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## Credibility of the Witnesses

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**Abstract:** This series gives a biographical summary about each of the Eleven Witnesses. Sjodahl quotes portions of published testimonies of the Three Witnesses. The first part summarizes the experiences of the eleven witnesses.

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*“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will the Father honour”* (JOHN 12: 26).

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CREDIBILITY OF THE WITNESSES.

J. M. SJODAHL.

THE Book of Mormon bears the signature of eleven witnesses, who testify solemnly to the miraculous origin of the volume.

Three, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, affirm that they *saw* the plates, because an angel came down from heaven and laid the volume before them and showed them the engravings; they also affirm that they *heard* a voice say that the translation was made “by the gift and power of God;” and that they were commanded, by the Lord, to “bear record of it.”\*

Three facts are set forth here: (1) The witnesses saw the angel, the plates, and the engraved characters; (2) they heard a voice declaring that the translation was divinely inspired; and (3) they were commanded to testify of what they had seen and heard.

Eight witnesses, Christian, Jacob, Peter, and John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum and Samuel Smith, testify that Joseph showed them the plates, and that they handled them and examined the engravings.†

Too much importance can not be attached to these testimonies. St. Paul, speaking of the resurrection of our Lord, which miracle was denied by many and ridiculed by some at that time, gave utterance, with tremendous earnestness, to these thoughts: “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are also found false witnesses of God”

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\*This important event transpired one day in the latter part of June, 1829, while the translation was being made in the home of David Whitmer.

†This happened a day, or perhaps two days, after the three witnesses had seen the plates.

(I. Cor. 15: 14, 15). In the same spirit we may say, with the miracle of Cumorah in view: If there were no Book-of-Mormon plates, our preaching would be vain, our faith would be vain, and the witnesses would be false witnesses. Hence an inquiry into the authenticity of the Book of Mormon naturally begins with a consideration of the character of the witnesses and the nature of their testimony.

Oliver Cowdery, like Joseph Smith, was a native of Vermont. He was born January 7, 1805, the same year as the Prophet, but the two had not met before the 5th of April, 1829, when Cowdery visited him at his home near Harmony, Pa. Shortly before that time the young Oliver had taught school at Manchester, New York, and while thus engaged, he had become acquainted with the Smith family and had heard of the golden plates. Being deeply impressed by the story as related to him, he made it a subject of private prayer, and then he decided to visit the Prophet and investigate the matter for himself. Two days after his first interview with the Prophet, he became his private scribe.

As a member of the Church, Oliver Cowdery, later, held important positions. He preached the first sermon to the world; he was one of the first missionaries to the Lamanites; he was an editor and publisher; he was a member of the High Council at Kirtland, and served in that body, first as a clerk, and then as its president, and when the Prophet Joseph left, with Zion's Camp, for Missouri, he and Sidney Rigdon were given charge of the affairs of the Church, in the absence of the Prophet himself. In 1835 he assisted in the selection of twelve men for the Apostleship, and was one of those who officiated in setting them apart for that high and holy calling. He was one of the trustees of the school in Kirtland, and with others he studied Hebrew and other languages. In 1837 he was assistant counselor to the First Presidency. After 1838, when he had lost his membership in the Church, he practiced law in Michigan, and was quite successful in that profession. Oliver Cowdery returned to the Church in 1848. He passed away in the Whitmer home in Richmond, Mo., not having been able to join the Saints in Utah, as was his intention. In 1878, David Whitmer related the story of the death of Oliver Cowdery, to Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith. He said in part:

“Oliver died the happiest man I ever saw. After shaking hands with the family and kissing his wife and daughter, 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.”—*Millennial Star* Vol. 40, p. 774.

David Whitmer was born January 7, 1805, the same year as the Prophet and Oliver. His father was one of the sturdy veterans of the revolutionary war and a faithful member of the Presbyterian church.

In 1828 David, on a business trip to Palmyra, met Oliver Cowdery, and as the story of the finding of the golden plates was the common topic of conversation of the people in the little country villages at that time, he naturally heard of it. He, possibly, met some of the young men who claimed they had seen the plates in the hill.

Shortly after this, Oliver Cowdery came to Fayette, where the Whitmers lived, and paid them a visit. He was then on his way to Harmony, to see the Prophet, and David made him promise to advise him, as soon as he should find out whether the story was true or not. Oliver kept his promise, and, as has already been stated, the Prophet was invited to come to Fayette, and the translation of the plates was finished there, at the home of the Whitmers. David was baptized in 1829, and became one of the original members of the Church when it was organized, April 6, 1830.

As a Church member David Whitmer was entrusted with important positions. In 1838, however, he was expelled from the Church. The complaint preferred against him was that he had failed to keep the Word of Wisdom; that he had neglected his meetings and other religious duties and affiliated with "dissenters"; but especially that he had arrogated to himself the title of president of the Church of Christ.

Severed from the Church, David located at Richmond, Mo., where he lived until he passed away, January 25, 1888. That he was honored and respected by his friends and neighbors, as a citizen and Christian gentleman, is evident from a statement that appeared in the *Richmond Conservator*, March 25, 1881:

"We, the undersigned citizens of Richmond, Ray Co., Mo., where David Whitmer, Sr., has resided, since the year, A. D. 1838, certify that we have been long and intimately acquainted with him and know him to be a man of the highest integrity and of undoubted truth and veracity."

This public acknowledgment of the trustworthiness of one of the witnesses to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon was signed by twenty-one prominent citizens of Richmond. Among them were two judges, a bank president, an editor, lawyers, a postmaster, a doctor, and some business men. Such was his reputation in the city where he lived for half a century.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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"THE deeper I go into the mysteries of nature, the more simple becomes my faith. Already it is as the faith of the Breton peasant, and I have every reason to believe that if I am able to penetrate yet deeper it will become as the faith of the Breton peasant's wife."—PASTEUR.