



Type: Magazine Article

The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, No. II

Author(s): Edward Stevenson

Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 48, No. 23 (7 June 1886)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 366–368

Abstract: As a witness who sat in the presence of the prophet Joseph and the Three Witnesses, this author presents his accounts of some of the occasions when testimonies were borne. The author states that he was “deeply inspired” as he heard them many times testify of being in the presence of a heavenly messenger who talked with them and showed them the plates. They were shown the Urim and Thummim and told these seer stones were used by ancient prophets. The second part focuses on Martin Harris.

THE THREE WITNESSES TO THE BOOK OF MORMON.

—O—
NO. II.

In the year 1870, I was called to perform a mission to the United States, and in the course of my journey I called at Kirtland, Ohio, to see the Temple, this being the first one built by the Latter-day Saints. It was at this time that I met Martin Harris again, after a lapse of thirty-six years. It was customary for him to avail himself of every opportunity to bear testimony to all strangers, and those visiting Kirtland and the Temple, believing it to be his special duty to do so, as he had been commanded by the angel of the Lord. It certainly was a great pleasure to me to find him still constant in his testimony, and in my heart I felt to pity him in his declining years, in his future prospects and hopes, and I felt to admonish him to the renewal of his duties and more advanced privileges of gathering to Zion and receiving his endowments and blessings. He seemed impressed, and said whatever befell him he knew that Joseph was a Prophet, for he had not only proved it from the Bible but that he had stood with him in the presence of an angel, and he also knew that the Twelve Apostles were chosen of God. A Mr. Bond who held the keys of the Temple, gave me a pressing invitation to preach in it, feeling, he said, inspired with the testimony borne to Martin Harris. My reply was that at some future time I would endeavor to comply with his request. In 1871, after my return home to Utah, I was divinely impressed to write to Martin Harris, and his reply was very favorable, he being inspired and impressed that it was his duty to gather up with the Saints, and become identified with the advanced work of God. The letter met the approval of President Young, and a subscription was taken up, in which many participated, a list of whom I still retain. When about sufficient was subscribed it was presented to President Young, who endorsed it with \$25, and I proceeded to New York, procured tickets, visited the hill Cumorah, and called for my charge at Kirtland, Ohio, finding

Martin Harris anxiously waiting. He related a little incident that occurred as he went to bid adieu to some old friends previous to his departure. His way led him through a woodland field, in which he lost his way. Wandering about, he became bewildered, and came in contact with briars and blackberry vines, his clothes were torn into tatters, and his skin lacerated and bleeding. He laid down under a tree in despair, with little hope of recovery. It was about midnight, when he was aroused, and called upon the Lord and received strength; and about one o'clock, a. m., he found his friends. When he related this circumstance he said the devil desired to prevent him from going to Zion.

The following day, Sunday, after my arrival in Kirtland, the Temple was opened to me with permission to preach in it, and a vote was taken for a second meeting in the afternoon, which was well attended. At our hotel in Chicago, where we laid over one day, Martin bore his testimony to several crowds gathered around to see "the man who had seen an angel." All seemed astonished to hear him relate the vision with a force and will hard to gainsay.

On our arrival at Des Moines, the capital of Iowa, where there was a Branch of the Church presided over by J. M. Ballinger, we rested a few days, and a new suit of clothes very much helped the feelings and appearance of the old gentleman. I took him to the leading newspaper office of the capital, and after being questioned, Martin bore his testimony to the editor and others, which was published with very favorable notice of the remarkable man who claimed to have stood in the presence of an angel in this our day. It was remarked that he was bright and smart for one of his years (about eighty). Martin also bore his testimony at a meeting, the audience listening to him with marked attention. The following day we baptized a Mrs. Fifield, in the Des Moines river, and proceeded on our journey to Salt Lake City, where Martin Harris bore

his testimony in the Tabernacle to a densely crowded house, and was listened to with almost breathless silence. Here again I was witness once more to the faithful, earnest testimony of his standing in the presence of the angel, hearing his voice and seeing the plates, &c. He accompanied me to several other meetings, and every time he was unequivocating in his firmness and testimony. Many interesting incidents were related by Martin on our journey, one of which I will relate. He said that on one occasion several of his old acquaintances made an effort to get him tipsy by treating him to some wine. When they thought he was in a good mood for talk, they put the question very carefully to him: "Well, now, Martin, we want you to be frank and candid with us in regard to this story of your seeing an angel and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon that are so much talked about. We have always taken you to be an honest, good farmer and neighbor of ours, but could not believe that you ever did see an angel. Now Martin, do you really believe that you did see an angel when you were awake?" No, said Martin, I do not believe it. The anticipation of the delighted crowd at this exclamation may be imagined. But soon a different feeling prevailed when Martin Harris, true to his trust, said, "Gentlemen, what I have said is true, from the fact that my belief is swallowed up in knowledge; for I want to say to you that as the Lord lives I do know that I stood with the Prophet Joseph Smith in the presence of the angel, and it was in the brightness of day." Martin Harris related this circumstance to me substantially as I give it, adding that, although he drank wine with them as friends, he always believed in temperance and sobriety.

While on our journey, and more particularly at the Des Moines river, at the baptism of the woman spoken of, I took occasion to teach Brother Martin the necessity of his being rebaptized. At first he did not seem to agree with the idea, but I referred him to the scriptural words, "repent and do the first works having lost the

first love," &c. (See Rev., 2nd chap.). Finally, he said if it was right, the Lord would manifest it to him by His spirit, and He did do so, for Martin, soon after his arrival in Salt Lake City, came to my house and said the spirit of the Lord had made it manifest to him, not only for himself personally, but also that he should be baptized for his dead, for he had seen his father seeking his aid. He saw his father at the foot of a ladder, striving to get up to him, and he went down to him taking him by the hand and helped him up. The baptismal font was prepared, and by arrangement I led Martin Harris down into the water and rebaptized him. Five of the Apostles were present, viz., John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Orson Pratt, Geo. A. Smith, and Joseph F. Smith, also J. D. T. McCallister, and others. After baptism, Orson Pratt confirmed him, being joined with the rest of the brethren, by the laying on of hands; after which he was baptized for some of his dead friends, and to add to the interest of the occasion, Martin's sister also was baptized for their female friends. The occasion was one which interested all present, and reminded us of Christ's parable of the lost sheep (Luke xv), "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." I wish to add that Brother Harris having been away from the Church so many years did not understand more than the first principles taught in the infantile days of the Church, which accounts for his not being posted in the doctrine of the Gospel being preached to the spirits who are departed, which was afterwards taught by Joseph Smith the Prophet, who, being instructed by inspiration, brought to light many things taught by Jesus and His disciples, and which are plainly laid down in the Bible. Who of us were able to understand the saying recorded in 1st Peter, iii c. that "Christ was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit: by which also he went and preached

unto the spirits in prison :” or, “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?” (1 Cor., xv, 29.) Those precious principles of Gospel truth were taught and practiced in the days of Jesus and his Apostles, when the Church was directed by divine inspiration and enjoyed apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, gifts and all necessary blessings to constitute a perfect Church, the absence of which has produced divisions, schisms and contentions, such as were found at the time when the angel (Rev. xiv, 6, 7 verses) came to the young man, Joseph Smith (Zec. ii, 3, 4). Since

that time we have been enlightened through the restoration of the not new, but the good old Gospel. We are taught plainly by Peter (4th chap. 6 v.) “For for this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they may be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” Martin Harris having been instructed in these things said the manifestation of the spirit plainly led him to do only what Jesus had established for the salvation of not only the living but the dead, for Christ died for all.

EDWARD STEVENSON.

POETRY.

LIVE TO DO GOOD.

Live to do good! 'Tis better far
Than mines of wealth untold;
The soul who loveth virtue's cause
Is richer far than gold.

Live to do good! A noble aim,
Worthy of kings to prize.
The good and noble of mankind
Alone can sympathize

With care and want, distress and woe.
The noble and the brave

Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Seek not for power, grandeur, fame,
Nor earthly honors crave.

Live to do good! Who liveth well
Will find that life is true,
And realize a noble aim,
With heavenly bliss in view.

Live to do good! ye Saints of God,
Pursue the paths of peace,
That you may gain His love and grace,
And joys which never cease.

WILLIAM B. CRAIG.

DIED.

WILLIAMSON.—At Paragoonah, Iron Co., Utah, April 27, 1886, of consumption, John Williamson, son of James and Ann Williamson; born September 6, 1844, at Pendlebury, Lancashire, England.

STONES.—At Paragoonah, Iron County, Utah, April 25, 1886, of congestive fever, Daniel Stones; born October 14, 1827, in Halghamore, Kearsley, England; was baptized in 1847; emigrated to Utah in 1874, and died as he lived, a faithful Latter-day Saint.

CONTENTS.

Future Punishment	- - - - - 353	President Brigham Young	- - - - - 364
Utah News	- - - - - 358	Releases-	- - - - - 365
Editorials.—Decision of the U. S. Supreme Court. — Elder Lambert		To Glass-blowers	- - - - - 365
Speaks for Himself. — Governor		Abstract of Correspondence	- - - - - 365
West Visits our Brethren in Prison	- - - - - 360, 362, 364	The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon	- - - - - 366
		Poetry.—Live to Do Good	- - - - - 368

EDITED, PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY DANIEL H. WELLS, 42, ISLINGTON,
LIVERPOOL.

FOR SALE ALSO IN ALL THE CONFERENCES OF THE CHURCH IN
GREAT BRITAIN