord. For he truly saith that no one shall have them to get gain; but the record thereof is of great worth; and whoso shall bring it to light, him will the Lord bless.” Moroni continues with the characteristics of the translator; “For none can have power to bring it to light save it be given him of God; for God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory, or the welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant

people of the Lord. And blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God.”³⁶

In 1823 Moroni again cautioned Joseph that he would be tempted because of the poverty and needs of his family, but he was forbidden from “get[ting] the plates for the purpose of getting rich.”³⁷ Oliver Cowder reported that Moroni informed Joseph, “These things (the plates) are sacred, and must be kept so, for the promises of the Lord concerning them must be fulfilled. No man can obtain them if his heart is impure, because they contain that which is sacred ... should they be entrusted in unholy hands the knowledge could not come to the world, because they cannot be interpreted by the learning of this generation.”³⁸ “They are not deposited here for the sake of accumulating gain and wealth for the glory of the world. ... they are of no worth among the children of men, only for their knowledge.”³⁹

In addition to cautioning Joseph, Moroni also informed him that the time would come that the Lord would provide additional witnesses to alleviate Joseph’s burden of bearing witness of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps hinting at the Eight Witnesses Moroni informed Joseph it would be his “privilege that you may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work.” Moroni then informed Joseph that to “three [witnesses] shall [the plates] be shown by the power of God; wherefore they (the Three Witnesses) shall know of a surety that these things are true.”⁴⁰

In fulfillment of this prophecy that the plates would be shown “by the power of God” the Angel Moroni appeared first to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Joseph Smith showing the plates and turning over the pages. Shortly after Martin Harris and Joseph had the same experience. The voice of God was heard from out of heaven declaring that the Book of Mormon plates were translated correctly by the gift and power of God.⁴¹ David stated that the voice of the Lord thrilled every fiber of his body.⁴² The voice commanded them to bear witness of what they had seen.

Moroni recorded that the testimony of the Three Witnesses “shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day.”⁴³

Moroni Testifies of the Blessings of the Book of Mormon

Even as Moroni was finishing the work of his father Mormon and engraving his own messages on the plates, he saw that God’s work in the last days would begin with the Book of Mormon. He recorded that when we see the “revelations ... written by ... John⁴⁴ be unfolded before the eyes of the people ... ye shall know that the time is at hand that they shall be made manifest in very deed. Therefore, when ye shall receive this record ye may know that the work of the Father has commenced upon all the face of the land.” Moroni concluded by prophetically speaking in the name of the Lord. He continued, “Therefore, repent ... and come unto me, and believe my gospel and be baptized in my name ... And blessed is he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world. And behold it is I that hath spoken it. Amen.”⁴⁵

Moroni indicated that the Book of Mormon will be a catalyst for the Lord’s work. Moroni stated, “remember, that [the plates] are to be translated by the gift and power of God. By them will the Lord work a great and marvelous work; the wisdom of the wise shall become as naught, and the understanding of the prudent shall be hid, and because the power of God shall be displayed those who profess to know the truth but walk in deceit, shall tremble with anger; but

with signs and wonders, with gifts and with healings, with the manifestations of the power of God, and with the Holy Ghost, shall the hearts of the faithful be comforted.”⁴⁶

Additionally, Moroni testified “on [the plates] is contained the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ ... and when it shall be brought forth by the power of God it shall be carried to the Gentiles, of whom many will receive it, and after be brought unto the fold of their Redeemer by obeying it also.”⁴⁷

In 1823, once Joseph arrived at the Hill Cumorah, Moroni appeared and showed Joseph the glory of God compared to the “Prince of Darkness and his innumerable train of associates.” He then described the central role of the Book of Mormon in the Restoration and the persecution of the Saints. Moroni declared to the 17 year old Joseph, “When [the Gold Plates] are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands. Then will persecution rage more and more; for the iniquities of men shall be revealed, and those who are not built upon the Rock will seek to overthrow this church; but it (the Church) will increase the more [it is] opposed, and spread farther and farther, increasing in knowledge till they (the members of the Church) shall be sanctified and receive an inheritance where the glory of God will rest upon them; and when this takes place, and all things are prepared, the ten tribes of Israel will be revealed in the north country, whither they have been for a long season; and when this is fulfilled will be brought to pass that saying of the prophet-‘And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord’-But, notwithstanding the workers of iniquity shall seek your destruction the arm of the Lord will be extended, and you will be borne off conqueror, if you keep all his commandments. Your name shall be known among the nations, for the work which the Lord will perform by your hands shall cause the righteous to rejoice and the wicked to rage.”⁴⁸

Notice Moroni prophesied that missionary work, priesthood ordinations, the knowledge and sanctification of the Saints, and the gathering of Israel would all increase. He coupled this unsurpassed growth of Church with the growth of Satan’s kingdom through rage, persecution, and seeking the Prophet’s life. Yet, despite this, the Church will grow because of this opposition. And the Book of Mormon initiates it all.

Joseph summarized the visits of Moroni in this way, “This messenger [Moroni] proclaimed himself to be an angel of God, sent to bring the joyful tidings that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the Gospel in all its fullness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the Millennial reign. I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of His purposes in this glorious dispensation.”⁴⁹

Do not Condemn the Book of Mormon

In addition to giving counsel to the future day translator, Moroni also counseled the future reader to not condemn the Book of Mormon because of any possible or perceived imperfections. Though he acknowledged that there may be imperfections of men he also declared that he knew of no imperfection in the record. Moroni declared that any imperfections that may be found in the Book of Mormon are the results of using an imperfect language, reformed Egyptian; if the writers had enough space they would have used Hebrew and Moroni could have been certain that there were no imperfection in the writing.⁵⁰

“No man who lives on the earth in the last days can be saved in the kingdom of heaven unless and until he comes to know, by the power of the Holy Ghost that this holy book is the mind and will and voice of God to the world ... men will stand or fall—eternally—because of what they think of the Book of Mormon.” Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Moroni also wanted it clear that the way we treat the Book of Mormon will be reflected in our own final judgement. He wrote to the future reader, “And whoso recieveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. Behold I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you. And if there be faults they be the faults of a man. But behold we know no fault; nevertheless, God knoweth all things; therefore, he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hellfire.”⁵¹

Moroni, sadly watched the fall of the Nephite civilization and the degradation of the Lamanite nation into warfare, violence and a loss of reverence for God and sacredness. As he watched these bloody scenes and pondered the future reader he urged, “give thanks to God that He hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.”⁵² As we read Moroni’s writings he urges charity to combat the evils of our days and be “more wise than [the Nephites] have been.”

Moroni then added additional depth to his caution. He stated, “And he that shall breathe out wrath and strife against the work of the Lord ... and shall say: We will destroy the work of the Lord ... the same is in danger to be hewn down and cast into the fire; ... And no on need say they shall not come, for [the plates] surely shall [come], for the Lord hath spoken it; for out of the earth shall [the plates] come, by the hand of the Lord, and none can stay it. And it shall come in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away; and it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead.”⁵³

Moroni also stated that contending and denying the “word of the Lord” shall be accursed and Jesus “will show no greater things.” Those who deny will lose the spirit, believe not the disciples, and ultimately will not believe in Christ of the Father. Conversely those who believe and come unto Christ will be shown greater things, even the “great things the Father laid up for you, from foundation of the world,” “then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid” be revealed, the revelations of John will be revealed; when this record is translated we will know that the work of the Lord has commenced.⁵⁴ And we know that the work and the glory of God is our immortality and eternal life.⁵⁵

I Speak unto You as if Ye Were Present Moroni Speaks to our Day

The Book of Mormon prophets wrote not just for their immediate benefit but for the benefit of future generations of Nephites. As a prophet to a crumbling civilization, a civilization that hunted Christians, Moroni did not have this same benefit. That doesn’t mean he wasn’t blessed to see his audience in vision. As part of a larger discussion of the religious corruption and world wide turmoil surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon Moroni declared, “Behold, the Lord hath shown me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things (the Book of Mormon) shall come forth among you. Behold I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doings.”⁵⁶

Moroni saw that we would deeply benefit for the words, teachings, and doctrines of the Book of Mormon in a time of religious confusion and a world in commotion.

“I ask that my testimony of the Book of Mormon ... given today under my own oath and office, be recorded by men on earth and angels in heaven. ... I want it absolutely clear when I stand before the judgement bar of God that I declared to the world with the most straightforward language I could summon, that the Book of Mormon is true, that it came forth the way Joseph said it came forth and was given to bring happiness and hope to the faithful in the travail of the latter days.” President Jeffery R. Holland

Moroni's Promise

Moroni bore testimony that if the Book of Mormon is read, meditating on the mercy of God, pondering the message in our hearts and asking with “real intent, having faith in Christ” then “[God] will manifest the truthfulness of it ... by the power of the Holy Ghost.”⁵⁷

An additional witness, often overlooked, is the Holy Ghost. Moroni clarifies that the Holy Ghost will testify of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.⁵⁸ The Lord asked the rhetorical question, “What greater witness can you have than from God?”⁵⁹ The obvious answer is that there is no greater witness than from God. Seeing the plates in our day, having them on display in Salt Lake, or turning over the plates with our own hands will strengthen an existing testimony, however it will not create a testimony. Christ himself spoke out against sign seekers, saying that they are an adulterous and wicked generation.⁶⁰ Bearing the burden of witnessing of the Book of Mormon alone was a difficult task for young Joseph. At the height of the translation of the plates Joseph was told by the Lord in March 1829, “If they will not believe my words, they will not believe you, my servant Joseph, [even] if it were possible that you should show them all these things which I have committed unto you. Oh, this unbelieving and stiffnecked generation.”⁶¹

Moroni gives us the key to knowing if the Book of Mormon is the word of God. We are to read, ponder and pray asking God with full purpose of heart, then listen and interpret the promptings of the Holy Ghost to know with certainty with the promise that we will know of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Moroni at the Pleasing Bar of God

The Book of Mormon prophets took writing on the plates very seriously. Moroni was no exception. After expounding the need for faith and believing he offered additional warnings. He then concludes, “And these things are written that we may rid our garments of the blood of our brethren, who have dwindled in unbelief.”⁶²

On 3 occasions in the Book of Mormon Moroni informed the reader that he will meet us on the day of judgment. Imagine, after passing from mortality and being brought before our Father in Heaven, with Jesus acting as our advocate pleading our cause before God. Moroni stated that he will also meet each of us there. He stated, “ye shall know that I have authority when ye shall see me, and we shall stand before God at the last day. Amen.”⁶³

On another occasion Moroni wrote, “And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgement-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood. And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he had talked with me face to face, and he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things.”⁶⁴

According to Moroni we, those who have received “these things” found in the Book of Mormon, will be asked, “Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man (Moroni), like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?”⁶⁵ We will have to give an account of what we have done with the Book of Mormon.⁶⁶ Moroni's message seems to be one of the greatest importance. The truthfulness of the book of Mormon and investigating its doctrines should be the focus of a lifetime.

The Book of Mormon and the Bible Work Together

The exiled Babylonian prophet Ezekiel likened the house of Israel to very dry bones scattered over a valley. The Bible *and* the Book of Mormon come together and breathe new life into Israel, which receives strength and becomes “an exceeding great army” armed with the word

“There is no record of the exact number of visits from Moroni [to Joseph], but 22 [visits] have been documented.” H. Donl Peterson

of God, temple ordinances, unified under one nation and one King.⁶⁷ Joseph sold into Egypt by his brothers also prophesied that when the Bible and the Book of Mormon come together scattered Israel will be gathered and a “choice seer” will “restore them who are of the House of Israel in the last days.”⁶⁸ And Lehi, a descendent⁶⁹ of Joseph in Egypt declared that the Bible and the Book of Mormon “grow together unto confounding false doctrine, ... laying down of contentions, ... establishing peace ... and bring them ... knowledge ...”⁷⁰

Like these exiled prophets the wandering Moroni also testified of the complimenting power of the Book of Mormon. Moroni invited each of us to “lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record (Book of Mormon) but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews (Bible), which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you. For behold, this (Book of Mormon) is written for the intent that ye may believe that (Bible); and if ye believe that (Bible) ye will believe this (Book of Mormon) also; and if ye believe this (Book of Mormon) ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them. And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. Amen.”⁷¹

The Book of Mormon will Come in a Time of Religious Corruption His Name Had for Good and Evil

Moroni also saw that the Book of Mormon will come forth in a time of great religious corruption. He said, “[The Book of Mormon] will come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money shall be forgiven of your sins ... [who] have built up churches unto yourselves to get gain ... transfigured the holy word of God ... And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts ... unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice and persecution, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.” The religions will build up “secret combinations to get gain” and suffer that the needy, poor, sick, and naked go unnoticed by them.⁷²

When Moroni appeared to Joseph he didn’t emphasize the religious corruption of Joseph’s day; there was no need because Joseph had already struggled with convert seeking religions whose good feelings were more pretended than real.⁷³ He had first hand experiences with the war of words and the religious confusion he felt. During the First Vision in the Spring of 1820 Joseph recalled, “I was answered that I must join none of [the religions], for they were all wrong ... 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 teach for the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.’ He forbade me to join with any of them ...”⁷⁴ Joseph recalled being told that “none of them was acknowledged of God as his Church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to ‘go not after them,’ at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”⁷⁵ He was informed that God had a work for him to do.

Rather than focus on the religious corruption, Moroni, in 1823 focused on the worldwide dichotomy that the work would create. “Your name shall be known among the nations, for the work which the Lord will perform by your hands shall cause the righteous to rejoice and the wicked to rage: with the one it shall be had in honor, and with the other in reproach; yet, ... it shall be a terror because of the great and marvelous work which shall follow the coming forth of this fulness of the Gospel.”⁷⁶ Moroni also indicated “that [God] had a work for me to do, that my name should be had for good and evil, among all nations, kindreds, and tongues.”⁷⁷

“And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfillment of the prophets—the book to be revealed.” Joseph Smith

Though it may have seemed strange, perhaps unbelievable, that a poor farm boy from upstate New York—“a boy of no consequence in the world,” a boy so “obscure” and doomed to labor for a scanty existence, so uneducated—would do a work that would so revolutionize the world of religion that his name would be known throughout the world.⁷⁸ Yet, today it is exactly as Moroni reported in 1823.

Moroni Gives the Plates to Joseph

“After having received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of the 22nd of September A.D., the angel of the Lord [Moroni] delivered the records into my hands.”⁷⁹

Joseph Returns the Plates to Moroni

In June of 1829, after Moroni showed the plates to the Three Witnesses Joseph brought his father, Joseph Sr., his brothers Hyrum and Samuel and 6 others associated with the Whitmer family to the Sacred Grove near his parents’ home in Manchester, New York. There Joseph showed the plates to these Eight Witnesses. While Joseph had the plates persecution intensified. “But,” Joseph recognized “that by the wisdom of God, [the plates] remained safe in my hands until I had accomplished by them what was required ... When according to arrangements, the messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him, and he has them in his charge until this day.”⁸⁰

Though I prefer Joseph’s straight forward account of returning the plates directly to Moroni, there are 10 second hand accounts of Joseph, Oliver, and perhaps others⁸¹ entering into a room within the Hill Cumorah and leaving the plates on a table.⁸² The most notable account comes from Brigham Young who publicly related the experience in 1877 and inferred that Oliver had informed him of the experience.⁸³

Moroni Conclusion

Moroni is a witness of the Book of Mormon. He bore doctrinal testimony as a mortal and as a resurrected being. Though he handled the plates, engraved the word of past prophets as well as his own teachings, carried the and protected the physical plates, eventually sealing a portion and burying plates, his message across 2 dispensations is that the record, the doctrines, teachings, and stories are so important in this time of religious corruption we need know of its truthfulness and then give an account of what we have done with the Book of Mormon and how we have valued it. His witness is that the Book of Mormon was written for our day to combat religious corruption, remind us of our Savior and the covenants, help us navigate a fallen world and remind us that we are “the people of the first covenant.”⁸⁴ He bore witness that the Book of Mormon and the bible support one another. Because of its great worth, Moroni warned against denying and condemning the Book of Mormon. His witness is powerful and vital.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.” Moroni

¹ H. Donl Peterson, “Moroni–Joseph Smith’s Tutor,” *Ensign*, January 1992, 22-29

² It is likely that Emma did not travel with Joseph, Oliver, and David and did not see Moroni. *Church History in the Fulness of Times* states that Emma briefly stayed behind to finalize things and say goodbye to her family (57). David mentions both Oliver and Joseph and even describes where they sat on the journey to Fayette, but does not mention Emma (*Interview with Joseph F. Smith and Orson Hyde*).

³ Joseph F. Smith Journal, 25 April 1918, cited in H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni-Ancient Prophet-Modern Messenger*, 114

⁴ See *Millennial Star* 49:772

⁵ Andrew Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:283

- ⁶ Their daughter's wedding appeared in the *Wayne Sentinel* dated May 8, 1828 while Martin was in Harmony working on the translation of the Plates. See Don Bradley, "9 things we now know about the lost manuscript of the Book of Mormon," dated 5 Feb 2021, as retrieved from LDSliving.com on 12/19/21.
- ⁷ Procter and Procter, *Revised and Enhanced History of the Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 152-53
- ⁸ See Glen L. Rudd, "The Angel Moroni," BYU-I Devotional, 11 March 2003; Eldin Ricks, "Moroni," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*,
- ⁹ Rhoda Young Greene was the sister of Brigham Young
- ¹⁰ Josephine Chase Bradshaw Collection, Church Archives, Author Unknown as cited in H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, (2000), 168-69
- ¹¹ *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 442
- ¹² Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 107; *Representative Women of Deseret*, 24; D&C 117:12, 17
- ¹³ See Cameron J. Parker, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , (2004), 55.
- ¹⁴ Sketch of a Well Spent Life, Labors in the Vineyard, *Juveniles Instructor Office*, 1884, 65-66
- ¹⁵ Harrison Burgess was not included in the original 26 witnesses of the plates because his vision took place after the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon
- ¹⁶ B. H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor*, (1963), 27-28
- ¹⁷ Revelation 14:6
- ¹⁸ See Jay and Donald Parry, *Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 183
- ¹⁹ *Journal of Discourses*, 7:164
- ²⁰ Luke Johnson was not included in the 26 witnesses because his vision of Moroni and the plates occurred after the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon
- ²¹ *History of Zerah Pulsipher*, 4-7
- ²² See *Autobiography of Zera Pulsipher* as found on https://www.johnpratt.com/gen/8/z_pulsipher.html as retrieved on 3/10/24.
- ²³ "Minutes of General Conference," 6 October 1852, Afternoon Session; *Millennial Star*, 31 July 1852, as found on <https://historicalgeneralconferences.weebly.com/1852-october.html>
- ²⁴ H Donl Peterson, "Moroni, the Last of the Nephite Prophets," *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, from Zion to Destruction*, as retrieved from rsc.byu.edu
- ²⁵ A member reported that he had heard Thomas B. Marsh, who was then the president of the Quorum of the Twelve relate how the death of Moroni. According to this brother, Marsh had informed him of a great anxiety Marsh had to know how Moroni was killed. Marsh asked Joseph to pray to know the fate of Moroni and Joseph received a vision, in which he saw Moroni being pursued by 6 Lamanites. Moroni contended with 3 Lamanites individually and killed them. Being exhausted, Moroni was killed. (see H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet Modern Messenger*, 80). This may be the only existing source and is a 3rd or 4th hand account.
- ²⁶ Brigham Young took Warren S. Snow to a hill near Manti and informed, "Here is the spot where the prophet Moroni stood and dedicated this piece of land for a temple site" (*Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 436). One member reported hearing Joseph teach that Moroni dedicated the St. George, Nauvoo, Jackson County, Kirtland, and "many others we know not of as yet" (*The Diary of Charles Walker*, 2:524-26 as found in H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, (2000), 79).
- ²⁷ "Introduction to the Book of Mormon"
- ²⁸ H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni—Joseph Smith's Tutor," *Ensign*, January 1992, 22-29; See also H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, 131-135
- ²⁹ D&C 27:5
- ³⁰ Moroni 10:34
- ³¹ *Gospel Doctrine*, (1939), 484
- ³² Joseph Smith History 1:41
- ³³ For a discussion of these scriptures see Appendix, "Moroni's Message to Joseph Smith"
- ³⁴ Procter and Procter, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*, 145
- ³⁵ D&C 27:5
- ³⁶ Mormon 8:14-16
- ³⁷ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:230-31
- ³⁸ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:84
- ³⁹ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:83-84
- ⁴⁰ Ether 5:2, 3
- ⁴¹ JSP *Journals*, 1:222, 238-40, 244, 266, 276, 284, 286, 292, 296, 304, 306, 308, 314, 318, 320, 324, 352; Joseph Smith—History 1:59, 62, 67, 75; History of the Church, 1:12-71; D. B. Dille Interview, *Millennial Star* 21 (August 20, 1859): 545. The interview occurred on September 15, 1853 as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 133; Rhett Stephens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years. A Play about Martin Harris, 1824-1830* (Cache Valley, Utah: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), 97n3 as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 135; Ole A. Jensen, "Testimony of Martin Harris," as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 139; William Harrison Homer, "The Last Testimony of Martin Harris," 1925, as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 139; Thomas Godfrey, Affidavit, July 2, 1933, as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 140; . William Pilkington,

Affidavit, April 3, 1934, *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 140; Theodore Farley Sr., Address delivered at Priesthood Session of Sharon Stake Quarterly Conference, March 23, 1940, as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 141; Edward Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon,” as found 143; Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith Interview as found in *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:44; Letter of James Hart, *Investigating the Book of Mormon*, 82.

⁴² See Theodore Farley Sr., Address delivered at Priesthood Session of Sharon Stake Quarterly Conference, March 23, 1940, as found in *Opening the Heavens*, first edition, 141

⁴³ Ether 5:4

⁴⁴ On a related note, during the conference at the Isaac Morley Farm in Kirtland on June 3, 1831 Joseph declared, “John the Revelator was then among the ten tribes of Israel who had been led away by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, to prepare them for the return from their long dispensation.” (Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 2:39; *History of the Church* 1:176).

⁴⁵ Ether 4:16-19

⁴⁶ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:84

⁴⁷ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:84

⁴⁸ Oliver Cowdery, *Messenger & Advocate*, vol. 2, 197-199

⁴⁹ *History of the Church* 4:536-37

⁵⁰ Mormon 9:32-33

⁵¹ Mormon 8:12, 17

⁵² Mormon 9:31

⁵³ Mormon 8:21, 26

⁵⁴ Ether 4:8-19

⁵⁵ Moses 1:39

⁵⁶ Mormon 8:34-35

⁵⁷ Moroni 10:3-6

⁵⁸ Moroni 10:4

⁵⁹ D&C 6:23

⁶⁰ Matthew 16:3, 4; Mark 16:17-18; Luke 11:29-30; Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48

⁶¹ D&C 5:7, 8

⁶² Mormon 9:35

⁶³ Ether 5:6

⁶⁴ Ether 12:38, 39

⁶⁵ Moroni 10:27, 34; see also Ether 12:38

⁶⁶ Nephi (2 Nephi 33:11) and his brother Jacob (Jacob 6:9, 13) also stated that they would be present at the final judgment. The Twelve Apostles in Jerusalem will judge the 12 tribes (Matt 19:28; D&C 29:12) and the 12 Apostles that Jesus chose in the Americas will judge the people from the American Continent (Mormon 3:18-19).

⁶⁷ Ezekiel 37

⁶⁸ Joseph Smith Translation Genesis 50:24-38

⁶⁹ Alma 10:3 informs us that Lehi was a descendent of Joseph through his son Manasseh; Joseph Smith taught that Ishmael descended from Joseph via his son Ephriam (see Elder Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:184).

⁷⁰ 2 Nephi 3:4-22

⁷¹ Mormon 7:8-10

⁷² Mormon 8:32-33, 36, 37, 39

⁷³ Joseph Smith History 1:6

⁷⁴ Joseph Smith History 1:19

⁷⁵ 1842 Account, *Opening the Heavens*, First Edition, 18

⁷⁶ Letter VIII, Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 1:85

⁷⁷ Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals*, 1:223

⁷⁸ Joseph Smith History 1:22-23

⁷⁹ Wentworth Letter, “Church History,” 1 March 1842 as found in Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories*, 1:495 and *History of the Church* 4:537

⁸⁰ Joseph Smith History 1:60

⁸¹ Additional people identified with the narration are Hyrum Smith, “Father Smith,” and “Whitmere,” perhaps David Whitmer. For a discussion see H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, 135-37

⁸² See “Is there a cave in the Hill Cumorah containing the Nephite records,” as retrieved from https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question: Is there a cave in the Hill Cumorah containing the Nephite records%3F#cite_note-2 on 7/19/2024

⁸³ *Journal of Discourses*, 19:40

⁸⁴ Mormon 7:10. Baptism is the first covenant we enter into. People of the first covenant implies membership in the church. However, context indicates a deeper meaning. The covenant is the covenant made to the house of Israel. That covenant had

origins in the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant isn't bound by mortality. It extends down through the eternities and also has origins from the foundation of the earth when we covenanted to be tested in all things and prove faithful in mortality. (Abraham 3:25-26).

Appendix 1 – Chart of What the Witnesses Saw

<i>Witness</i>	<i>3 Witness</i>	<i>8 Witness</i>	<i>Shown Plates by Moroni</i>	<i>Saw Plates Uncovered</i>	<i>Saw Plates Covered</i>	<i>Lifted Plates</i>	<i>lifted the Box with Plates</i>	<i>Heard Metallic "Jink"</i>	<i>Scribed*</i>	<i>Other BoM Relics Seen</i>	<i>Served Mission(s)</i>	<i>Year Baptized</i>
1) Joseph Smith	Present	Present								All **		1829
2) Martin Harris										All **		1830, '42, '70
3) Oliver Cowdery										All **		1829
4) David Whitmer										All **		1829
5) Joseph Smith Sr										Possibly U & T		1830
6) Hyrum Smith										Breastplate		1829
7) Samuel H. Smith												1829
8) Hiram Page												1830
9) Christian Whitmer												1830
10) Peter Whitmer Jr												1829
11) Jacob Whitmer											Elder's License	1830
12) John Whitmer												1829

<i>Witness</i>	<i>3 Witness</i>	<i>8 Witness</i>	<i>Shown Plates by Moroni</i>	<i>Saw Plates Uncovered</i>	<i>Saw Plates Covered</i>	<i>Lifted Plates</i>	<i>"lifted the Box with Plates</i>	<i>Heard Metallic "Jink"</i>	<i>Scribed</i>	<i>Other BoM Relics Seen</i>	<i>Served Mission(s)</i>	<i>Year Baptized</i>
13) Mary Whitmer												1830
14) Lucy Smith				Likely						Breastplate, U & T	Bore Testimony	1830
15) Josiah Stowell										Possible Breastplate		1830
16) Luke Johnson			Likely									1831
17) Lucy Harris												
18) Lucy Harris*												
19) Alvah Beaman												1830
20) Katharine Smith												1830
21) Sophronia Smith												1830
21) William Smith										Possible Breastplate		1830
22) Emma Hale Smith												1830
23) Isaac Hale												
24) Joseph McKune												
25) Moroni										All *		Date Uncertain
Totals	3	8	7	16	12	18	8	6	9	10	13	22

*Others scribed for Joseph, but are not listed because they did not have a tangible/physical witness of the plates. The witnesses marked are those witnesses who did experience the plates.

** All indicates that the saw the box that contained the plates on the Hill Cumorah, the Urim and Thummim, the breastplate, the sword of Laban, and the liahona

Lucy Harris was the daughter of Martin and Lucy Harris

Appendix – “Moroni’s Message to Joseph Smith”

List compiled from Kent P. Jackson, “Moroni’s Message to Joseph Smith,” *Ensign*, August 1990, p 13. See additional information as found in *Messenger and Advocate*, (February 1835), p 77-80 and *Messenger and Advocate*, (April 1835), p 108-112. Underlined in black come from Oliver Cowdery and **bolded** come from Joseph Smith and underlined in both are found in both accounts.

Scripture	Category*	Key phrases
<u>Duet. 32:23-24</u>	1, 7	“burnt with hunger and devour with burning heat and with bitter destruction
<u>Duet. 32:43</u>	10	“rejoice .. for I will avenge the blood of his servants ... and will be merciful
<u>Psalms 100:1-2</u>	10	
<u>Psalms 107:1-7</u>	10	“They [who] wander in the wilderness is in a solitary way .. hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them ... and he led them forth by the right way
<u>Psm. 144:11-12</u>	8, 10	
<u>Psm. 146:10</u>	10	“The Lord shall reign for ever”
<u>Isaiah 1:7</u>	1	“your country is desolate, your city is burned with fire”
<u>Isaiah 1:23-24</u>	1	Mistreating the poor and widowed
<u>Isaiah 1:25-26</u>	1, 7, 10	“I will turn my hand upon thee and purely purge away thy dross ... I will restore ... thou shalt be called the righteous city, the faithful city”
<u>Isaiah 2:1-4</u>	10	“mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the tops of the mountains... out of Zion shall go forth his law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”
<u>Isaiah 4:5-6</u>	10	“The Lord will create ... as smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night, upon all the glory shall be a defense”
<u>Isaiah 11</u>	2, 6, 7, 10	“and in that day ... an ensign to the people, to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious ... his had again the second time to recover ... his people. ... he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather ... an highway for the remnant of his people”
<u>Isaiah 29:11</u>	4	“and the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed ... delivered to won that is learned, saying, Read this ... I cannot for it is sealed”
<u>Isaiah 29:13</u>	1, 2, 3	“This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, ... their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men”
<u>Isaiah 29:14</u>	3, 4	“I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder”
<u>Isaiah 43:6</u>	6	“I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth”
<u>Jeremiah 16:16</u>	6	“I will send for many fishers ... [and] for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks”
<u>Jer. 30:18-21</u>	10	“I will ... have mercy ... I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them ... their nobles shall be of themselves”
<u>Jer. 31:1</u>	10	“will I be the God of all the families of Israel and they shall be my people”
<u>Jer. 31:6</u>	6	“the watchmen upon the mount Ephriam shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God”

<u>Jer. 31:8</u>	6	"I will bring them from the north country, and ... the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame ... a great company shall return"
<u>Jer. 31:9</u>	6	"They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them ... for I am a father to Israel, and Ephriam is my firstborn"
<u>Jer. 31:27-28</u>	10	"I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man ... so will I watch over them, to build and to plant, saith the Lord"
<u>Jer. 31:32-33</u>	10	"This shall be the covenant I will make with the house of Israel; after those days ... I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be my people"
<u>Jer. 50:4-5</u>	6	"the children of Israel shall come ... and seek the Lord their God ... saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten"
Joel 2:28-32	3, 10	"I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh ... prophesy ... dreams ... visions ... I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke"
Mal. 3:1-4	2, 7, 9, 10	"The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple ... Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord"
Mal. 4:1-6 JSH 1:38-40	5, 7, 8	"The day cometh that the earth shall burn as an oven ... I will reveal unto you the priesthood, by the hand of Elijah ... and he shall plant in the hearts of the Children the promised made to the father ... if it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming."
Acts 3:22-23	2	"Moses truly said ... A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you ... like unto me ... every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed"
<u>1 Cor. 1:27-29</u>	2	"God hath chosen the foolish things ... weak things ... base things of the world ... that no flesh should glory in his presence"
<u>Pms. 144:13</u>	6, 8	"that our garners may be full ... that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands"

*Categories as designated by Kent P. Jackson

- 1 – Apostasy and Scattering
- 2 – The calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith
- 3 – The opening of the heavens during the Restoration
- 4 – The coming forth of the Book of Mormon
- 5 – The restoration of the priesthood and sealing keys
- 6 – The gathering of the elect
- 7 – The Destruction and purification prior to and during the Second Coming
- 8 – The deliverance for the faithful
- 9 – The Second Coming
- 10 – The premillennial and millennial state of the faithful

Moroni's Visit and the Hill Cumorah

September 22, 1823 (1st Visit with Moroni)

27 I continued to pursue my common vocations in life until the twenty-first of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision. (JSH 1:27)

28 During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three ... I was left to all kinds of temptations ... and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; ... In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature. But I was guilty of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been. But this will not seem very strange to any one who recollects my youth, and is acquainted with my native cheery temperament.

29 In consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when, on the evening of the ... twenty-first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.

30 While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.

33 He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.

34 He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants;

35 Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted “seers” in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.

36 After telling me these things, he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament.

42 Again, he told me, that when I got those plates of which he had spoken—for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled—I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it.

43 After this communication, I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark, except just around him; when, instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance.

44 I lay musing on the singularity of the scene, and marveling greatly at what had been told to me by this extraordinary messenger; when, in the midst of my meditation, I suddenly discovered that my

room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside.

45 He commenced, and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit, without the least variation; which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things, he again ascended as he had done before. (JSH 1:28-45). During this time I was in vision I did not realize any thing around me except what was shown in this communication (JS Papers Journals 1:89; 1832 account).

When the angel ascended the second time, he left Joseph overwhelmed and astonished yet gave him but a short time to contemplate the things which he had told him before he made his reappearance ...' (History of JS by His Mother, 77-8).

46 By this time, so deep were the impressions made on my mind, that sleep had fled from my eyes, and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard. But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them (JSH 1:46); *adding a few words of caution and instruction, thus: that he must beware of covetousness, and he must not suppose the record was to be brought forth with the view of getting gain, for this was not the case, but that it was to bring forth light and intelligence, which had for a long time been lost to the world; and that when he went to get the plates, he must be on his guard, or his mind would be filled with darkness. The angel then told him to tell his father all which he had both seen and heard. (History of JS by His Mother, 78).*

47 After this third visit, he again ascended into heaven as before, and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced; when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me for the third time, the cock crowed, and I found that day was approaching, so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.

48 I shortly after arose from my bed, and, as usual, went to the necessary labors of the day (JSH 1:47-8); *"Joseph Sr., Alvin, and Joseph were reaping together in the field, and as they were reaping, Joseph stopped quite suddenly, and seemed to be in a very deep study. Alvin observing it, hurried him ... upon this Joseph went to work again, and after laboring a short time, he stopped just as he had done before (History of JS by His Mother, 79); but, in attempting to work as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as to render me entirely unable (JSH 1:48). "This being quite unusual and strange attracted the attention of his father, upon which he discovered Joseph was very pale. My husband supposing he was sick, told him to go to the house, and have his mother doctor him" (History of JS by His Mother, 79). I started with the intention of going to the house; but, in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me, and I fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything.¹*

49 The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name. I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before. (Joseph Smith History 1:48-49).

¹ His mother relates the events as follows: "He accordingly stopped his work, and started, but on coming to a beautiful green, under an apple tree, he stopped and lay down, for he was so weak he could not proceed no further. He was here but a short time, when the messenger who he saw the previous night visited him again" (History of JS by His Mother, 79).

P26 "... the first thing he said was, 'Why did you not tell your father that which I commanded you to tell him?' Joseph replied, 'I was afraid my father would not believe me.' The angel rejoined, 'He will believe every word you say to him'" (History of JS by his mother, 79).

P27 49 He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received. (JSH 1:49). "Joseph then promised the angel that he would do as he had been commanded. Upon this the messenger departed" (History of JS by his mother, 79-80).

P28 50 I obeyed; I returned to my father in the field, and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He wept and (JSP Papers Journals 1:89) replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger (JSH 1:50) [and] not to fail in attending strictly to the instructions which he had received from this messenger" (History of JS by His Mother, 80). I left the field, and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there. (Joseph Smith History 1:49-50)

P29 "... as we could naturally expect, the thought of the previous vision was present... but again a thought would start across the mind on the prospects of obtaining so desirable a treasure... to raise him above a level with the common earthly fortunes of his fellow men, and relieve his family from want, in which, by misfortune and sickness they were placed. (Latter-Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate, July 1835, 157-8).

P30 "He was to remember ... when it should be brought forth must be done expressly with ... an eye single to the glory of God, and the welfare and restoration of the house of Israel. ... that no ... contaminating influence of wealth, without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, must have place in the heart. ... Such was the instruction and this caution."

P31 "Here was a struggle in deed; for ... he knew that if God did not give he could not obtain; with the hope or thought of his obtaining, his mind would be carried back to its former reflection of poverty and abuse—wealth, grandeur and ease, until before arriving that the place described, this wholly occupied his desire; and when he thought upon the fact of what was previously shown him, it was with an assurance that he should obtain, and accomplish his desires in relieving himself and his friends from want."

"... such were his reflections during his walk of from two to three miles: the distance from his father's house to the place pointed out. And to use his own words it seed as though two invisible powers were influencing or striving to influence his mind ... That precious instruction ... pray always—which was expressly impressed upon him, was at length forgotten, ... a fixed determination to obtain and aggrandize himself, occupied his mind when he arrived at the place ..." (Messenger and Advocate, July 1835, 157-58).

51 ... On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. ...

52 Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them. (JSH 1:51-52)

"On attempting to take possession of the record a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him, in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before. What was the [reason] of this he knew not ... He therefore made the third attempt² with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times ... he exclaimed, "Why can I not obtain this book?" "Because

² Joseph's 1832 History confirms he made 3 attempts to remove the plates (JS Papers Histories, Circa Summer 1832, p 4).

you have not kept the commandments of the Lord, (Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate, Oct. 1835, 197-8) for the time is not yet fulfilled, therefore, thou wast left unto temptation that thou mightiest be made acquainted with the power of the adversary" (JS Papers Histories, Circa Summer 1832, 3-4), answered a voice, within a seeming short distance. He looked, and to his astonishment, there stood [Moroni]. In an instant, all the former instructions ... were brought to his mind: ... He had come, to be sure, and found the word of the angel fulfilled concerning the reality of the record, but he had failed to remember the great end for which they had been kept, and in consequence could not have power to take them into his possession and bear them away. (Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate, Oct. 1835, pp. 197-98.)

"At that instant he looked to the Lord in prayer, and as he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul was lit ... the heavens were opened and the glory of the Lord shone round about and rested upon him. While he thus stood gazing and admiring, the angel said, "Look!" and as he thus spake he beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. ... the heavenly messenger said, "All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one. Behold, whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one: It is he that fills the hearts of men with evil, to walk in darkness and blaspheme God; and you may learn from henceforth, that his ways are to destruction, but the way of holiness is peace and rest. You now see why you could not obtain this record; that the commandment was strict, and that if ever these sacred things are obtained they must be by prayer and faithfulness in obeying the Lord. They are not deposited here for the sake of accumulating gain and wealth for the glory of this world: they were sealed by the prayer of faith, and because of the knowledge which they contain they are of no worth among the children of men, only for their knowledge. ... These things are sacred, and must be kept so, for the promise of the Lord concerning them, must be fulfilled. No man can obtain them if his heart is impure, because they contain that which is sacred; and besides, should they be entrusted in unholy hands the knowledge could not come to the world, because they cannot be interpreted by the learning of this generation; ... Therefore, remember, that they are to be translated by the gift and power of God. By them will the Lord work a great and a marvelous work: the wisdom of the wise shall become as naught, and the understanding of the prudent shall be hid, ... but with signs and with wonders, with gifts and with healings, with the manifestations of the power of God, and with the Holy Ghost, shall the hearts of the faithful be comforted. You have now beheld the power of God manifested and the power of satan: you see that there is nothing that is desirable in the works of darkness; that they cannot bring happiness; that those who are overcome therewith are miserable, while on the other hand the righteous are blessed with a place in the kingdom of God where joy unspeakable surrounds them. ... The glory of God crowns them, and they continually feast upon his goodness and enjoy his smiles. Behold, ... you have seen this great display of power, by which you may ever be able to detect the evil one, ... This is the sign: ... when it is known that the Lord has shown you these things, the workers of iniquity will seek your overthrow: they will circulate falsehoods to destroy your reputation, and also will seek to take your life; but remember this, if you are faithful, and shall hereafter continue to keep the commandments of the Lord, you shall be preserved to bring these things forth; ... **When they [the Gold Plate] are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands. Then will persecution rage more and more; for the iniquities of men shall be revealed, and those who are not built upon the Rock will seek to overthrow this church; but it [Church] will increase the more opposed, and spread farther and farther, increasing in knowledge till they [the members of the Church] shall be sanctified and receive an inheritance where the glory of God will rest upon them; and when this takes place, and all things are prepared, the ten tribes of Israel will be revealed in the north country, whither they have been for a long season; and when this is fulfilled will be brought to pass that saying of**

the prophet-'And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord'-But, notwithstanding the workers of iniquity shall seek your destruction the arm of the Lord will be extended, and you will be borne off conqueror, if you keep all his commandments. **Your name shall be known among the nations, for the work which the Lord will perform by your hands shall cause the righteous to rejoice and the wicked to rage:** with the one it shall be had in honor, and with the other in reproach; yet, with these it shall be a terror because of the great and marvelous work which shall follow the coming forth of this fulness [fullness] of the gospel. Now, go thy way, remembering what the Lord has done for thee, and be diligent in keeping his commandments, and he will deliver thee from temptations and all the arts and devices of the wicked one. Forget not to pray, that thy mind may become strong, that when he shall manifest unto thee, thou mayest have power to escape the evil, and obtain these precious things." (MA Oct 1835, vol 2, 197-99).

"... the angel showed him, by contrast, the difference between good and evil, and likewise the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God, in such a striking manner that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the very end of his days; and in giving a relation of this circumstance, not long prior to his death, he remarked that 'ever afterwards he was willing to keep the commandments of God' ..." (History of JS by his Mother, 81).

53 ...³ and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time (JSH 1:53); "that he could not take them from the place wherein they were deposited until he had learned to keep the commandments of God—not only till he was willing able to do it" (History of JS by His Mother, 81). I had been tempted of the adversary and sought the plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the glory of God therefore I was chastened (JS Papers Journals 1:89 fn 106; JSP Histories 1:14; 1832 account).

He told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates.

54 Accordingly, as I had been commanded, I went at the end of each year (JSH 1:53-54), but did not obtain, also the 3rd and 4th year (JSP J1:89) and at each time I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days (JSH 1:54). I did obtain them and translated them into the English language by the gift and power of God and have been preaching it ever since (JSP J1:89).

September 22, 1823

"The ensuing evening, when the family were altogether, Joseph made known to them all that he had communicated to his father in the field, and also of his finding the record, as well as what passed between him and the angel while he was at the place where the plates were deposited.

"Sitting up late that evening, in order to converse upon these things, together with over-exertion of mind, had much fatigued Joseph; and when Alvin observed it, he said, "Now, brother, let us go to bed, and rise early in the morning, in order to finish our day's work at an hour before sunset, then, if mother will get our suppers early, we will have a fine long evening, and we will all sit down for the purpose of listening to you while you tell us the great things which God has revealed to you.

"Accordingly, by sunset the next day, we were all seated, and -Joseph commenced telling us the great and glorious things which God had manifested to him; but, before proceeding, he charged us not to

³ See footnote 2 on previous page

mention out of the family that which he was about to say to us, as the world was so wicked that when they came to a knowledge of these things they would try to take our lives; and that when we should obtain the plates, our names would be cast out as evil by all people. Hence the necessity of suppressing these things as much as possible, until the time should come for them to go forth to the world.

"After giving us this charge, he proceeded to relate further particulars concerning the work which he was appointed to do, and we received them joyfully, never mentioning them except among ourselves, agreeable to the instructions which we had received' from him.

"From this time forth, Joseph continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening, for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same. I presume our family presented' an aspect as singular as any that ever lived upon the face of the earth—all seated in a circle, father, mother, sons and daughters, and giving the most profound attention to a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life: he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study.

"We were now confirmed in the opinion that God was about to bring to light something upon which we could stay our minds, or that would give us a more perfect knowledge of the plan of salvation and the redemption of the human family. This caused us greatly to rejoice, the sweetest union and happiness pervaded our house, and tranquility reigned in our midst.

"On the twenty-second of September, 1824, Joseph again visited the place where he found the plates the year previous; and supposing at this time that the only thing required, in order to possess them until the time for their translation, was to be able to keep the commandments of God—and he firmly believed he could keep every commandment which had been given him—he fully expected to carry them home with him. Therefore, having arrived at the place, and uncovering the plates, he put forth his hand and took them up, but, as he was taking them hence, the unhappy thought darted through his mind that probably there was something else in the box besides the plates, which would be of some pecuniary advantage to him. So, in the moment of excitement, he laid them down very carefully, for the purpose of covering the box, lest some one might happen to pass that way and get whatever there might be remaining in it. After covering it, he turned round to take the Record again, but behold it was gone, and where, he knew not, neither did he know the means by which it had been taken from him.

"At this, as a natural consequence, he was much alarmed. He kneeled down and asked the Lord why the Record had been taken from him; upon which the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and told him that he had not done as he had been commanded, for in a former revelation he had been commanded not to lay the plates down, or put them for a moment out of his hands, until he got into the house and deposited them in a chest or trunk, having a good lock and key, and, contrary to this, he had laid them down with the view of securing some fancied or imaginary treasure that remained.

"In the moment of excitement, Joseph was overcome by the powers of darkness, and forgot the injunction that was laid upon him.

"Having some further conversation with the angel, on this occasion, Joseph was permitted to raise the stone again, when he beheld the plates as he had done before. He immediately reached forth his hand to take them, but instead of getting them, as he anticipated, he was hurled back upon the ground with

great violence. When he recovered, the angel was gone, and he arose and returned to the house, weeping for grief and disappointment.

"As he was aware that we would expect him to bring the plates home with him, he was greatly troubled, fearing that we might doubt his having seen them. As soon as he entered the house, my husband asked him if he had obtained the plates. The answer was, "No, father, I could not get them."

"His father then said, "Did you see them?"

"Yes," replied Joseph, "I saw them, but could not take them.""

"I would have taken them," rejoined his father, with much earnestness, "if I had been in your place."

"Why," returned Joseph, in quite a subdued tone, "you do not know what you say. I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me."

"Joseph then related the circumstance in full, which gave us much uneasiness, as we were afraid that he might utterly fail of obtaining the Record through some neglect on his part. We, therefore, doubled our diligence in prayer and supplication to God, in order that he might be more fully instructed in his duty, and be preserved from all the wiles and machinations of him "who lieth in wait to deceive." (The History of JS by his mother, 81-85).

September 22, 1824, 1825 and 1826 (2nd, 3rd and 4th Visits with Moroni)

Joseph didn't leave any details about what had happened at these meetings with Moroni.

September 22, 1827 (5th Visit with Moroni)

In January 18, 1827 Joseph married Emma Hale. Her family was opposed to their marriage and so Joseph and Emma lived in Manchester with his family. Joseph went to Harmony Pennsylvania to collect a few of her things and bring them back. Isaac Hale, Emma's father accused Joseph of stealing his daughter and tearfully pleaded for Joseph to stop treasure seeking. Joseph tearfully promised that he would.

Later in January Joseph was sent by his father on business into Manchester. He arrived home much later than expected and his father asked him why he was so late. Lucy Mack Smith recorded,

"Presently he smiled, and said in a calm tone, "I have taken the severest chastisement that I have ever had in my life."

"..., "it was the angel of the Lord: as I passed by the hill of Cumorah, where the plates are, the angel met me, and said that I had not been engaged enough in the work of the Lord; that the time had come for the record to be brought forth; and that I must be up and doing, and set myself about the things which God had commanded me to do. But, father, give yourself no uneasiness concerning the reprimand which I have received, for I now know the course that I am to pursue, so all will be well."

"It was also made known to him, at this interview, that he should make another effort to obtain the plates, on the twenty-second of the following September, but this he did not mention to us at that time. (History of JS by his mother, 100-1).

Joseph Knight and Josiah Stowell (Stoal) visited the Smith farm in Manchester New York and stayed over night on September 21, 1827. At midnight Joseph borrowed the horse and carriage of Joseph

Knight and went to the Hill Cumorah with his wife of 9 months, Emma while his mother spent a sleepless night waiting for his return. (see History of JS by his mother,). Moroni gave Joseph a strict charge to keep the plates safe. According to Joseph

The same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge that I should be responsible for them. That if I should let them go carelessly or through any neglect of mine I should be cut off, but that if I would use all me endeavors to preserve them until he (the messenger) should call for them, they should be protected. (JSH 1:59).

Not having a chest or any other secure place Joseph hid the plates in a hallowed out birch tree near the Hill Cumorah about 3 miles from the Smith home. He then covered it with branches to conceal it better (Lucy Mack Smith, History, book 5, 11).

After 4 years of preparation Joseph was finally entrusted with the plates. He received the plates at the age of 21 years old. Shortly after receiving the plates, breastplate, and the Urim and Thummim Joseph wondered how he could proceed without some assistance, particularly financial assistance. Probably during the final interview with Moroni in September 1827, Joseph inquired who could help him. Moroni told him, “go and look in the spectacles, and he would show him the man that would assist him.” He was shown Martin Harris. When Joseph approached Martin and told him of the events Martin was surprised. He later recalled how the message “struck me with surprise. I told him I wished him to be careful about these things. ‘Well,’ said Joseph, ‘I saw you standing before me as plainly as I do now’” (see Opening the Heavens. 276).

Appendix 4 – The Lost Manuscript of the Book of Mormon

Joseph had received the plates in September 1827. Due to persecution, hardship, and difficulty finding a full-time scribe he had had limited time to translate. The 116 pages that were lost represent the work done in June and July 1828 with Martin Harris acting as scribe.

Initially Emma served as Joseph's scribe, but she became burdened with the housework and the time consuming translation process. Martin Harris began to scribe for Joseph. This was a tremendous sacrifice for him. Martin missed the planting season on his own farm and also missed his daughter's wedding.¹ It also created additional contention and bad feelings between Martin and his wife Lucy Harris. Lucy feared that Martin was being duped and that Joseph was trying to swindle Martin out of his property and money. Martin thought that if he showed the manuscript to his wife and a few others they would see the value in the work and be convinced of the truthfulness. Martin felt that there was something substantial enough in the manuscript to convince his family.

Martin asked Joseph if he could take the manuscript home to put his family at ease in regard to the time and support he was giving Joseph. Joseph inquired of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim and "the answer was that he must not. However, he was not satisfied with this answer, and desired that I should inquire again. I did so, and the answer was as before. Still he could not be contented but insisted that I should inquire once more. After much solicitation I again inquired of the Lord, and permission was granted him to have the writings on certain conditions."² Martin was only show them to 5 family members whom Martin had designated. According to Lucy Mack Smith, Martin "bound himself in a written covenant of the most solemn nature ..."³ Martin took the manuscript and went home to Palmyra.

The day after Martin returned home to Palmyra, Emma gave birth to their first child named Alvin who only lived a short time. Emma nearly died and two weeks later she was still very ill. As Emma made a slow recovery Joseph's thoughts and anxiety turned to Martin Harris and the pages of manuscript. To make matters worse, an "angel" had taken the interpreters from Joseph before he had discovered what had happened to the manuscript "in consequence of [his] having wearied the Lord in asking for the privilege of letting Martin Harris take the writings."⁴ Emma insisted that Joseph go and inquire after Martin. Joseph's anxiety increased until finally he left Emma and went to his parents' home.

Martin had covenanted to only show the manuscript to very specific people, his brother Preserve Harris, his parents Nathan and Rhoda Harris, his wife Lucy Harris and her sister Mary Harris Cobb. The manuscript was locked in his wife's "set of drawers." While his wife was not home a friend called. Martin wanted to show his friend the manuscript and picked the lock, damaging the dresser. Lucy Mack Smith reminisced, "passing by his oath, he (Martin Harris) showed it to any good friend that happened to call on him."⁵

The anxiety over the uncertainty of the manuscript, losing the interpreters, and the health of Emma weighed so heavy on Joseph and had such physical effect on him that a stranger insisted on accompanying Joseph on the last leg of his journey to Manchester to ensure that he

did not collapse. This stranger walked with Joseph for twenty miles and brought him to his parents' home. (History of JS by his Mother, 125-128).

After recovering a little, Joseph sent for Martin expecting him to come quickly. After hours of delay, Martin finally came "walking with a slow and measured" walk with "his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground." Instead of coming into the gate he sat on the fence for "some time with his hat drawn over his eyes." He then entered the house and sat with the Smith's to eat. When Hyrum asked if he was sick. Martin "pressed his hands upon his temples, and cried out in a tone of deep anguish, 'Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul.'" (History of JS by his Mother, 128-29).

Joseph sprang from the table, exclaiming, "Martin, have you lost that manuscript? have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head as well as your own?" Martin replied, "Yes; it is gone, and I know not where."

Joseph exclaimed, "Oh, my God! All is lost! all is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God. I should have been satisfied with the first answer which I received from the Lord; for he told me that it was not safe to let the writing go out of my possession." He wept and groaned, and walked the floor continually.

Joseph asked Martin to return and make one more search. Martin said he had ripped open beds and pillows; and that he knew it was not there.

"Then must I," said Joseph, "return with such a tale as this? I dare not do it. And how shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?" (History of JS by his mother, 128-29).

From what his mother remembered about the events, it is clear Joseph felt fully responsible for what transpired. After returning to Harmony Joseph poured out his soul asking for forgiveness. Moroni appeared and returned the Urim and Thummim. Joseph received D&C 3. The main points are listed below:

- "The works, and the designs, and purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught" (D&C 3:1)
- "... although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him." (D&C 3:4)
- Joseph had been entrusted with the things of heaven with a strict commandments. He was also to "not transgress them." "And behold how oft have you (Joseph) transgressed the commandments and laws of God..." (3:6-7).
- "For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despised his word—Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble." (3:7-8).
- "...repent of that which you have done which is contrary to the command which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and again called to the work; Except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift" (3:10-11)
- Martin Harris is also rebuked as a "wicked man" because he "has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises which were made before God, and has depended upon his own judgment and boasted in his own wisdom." (3:12-13).

- Joseph lost the privilege to translate for a “season,” but the knowledge of the Savior which is contained on the plates must come forth (3:14-20)

Though Moroni returned the Urim and Thummim to Joseph in July 1828 he wouldn't receive the plates until September 22, 1828. At that time Joseph was made aware of a plot by wicked people. These individuals had taken the manuscript and altered parts of it. Then if Joseph retranslated the 116 pages they would show the original manuscript with alterations and claim that Joseph was deceiving the people. Because of this “cunning plan” of Satan to “destroy this work” he was told not to retranslate. (see D&C 10:7-33).

So what do we learn from this experience? There are many lessons in the events surrounding the lost manuscript. I would like to focus on just a few.

First, the Lord made provisions for Nephi to give us the content of the lost 116 pages without retranslating the manuscript. Nephi tells us that he first made an abridgement of his father's visions, dreams, writings, and prophecies and then made a record of his own experiences (1 Nephi 1:16-17). The Lord knew 2000 years before the manuscript would be lost and made provisions to receive the content. Elder Holland believes that what we received in the translation of Nephi is greater than what we lost in the 116 pages (see *For a Wise Purpose*, Ensign, Jan. 1996). While Nephi recorded his experiences he said, “the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not” (1 Ne. 9:5). Nephi didn't know but the Lord knew why Nephi was to write what he did.

Another lesson to learn from these events come from some anti-Mormon claims. They raise the question, “why not use the rock to locate the lost 116 pages?”, meaning why not use the Urim and Thummim to locate the lost manuscript? The simple answer to this the dumb question is, because the Lord told him not to worry about the lost pages and that He, God would confound the people who took the manuscript (see D&C 10:41, 42). The pages were lost because he did not follow the counsel of the Lord. But, more importantly we learn a valuable lesson in repentance from the lost manuscript event—we are to learn from the mistake, but leave it in the past and not continue to dig it up again and again. Just as the Lord took care of the lost manuscript and Joseph was to continue on in the translation, we are to trust in the Lord and move forward.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland saw in the episode of the lost 116 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript evidence of the existence of the Plates and the truthfulness and divine origins of the translation which Joseph and Oliver were engaged in. He said,

“If the loss of those 116 pages ... was simply the disappearance of some thoughtful, wisdom literature and a few chapters of a remarkably deft fiction as opponents of the book of Mormon would say, what's the big deal? Why then all that business about Joseph going through the depths of hell, worrying about whether he was going to get the manuscript back and fearing a rebuke from God.

[Here Elder Holland quotes Lucy Mack Smith's account of Joseph's despair and Martin's hopelessness as quoted above].

“Well my goodness, that's an elaborate little side story—which makes absolutely no sense at all unless of course there really were plates, and there really was a translation process going on, and there really had been a solemn covenant made with the Lord, and there really was an enemy who did not want that book to ‘come forth in this generation’ (D&C 10:33). (see “A Standard Unto my People,” 18th Annual CES Religious Educator Symposium, 9 August 1994, 5-6).

I would add to Elder Holland's thoughts that the deep despair experienced by Joseph and Martin also doesn't make much sense unless there really was broken solemn covenant between Martin Harris, Joseph Smith and the Lord.

As bitter and difficult this experience was for Joseph it did solidify his resolve to do what the Lord asked of him at all costs. As a result of the feelings of despair he felt, Joseph declared, "I have made this my rule: when the Lord commands, do it" (HC 2:170). That fortitude and determination is seen through the remainder of his life. He didn't shy away from mobs and persecutions. Joseph didn't back down from doctrines like the 3 degrees of glory, eternal progression toward godhood, celestial marriage and so on.

¹ see LDSLiving.com, "7 Things we know about the Lost 116 pages of Manuscript"

² Joseph Smith Papers, Vol. A-1, 9

³ *History of JS by his Mother*, 124-5

⁴ Joseph Smith Papers, *Histories* 1:246

⁵ *History of JS by his Mother*, 130-31

Appendix 5 – Hugh Nibley’s Book of Mormon Challenge

Quotation from Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, (1989), 221-22

But why would anybody be so upset by what a Harvard pundit of our own day calls “the gibberish of a crazy boy”? Because the Book of Mormon is anything but gibberish to one who takes the trouble to read it. Here is an assignment which we like to give to classes of Oriental (mostly Moslem) students studying the Book of Mormon (it is required) at the Brigham Young University:

"Since Joseph Smith was younger than most of you and not nearly so experienced or well-educated as any of you at the time he copyrighted the Book of Mormon, it should not be too much to ask you to hand in by the end of the semester (which will give you more time than he had) a paper of, say, five to six hundred pages in length. Call it a sacred book if you will, and give it the form of a history. Tell of a community of wandering Jews in ancient times; have all sorts of characters in your story, and involve them in all sorts of public and private vicissitudes; give them names--hundreds of them--pretending that they are real Hebrew and Egyptian names of circa 600 b.c.; be lavish with cultural and technical details--manners and customs, arts and industries, political and religious institutions, rites, and traditions, include long and complicated military and economic histories; have your narrative cover a thousand years without any large gaps; keep a number of interrelated local histories going at once; feel free to introduce religious controversy and philosophical discussion, but always in a plausible setting; observe the appropriate literary conventions and explain the derivation and transmission of your varied historical materials. "Above all, do not ever contradict yourself! For now we come to the really hard part of this little assignment. You and I know that you are making this all up--we have our little joke--but just the same you are going to be required to have your paper published when you finish it, not as fiction or romance, but as a true history! After you have handed it in you may make no changes in it (in this class we always use the first edition of the Book of Mormon); what is more, you are to invite any and all scholars to read and criticize your work freely, explaining to them that it is a sacred book on a par with the Bible. If they seem over-skeptical, you might tell them that you translated the book from original records by the aid of the Urim and Thummim--they will love that! Further to allay their misgivings, you might tell them that the original manuscript was on golden plates, and that you got the plates from an angel. Now go to work and good luck!

To date no student has carried out this assignment, which of course, was not meant seriously. But why not? If anybody could write the Book of Mormon as we have been so assured, it is high time that somebody, some devoted and learned minister of the Gospel, let us say, performed the invaluable public service of showing the world it can be done.

Appendix 4 – The Ongoing Translation of the Book of Mormon

The Lord informed the Saints that he will quicken His work in His own time. As evidence of a continual Restoration the Book of Mormon continues to fill the world and the pace is quickening. In 1830 the first 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon were printed. In 2000 the Church had distributed 100 million copies of the Book of Mormon. That number doubled to 200 million in just 23 ½ years later in the summer of 2023.¹

Not only is the Church distributing numerous copies of the Book of Mormon, the Church has increased its efforts to make the Book of Mormon accessible to a greater number of people in their own language. In 1870 the Book of Mormon was available in 7 languages. Given the limits in access to reliable translations, printing offices, and staff to carry out the undertaking, that is quite a remarkable feat for the time. 100 years later, in 1970 the total number was just 24 languages. The Church increased their efforts in the 1980s and 90s and pushed that number to 98 by 2000. As of December 31, 2023 the Church has full translations in 92 languages and selections printed in an additional 21 languages making 113 total translations of the Book of Mormon.²

¹ Ryan Jensen, “Church Distributes 200 Millionth Book of Mormon Distributed,” *Church News*, 29 December 2023

² David Schneider, “How Many Languages have Book of Mormon Translations?,” *Church News*, 31 December 2023