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# The Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon

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## D&C 5:12

In June 1828 Joseph Smith Sr. received word that the translation of the gold plates was finished and a copyright secured for the manuscript on June 11, 1829. Father Smith “conveyed this intelligence to Martin [Harris].” Mother Smith explained the reason why Martin needed to know: “We loved the man, although his weakness had cost us much trouble.”<sup>1</sup> Martin rejoiced at the news and the next morning journeyed with Father and Mother Smith to the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, arriving about sunset.

That evening in the Whitmer home, the Smiths, the Whitmers, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris read part of the completed manuscript and talked of witnesses of the gold plates and wondered aloud who would be chosen. Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris asked Joseph to “inquire of the Lord” if they might be the witnesses. Joseph said, “They became so very solicitous, and urged me so much to inquire that at length I complied, and through the Urim and Thummim” received an answer.<sup>2</sup> The answer he received was that the three men named would “know of a surety that these things are true, for from heaven will I declare it unto them” (D&C 5:12).

The next morning a worship service took place in the Whitmer home. During the service, Joseph said, “Martin Harris, you have got to humble yourself before your God this day,

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845. Document Transcript. Joseph Smith Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *History*, 1838–1856 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], p. 23. Joseph Smith Papers.

that you may obtain a forgiveness of your sins. If you do, it is the will of God that you should look upon the plates, in company with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.”<sup>3</sup>

As the morning progressed, Joseph and Oliver brought David from the field where he was plowing and in company with Martin walked into a nearby “piece of woods” to “try to obtain by fervent and humble prayer, the fulfillment of the promises given.” After kneeling down, “according to previous arrangements,” Joseph prayed. He was followed “by each of the rest in succession,” yet they did not receive a manifestation of the truthfulness of the gold plates. Believing they would yet receive the desired manifestation, they “again observed the same order of prayer, each calling on, and praying fervently to God in rotation.”<sup>4</sup> Yet again, there was no manifestation.

As the Prophet Joseph recalled the subsequent events, Martin “proposed that he should withdraw himself from us, believing as he expressed himself that his presence was the cause of our not obtaining what we wished for.” Martin then walked away from the others. Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer then “knelt down again, and had not been many minutes engaged in prayer,” when an angel appeared and showed them the plates.<sup>5</sup> Of this sacred experience, David Whitmer said,

We then kneeled down and prayed. Joseph prayed. We then got up and sat on the log and were talking, when all at once a light came down from above us and encircled us for quite a little distance around; and the angel stood before us. He was dressed in white, and spoke and called me by name and said “Blessed is he that keepeth His commandments.” This is all that I heard the angel say. A table was set before us and on it the records were placed. The Records of the Nephites, from which the Book of Mormon was translated, the brass plates, the Ball of Directors, the sword of Laban and other plates. While we were viewing them the voice of God spoke out of heaven saying that the Book was true and the translation correct.<sup>6</sup>

There were now two witnesses of the Book of Mormon, but what of Martin? The Prophet Joseph wrote,

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<sup>3</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (1853), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (September 1, 1842): 897–98.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” 897–98.

<sup>6</sup> “Letter from Elder W. H. Kelley,” *The Saints’ Herald* 29, no. 5 (March 1, 1882): 68.

I now left David and Oliver, and went in pursuit of Martin Harris, whom I found at a considerable distance, fervently engaged in prayer. He soon told me, however, that he had not yet prevailed with the Lord, and earnestly requested me to join him in prayer, that he also might realize the same blessings which we had just received. We accordingly joined in prayer, and ultimately obtained our desires, for before we had yet finished, the same vision was opened to our view, at least it was again opened to me, and I once more beheld and heard the same things; whilst at the same moment, Martin Harris cried out, apparently in an ecstasy of joy, "'Tis enough; 'tis enough; mine eyes have beheld; mine eyes have beheld;" and jumping up, he shouted, "hosannah," blessing God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph left the wooded area and returned to the Whitmer home in the afternoon. Upon seeing his parents, he exclaimed,

Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am; the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, who has testified to them, and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said, for now they know for themselves, that I do not go about to deceive the people, and I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear, and it rejoices my soul, that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.<sup>8</sup>

As Martin entered the Whitmer home, he "seemed altogether unable to give vent to his feelings in words," yet he said,

I have now seen an angel from heaven, who has of a surety testified of the truth of all that I have heard concerning the record, and my eyes have beheld him. I have also looked upon the plates and handled them with my hands and can testify of the same to the whole world. But I have received for myself a witness that words cannot express, that no tongue can describe, and I bless God in the sincerity of my soul that he has condescended to make me—even me—a witness of the greatness of his work an[d] designs in behalf [of] the children of men.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> History, 1838–1856, 23; see "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 21 (1 September 1842): 897–898.

<sup>8</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, p. 11, bk. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, p. 1, bk. 9.