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## The Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** This series discusses the origin of the Book of Mormon. It includes topics such as the Hill Cumorah, Joseph Smith's first vision, the visit of the angel Moroni, the description of the gold plates, the translation and historical importance of the Book of Mormon, the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses, Native American traditions that correspond with concepts in the Book of Mormon, legends from Tongan Islanders that are similar to those of Judaism, and the prophecy of no kings in America and its fulfillment. The second part discusses the Three and Eight Witnesses.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS'  
MILLENNIAL STAR.

[ESTABLISHED 1840.]

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*“A gentle word soothes anger just as water puts out fire, and there is no soil so barren but that tenderness brings forth some fruit.”—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES.*

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THE BOOK OF MORMON.

*(Continued from page 791.)*

THE THREE WITNESSES.

The Book of Mormon itself has been testified to in various ways, and among the testimonies that have been given concerning it are those of some reliable men who have lived upon this continent in our own day. We do not have to go away back to the first Christian era for testimonies and proofs; we do not have to rely altogether upon the sayings of those who are now dead; for though all the original witnesses of the Book of Mormon have passed to the great beyond, yet their descendants are still alive, and there are so many living now who are acquainted with the circumstances associated with the early days of the Church, that even at this late date, eighty years after the event, which we specially remember to-day, transpired, it is possible to obtain from authentic sources data of great value; not only from such papers as I have exhibited to you to-day, but from a great many other documents and testimonies which throw light upon the conditions existing now as well as the conditions eighty years ago. Several men have lived in our own day who testify that they saw angels. Joseph Smith was not the only person who testified that he saw angels. There were especially three men, closely associated with him, who are known as the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, who saw an angel. I will not take time to read their testimony, because you are so

well acquainted with it; and even the strangers within our gates, who have seen copies of the Book of Mormon, know that this statement of the Three Witnesses can be found in the beginning of the book. These witnesses testify in all soberness that they saw the plates, that they were shown them by an angel, that they saw the engravings upon the plates, of which they have given descriptions, similar to that which I have read from the pen of Orson Pratt. These men were faithful and true to their testimony. They went into darkness, it is true, and they even went out of the Church, which, from whatever standpoint we have a mind to look upon it, tends to make their testimony still stronger. Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris will always live among the Latter-day Saints as the men who stood close by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and who, like him, saw angels, and heard the voice of God from on high testifying that the translation from the plates was correct, and commanding them to bear record unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples. In obedience to that commandment, these three witnesses placed their testimony on record. Many other people who have received a testimony from God in regard to the truth of the Book of Mormon have been most diligent in testifying to others of what they believe and know. Some of them circumnavigated the globe in going to all parts of the world to bring the glad tidings of the restored gospel to the people. The elders of this Church have borne record of these glad tidings far and near. They have testified that an angel came down from the regions of glory, that a book had been brought forth out of the earth, with a message to the children of men, and that with it had come the restoration of the gospel, for the salvation of all mankind.

I have no disposition to read very much. I am never a success at reading in public meetings, because it generally takes away much of the attention of the people and that force that a speaker likes to use when he speaks to an audience. But I have a few brief extracts which I desire to read this afternoon.

#### OLIVER COWDERY'S TESTIMONY.

Oliver Cowdery, as I have said, stood very close to the Prophet Joseph. He acted as the prophet's scribe and sat by his side when the whole book was being translated, with the exception of a few pages. He was indeed an important personage, and his words go a long way with every man and woman who will think. He stands ahead of all the witnesses, for the reason that he, in the beginning, stood closer to the Prophet Joseph than any other man. Although he was faithful and true to the testimony he had borne at first, yet he was mortal, and like many others committed wrongs. We find while God is kind to the sinner and is full of forgiveness and mercy, He has no forbearance for sin itself. When Oliver Cowdery did wrong he was excommunicated from the Church like

any other member who commits sin, but while he was out of the Church he bore as strong a testimony to the Book of Mormon as he had done before. If a fraud had been perpetrated, Oliver Cowdery certainly would have been the man to tell the world about it, and he would, under the circumstances, most assuredly have declared to the world that the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was not true. If the whole thing had been a fraud, he would have exposed it when he was cast out of the Church, and he would have retracted his testimony concerning the Book of Mormon. But not so. In his darkest hours Oliver Cowdery was as faithful and true to his testimony as he was at the time he was one of the historians of the Church, or helped to choose the twelve apostles, when he stood so high in the councils of the Church. After he had been excommunicated from the Church for ten years, he came back to the saints and humbly asked to be admitted into the Church again. His request was granted. Soon after this he prepared to go on a mission to Great Britain, but his career was suddenly cut short, as he died at Richmond, Mo., in March, 1850. Not long before his death, he made some remarks that are of importance to every Latter-day Saint and to everybody who has heard them. The saints had at the time recently been driven from Nauvoo and were on their way to the Rocky Mountains. A special conference was being held at Kanessville, Ia., October 21st, 1848, on which occasion a large congregation of saints and strangers were present. Oliver Cowdery arose and made the following remarks: "Friends and Brethren—My name is Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery. In the early history of this Church I stood identified with her, and was one in her councils. \* \* 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 means of the Urim and Thummim, or, as it is called by that book, '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.' The 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." Oliver Cowdery died when only forty-five years of age, he being born the same year that the Prophet Joseph was born, 1805, and he died in 1850.

#### DAVID WHITMER'S ATTESTATION.

David Whitmer was another witness. He lived to be an old man, being considerably over eighty years of age when he died in Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, on the 25th day of January, 1888.

We have volumes, I may say, published in regard to his testimony. A lecture could be delivered on him alone, but that will not be necessary on this occasion. I will simply say that David Whitmer, like Oliver Cowdery, was always true and faithful to his testimony. When prominent people frequently visited him from Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis and elsewhere, and when several leading papers of the east sent special delegations to him, urging him to tell the truth in regard to the Book of Mormon, he always, in answering them, bore the same testimony that he did in the years of his youth, namely, that the Book of Mormon is true. On one occasion he said: "The fact is, it was just as though Joseph, Oliver and I were sitting just here on a log, when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like 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 he sits (pointing to John C. Whitmer, sitting a few feet from him), 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 (i.e., the ball which Lehi had), and the interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God."

Seven years before his death, a man in his neighborhood circulated a report that David Whitmer had gone back on his testimony in regard to the Book of Mormon. He felt so bad to think that anybody would accuse him of such a thing that he prepared and signed a sworn statement, which was published in the *Conservator*, a paper published in Richmond, Mo., March 25, 1881, and in this document he says:

"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 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 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 statements as then made and published."

As I have said, I have a great many documents and sayings to show that David Whitmer again and again reiterated his testimony of the Book of Mormon. Whenever he had an opportunity, either in private conversation or in being interviewed by newspaper men or others, he would always tell the same story in regard to that book. He never denied the testimony that he first bore to its divinity. Three days before his death he called his children

and other relatives and friends together and testified to them, with all the fervor of his soul, that the Book of Mormon was true; this testimony lives in the hearts of his children and grandchildren to this day.

#### AFFIRMATION OF MARTIN HARRIS.

Martin Harris, the other witness, came to Salt Lake City in 1870. He is the only one of the three witnesses who is buried within the confines of the State of Utah. Only a short time ago I visited his grave in Clarkston, Cache County, Utah. While he was away from the Church for many years, he was never untrue to his testimony, and though an old man, and perhaps a little childish, when he came here, he was very much elated over what he saw, and he fully appreciated what the believers in the Book of Mormon had accomplished in these mountains. On one occasion, when he looked down from Ensign Peak on this city, he was led to utter in the height of his enthusiasm: "Who should have thought that the Book of Mormon could have done all this!"

Of course, we might ridicule such an expression to a certain extent; yet it is true that if it had not been for the Book of Mormon, there would not have been such a city in the valley of the Great Salt Lake as the one Martin Harris saw here in 1870. There might have been a city or a town of some kind, but not a city of the saints, like the one he beheld on that occasion.

Martin Harris died in Clarkston, Utah, on the 10th of July, 1875. On one occasion he stood up in this tabernacle when it was filled with people, and testified that the Book of Mormon was true, and when he, on his dying bed, was visited by one of the brethren who said to him: "Martin, they are translating the Book of Mormon into the Spanish language," he quickly roused himself and said, "What is that? What is that? I want to hear more about that." And he lived three days longer, elated and happy, because the book was to be published in one more language.

Now, these are the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon. There are other witnesses whom I must mention.

#### THE EIGHT WITNESSES.

Some nineteen years ago, I had an interesting mission, a special one, given to me by the authorities of the Church. Perhaps some of my friends will remember that the late Edward Stevenson and myself, together with another brother (Bishop Joseph S. Black of Deseret) went east in 1888 and visited nearly all of the so-called waste places of Zion. Among the states we thus visited was Missouri, where we were particularly interested in interviewing the descendants of the eight witnesses, as well as of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, but unhappily we reached Richmond a few months after the last of the three witnesses, had passed away, namely, David Whitmer, who died in January, as we visited Richmond the following September. We soon found that Rich-

mond and vicinity contained many relatives of the Whitmers and Pages; and therefore we spent several days there visiting from house to house, in order to find out what we could from the children, grandchildren and friends of the eight witnesses.

Of course you are aware that there were eight witnesses besides the three witnesses that I first mentioned. While these eight witnesses did not receive the same divine manifestations that the three witnesses did, yet they testified to the fact that they knew the Book of Mormon to be true, and that they had seen the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated and had handled them.

Before visiting among these people I was not quite satisfied with the assertion that I had heard so many make to the effect that these witnesses all remained faithful and true to their testimony to the days of their death. I wanted to know something more definite about each of them, and for this purpose we spent an interesting time among the Whitmers and others in Richmond, interviewing many and listening to what they knew and could tell us about these witnesses.

#### CHRISTIAN WHITMER.

I will first mention Christian Whitmer. He was one of the early elders of the Church—a good and faithful man. His being exposed to the persecutions in Jackson county in 1833 brought upon him a disease from which he died on the 27th of November, 1835, in Clay county, Missouri, the second temporary home that the saints had in that state.

#### JACOB WHITMER.

In the order that the names appear in the Book of Mormon Jacob Whitmer is the next witness. He lived to a pretty good age, and he, too, was true to his testimony, though he left the Church as early as 1838. In his later years he lived in Richmond, where he died April 21, 1856. There was a certain apostate faction, known as the Whitmerites, living in and about Richmond in 1838, and even now there are a few of them left. A son of Jacob Whitmer, namely John C. Whitmer, who for several years prior to his death stood at the head of this faction as its president, was very much elated about the Book of Mormon, and he willingly told us what he could remember about his father. During our conversation he testified as follows: "My father, Jacob Whitmer, was always faithful and true to his testimony in regard to the Book of Mormon, and confirmed it on his deathbed."

#### PETER WHITMER, JR.

Peter Whitmer, Jr., was another witness. He also remained steadfast to his testimony to the last, and died as a faithful elder in the Church. He was one of the first men to take a long mission. Leaving the place where the Church was organized in the latter

part of 1830, he traveled about one thousand three hundred miles westward and was one of the first elders who placed his feet in Jackson County, Missouri, arriving there early in 1831, together with Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson and Fredrick G. Williams. He died on the 22nd of September, 1836, in Clay County, Missouri, true and faithful to his testimony of the Book of Mormon.

JOHN WHITMER.

Another witness was John Whitmer, who was the first regular historian of the Church. In this connection I may digress a little by saying that some years ago, on one of my special missions to the states, I succeeded in obtaining from the relatives of John Whitmer a copy of the old history that he kept at the time he was Church Historian. He did not write very much 'tis true, but some of the little he did write and which thus fell into our hands, we think is very valuable. John Whitmer died on the 11th of July, 1878, in Far West, Caldwell County, Missouri. Although he never joined the Church again after his excommunication in 1838, he was always true to his testimony in regard to the Book of Mormon. Even in his darkest days, and at the time when he, full of enmity, first turned his back upon the Church and the Prophet Joseph, he declared in the presence of a number of Missourians—enemies of the work of God—that he knew the Book of Mormon was true. His nephew, John C. Whitmer, of Richmond, who was with him before his death, testified that “his uncle John” bore testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon until the last. This is corroborated by many others who visited John Whitmer on various occasions previous to his death.

HIRAM PAGE.

Hiram Page was another man in whom we were interested. You will remember him as a witness. He had a son living in Richmond when I visited there in 1880. This son, Philander Page, testified as follows: “I knew my father to be true and faithful to his testimony to 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. I can also testify that Jacob, John, and David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery died in full faith in the divinity of the Book of Mormon. I was with all these witnesses at their deathbeds and heard them all bear their last testimony.”

John C. Whitmer (a nephew of Hiram Page by marriage), to whom I have already referred twice, testified: “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.”

*(To be continued.)*