

other...shall view it, *save it be a few according to the will of God,*" thus allowing for the inclusion of the Eight Witnesses.

Joseph Smith later impugned the integrity of at least four of the Witnesses before they left or were expelled from the Church: "Such characters as McLellin, John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them."

After Smith's assassination, James Strang, claiming to be Smith's chosen successor, also produced buried plates and the testimony of eleven witnesses to their authenticity. All living witnesses to the Book of Mormon (except possibly Cowdery)—three of the Whitmers, Martin Harris, and Hiram Page—accepted at least briefly Strang's leadership, angelic call, metal plates, and his translation of these plates as authentic.

Years later, Mormon leader Brigham Young said that some witnesses of the Book of Mormon, who handled the plates and conversed with the angels of God, were afterwards left to doubt and to disbelieve that they had ever seen an angel.

Why were Martin Harris and David Whitmer only allowed to see the plates with "spiritual eyes"? (see *Dialogue*, Winter 1972, pp. 83-84) Even some of the eight witnesses, who were supposed to be "physical" witnesses of the plates, claimed the event was based on the supernatural. For instance, John Whitmer, in the *History of the Church*, claims that "they were shown to me by a supernatural power".

If the plates were real, why would it take faith to see them? (D&C 17:2) (How could he have translated without the plates, as his scribes said, if he was doing a literal translation of a physical object?)

Why does the church now extol the witnesses when Joseph Smith condemned them?

(Doctrine and Covenants 3:12-13) ("Such characters as McLellin, John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them." - *History of the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 232) (In *History of the Church*, Vol. 3, page 228 Joseph Smith calls David Whitmer a "dumb ass".)

Why would most of them leave the church?

Why would many of them become Strangites? If Utah Mormons believe the witnesses' testimonies of Joseph Smith's claims shouldn't they also believe the testimonies of James Jesse Strang's very similar claims? (same for William E. McLellin's movement)

Why did Brigham Young say that the witnesses doubted and disbelieved in their experience? "Some of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, who handled the plates and conversed with the angels of God, were afterwards left to doubt and disbelieve that they had ever seen an angel." (JOD 7:164 1859).

What sort of objectivity can the witnesses offer when all (except Martin Harris--who had a financial interest) were related to Joseph Smith or David Whitmer?

What was the purpose in Moroni taking the plates back? Why couldn't Joseph at least been able to copy down the characters on the plates so that future generations could hopefully verify the characters' authenticity?

These questions and many others need to be answered.

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Pamphlet 599

Testimonies for the *Book of Mormon*

Whatever judgment a reader may make about the *Book of Mormon*—an inspired revelation, a hoax, an early American epic novel, or a wicked scheme to deceive Methodists and Baptists—he must admit that the book is a remarkable document. It has influenced the course of history and has changed the lives of millions of men and women.

The publication of the *Book of Mormon* was a significant event in the life of the LDS Church. With its publication in March 1830, two sets of witnesses testified to it as the history of the early peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Joseph Smith said that he translated the record by the gift and power of God.



Joseph Smith and the Eight Witnesses, by Harold T. (Dale) Kilbourn (1984), illustrates Joseph Smith allowing the eight witnesses to touch the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated.

The Testimony of Three Witnesses

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 shewn 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

The Testimony of Eight Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that Joseph Smith, Jr., the translator of this work, has shewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said

Smith has translated, we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shewn unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen; and we lie not, God bearing witness of it.
Christian Whitmer
Jacob Whitmer
Peter Whitmer, Jr.
John Whitmer
Hiram Page
Joseph Smith, Sen.
Hyrum Smith
Samuel H. Smith

Every edition of the *Book of Mormon* carries the testimony of the three witnesses and of eight witnesses who swore that they had seen and handled the plates. Harris, Cowdery and Whitmer all left the Mormon Church and were damned by [Joseph] Smith, but Cowdery and Harris returned and were re-baptized. None of the trio ever denied his testimony but Harris later explained that he had seen the plates with the eyes of faith. Questioned by a lawyer, Harris replied, "I did not see them [the plates] as I do that pencil-case, yet I saw them with the eye of faith; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me—although at the time they were covered with a cloth" (John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, Philadelphia, 1842, pp. 256-7) . 1

Of the eight other witnesses three were members of the Smith family, four were the Whitmers and the eighth (Hyrum Page) had married a Whitmer daughter.

Skeptical criticism of the Testimonies

Critics of the Latter Day Saint movement—from late nineteenth-century clergymen to Mark Twain to modern agnostics, evangelical Christians, and Mormons who have been disciplined by the LDS Church—argue that the testimonies of the witnesses cannot be taken at face value.

“Non-Mormons speculate that Smith was able to obtain these testimonies by means of his powers of suggestion and hypnosis. It is even possible that he fashioned some plates to resemble the golden plates and used these to convince the witnesses” (*The Latter-day Saints in the Modern World*, by William J. Whalen, John Day Company, 1964, p. 32.).

All the witnesses were family, close friends, or financial backers of Joseph Smith. Cowdery, Page, and the five Whitmers were related by marriage. Mark Twain later joked, "I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified."

Martin Harris was said to have stated that the Eight Witnesses never saw the plates, and "hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it." Although Harris continued to testify to the truth of the *Book of Mormon* even when he was estranged from the church, at least during the early years of the movement, he seems to have repeatedly admitted the internal, subjective nature of his visionary experience.

In Doctrine and Covenants 5:11-14, revealed to Joseph Smith in March 1829, the Three Witnesses are told that they will be given power to see the golden plates, "to behold and view these things...and to none else will I grant this power, to receive this same testimony among this generation." In 2 Nephi 27:13, a translation completed in the late spring or early summer of the same year, the Three are told that "none