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## He Saw the Golden Plates

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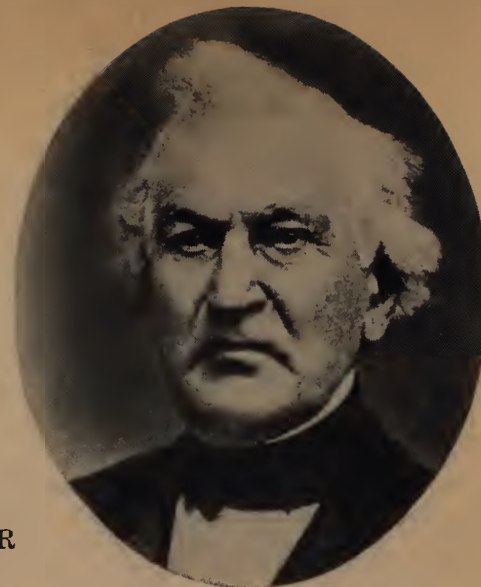
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**Abstract:** An account of an interview between David Whitmer and the author's father, James H. Moyle, in which Whitmer reaffirmed the validity of the plates and the angel who showed them to him. Contains a reproduction of the testimony of the Three Witnesses. David Whitmer, after being excommunicated from the Church, still testifies of the truthfulness and divinity of the Book of Mormon.

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to the end, he held that . . . **He saw  
the Golden Plates**

by President Henry D. Moyle



DAVID  
WHITMER

*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 marvelous 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 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 honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.*

*Oliver Cowdery  
David Whitmer  
Martin Harris*

**I** AM a son of James H. Moyle. My father visited David Whitmer at his home in Richmond, Missouri, shortly before the latter's death on Jan. 25, 1888.

David Whitmer vigorously and unequivocally

(For Courses 26 and 28, lessons of September 25, "The Book of Mormon Authenticity"; for Course 6, lesson of October 16, "The Book of Mormon—the Word of the Lord"; for Course 4, lessons of November 20 and 27, "The Book of Mormon Is a Record"; and for Course 16, lessons of November 6 and 13, "L.D.S. Contributions to Scripture.")

reaffirmed his testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon. Forty-seven years had passed since his excommunication from the Church. Father's recital of that most important meeting follows:

*While I was studying at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, I read in one of the local papers that David Whitmer was alive and that he had given a very interesting interview to a newspaper man. That aroused my interest. So I determined that, on my way home, I would see him if he were still living.*

*Realizing this fact, I made my way to Richmond, Missouri, when I graduated from Michigan, on the last of June, 1885. There was only one train a day in and out of that town. I therefore had to remain there during the night. Richmond was a small town, something like our nice little country towns here in Utah, in a farming section of the country. There was a bus to meet the train—drawn by horses, of course. I sat on the seat with the driver, and there I began my investigation of David Whitmer and continued it for one day. I talked with the driver. He said David Whitmer was a highly respected citizen of Richmond. I stopped at the local hotel and talked with the clerk; he gave me the same response, as did everyone else I approached.*

*In the newspaper article the statement was made that David Whitmer was pestered with curiosity seekers who had heard that he had seen an angel from heaven. So I bought a nice little present for him, to show that I was really interested, and I induced a friend of his to give me a favorable introduction.*

*We went to his home. It was a plain, simple little two-story building with one or two little fruit trees in front of it. There were no other ornaments. (We didn't have lawns in those days.) He was sitting in front of the house under his fruit trees.*

*I told him something about myself and my family. I was born in the Church. My mother was born in the early days of the Church in Illinois. My father came to Utah in his 'teens—a boy alone in the world with no relatives in America, and it was all for his religion. My mother's father had given up a new home and farm for the Gospel. He had come to Kirtland in 1834 where he built a nice home and farm. That, too, was given up for the Gospel's sake, and he went to Missouri, where his resources were exhausted. In the late fall of 1838 he built a simple, rough log home in Far West, from which place they were again*

driven by organized military mobs early in the spring of 1839. Then, with their resources exhausted, they had either to go east or with their people to Illinois. They chose to go to Illinois. My mother was born just after their arrival in Illinois. My grandfather pulled a handcart every foot of the way from the Missouri River to the valley. My mother saw him as he entered the valley and said that his fingers looked like the claws of a bird, and he much like a skeleton.

I told David Whitmer that I had grown up in the pioneer days of Utah believing devoutly in my religion. I told him further that I had just graduated from the University of Michigan as a lawyer and that I was about to commence my life's work as he was preparing to lay his down. And so I begged of him not to let me go through life believing in a vital falsehood. Was his testimony, as published in the Book of Mormon, true? Was there any possibility that he might have been deceived in any particular?

His answer was unequivocal. There was no question about its truthfulness. The angel had stood in a little clear space in the woods with nothing between them but a fallen log—the angel on one side and the witnesses on the other. It had all occurred in broad, clear daylight. He saw the plates and heard the angel with unmistakable clearness.

He was 80 years old at the time I saw him—perfectly white-haired, serious-minded and beyond question sincere. His mind seemed perfectly clear. He moved about with freedom and lived three years after, with his mind normal. He was the first witness I ever attempted to cross examine, and I did so with all the intensity of my impelling desire to know the truth. The interview lasted 2½ hours. I exhausted all my resources, and he was very kind and willing to aid me.

There was only one thing that did not fully satisfy me. I had difficulty then, as I have now, to describe just what was unsatisfactory. I wrote in my diary immediately on my return home that in describing the scene in the woods he was "somewhat spiritual in his explanations and not as materialistic as I wished." That was my description then, and I cannot make it any clearer now. He said "it was indescribable"; that "it was through the power of God." He then spoke of Paul's hearing and seeing Christ, but his companions did not because heavenly beings are only seen in the spirit. I asked if the atmosphere about the witnesses was normal. He said it was "indescribable," but the light was bright and clear, yet apparently a different kind of light, something of a soft haze, I concluded.

A few years before this, Joseph F. Smith and Apostle Orson Pratt reported that in an interview with them, he said the light was more brilliant than that of the noonday sun.

I have wondered if there was a special significance, not clear to me, in the language used by the three witnesses in their testimony referring to the Golden Plates: ". . . and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man . . ." The eight witnesses say the plates were shown unto them by Joseph Smith. That I call materialistic; the other spiritual, and I could not get anything more out of it. Paul says: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God . . . for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Corinthians 2:11, 14.)

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA and I think, another encyclopedia, in an edition published not long before David

Whitmer's death, rendered a real service in disguise to the truth by repeating and giving credit to the falsehood circulated by the enemies of the Book of Mormon that David Whitmer had repudiated his testimony. That provoked a formal denial from David Whitmer, and he said that the contrary of this was the truth. In this statement he was supported by the leading citizens of Richmond and the county officials of the county in which Richmond is located. All of them not only joined in the denial but asserted that David Whitmer had consistently adhered to his testimony and that he was a highly respected citizen of the community.

I asked David Whitmer why he left the Church. His answer thrilled me more than any other statement which he made. It was the greatest surprise of the interview. I was not familiar then with his history after leaving the Church. He said, "I never left the Church. Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet of God and I accepted nothing revealed to him after 1835 because I did not know whether it came from God or from Sidney Rigdon. He introduced into the Church many innovations. I have presided over a branch of the Church here in Richmond ever since the 'thirties."

The surprise and thrill were due to the way he said it, the way he looked and the circumstances surrounding the interview. The spontaneous expression of his thought—it came as if from the depths of his soul—"Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet of God" which spoke so impressively the most important fact that I was seeking. He could not have fallen if he had not been a prophet of God. That fact, that knowledge in David Whitmer was as manifest as the fact that he sat before me. The conviction came to me as clearly as the sunshine that, if David Whitmer knew anything of the facts, it was that Joseph Smith, in bringing forth the Book of Mormon and organizing the Church, was a prophet of God, and the testimony of the three witnesses was the truth and nothing but the truth.

And David Whitmer was selected to be one of the three who not only saw the plates and the engravings thereon, but saw and heard the messenger from heaven, who ". . . brought and laid [the plates] before our eyes, . . ." and he and they, the three witnesses, declare that they ". . . beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; . . ." and heard the "voice of the Lord" which commanded them that they ". . . should bear record of it; . . ." This they did throughout their lives, even when groping in darkness and the loss of the divine "light of life" and in antagonism to Joseph Smith and the body of the people.

That declaration of David Whitmer's that Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet in 1835 coming as it did, removed all doubt in my mind about the sincerity and honesty of David Whitmer's testimony as published in the Book of Mormon.

In that interview I did my best to ascertain if money could influence David Whitmer and so when he showed me what he called the original copy of the translation of the Book of Mormon, which he did with apparent great pride and interest, I asked him what he would sell it for. He would not even discuss the subject. He said that when the great cyclone a few years before struck Richmond and destroyed many homes, including his own, except the room in which the manuscript was kept, that manuscript was not injured at all. It appeared to me to be in excellent condition. Money had no value to him compared with that of the manuscript, notwithstanding his circumstances in life.

(Concluded on page 229.)

Another reason for our mission success is the expanding community and the number of people coming into this area who are seeking new friends and making changes in their lives. New subdivisions have been fruitful for our missionaries in their proselyting. We have found that the growth of the Church remains in about the same proportion as the growth of the city. Generally speaking, when people move they make new friends and, many times, new affiliations; they also make changes in their social habits. As a result they are often anxious to listen to the Gospel message.

A further reason for our success is the fine organization of the mission. Elder Paul C. Palmer was sustained as the first president, followed by Elder N. Leo Packer. The present presiding authority is President G. Stephen Tanner. This work has continued to grow under the able leadership of each of these men and their counselors. At the present time the mission is fully organized with a district president in each ward and is functioning properly. As a result, more contacts are made and more meetings are held. The entire stake organization, including all the auxiliaries, support the mission wholeheartedly.

The kind and efficient manner in which the missionaries present the Gospel to their contacts is also a major factor in our success. Although the seven lesson plan is followed and flannelboards are extensively used, the policy is not to press the contact toward an early baptism. The missionaries have been kind, patient, loving and understanding. Unfortunately, in instances where pressure has

been used, enemies have been made and possible converts lost. Our missionaries are doing the finest quality of work with a spirit of love and understanding. They have all been faithful, and they attribute most of their success to the fact that they are instruments in God's hands. One missionary says it is best described in *I Corinthians 3:6*: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

One missionary, when his companion was unable to go, took his 10-year-old son to a cottage meeting with him. This young man's reaction was: "Daddy, is the Spirit of the Lord always here like this?"

Another very important factor in the success of the mission is the willingness of the ward members to accept investigators in their congregations and to make them feel at home. This friendliness and companionship between ward members and investigators does not end with conversion but continues indefinitely. This friendship is particularly effective during those first few crucial months of membership in the Church. The beautiful buildings in which we meet also make an impression on those investigating the Gospel.

The investigator classes in our Sunday Schools have also been most helpful and are accomplishing the purposes for which they were organized.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, the stake missionaries of East Phoenix Stake are truly having the best times of their lives as they bring converts to know the Gospel of Christ.

<sup>1</sup>See purposes set forth by Elder Delbert L. Stapley in *The Instructor* of November, 1953, page 328: "The Investigators' Class Is Specially Designed To Aid in Their Conversion."



## HE SAW THE GOLDEN PLATES

(Concluded from page 227.)

My father sought throughout his life, after his visit with David Whitmer, to give everyone the benefit of David Whitmer's testimony.

I am my father's oldest son. I knew him as a father for over a half century. I was not only a part of his household for over 30 years, but for many years I was associated with him in his law office. I knew him to be a man of unquestioned integrity. Although he had been a man of action all his life, aggressive in all that he did, unswerving in his determination to maintain his set principles and standards and ideals, encountering on the way strong opponents and advisers, I never heard anyone question his integrity or his dedication to what he believed was true.

With this as a background it is not hard to realize that to me his testimony of his visit to David Whitmer was as real as though I had experienced it myself. I have always felt as if the testimony of David Whitmer had been received by me from him personally.

I have always known the Book of Mormon is true, as the prophet Joseph Smith and the witnesses represent. I recognize this is one of the greatest heritages left me by my father, James H. Moyle. He told me it was true. His life made this testimony undeniable in my mind. How wonderful to have such a father and to have his testimony confirmed almost every day of my life by my own contacts with the spirit and power of our Heavenly Father!