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They Bear Witness

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Abstract: This article testifies that the Lord has always had witnesses to bear testimony of his truths—the coming forth of the Book of Mormon follows suit. All who read the Book of Mormon may read the testimony of the Three Witnesses.

They Bear Witness

by Joseph Fielding Smith

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

AS A WITNESS to the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ, I address my remarks not only to those who are assembled here, but also to those who are scattered abroad, many of whom may not be members of the Church.

The Lord said that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, all things should be established, and he has always had witnesses who could bear testimony of this truth by divine revelation and appointment.

When he sent the missionaries out in the early days after the restoration of the gospel, the Lord said he sent them that they might "be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.

"Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor.

"Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads." (D & C 88:80-82.)

So the words that are spoken by those who are commissioned and have the authority to bear witness of the truth are binding not only upon the members of the Church, but also upon all unto whom this message comes.

In regard to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the Lord said that he would choose witnesses. There should be three special witnesses that should bear record to the world, and said he:

"And there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word unto the children of men; for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead.

"Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!" (2 Ne. 27:13-14.)

I shall not take time to read the testimonies of the Three Witnesses, nor of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. These are published in each copy of that book. The testimony of Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris was that in the presence of an angel they beheld the record from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and had the privilege of examining it in the presence of that heavenly being, and the voice of the Lord sounded to them from the heavens calling upon them to bear witness of this truth, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

Eight other witnesses beheld the plates, but not in the presence of an

angel. These are the witnesses spoken of in the Book of Mormon, whom the Lord said he would call to bear record of the truth of this Book of Mormon.

All those who have heard of the Book of Mormon, all those who have read it, have had the opportunity to read the testimonies of Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, who bore solemn testimony to the truth of this record, that is, of its being revealed. If they refuse to read (and yet their attention has been called to this fact, that the Lord has spoken, that he has given into the hands of the world today the record of those people who lived anciently) and they turn away and reject it, they will have to answer for it before the judgment seat of God.

And wo be unto those who take it upon themselves to fight these revelations.

I bear witness to you that the Lord has made it very clear to me by revelation which I have received, and many of you who are here present can bear witness likewise, that these things are true, and that is the privilege of any sincere person who will endeavor to read with a prayerful spirit and a desire to know whether the book is true or not; and he will receive that testimony according to the promise that was made by Moroni, who sealed the record to come forth in the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times.

I thought it would be well, however, to bring two testimonies here and read them, one from David Whitmer and one from Oliver Cowdery. When I read these, I am going to read the copies that I made from the original sources. This is not a copy from a copy, but a copy from the original, that I read to you.

This is a testimony of David Whitmer, given in Richmond, Missouri, March 19, 1881—copied from the original document, which was published in the *Richmond Conservator* on that date.

"Unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people unto whom these presence shall come—

"It having been represented by one John Murphy of Polo [Caldwell County], Missouri, that I had in a conversation with him last summer, denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon—

"To the end thereof, 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 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, will 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 now again affirm the truth of all my statements as then made and published.

"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear: It was no delusion. What is written is written, and he that readeth let him understand. . . .

"And if any man doubt should he not carefully and honestly read and understand the same before presuming to sit in judgment, and condemning the light which shineth in darkness, and showeth the way to eternal life, as pointed out by the hand of God?

"In the Spirit of Christ who hath said follow thou me; for 'I am the life, the light, and the way.' I submit this statement to the world. God, in whom I trust being my judge, as to the sincerity of my motives and the faith and hope that is in me of eternal life.

"My sincere desire is that the world may be benefited by the plain and simple statement of the truth.

"And all the honor be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen."

"David Whitmer, Sr."

This document bears the signature and endorsement as to the character of David Whitmer by the following citizens of Richmond, Ray County, Missouri.

Richmond, Mo. March 19th., A.D. 1881.

"We the undersigned citizens of Richmond, Ray County, 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—Given at Richmond, Mo., this March 19, A.D. 1881.

A. W. Doniphan"

George W. Dunn, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit.

T. D. Woodson, President Ray County Savings Bank

Jacob O. Child, Editor of *Conservator*
H. C. Garmen, Cashier Ray County Savings Bank

W. A. Holman, County Treasurer
J. S. Hughes, Banker, Richmond, Mo.
James Hughes, Banker, Richmond, Mo.
D. P. Whitmer, Attorney At Law
James W. Black, Attorney At Law
L. C. Cantwell, Postmaster, Richmond, Mo.

Geo. I. Watson, Mayor
Jas. A. Davis, Revenue Collector
J. Hughes, Probate Judge and P. J. Ray County Courts

(Continued on following page)

President Joseph Fielding Smith

Continued

Geo. W. Trigg, County Clerk Ray County
H. W. Mosby, M.D.
Thos. McGinnis, Late Sheriff Ray County
W. R. Holman, Furniture Merchant
J. P. Quousinberrey, Merchant
Lewis Slaughter, Recorder of Deeds
G. W. Buchanan, M.D.
A. K. Reyburn

The following editorial in the *Richmond Conservator* was also published: "Elsewhere we publish a letter from David Whitmer, Sen., an old and well known citizen of Ray, as well as an endorsement of his standing as a man, signed by a number of the leading citizens of this community, in reply to some unwarranted aspersions made upon him.

"There is no doubt that Mr. Whitmer, who was one of the Three Witnesses of the authenticity of the gold plates, from which he asserts that Joe Smith translated the Book of Mormon (a facsimile of them he now has in his possession with the original records)"—may I be pardoned to pause there and say he did not have the original records; what the editor meant was that he had a copy of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, which manuscript was used in the translation of the record—"is firmly convinced of its divine origin, and while he makes no effort to obtrude his views or belief, he simply wants the world to know that so far as he is concerned there is no 'variableness or shadow of turning.' Having resided here for half of a century, it is with no little pride that he points to his past record, with the consciousness that he has done nothing derogatory to his character as a citizen and a believer in the Son of Mary to warrant such an attack on him, coming from what source it may, and now, with the lilies of seventy-five winters crowning him like an aureole, and, his pilgrimage on earth well nigh ended he reiterates his former statement and will leave futurity to solve the problem that he was but a passing witness of its fulfillment."

From a letter written by Oliver Cowdery, another of the three witnesses, to his brother-in-law, Phineas Young, March 23, 1846, from Tiffin, Ohio, I copy this:

"I have cherished a hope, and that 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 look down through time, and witness 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 have gone to your long-sought rest."

You know, when Oliver Cowdery wrote that he was not a member of the Church, he had left the Church through some transgression. Not long, however, after he wrote this letter to his brother-in-law he found his way back to the body of the Church.

When the Prophet Joseph Smith was in Carthage Jail with his brother Hyrum, John Taylor, and Willard Richards, the Prophet asked that a letter be written to Oliver Cowdery asking him if he had not fed upon the husks long enough. I do not know what became of that letter, but evidently it must have been written and shortly after the martyrdom, Oliver Cowdery found his

way back to Nauvoo and then continued his journey across the Territory of Iowa to the camp of the Latter-day Saints at Kanesville, where he made his plea to be brought back again into the Church, testifying there again, which testimony I think is quite generally known, that he was not asking to come back for any place or position, but merely to be a humble member of the Church, and he bore witness to the same things on his return.

Just another word—if Oliver Cowdery had been lying and the story was not true, at the time when unstable members of the Church were forsaking it, he never would have gone to Nauvoo, among the enemies of the people, and then continued his journey westward to find the body of the Latter-day Saints when everyone else thought they had gone to their destruction.

The Lord bless you, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Repent ye therefore . . ."

by Clifford E. Young

ASSISTANT TO THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

MY BRETHREN AND SISTERS, I am sure you can appreciate my feelings in occupying this position following the impressive address to which we have just listened. I trust that what I shall say may add to your faith.

You will remember that following the crucifixion of the Savior and his resurrection, he tarried with his disciples for some forty days, giving them instructions and administering to them the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Then he assured them that as he left them, he would again come in like manner to bless the children of men. He enjoined upon the Twelve that they should tarry in Jerusalem until they could be endowed with power from on high; then they were to go forth and to proclaim the gospel, his gospel, to all nations, a message of eternal life.

So, following these events, we find the people gathered "with one accord" on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter, feeling this great power that had been promised, declared to the multitude Jesus Christ and him crucified. We are told that "they were pricked in their hearts," impressed by the Spirit, and they cried with one accord, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Then Peter taught them the basic principles of the gospel, that they should repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins; and he promised them that they, too, would have the blessings of the Holy Ghost which had rested upon him and others of the Twelve. Later, we find Peter and John going up to the temple.

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

And a certain man lame from his

mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. [Something material.]

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. (Acts 3:1-11.)

When the fame of this miracle spread, people gathered from near and far to listen to the message, as they had on the Day of Pentecost. Among these people were some who doubtless had participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. They had not realized what they had done. Then Peter, preaching to them, said:

And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers, [I know, using the old English expression, "I wot," I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.]