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## The Three Witnesses

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**Abstract:** This article includes a reprint of the testimony of the Three Witnesses from the Book of Mormon, a report of Oliver Cowdery's testimony given at the conference at Council Bluffs, his testimony at the time of his death in David Whitmer's home, David Whitmer's rebuttal to John Murphy, William Harrison Homer's interview with Martin Harris, and Harris's testimony given in Salt Lake City and in Clarkston, Utah, just prior to his death.

## THE THREE WITNESSES

By BISHOP HEBER C. IVERSON

**O**LIVER COWDERY, who was the scribe for Joseph Smith as he translated the Book of Mormon, together with two companions, gave the following testimony of the authenticity of that sacred volume :

“Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvellous in our eyes. Nevertheless, 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

### Giving Honour

A TOTAL of three thousand baptisms for the dead on the line of Oliver Cowdery, one of the Three Witnesses and first person to be baptized into the Church in this dispensation, were performed at special ceremonies under the direction of the Aaronic priesthood in the seven temples of the Church last April 27th.

Commemorating the 151st birthday anniversary of Martin Harris, 10,000 persons, most of them youths between the ages of 12 and 20 years, gathered at his grave in Clarkston, Utah, May, 1934, for special exercises conducted by the Aaronic priesthood. It was the greatest single assemblage of the Aaronic priesthood of the Restored Church up to that time.

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

(Signed)

OLIVER COWDERY,  
DAVID WHITMER,  
MARTIN HARRIS.”

After giving this sacred testimony, Oliver Cowdery, because of insubordination, unchristianlike conduct, was excommunicated by the Prophet Joseph from the Church in 1838. He went into

an adjoining state and became there the prosecuting attorney in a judicial district. He was a school teacher and a practising attorney. In 1848 he came to a special conference of the Church, held in Kaneshville, Iowa on the 21st day of October, 1848, and addressing the audience said:

“Friends and Brethren: My name is Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery. In the early history of this Church I stood identified with her, and one in her councils. True it is that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance; not because I was better than the rest of mankind was I called; but to fulfill the purposes of God. He called me to a high and holy calling.

“I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, or, as it is called by that book, the ‘holy interpreters.’ I beheld with my eyes, and handled with my hands, the gold plates from which it was transcribed. I also saw with my eyes and handled with my hands the ‘holy interpreters.’

“That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it; Mr. Spaulding did not write it; I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet. It contains the everlasting Gospel, and came forth to the children of men in fulfillment of the revelations of John, where he says he saw an angel come with the everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. It contains principles of salvation, and if you, my hearers, will walk by its light and obey its precepts, you will be saved with an everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God on high.

“Brother Hyde has just said that it is very important that we keep and walk in the true channel, in order to avoid the sand bars. This is true. The channel is here. The Holy Priesthood is here. I was present with Joseph when an holy angel from God came down from heaven and conferred on us the Lesser or Aaronic Priesthood, and said to us, at the same time, that it should remain upon the earth while the earth stands.

“I was also present with Joseph when the Higher or Melchizedek Priesthood was conferred by holy angels from on high. This Priesthood we then conferred on each other, by the will and commandment of God. This Priesthood as was then declared, is also to remain upon the earth until the last remnant of time. This holy Priesthood, or authority, we then conferred upon many, and is just as good and valid as though God had done it in person.

“I laid my hands upon that man—yes, I laid my right hand upon his head (pointing to Brother Orson Hyde) and I conferred upon him this Priesthood, and he holds that Priesthood now. He was also called, through me, by the prayer of faith, an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

**OLIVER COWDERY** was rebaptized a short time after this statement was made, at this special conference, but while making preparations to migrate to Utah he was taken ill in the city of Richmond, Missouri, in the home of his associate, David Whitmer. Just before his passing he called to his bedside some of

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his relatives, and the last words that he uttered, before closing his eyes in death, were an affirmation of that which has been quoted.

Now, what with respect to the other witnesses? David Whitmer was excommunicated in 1838. He lived in Richmond, Missouri until the year 1888, fifty years out of the Church, dying a non-member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This has been said concerning him:

During the last few years of his life he was frequently visited by representatives of the Press and many others, to whom he would always bear strong and faithful testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon.

On one occasion, when the report reached him that he was accused by a certain party of having denied his former testimony, he wrote the following, which was published in the Richmond (Mo.) *Conservator* of March 25th, 1881:

“Unto all Nations, Kindreds, Tongues and People, unto whom these presents shall come:

“It having been represented by one John Murphy, of Polo, Caldwell county, Missouri that I, in a conversation with him last summer, denied my testimony as one of the Three Witnesses of 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. . . .

“My sincere desire is that the world may be benefitted by this plain and simple statement of truth. And all the honour to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

“Richmond, Mo., March 19, 1881. DAVID WHITMER, SEN.”

**D**AVID WHITMER was an outstanding character. He was above the average in intelligence and integrity. His word was as good as his bond. His character was certified to be of the highest type by the mayor of the city, by judges on the bench, by lawyers, by the postmaster, by the most prominent and leading citizens in the City of Richmond. He was known by his neighbours to be truthful and honourable in every respect.

Three days before his death he called to the family physician and said to him: “Dr. Buelanan, am I in my right mind?” “You are, Mr. Whitmer,” was the answer, “for I have just held conversation with you. Why do you ask?” “Because I want now my family and a few of my intimate friends to come to my bedside.” They came. He sat up and bore his dying testimony and witness of the truth of that which I have read to you concerning his testimony in this sacred volume, the Book of Mormon. He closed his eyes in death, and sealed his lips, like his companion and associate, Oliver Cowdery, with that testimony upon them.

Now, what of the other witness, Martin Harris? He was not excommunicated from the Church. He became, however, very

much disappointed, after the death of the Prophet Joseph, because he was not called to a position of prominence.

Martin Harris's family travelled with one of the early migrations of the Church to Utah, but Martin Harris refused to go. He remained in Kirtland, Ohio. On his return from a mission to England, a young man by the name of William Harrison Homer visited the city of Kirtland, in which the Kirtland temple was standing. Martin Harris was at that time the custodian of that sacred building.

After a brief conversation, Martin Harris said to Elder Homer, "If you desire to see the temple, follow me." They went into that sacred place. They came to a point where the sun was shining brightly through the window, falling upon the floor. They paused for a moment, and this question was put by Elder Homer to Martin Harris, "Do you still believe, Mr. Harris, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that the Book of Mormon is true?" Answering, he said, very impressively:

"Young man, do I believe it? Do you see that sun shining? Just as surely as the sun is shining on us and gives us light, and the moon and stars give us light by night, just as surely as the breath of life sustains us, so surely do I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, chosen of God to open the last dispensation of the fullness of times. So surely do I know that the Book of Mormon was divinely translated. I saw the plates. I saw the angel. I heard the voice of God. I know that the Book of Mormon is true, and that Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God. 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."

Elder Homer returned to Salt Lake and related the incident to President Brigham Young.

They sent for Martin Harris. He went to Utah. He was

## NEWS OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

**Appointment** of Dr. Thomas D. Rees of Los Angeles, California as president of the Australian mission to succeed President Clarence T. Tingey has been announced by the First Presidency. Elder Rees was formerly president of Juab stake in southern Utah. President Tingey has served three missions to Australia.

**Chief** morale officer of the silver jubilee anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America to be held in Washington D.C., August 21st to 30th is the position to which Oscar A. Kirkham, executive secretary of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement association, has recently been appointed. The announcement was made by Dr. James E. West, Chief Scout executive of America. The

assignment is the fourth signal honour of directing the morale forces at Scout jamborees that has come to the Latter-day Saint scouter. In the international jamborees at Arrowe park and Birkenhead, England and at Gedollo, Hungary he served in this capacity.

**Japanese** radio listeners have sent several letters to KSL, Salt Lake City broadcasting station, in acknowledgement of its recent around-the-world broadcast, which featured an address by President Heber J. Grant. One letter from Tokyo was accompanied by a clipping from *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Tokyo newspaper, showing a group of Japanese listeners tuning in on the programme.



baptized again into the Church. He stood in the Tabernacle in 1870, and before ten thousand people said:

"These eyes have seen the golden plates. These eyes have seen the angel of God. These hands have handled the golden plates. These ears have heard the voice of God, and I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of the living God, and my testimony to the Book of Mormon is true."

In 1875, on the 10th day of July in the little town of Clarkston, Cache county, Utah, just before Martin Harris's spirit took its flight, he called to Elder Homer, who was in the room:

"You have been my friend. Yes, I did see the plates on which the Book of Mormon was written. I did see the angel. I did hear the voice of God, and I do know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, holding the keys of the Holy Priesthood."

What can you think of such testimony? It is recognized in jurisprudence that death-bed witness, or testimony, is the outstanding and supreme kind of testimony, almost unimpeachable. Here is the testimony of these three men, in the Church, out of the Church, subject to all sorts of prejudice and persecution and bitterness and ostracism. Yet they held faithful and true to the last breath of their lives, to that wonderful and marvellous witness and testimony—the restoration of the Gospel, the restoration of the Holy Priesthood.—(Adapted from a sermon delivered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, May 19th, 1935.)

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## THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

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third, with 4,025 points. Approximately 300 persons attended the Honour Day exercises in the Chapel.

Saturday evening the gala M. I. A. flannel dance was held in the Town hall. More than 400 persons attended.

The Sunday sessions began at 8 a.m. with a testimony meeting in the Chapel, approximately 300 attending. The general session which followed at 10 a.m. in the Town hall was attended by approximately 400 saints and friends. The programme included an organ prelude by Elder Bertram Willis; introduction of the new slogan by Sister Bickerstaff; a message from the general boards by Sister Bennett, and talks by President Cannon and Sisters Merrill, Cannon and Horner. Elder Durham conducted.

"Build Zion Today with M. I. A." was the theme of the Sunday afternoon session. Speakers on the programme, conducted by Elder Durham, were Sisters Horner, Bailey and Mace, and Brothers Tarr, Bleakley and Russell of the mission boards, and Kenneth Bailey of Kidderminster branch, Joyee Gittins of Kidderminster branch, Ernest Osbourne of St. Albans branch, Edna Bloxham of Mansfield branch, Norman Dunn of Handsworth branch, and Marie Anastasion of South London branch. A prelude to the meeting was played on the large Town hall organ by 15-year-old Melvin Dunn of Handsworth branch.

Meetings of M. I. A. executives were conducted in the afternoon. The general session, attended by approximately 450 persons, was conducted in the evening by Sister Horner. "A Challenge to the Youth of Britain" was given by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, and it was answered by Brother Lorenzo P. Dunn