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## “TOO MEAN TO MENTION” THE BOOK OF MORMON WITNESSES

By Sandra Tanner

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, claimed that when he was seventeen years old, a heavenly messenger appeared to him in his bedroom in Western New York to commission him to translate an ancient record containing God’s dealings with the forefathers of the Native Americans. The angel, later identified as Moroni, explained that he was once a mortal and was the last person to write on the sacred plates, which he had hid in a stone box in a nearby hill in approximately 421 A.D. He explained that the record contained “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent,” and that they also contained “the fulness of the everlasting Gospel.” Also stored in the box was the sword of Laban, a breast plate and the Urim and Thummim (described as large spectacles) to aid in translating the record.

Four years later, on September 22, 1827, the angel allowed Smith to retrieve the plates and the Urim and Thummim from the hill, and sometime later he began his translation. Upon completion, Joseph Smith claimed that he returned the gold plates to the angel and published the book in 1830 under the title *The Book of Mormon*. Included in the book were two statements, one signed by three men attesting that an angel had appeared to them and showed them the gold plates. The other statement, signed by eight witnesses, affirmed that they had seen the plates. In this article we will look at some of the background of these men.

### THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

Writing in 1842, Rev. Henry Caswall related a description of the plates and the heavenly instruments by Joseph’s mother, Lucy Smith:

My son Joseph has had revelations from God since he was a boy, and he is indeed a true prophet of Jehovah. The angel of the Lord appeared to him fifteen years since, and shewed him the cave where the original golden plates of the book of Mormon were deposited. He shewed him also the Urim and Thummim, by which he might understand the meaning of the inscriptions on the plates, and he shewed him the golden breastplate of the high priesthood. . . . I have myself seen and handled the golden plates; they are about eight inches long, and six wide; some of them are sealed together and are not to be opened, and some of them are loose. . . .

I have seen and felt also the Urim and Thummim. They resemble two large bright diamonds set in a bow like a pair of spectacles. My son puts these over his eyes when he reads unknown languages, and they enable him to interpret them in English.<sup>1</sup>

When and how Lucy Smith saw the plates and the Urim and Thummim has never been explained. We assume it was in a vision or dream since she wasn’t one of the Book of Mormon witnesses. Also, none of the people who witnessed Smith during his translation activities describe him actually using the spectacles. Even Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma, who was one of his scribes, was never permitted to see the plates.

After Martin Harris, one of Smith’s scribes and benefactor, lost the first 116 pages of the manuscript,



Oliver Cowdery



David Whitmer



Martin Harris

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 220-221.

the work of translation shifted from using the Urim and Thummim to using Smith's seer stone, found in a neighbor's well in 1822, five years before receiving the plates.<sup>2</sup> Emma Smith tells how this happened in an 1870 letter to Emma Pilgrim:

Now the first that my <husband> translated, was translated by the use of the Urim and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather a dark color . . .<sup>3</sup>

Emma gave the following description of the translation process:

"In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, after sitting by the table close by him, he sitting with **his face buried in his hat**, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us."<sup>4</sup>

Curiously, in illustrating various instruction manuals, the LDS Church does not depict Smith using either the Urim and Thummim or the seer stone. He is almost always shown sitting at a desk and simply looking at the plates, as though he were doing a regular translation.

## MONEY DIGGING

During the same time period that the angel was supposedly grooming Smith for the role of "Seer" (before allowing him to retrieve the plates) he and his father were involved in treasure digging. In the early 1820's Joseph was often sought out as a "seer" who could discern the location of buried treasures by looking at his stone.<sup>5</sup> When Martin Harris was interviewed in 1859 he mentioned Smith's early use of his stone:

Joseph had a **stone** which was dug from the well of Mason Chase, . . . It was by means of this stone he first discovered these plates. . . . Joseph had had this stone for some time. There was a company there in that neighborhood, who were **digging for money** supposed to have been hidden by the ancients. Of this company were old Mr. Stowel—I think his name was

Josiah—also old Mr. [Alvah] Beman, also Samuel Lawrence, George Proper, **Joseph Smith, jr., and his father, and his brother Hiram Smith**. They dug for money in Palmyra, Manchester, also in Pennsylvania, and other places. When Joseph found this stone, there was a company digging in Harmony, Pa., and they took Joseph to look in the stone for them, and he did so for a while, and then he told them the enchantment was so strong he could not see, and they gave it up. There he became acquainted with his future wife, the daughter of old Mr. Isaac Hale, where he boarded.<sup>6</sup>

While Smith was acting as "seer" for the money-digging group, he was arrested in 1826 in Chenango County, New York, jailed and appeared before Justice Albert Neeley. He was charged with a misdemeanor for claiming magical powers to find buried treasure. Joseph's defense was that he truly had the gift but had given up looking in his stone to find treasures as it hurt his eyes. In Judge Neeley's court record Smith reportedly said:

That he [Joseph Smith] had a certain stone which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were; that he professed to tell in this manner where gold mines were a distance underground, and had looked for Mr. Stowel[!] several times, . . . that he had occasionally been in the habit of looking through this stone to find lost property for three years, but of late had pretty much given it up on account of its injuring his health, especially his eyes, made them sore. . . .<sup>7</sup>

However, rather than giving up the use of his magic stone all together, Smith simply changed the way he used it, from treasure hunting to translating the Book of Mormon plates.

## MAGIC INVOLVEMENT

Contrary to the Bible's strong denunciation of magic and necromancy in Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Joseph Smith and many, if not all, of the witnesses had been involved in the magic practices of the area, believing in ghosts who guarded buried treasures, using magic spells and paraphernalia.

Besides Joseph Smith's seer stone, he also owned a magic Jupiter talisman (a silver medallion worn on a string around the neck).<sup>8</sup> Mormon historian Reed C. Durham made these observations about Smith's talisman in his

2 For a detailed discussion of the problems associated with Smith's claim of using the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone, see *The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry*, by LaMar Petersen, chapter 2. Also, D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), pp. 174-175, 243.

3 As cited in *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 1, p. 532.

4 *The Saints' Herald*, May 19, 1888, p. 310, as cited by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 81.

5 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2008), pp. 32-49D.

6 Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 303-304.

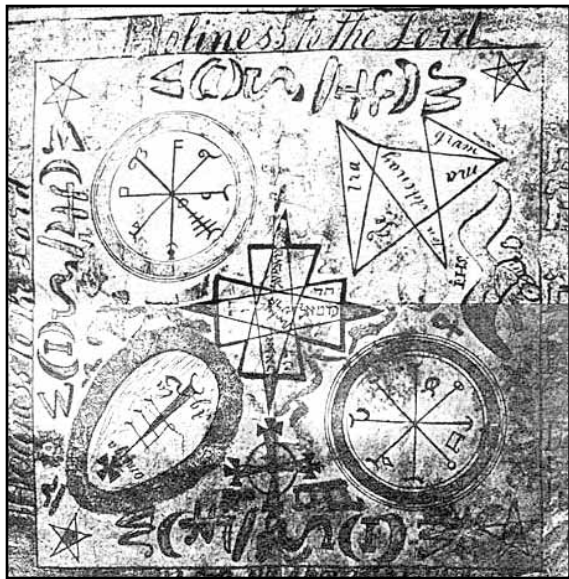
7 As cited by H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844*, (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005), p. 68.

8 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1988), pp. 2-5.

presidential address to the Mormon History Association on April 20, 1974:

All available evidence suggest that Joseph Smith the Prophet possessed a magical Masonic medallion, or talisman, which he worked during his lifetime and which was evidently on his person when he was martyred. His talisman is in the shape of a silver dollar and is probably made of silver or tin. . . . [it] can now be identified as a Jupiter talisman. It carries the sign and image of Jupiter and should more appropriately be referred to as the Table of Jupiter. . . .

In astrology, Jupiter is always associated with high positions, getting one's own way, and all forms of status.<sup>9</sup>



A photo of a magic parchment owned by Joseph Smith's brother, Hyrum.

Joseph's brother, Hyrum, who was one of the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon, also owned magic parchments and a magic dagger. These artifacts are currently in the possession of Eldred G. Smith, Patriarch emeritus of the LDS Church and great, great-grandson of Hyrum Smith. Mormon writer Pearson H. Corbett describes these relics of Hyrum Smith in his book, *Hyrum Smith—Patriarch*:

Dagger, Masonic ten inch, stainless steel—wooden handle—Masonic symbols on blade.

Emblematic parchments—Masonic—three, original hand painted on heavy bodied paper—on border appears initials "I.H.S." . . .

Pouch, Masonic cotton fabric 4" x 4" with draw string attached.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> As cited in *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, p. 2. See also *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> Pearson H. Corbett, *Hyrum Smith—Patriarch*, p. 453, as cited in *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, p. 5.

Historian D. Michael Quinn made the following observation about the Smith family's magic artifacts:

The three magic parchments possessed by the Smith family have three different purposes, all interrelated. The "Holiness to the Lord" parchment is a lamen of ceremonial magic to receive visitation from "good angels." The "Saint Peter bind them" parchment is a talisman for personal protection. The faded "Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah" parchment is a house-amulet.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Smith, told of the family's magic involvement in the preliminary draft of her family history, although defending it as something that never interfered with their regular work:

I shall change my theme for the present but let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopt our labor and went <at> tryin=g to win the **faculty of Abrac [,] drawing Magic circles or sooth saying** to the neglect of all kinds of bu<i>ssness we never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation but whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remmember the service of & the welfare of our souls.<sup>12</sup>

In Acts 19:19 we read of some people who "used curious arts" before they were converted to Christianity. At the time they confessed the Lord, however, they "brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." Unlike the early Christians who destroyed their magic paraphernalia, the Smiths preserved their magic artifacts. In fact, the LDS Church has preserved several of Smith's seer stones in their church vault.<sup>13</sup>

A young man named Oliver Cowdery, who became one of Joseph Smith's most important scribes and one of the three witness to the Book of Mormon, was also involved in magic, using a forked divining rod.<sup>14</sup> Shortly after Cowdery became a scribe, Smith received a revelation mentioning Cowdery's special gift. The 1829 revelation, printed in the 1833 *Book of Commandments*, spoke of Cowdery's "gift of working with the rod," which was referred to as his "rod of nature" which he held in his hands. However, when this revelation was reprinted in the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, it underwent important rewording. Cowdery's "rod of nature" became the "gift of Aaron" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 8:6-8). One

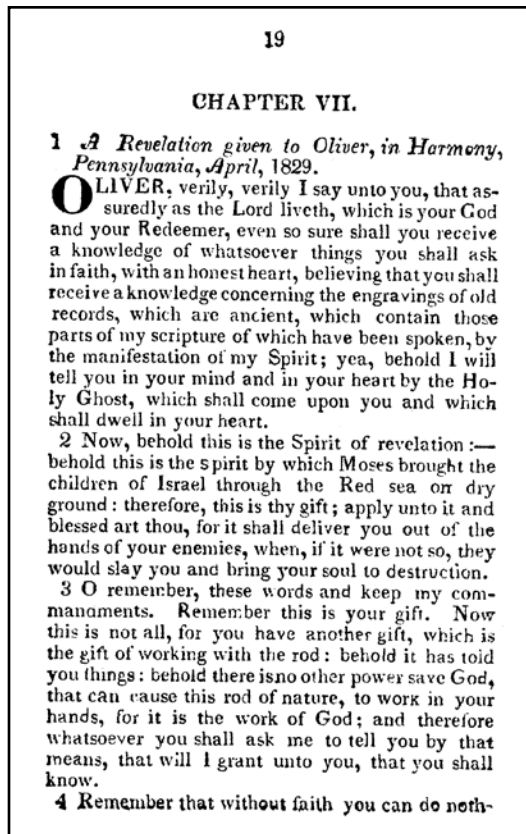
<sup>11</sup> Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> As cited in *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 1, p. 285.

<sup>13</sup> Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, pp. 245-246.

<sup>14</sup> Cowdery's father, William, was a noted rodsman in Vermont. See *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, p. 35.

assumes the word changes were made to disguise the obvious references to magic paraphernalia.<sup>15</sup>



Section 7 of the 1833 Book of Commandments. The change from “rod of nature” to “gift of Aaron” was made in the 1835 D&C and is now printed as section 8.

Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses, also had a seer stone which he used to obtain revelations. Joseph Smith charged that Page gave false revelations through his stone and that the other witnesses to the Book of Mormon were being influenced by his revelations:

To our great grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive, . . . Brother **Hiram Page** had in his possession a **certain stone**, by which he obtained certain “revelations” . . . all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God’s house, . . . **the Whitmer family and Oliver Cowdery**, were believing much in the things set forth by this stone, we thought best to inquire of the Lord concerning so important a matter . . . ”<sup>16</sup>

Seeing a threat to his leadership, Joseph Smith countered with a revelation stating that “no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun.,

for he receiveth them even as Moses” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 28:2). Then in verse eleven, Oliver Cowdery is instructed to tell Hiram Page that “those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that Satan deceiveth him.”

In an 1859 interview Martin Harris recounted one of the events that convinced him that Joseph Smith truly had the gift of using a seer stone:

In the first place, he [Joseph Smith] told me of this stone, and proposed to bind it on his eyes, and run a race with me in the woods. A few days after this, I was at the house of his father in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra village [New York], and was picking my teeth with a pin while sitting on the bars. The pin caught in my teeth, and dropped from my fingers into shavings and straw. I jumped from the bars and looked for it. Joseph and Northrop Sweet, also did the same. We could not find it. I then took Joseph on surprise, and said to him—I said, “Take your stone.” I had never seen it, and did not know that he had it with him. He had it in his pocket. He took it and placed it in his hat—the old white hat—and placed his face in his hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin.<sup>17</sup>

This is but one example of Smith using his stone to find lost items. Historian D. Michael Quinn gave the following summary of the Smith family’s involvement in magic:

Joseph Smith (founding prophet and president of the new church) had unquestionably participated in treasure-seeking and stone divination. Evidence indicates that he also used divining rods, a talisman, and implements of ritual magic. His father (one of the Eight Witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon and later the church’s patriarch) had also participated in divining and the quest for treasure. His older brother Hyrum (another of the Eight Witnesses, a member of the First Presidency, and church patriarch after their father’s death) had also participated in the treasure-quest and was custodian of the family’s implements of ritual magic at his own death. His younger brothers Samuel and William (one of the Eight Witnesses and one of the original twelve apostles, respectively) accepted their brother’s stone divination and apparently joined some of Joseph’s treasure-expeditions. Understandably, they found nothing objectionable in other folk magic practices of their father and brothers.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, pp. 35-39.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 109-110.

<sup>17</sup> Joel Tiffany, ed., *Tiffany’s Monthly*, (May 1859): p. 164.

<sup>18</sup> Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, p. 240.

Quinn then goes on to enumerate the magic involvement of the rest of the witnesses:

The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon were likewise involved in folk magic. Oliver Cowdery was a rodsman before his 1829 meeting with Smith, soon announced a revelation authorizing Cowdery to continue the revelatory use of his “rod of nature”. . . David Whitmer revered Smith’s use of a seer stone and may have possessed one of his own. Whitmer authorized a later spokesman for his own religious organization to obtain revelations through a stone . . . Martin Harris endorsed Smith’s use of a seer stone for divination and treasure-seeking. Before and after the discovery of the gold plates, Harris himself participated in treasure-digging and identified the Smith brothers Joseph and Hyrum as co-participants . . .

Of the remaining Eight Witnesses, Jacob Whitmer . . . had a seer stone which his descendants preserved. . . His brother-in-law Hiram Page . . . definitely had a stone of his own that he used for revelations . . . Christian, John, and Peter Whitmer Jr. were included in their pastor’s accusation of magic belief.<sup>19</sup>

A number of friends and relatives observed Smith as he dictated the Book of Mormon story to a scribe, all the while having his face buried in his hat as he stared at his magic stone. Smith’s father-in-law, Isaac Hale gave this description of the process:

The Manner in which he [Joseph] pretended to read and interpret, was the same as when he looked for the money-diggers, with the stone in his hat, and his hat over his face, while the Book of Plates were at the same time hid in the woods!<sup>20</sup>

When the plates were not hid in the woods they were laying off to one side, covered by a cloth. This leaves one wondering why God bothered preserving the plates if they were not necessary for the translation process? Furthermore, why preserve the Urim and Thummim for hundreds of years if a magic stone would work just as well? Since the plates were reportedly returned to the angel, there is no way for us to know if there really were any gold plates or whether the translation was correct. To counter this argument, Mormons often appeal to the statements made by Smith’s friends who claimed to see the plates. But did they see them through the “eye of faith” as some claimed or in a natural setting? Are these people to be believed?

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>20</sup> E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio, 1834), p. 265.

## THE WITNESSES

The Book of Mormon declared that after Joseph received the plates —

the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it [the plates] save it be that **three witnesses** shall behold it, **by the power of God**, besides him [Joseph] to whom the book shall be delivered; and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein. 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.<sup>21</sup>

At the front of the Book of Mormon are two statements by Smith’s friends and family attesting to his translation of the plates. In the first statement Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris claimed that an angel of God showed the plates to them in a vision. The second statement is signed by eight men who claimed to see and heft the plates, although no angel is mentioned. This statement is signed by Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jun., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sen. [Joseph’s father], Hyrum Smith and Samuel H. Smith [brothers of Smith].

The witnesses loosely fall into two groups—the Smith family and the Whitmer family. Oliver Cowdery, a third cousin of Joseph Smith, married David Whitmer’s sister, Elizabeth Ann. Hiram Page married another sister, Catherine Whitmer. Martin Harris does not fall into either group, being an established farmer in the area where the Smiths lived and the one who would end up financing the printing of the Book of Mormon.

Smith Family	Whitmer Family
Joseph Smith, Jr.	David Whitmer
Joseph Smith, Sr.	Christian Whitmer
Hyrum Smith	Jacob Whitmer
Samuel H. Smith	Peter Whitmer, Jr.
Oliver Cowdery	Oliver Cowdery
	John Whitmer
	Hiram Page

## SEPARATE VISIONS

The testimony of the three witnesses leaves a person with the impression that they all saw the angel and the gold plates at the same time; however, such was not the case. In his *History of the Church*, Joseph Smith admits

<sup>21</sup> Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 27:12-13.

that Martin Harris was not with Whitmer and Cowdery when he saw the plates. Joseph had the three witnesses pray continually in an effort to obtain a view of the plates, but to no avail. Finally:

Upon this, our second failure, Martin Harris 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. He accordingly withdrew from us, and we knelt down again, . . . presently we beheld a light above us in the air, of exceeding brightness; and behold, an angel stood before us. In his hands he held the plates. . . .

I now left David and Oliver, and went in pursuit of Martin Harris. . . . 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, 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;" . . .<sup>22</sup>

There seems to be some question as to the time that elapsed between the two visions. Joseph Smith would have us believe that Martin Harris' vision occurred immediately after the other vision, but according to a reporter who interviewed David Whitmer, it was "a day or two after."<sup>23</sup> According to Anthony Metcalf, Martin Harris claimed that it was "about three days" later when he saw the plates.<sup>24</sup>

Mormon writer Marvin S. Hill commented:

. . . there is a possibility that the witnesses saw the plates in vision only. . . . There is testimony from several independent interviewers, all non-Mormon, that Martin Harris and David Whitmer said they

**saw the plates with their "spiritual eyes" only. . . .**

This is contradicted, however, by statements like that of David Whitmer in the *Saints Herald* in 1882, "these hands handled the plates, these eyes saw the angel." But Z. H. Gurley elicited from Whitmer a not so positive response to the question, "did you touch them?" His answer was, "**We did not touch nor handle the plates.**" So far as the eight witnesses go, William Smith said his father never saw the plates except under a frock. And Stephen Burnett quotes Martin Harris that "the eight witnesses never saw them. . . ." Yet John Whitmer told Wilhelm Paulson . . . that he saw the plates when they were not covered, and he turned the leaves.<sup>25</sup>

Stephen Burnett, an early Mormon convert, heard Martin Harris speak in 1838, where Harris admitted the witnesses did not physically handle the plates, which led Burnett to renounce all of Mormonism. In April of 1838 he wrote a letter to Lyman E. Johnson explaining his decision:

. . . when I came to hear Martin Harris state in a public congregation that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only **in vision or imagination**, neither Oliver [Cowdery] nor David [Whitmer] & also that the eight witnesses **never saw them** & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundation was sapped & the entire superstructure fell in heap of ruins, I therefore three week[s] since in the Stone Chapel gave a full history of the church since I became acquainted with it, the false preaching & prophecying etc of Joseph [Smith] together with the reasons why I took the course which I was resolved to do, and renounced the Book of Mormon . . . after we were done speaking M[artin] Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted

22 Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 54-55.

23 George Reynolds, *The Myth of the Manuscript Found* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), p. 83.

24 Anthony Metcalf, *Ten Years Before the Mast* (Malad City, In., 1888), pp. 70-71.

25 Marvin S. Hill, "Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, (Winter, 1972): pp. 83-84.

the hard earnings of those to whom it justly belonged. I have reflected long and deliberately upon the history of this church & weighed the evidence for & against it - both to give it up - but when I came to hear Martin Harris state in a public congregation that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only, in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundation was sapped & the entire superstructure fell in heap of ruins, I therefore three weeks since in the Stone Chapel gave a full history

Stephen Burnett letter to Lyman E. Johnson, April 15, 1838, from letterbook in the LDS Church archives.

the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but **he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain**. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight [witnesses] was false, if it had not been picked out of [h]im but should have let it passed as it was . . . I am well satisfied for myself that if the witnesses whose names are attached to the Book of Mormon never saw the plates as Martin [Harris] admits that there can be nothing brought to prove that any such thing ever existed . . .<sup>26</sup>

According to Martin Harris, the witnesses only hefted the plates, while stored in a sack, and did not view them with the naked eye.

## LEFT TO DOUBT?

The LDS Church claims that the witnesses to the Book of Mormon never denied their testimony. There are, however, at least two statements in Mormon publications which indicate that the witnesses had doubts. In 1859, Brigham Young, the second president of the LDS Church, stated:

“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 to disbelieve that they had ever seen an angel.**”<sup>27</sup>

There is evidence to indicate that Oliver Cowdery, one of the three witnesses, may have had doubts about his testimony. The following appeared in a poem that was published in the Mormon publication *Times and Seasons* in 1841:

Or does it prove there is no time,  
Because some watches will not go?

. . .

Or prove that Christ was not the Lord  
Because that Peter cursed and swore?

**Or Book of Mormon not His word  
Because denied, by Oliver?**<sup>28</sup>

## RELIABLE MEN?

LDS Apostle John A. Widtsoe said that the eleven men who testified to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon had “spotless reputations.” Non-Mormons, on the other hand, have made many serious charges against

the witnesses. Some of the most damaging statements against the Book of Mormon witnesses, however, came from the pen of Joseph Smith and other early Mormon leaders.

In fact, after Martin lost the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript, Joseph Smith gave a revelation in July of 1828 in which Martin Harris was called a “wicked man,” who “has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 3:12-13). In another revelation given sometime later, God was supposed to have told Joseph Smith that Harris “is a wicked man, for he has sought to take away the things wherewith you have been entrusted; and he has also sought to destroy your gift” (*D&C* 10:7).

## TROUBLE IN MISSOURI AND OHIO

Although Joseph Smith was able to prevail against the revelations from Hiram Page’s peep stone, more serious problems were developing in the late 1830’s in the Mormon settlements in Far West, Missouri and Kirtland, Ohio.

After the Mormons were driven from Independence, Missouri, in the early 1830’s, Smith instructed the church members not to sell their property with the hope that they could still reclaim the land. However, David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery went against this edict. Kenneth Winn explained:

Cowdery was particularly nettled over the church’s presuming to dictate how he used his property. . . . The dissenters’ avowal that their individual freedom should take precedence over the judgment of church authorities made active conflict inevitable. Nor was it long in coming. In January [1838], against policy, William Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer sold their land in Jackson County. . . . Accordingly, on April 12, the Missouri High Council charged David and John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Lyman Johnson with various counts of dereliction of duty, violation of church policy, and disrespect for the church leadership and cut them off from the church.<sup>29</sup>

In Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith and the leaders had become embroiled in land speculation, borrowing large amounts of money and starting their own bank.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2, pp. 291-292.

<sup>27</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (June 5, 1859) vol. 7, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> *Times and Seasons*, Nauvoo, Illinois (July 15, 1841) vol. 2, p. 482.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 122-123.

<sup>30</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York City: Knopf, 1971), pp. 192-204.



Kirtland Bank Note

When the bank failed, the economy collapsed and the creditors started demanding payment, many lost faith in Joseph's prophetic leadership. Apostle George A. Smith related the following:

After the organization of the Twelve Apostles, the spirit of apostasy became more general. . . . One of the First Presidency, several of the Twelve Apostles, High Council, Presidents of Seventies, **the witnesses of the Book of Mormon**, Presidents of Far West, and a number of others standing high in the Church were all carried away in this apostasy. . . .<sup>31</sup>

While George A. Smith didn't specify the names of the witnesses, we know that Martin Harris, David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery had all left the LDS Church by 1838. In fact, the LDS leaders published an attack on the character of Martin Harris in *The Elders' Journal*, a Mormon publication edited by Joseph Smith. The article charged that Harris and others were guilty of "swearing, lying, cheating, swindling, drinking, with every species of debauchery."<sup>32</sup> Martin Harris, in turn, accused Joseph Smith of "lying and licentiousness."<sup>33</sup>

In a letter dated December 16, 1838, Joseph Smith said that "John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris are **too mean to mention**."<sup>34</sup> Smith specifically singled out David Whitmer:

God suffered such kind of beings to afflict Job. . . . This poor man [William E. McLellin] who professes to be much of a prophet, has no other dumb ass to ride but **David Whitmer**, to forbid his madness when he goes up to curse Israel; and this ass not being of the same kind as Balaam's, . . . he brays out cursings instead of blessings. Poor ass!<sup>35</sup>

Before driving the dissenters from Far West, Missouri, the Mormons wrote them a very threatening letter. In

this letter the dissenters were accused of stealing, lying and counterfeiting:

Whereas the citizens of Caldwell county have borne with the abuse received from you at different times, . . . until it is no longer to be endured; . . . out of the county you shall go, . . . depart, depart, or a more fatal calamity shall befall you.

After **Oliver Cowdery** had been taken by a State warrant for stealing, and the stolen property found . . . in which nefarious transaction **John Whitmer** had also participated. **Oliver Cowdery** stole the property, conveyed it to **John Whitmer** . . . **Oliver Cowdery**, **David Whitmer**, and Lyman E. Johnson, united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs of the deepest dye, to deceive, cheat, and defraud the saints out of their property. . . .

During the full career of **Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer's bogus money business**, it got abroad into the world that they were engaged in it. . . . We have evidence of a very strong character that you are at this very time engaged with a gang of counterfeiters, coiners, and blacklegs, . . . we will put you from the county of Caldwell: so help us God.<sup>36</sup>

The dissenters, fearing for their lives, fled Far West, leaving their families behind. Fawn Brodie tells of their hardship:

Upon receiving this ultimatum **the two Whitmers, with Oliver Cowdery** and Lyman Johnson, set out for Clay County to hire a gentile lawyer. When they returned from Liberty, they met their families on the road, bearing a tale of Danite [a secret Mormon vigilante group] persecution that the men could not believe possible as coming from their former brethren. The Danites had surrounded their homes, ordered their wives to pack their blankets and leave the county immediately, and threatened death to anyone who returned to Far West. They had been robbed, according to John Whitmer, of all their goods save bedding and clothes.<sup>37</sup>

Writing in 1887, David Whitmer explained why he had left the church:

If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon; if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, **God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to "separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints**, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them."

31 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, pp. 114-115.

32 *Elders' Journal* (August, 1838): p. 59.

33 John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), "Testimony of Fanny Brewer," p. 85.

34 Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 3, p. 232.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

36 Letter quoted in *Senate Document 189* (February 15, 1841), pp. 6-9.

37 Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 219.



In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. . . . About the same time that I came out, the Spirit of God moved upon quite a number of the brethren who came out, with their families, **all of the eight witnesses who were then living** (except the three Smiths) **came out**; Peter and Christian Whitmer were dead. **Oliver Cowdery came out also. Martin Harris was then in Ohio.** The church went deeper and deeper into wickedness.<sup>38</sup>

## COWDERY A COUNTERFEITER?

In the “Far West Record,” an early LDS ledger containing minutes of various church meetings, is some very important information concerning Oliver Cowdery and the bogus money business. After examining the record, LDS scholar Leland Gentry wrote:

[Fredrick G.] Williams, . . . testified that **Oliver** [Cowdery] had personally informed him of a man in the church by the name of Davis who could compound metal and make dies which could not be detected from the real thing. **Oliver** allegedly told Williams that there was no harm in accepting and passing around such money, provided it could not be determined to be unsound.

Joseph Smith’s testimony was similar. He claimed that a nonmember of the Church by the name of Sapham had told him in Kirtland that **a warrant had been issued against Oliver** “for being engaged in making a purchase of bogus money and dies to make the counterfeit money with.” According to Smith, he and Sidney Rigdon went to visit Oliver concerning the matter and told him that if he were guilty, he had better **leave town**; but if he was innocent, he should stand trial and thus be acquitted. “That night or next,” the Prophet said, Oliver “left the country.”<sup>39</sup>

From this information it would appear that Joseph Smith was complicit in that he warned Oliver Cowdery to flee from the law if he was guilty.

When Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated from the LDS Church in 1838, one of the charges against him was:

For seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith Jr by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery &c.<sup>40</sup>

An example of Cowdery’s accusations against Smith is his 1838 letter to his brother, Warren, charging Smith with having an affair with his teenage housekeeper while in Kirtland, Ohio, in the mid-1830’s:

When he [Joseph Smith] was there we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. **A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger’s** was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deserted from the truth in the matter, and as I supposed was admitted by himself.<sup>41</sup>

The eighth charge against Cowdery read as follows: “For disgracing the Church by being connected in the bogus business, as common report says.”<sup>42</sup> Mormon scholar Leland Gentry states: “Joseph Smith, for example, testified that Cowdery had informed him that he had ‘come to the conclusion to get property, and that if he could not get it one way, he would get it another, God or no God, Devil or no Devil, property he must and would have.’”<sup>43</sup>

Since six of the nine charges against Cowdery were sustained, he was “considered no longer a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>44</sup> If the charges against Cowdery were true, he certainly does not present a picture of someone to trust. If the charges against him were trumped up or exaggerated, it doesn’t speak well for Joseph Smith’s character.

## COWDERY JOINS THE METHODISTS

After separating himself from the Mormons, Oliver Cowdery became a member of the “Methodist Protestant Church of Tiffin, Seneca County, Ohio.” C. J. Keen, a lay leader in the Methodist Church, gave an affidavit in which he stated:

. . . Mr. Cowdery expressed a desire to associate himself with a Methodist Protestant Church of this city. . . . he was unanimously admitted a member thereof.

At that time he arose and addressed the audience present, admitted his error and implored forgiveness, and said he was sorry and ashamed of his connection with Mormonism.

He continued his membership while he resided in Tiffin, and became superintendent of the Sabbath-

38 David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Missouri, 1887), pp. 27-28.

39 Gentry, Leland H., “A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri from 1836 to 1839” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1965), p. 146.

40 Donald Q. Cannon, Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), p. 163.

41 Letter dated Jan. 21, 1838, recorded by Warren Cowdery, original located in the Huntington Library, San Marin, California. See also Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), p. 28.

42 Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 3, p. 16.

43 Gentry, “A History of the Latter-day Saints,” p. 147.

44 Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 16-17.

School, and led an exemplary life while he resided with us.<sup>45</sup>

Mormon writer Richard L. Anderson admits that Cowdery joined the Methodists:

“The cessation of his activity in the Church meant a suspension of his role as a witness of the Book of Mormon. Not that his conviction ceased, but he discontinued public testimony as he worked out a successful legal and political career in non-Mormon society . . . he logically affiliated himself with a Christian congregation for a time, the *Methodist Protestant Church at Tiffin, Ohio*.”<sup>46</sup>

It should be noted that the poem about Oliver Cowdery denying his testimony to the Book of Mormon appeared in the Mormon publication *Times and Seasons* around the same time that Cowdery renounced Mormonism and joined the Methodist Church at Tiffin, Ohio.

## FOLLOWING JAMES JESSE STRANG

After Smith’s death there was dissention in the church regarding church leadership. James Jesse Strang, like Joseph Smith, claimed that he found ancient brass plates that he translated with his own Urim and Thummim. He also produced witnesses who swore they saw his plates, and their testimony is recorded in his book in almost the same way as that the witnesses in the Book of Mormon. Some of the Book of Mormon witnesses were influenced by the claims of James Jesse Strang as Smith’s successor. Brigham Young and the other Mormon leaders denounced Strang as an impostor, but four of the Book of Mormon witnesses joined the Strangite movement. On January 20, 1848, James J. Strang wrote the following:



James Strang

. . . early in 1846 the tract reprint of the first number of the *Voree Herald* [Wisconsin], containing the evidence of my calling and authority, strayed into upper Missouri. Immediately I received a letter from **Hiram Page**, one of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, and a neighbor and friend to the **Whitmers’** who lived near him, and that they rejoiced with exceeding joy that God had raised up one to stand in place of Joseph. . . . He goes on to say that **all the witnesses of the Book**

**of Mormon living in that region received the news with gladness**, and finally that they held a council in which **David and John Whitmer** and this **Hiram Page** were the principal actors; and being at a loss what they ought to do about coming to Voree, sent up to me as a pophet of God to tell them what to do. . . . last April (1847) I received another letter from the same **Hiram Page**, acknowledging the receipt of mine . . . and giving me the acts of another council of himself at the **Whitmers’**, . . . they invite me to come to their residence in Missouri and receive from them, **David and John Whitmer**, church records, and manuscript revelations, which they had kept in their possession from the time that they were active members of the church. These documents they speak of as great importance to the church, and offer them to me as the true shepherd who has a right to them . . .”<sup>47</sup>

In a letter to David Whitmer, dated December 2, 1846, William E. McLellin said that James J. Strang “told me that all the witnesses to the book of Mormon yet alive were with him, except Oliver [Cowdery].”<sup>48</sup> John Whitmer, David’s brother, wrote the following in his history of the church which later, however, was crossed out:

God knowing all things prepared a man whom he visited by an angel of God and showed him where there were some ancient record hid, . . . whose name is James J. Strang. . . . and Strang Reigns in the place of Smith the author and proprietor of the Book of Mormon.<sup>49</sup>

Martin Harris joined the Strangite movement and even went on a mission to England for the Strangites. The LDS Church’s own publication *Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* had a great deal to say about Martin Harris when he arrived in England:

**One of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon**, yielded to the spirit and temptation of the devil a number of years ago—turned against Joseph Smith and became his bitter enemy. He was filled with the rage and madness of a demon. One day he would be one thing, and another day another thing. He soon became partially deranged or shattered, as many believed, flying from one thing to another. . . . In one of his fits of monomania, he went and joined the “Shakers” or followers of Anna Lee. . . . but since **Strang** has made his entry . . . **Martin** [Harris] leaves the “Shakers,” whom he knows to be right, . . . and joins **Strang**. . . . We understand that he

45 Affidavit of C. J. Keen, as quoted by Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1914), pp. 58-59.

46 *Improvement Era* (January 1969): p. 56.

47 James J. Strang, ed., *Gospel Herald* (January 20, 1848).

48 William E. McLellin, *The Ensign of Liberty*, Kirtland, Ohio (April, 1847).

49 Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), pp. 194-195.

is appointed a mission to this country, . . . if the Saints wish to know what the Lord hath said to him they may turn to . . . the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and the person there called a “wicked man” is no other than Martin Harris . . . Elder Wheelock will remember that evil men, like Harris, out of the evil treasure of their hearts bring forth evil things. . . .

Just as our paper was going to press, we learned that Martin Harris, about whom we have written in another article, had landed in Liverpool, . . . there was a strangeness about him, and about one or two who came with him . . . A lying deceptive spirit attends them, and has from the beginning. . . . they know that they are of their father, the devil, who was a liar from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Book of Mormon witnesses were attracted to Strang for a short time, they soon became interested in a movement started by former apostle William E. McLellin.

## WILLIAM E. McLELLIN

Five of the Book of Mormon witnesses definitely supported McLellin’s movement and another gave some encouragement to it. One of McLellin’s claims was that David Whitmer was the rightful successor to Smith, not Brigham Young. Martin Harris was baptized into the McLellin movement and even joined with Leonard Rich and Calvin Beebe in a “Testimony of Three Witnesses” that Joseph Smith ordained David Whitmer to be his “Successor in office.”<sup>51</sup> The Mormons who went to Utah felt, of course, that Brigham Young was to be leader of the church. On July 28, 1847, Oliver Cowdery wrote a letter to David Whitmer in which he gave support to McLellin’s ideas and told Whitmer that “our right gives us the head.” In a letter dated September 8, 1847, David Whitmer wrote to Oliver Cowdery and told him that “it is the will of God that you be one of my counsellors in the presidency of the Church. Jacob and Hiram have been ordained High Priests . . .”<sup>52</sup>



William E. McLellin

William E. McLellin recounted how David Whitmer gave revelations supporting his organization and condemned the Mormon Church:

. . . after a few moments of solemn secret prayer, the following was delivered solely through and by **David Whitmer, as the Revelator**, and written by

me as scribe, viz: “Verily, verily thus saith the Lord unto my servants David, and John, and William, and Jacob, and Hiram, . . . Behold I have looked upon you from the beginning, and have seen that in your hearts dwelt truth, and righteousness [*sic*]. . . . it must needs have been that ye were cast out from among those who had poluted themselves and the holy authority of their priesthood. . . . For verily, verily saith the Lord, even Jesus, your Redeemer, they have polluted my name, and have done continually wickedness in my sight, . . . Thou shalt write concerning the downfall of those who once composed my church . . .”

But here David [Whitmer] said **a vision opened before him**, and the spirit which was upon him bid him stop and talk to me concerning it. He said that in the bright light before him he saw a small chest or box of very curious and fine workmanship, which seemed to be locked, but he was told that it contained precious things, I was told that it contained ‘the treasure of wisdom, and knowledge from God.’ . . . David and I turned aside, and called upon the Lord, and received direct instruction how we should further proceed. . . . **I ordained H. Page to the office of High Priest, . . . we two ordained Jacob Whitmer to the same office. Then we all laid hands on John Whitmer and reordained him . . . we stepped forward and all laid hands upon David and re-ordained him . . .**<sup>53</sup>

McLellin’s movement never really got off the ground, and later in his life David Whitmer was reluctant to talk about his association with McLellin. In 1849 Hiram Page, David Whitmer’s brother-in-law and one of the eight witnesses, renounced the McLellin movement. Richard P. Howard explains:

McLellin’s flagging hope for David Whitmer’s seership vanished as he read, published in the August issue of the Olive Branch—the periodical of the James C. Brewster-Hazen Aldrich Church of Christ also at Kirtland—Hiram Page’s letter of 24 June 1849. Page speaking for himself and his Whitmer relatives in Richmond, renounced what was of value to McLellin from the proceedings of the “conference” of September 1847. Page acknowledged McLellin’s honorable motives in trying to affirm the Whitmers as good and honest people. The Whitmers, however, took exception to McLellin’s claim of direction by the Holy Spirit in coming there and insisting that they organize in some church capacity. Page saw through to the center of McLellin’s thinking that the church “must come through him, which would give a sanction to all that he had done, which would give a more speedy rise to the cause. . . . But we had not as

50 *Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, vol. 8, pp. 124-128.

51 *The Ensign of Liberty* (December 1847): pp. 43-44.

52 *Ibid.*, (May, 1848): p. 93.

53 *Ibid.*, (August 1849): pp. 101-104.

yet come to an understanding, but consented to the organization after three days successive entreaties. Now we acknowledge that the organization was not in accordance with the order of the Gospel Church.”<sup>54</sup>

If David Whitmer could give a revelation in the McLellin group, which Mormons would not accept and Whitmer eventually abandoned, on what basis should we accept his earlier claim of a vision regarding the Book of Mormon?

Since a person who is investigating the Book of Mormon has only the testimony of eleven men to rely on, he should be certain that they were trustworthy men. If the Book of Mormon witnesses were honest, stable and not easily influenced by men, we would be impressed by their testimony. Unfortunately, however, we find that this is not the case. The evidence shows that in matters relating to religion they were gullible and easily misled.

Since the testimony of the three witnesses who claimed to see the angel is especially important, we want to summarize the information we have on their character.

## MARTIN HARRIS

Martin Harris was very unstable in his religious life. G. W. Stodard, a resident of Palmyra, made this statement in an affidavit dated November 28, 1833:

I have been acquainted with Martin Harris, about thirty years. As a farmer, he was industrious and enterprising. . . . Although he possessed wealth, his moral and religious character was such, as not to entitle him to respect among his neighbors. . . . He was first an orthodox [*sic*] Quaker, then a Universalist, next a Restorationer, then a Baptist, next a Presbyterian, and then a Mormon.<sup>55</sup>

Martin Harris’ instability certainly did not cease when he joined the Mormon church. The Mormons themselves recorded that Harris “became partially deranged . . . flying from one thing to another.”<sup>56</sup> Mormon writer Richard L. Anderson admits that Martin Harris “changed his religious position eight times” during the period when he was in Kirtland, Ohio:

The foregoing tendencies explain the spiritual wanderlust that afflicted the solitary witness at Kirtland. In this period of his life **he changed his religious position eight times**, including a rebaptism by a Nauvoo missionary in 1842. Every affiliation of Martin Harris

was with some Mormon group, except when he was affiliated with the Shaker belief, a position not basically contrary to his Book of Mormon testimony because the foundation of that movement was acceptance of personal revelation from heavenly beings.<sup>57</sup>

If we add the “eight times” that Martin Harris changed his religious position in Kirtland to the five changes he made before, we find that *he changed his mind thirteen times!*

Mormon writer E. Cecil McGavin stated:

Martin Harris was an un-aggressive, vacillating, easily influenced person who was no more pugnacious than a rabbit. . . . His conviction of one day might vanish and be replaced by doubt and fear before the setting of the sun. He was changeable, fickle, and puerile in his judgment and conduct.<sup>58</sup>

After changing his mind about religion many times, Martin Harris returned to the Mormon church. There is evidence to show, however, that he was still not satisfied. Anthony Metcalf claimed Martin Harris told him that he “never believed that the Brighamite branch of the Mormon church, nor the Josephite church, was right, because in his opinion, God had rejected them,” and he took his endowments in Salt Lake City, only to find out “what was going on in there.”<sup>59</sup>

Joseph Smith’s own revelations referred to Harris as a “wicked man,” and the church’s publication *Millennial Star* said that he was an “evil” man and that “a lying deceptive spirit” attended him and his friends.

The Mormons themselves said that Harris had “fits of monomania.” Harris’ wife made some very serious charges against his character, but they are actually not much worse than those made by the Mormons. Mrs. Harris stated that Martin had “*mad-fits*.” The Mormons said that when he left the church he “was filled with the rage and madness of a demon.” She stated that Martin was a liar. The Mormons admitted that when he came to England “a lying deceptive spirit” attended him. She stated that Mormonism had made him “more cross, turbulent and abusive to me.” Joseph Smith himself later classified Martin Harris as one of those who was “too mean to mention.”

<sup>57</sup> *Improvement Era* (March 1969): p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> E. Cecil McGavin, *The Historical Background for the Doctrine and Covenants* (1949), p. 23, as cited by LaMar Petersen, *The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), p. 89.

<sup>59</sup> Metcalf, *Ten Years Before the Mast*, as quoted by Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness For Christ in America* (Independence, Mo.: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1951), vol. 2, pp. 348-349

<sup>54</sup> Richard P. Howard, “Mormonism’s ‘Stormy Petrel’” in *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854-1880*, Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey, eds. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), pp. 22-23

<sup>55</sup> Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, pp. 260-61.

<sup>56</sup> *Millennial Star*, vol. 8, p. 124.

## OLIVER COWDERY

Oliver Cowdery was involved in rod working even before meeting Smith. He also believed in magic seer stones. According to Joseph Smith, Cowdery was led astray by Hiram Page's "peep-stone." After he was excommunicated from the Mormon church he united with the "Methodist Protestant Church" at Tiffin, Ohio. As mentioned previously, the Mormons published a poem in 1841 which stated that the Book of Mormon was "denied" by Oliver. He accused Joseph Smith of adultery while the Mormons, on the other hand, claimed that Oliver "committed adultery." Joseph Smith listed Cowdery among those who were "too mean to mention" and the Mormons claimed that he joined "a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs." Joseph Smith testified that when a warrant was issued against Cowdery for "being engaged in making a purchase of bogus money and dies," he "left the country."



Person using a hazel rod.

While Cowdery returned to the LDS Church before his death, David Whitmer claimed that Cowdery died believing Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet and that his revelations in the *Doctrine and Covenants* must be rejected:

I did not say that Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer had not endorsed the *Doctrine and Covenants* in 1836. They did endorse it in 1836; I stated that they "came out of their errors (discarded the *Doctrine and Covenants*), repented of them, and died believing as I do to-day," and I have the proof to verify my statement. If any one chooses to doubt my word, let them come to my home in Richmond and be satisfied. In the winter of 1848, after Oliver Cowdery had been baptized at Council Bluffs, he came back to Richmond to live. . . . Now, in 1849 the Lord saw fit to manifest unto John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and myself nearly all the errors in doctrine into which we had been led by the heads of the old church. We were shown that the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants* contained many doctrines of error, and that it must be laid aside. . . . They were led out of their errors, and are upon record to this effect, rejecting the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants*.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> David Whitmer, *An Address to Believers in The Book of Mormon* (Richmond, Mo., 1887), pp. 1-2.

## DAVID WHITMER

David Whitmer was also very gullible. He was influenced by Hiram Page's "peep-stone," and possibly by a woman with a "black stone" in Kirtland, Ohio. Joseph Smith identified David Whitmer with those who were "too mean to mention," and called him a "dumb ass." The Mormons also accused Whitmer of joining with a "gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs."<sup>61</sup>

David Whitmer evidently supported James J. Strang for awhile, then changed his mind and joined the McLellin group, where he was to be the prophet and head. He even gave a revelation in which the Lord was supposed to have told him the Mormons "polluted my name, and have done continually wickedness in my sight." Yet he left the McLellin movement, leaving one to question the source of his revelation.

David Whitmer never returned to the LDS Church. Toward the end of his life he was a member of the "Church of Christ"—another small group which believed in the Book of Mormon. Just before his death, Whitmer published two different pamphlets, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* and *An Address to Believers in the Book of Mormon*, in which he reaffirmed his rejection of all things Mormon outside of the Book of Mormon.<sup>62</sup>

Apostle John A. Widtsoe said that the *Book of Mormon* plates were seen and handled "by eleven competent men, of independent minds and spotless reputations." We feel, however, that these witnesses were easily influenced by men, given to magic and visions, vacillating in their stories and therefore were not competent witnesses. Some of them even gave false revelations in the name of the Lord. Mormons ask us to accept David Whitmer's testimony to the Book of Mormon, but will they accept Whitmer's revelations which he gave when he was with the McLellin group? Certainly not. Neither will they accept his statement that "God spake to me again by His own voice from the heavens, and told me to 'separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints.'"

<sup>61</sup> Letter quoted in *Senate Document 189* (February 15, 1841): pp. 6-9.

<sup>62</sup> Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, p. 27.

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It would appear that the witnesses to the Book of Mormon would follow almost anyone who had a seer stone or claimed to have been visited by an angel. Take for instance their willingness to believe in James J. Strang who claimed to translate ancient plates with his Urim and Thummim. The reader will remember that Martin Harris even served on a mission for the Strangites. This was not the only time that Harris endorsed a religion which claimed to have a sacred book given directly by the Lord. As we have already shown, in the *Millennial Star* the Mormons admitted that Martin Harris joined the Shakers: “In one of his fits of monomania, he went and joined the ‘Shakers’ or followers of Anne Lee.”

## THE SHAKERS

The Shakers felt that “Christ has made his second appearance on earth, in a chosen female known by the name of Ann Lee, and acknowledged by us as our Blessed Mother in the work of redemption.”<sup>63</sup> The Shakers, of course, did not believe the Book of Mormon, but they had a book entitled *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book; From the Lord God of Heaven, to the Inhabitants of Earth*. More than sixty individuals gave testimony to the *Sacred Roll and Book*, which was published in 1843. Although not all of them mention angels appearing, some of them tell of many angels visiting them—one woman told of eight different visions. On page 304 of this book, we find the testimony of eight witnesses:



Ann Lee

We, the undersigned, hereby testify, that we saw the holy Angel standing upon the house-top, as mentioned in the foregoing declaration, holding the Roll and Book.

Sarah Maria Lewis.  
Sarah Ann Spencer.  
Lucinda McDoniels.  
Maria Hedrick.

Betsey Boothe.  
Louisa Chamberlain.  
Caty De Witt.  
Laura Ann Jacobs.

Joseph Smith only had three witnesses who claimed to see an angel. The Shakers, however, had a large number of witnesses who claimed they saw angels and the *Roll*

63 *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book; From the Lord God of Heaven, to the Inhabitants of Earth* (Cantebury, N.H., 1843), p. 358.

and *Book*. There are over a hundred pages of testimony from “Living Witnesses.” The evidence indicates that Martin Harris accepted the *Sacred Roll and Book* as a divine revelation. Non-Mormon Clark Braden stated: “Harris declared repeatedly that he had *as much evidence for a Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon.*”<sup>64</sup>

Mormons have also conceded that Martin Harris believed in the Shaker book. In a thesis written at Brigham Young University, Wayne Cutler Gunnell stated that on December 31, 1844, “Phineas H. Young [Brigham Young’s brother] and other leaders of the Kirtland organization” wrote a letter to Brigham Young in which they stated: “There are in this place all kinds of teaching; Martin Harris is a firm believer in Shakerism, says his testimony is greater than it was of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>65</sup>

The fact that Martin Harris would even join such a group shows that he was unstable and easily influenced. Therefore, his testimony that the Book of Mormon was of divine origin should not be relied upon. How can anyone put their trust in men who were constantly following after movements like the Shakers, Strangites, and the McLellin group? The Book of Mormon witnesses when “weighed in the balances” are found wanting.

## OTHER VISIONS

Besides the angel that appeared to the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, there were many other occasions in the history of Mormonism when angels were supposed to have appeared.

Joseph Smith declared on March 27, 1836, that the Kirtland Temple was “filled with angels.”<sup>66</sup> Under the date of March 30, 1836, the following appears in Joseph Smith’s history: “The Savior made his appearance to some, while angels ministered to others, . . . the occurrences of this day shall be handed down upon the pages of sacred history, to all generations; as the day of Pentecost, so shall this day be numbered and celebrated as a year of jubilee . . .”<sup>67</sup>

Joseph Smith claimed that he and Oliver Cowdery saw Moses, Elias, Elijah and the Lord in the Kirtland Temple (see *Doctrine and Covenants*, sec. 110). If a person reads only Joseph Smith’s account of this “endowment” he is apt to be very impressed. William E. McLellin, however, gives an entirely different story. He claims that there was “no endowment.”<sup>68</sup> It should be remembered that

64 Clark Braden, *The Braden and Kelley Debate* (Cincinnati, OH, 1884), p. 173.

65 Wayne Cutler Gunnell, *Martin Harris—Witness and Benefactor to the Book of Mormon* (Master’s Thesis, BYU, 1955), p. 52.

66 Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 428.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 433.

68 *Ensign of Liberty* (March 1848): p. 69.

McLellin was one of the Twelve Apostles at the time the endowment was supposed to have been given. On page seven of the *Ensign of Liberty*, McLellin joined with five others in stating that “the anticipated endowment” was “a failure!!” In fact, a reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News* stated that David Whitmer absolutely denied the manifestations in the temple:

The great heavenly “visitation,” which was alleged to have taken place in the temple at Nauvoo, was a grand fizzle. The elders were assembled on the appointed day, which was promised would be a veritable day of Pentecost, but there was no visitation. No Peter, James and John; no Moses and Elias, put in an appearance. “I was in my seat on that occasion,” says Mr. Whitmer, “and I know that the story sensationally circulated, and which is now on the records of the Utah Mormons as an actual happening, was **nothing but a trumped up yarn** . . . ”<sup>69</sup>

When we look at the testimony of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon or the report of happenings in the Kirtland temple we must remember that many early Mormons were given to visions. Apostle George A. Smith made this statement concerning an incident in the Kirtland temple: “Sylvester Smith bore testimony of seeing the hosts of heaven and the horsemen. In his exertion and excitement it seemed as though he would jump through the ceiling.”<sup>70</sup>

John Whitmer, one of the eight witnesses and church historian in the 1830’s, related the following concerning some of the visions that members of the church had in Kirtland, Ohio:

For a perpetual memory, to the shame and confusion of the Devil, permit me to say a few things respecting the proceedings of some of those who were disciples, and some remain among us, and will, and have come from under the error and enthusiasm which they had fallen.

Some had visions and could not tell what they saw. Some would fancy to themselves that they had the sword of Laban, and would wield it as expert as a light dragon; some would act like an Indian in the act of scalping; some would slide or scoot on the floor with the rapidity of a serpent, which they termed sailing in the boat to the Lamanites, preaching the gospel. And many other vain and foolish maneuvers that are unseemingly and unprofitable to mention. Thus the Devil blinded the eyes of some good and honest disciples.<sup>71</sup>

69 *The Des Moines Daily News*, October 16, 1886. The article reads “temple at Nauvoo,” but it must refer to the Kirtland temple since Whitmer left the church before the Nauvoo temple was built.

70 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 10.

71 *John Whitmer’s History*, chapter 6.

It seems that the early Mormons could see almost anything in vision. John Pulsipher recorded the following in his journal:

One pleasant day in March, while I was at work in the woods, about one mile from the Temple, . . . there was a steamboat past [*sic*] over Kirtland in the air! . . . It passed right along and soon went out of our hearing. When it got down to the city it was seen by a number of persons. . . . Old Elder Beamon, who had died a few months before was seen standing in the bow of the Boat. . . . The boat went steady along over the city passed right over the Temple and went out of sight to the west!<sup>72</sup>

## SEER STONES IN THE CELESTIAL KINGDOM

Unlike reports of visions, the mention of seer stones became fewer after the Mormons moved from New York. However, Smith seemed to envision their use in the afterlife. In 1843 Joseph Smith wrote:

Doctrine and Covenants 130: 6-11

6 The angels do not reside on a planet like this earth;  
7 But they reside in the presence of God, on **a globe like a sea of glass** and fire, where all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord.

8 The place where God resides is a great **Urim and Thummim**.

9 This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto **crystal** and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon, whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom, or all kingdoms of a lower order, will be manifest to those who dwell on it; and this earth will be Christ’s.

10 Then **the white stone** mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one, whereby things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known;

11 And **a white stone** is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is the key word.

72 “John Pulsipher Journal,” as quoted by Max Parkin, *Conflict at Kirtland—A Study of the Nature and Causes of External and Internal Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio Between 1830 and 1838* (Salt Lake City: Max Parkin, 1966), p. 331. Originally Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966.

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Brigham Young related a conversation he had with Joseph Smith regarding seer stones:

I met with the Twelve at brother Joseph's. He conversed with us in a familiar manner . . . and explained to us the Urim and Thummim. . . . He [Joseph] said that every man who lived on the earth was entitled to a **seer stone**, and should have one, but they are kept from them in consequence of their wickedness, and most of them who do find one make an evil use of it: he showed us his seer stone.<sup>73</sup>

Seer stones remained popular with the Mormons even into the Utah period. Historian D. Michael Quinn explained:

In 1860 Young also preached "that the gift of seeing was a natural gift, that there are thousands in the world who are natural born Seers." [*Deseret News*—Weekly, Dec. 26, 1860] Shortly after publication of a summary of this sermon, Apostle John Taylor explained to a church congregation the meaning of Young's remarks in regard to seer stones and church authority: "Brigham Young in saying that He did not profess to be a prophet [,] seer & Revelator as Joseph Smith was, was speaking of men being born Natural Prophets & Seers. Many have the gift of seeing through seer stones without the Priesthood at all. He [Young] had not this gift [of using seer stones] naturally yet He was an Apostle & the Preside[n]t of the Church & Kingdom of God on the Earth . . ." With such statements from church leaders, it is understandable why many Mormon pioneers exercised "this gift" of using seer stones.<sup>74</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When one reads of the involvement with magic objects by Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon witnesses plus charges and counter-charges of wrong doing and visions in various early splinter groups, one is left to wonder about the credibility of their religious experiences. Dan Vogel observed:

The real question is not the trustworthiness of the witnesses but whether testimony resulting from visions

<sup>73</sup> *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* (February 20, 1864), vol. 26, p. 118.

<sup>74</sup> Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, p. 251.

or hallucinations is reliable. Indeed, does the testimony of the Book of Mormon witnesses merit greater attention than that of other similar religious testimony?<sup>75</sup>

Joseph Smith was certainly not the first to claim revelations or to bring forth a new book purporting to be scripture. For instance, the story of the coming forth of the Koran, the sacred scripture of Islam, bears some interesting parallels to Joseph Smith's account of the origin of the Book of Mormon. N. J. Dawood, who translated the Koran into English, gave this information concerning its origin:

"For Muslims it is the infallible word of God, a **transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven**, revealed to the Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel. . . . According to Muslim tradition, one night in Ramadhan about the year 610 [A.D.], as he was asleep or in a trance, the Angel Gabriel came to him and said: 'Recite!' He replied: 'What shall I recite?' The order was repeated three times. . . .

"The Koranic revelations followed each other at brief intervals and were at first committed to memory by professional remembrancers. During Mohammed's life-time verses were written on palm-leaves, stones, and any material that came to hand. Their collection was completed during the caliphate of Omar, . . ."<sup>76</sup>

Mohammed declared that he was God's true prophet, appointed by an angel, and that he was restoring true religion to the earth. Twelve centuries later, the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith made a similar claim. When Mormons assert that they have had a spiritual experience that proves the truthfulness of Mormonism to them, they need to remember that many other faiths make similar claims. Even within the various splinter groups of Mormonism there are numerous assertions of visions. As Christians we must evaluate all such claims and test them in light of the evidence and what God has already revealed in the Bible.

<sup>75</sup> Dan Vogel, "The Validity of the Witnesses' Testimonies," Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> *The Koran*, translated by N. J. Dawood (1968), Introduction, pp. 9-10.



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## **What Is The True Number of Mormons In The United States of America?**

By Kent H. Roberts  
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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the “Mormons,” is frequently identified as one of the fastest growing churches in the United States. Official membership statistics show a six fold increase in membership of the LDS church from 1950 to 2010, while the US population only doubled and the population of Utah, the center of the church, has only quadrupled during that time. This growth rate draws attention to the LDS church. As a missionary organization, the church certainly encourages this positive attention. The attention also increases the political influence of the church which is significant in Washington DC and more than significant in the Western states of Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona and California.

For the past twenty years, Professors Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar have conducted the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS). Using standard statistical methods and the same question: “What is your religion, if any?”, they have been determining which religious groups Americans actually belong to and in what numbers. The research is not directed at the LDS church or any other particular denomination. The Survey has been conducted in 1990, 2001 and 2008.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008)*, p. 2, posted at: [http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS\\_Report\\_2008.pdf](http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf) (viewed 1 October 2011). Hereafter “ARIS 2008.”

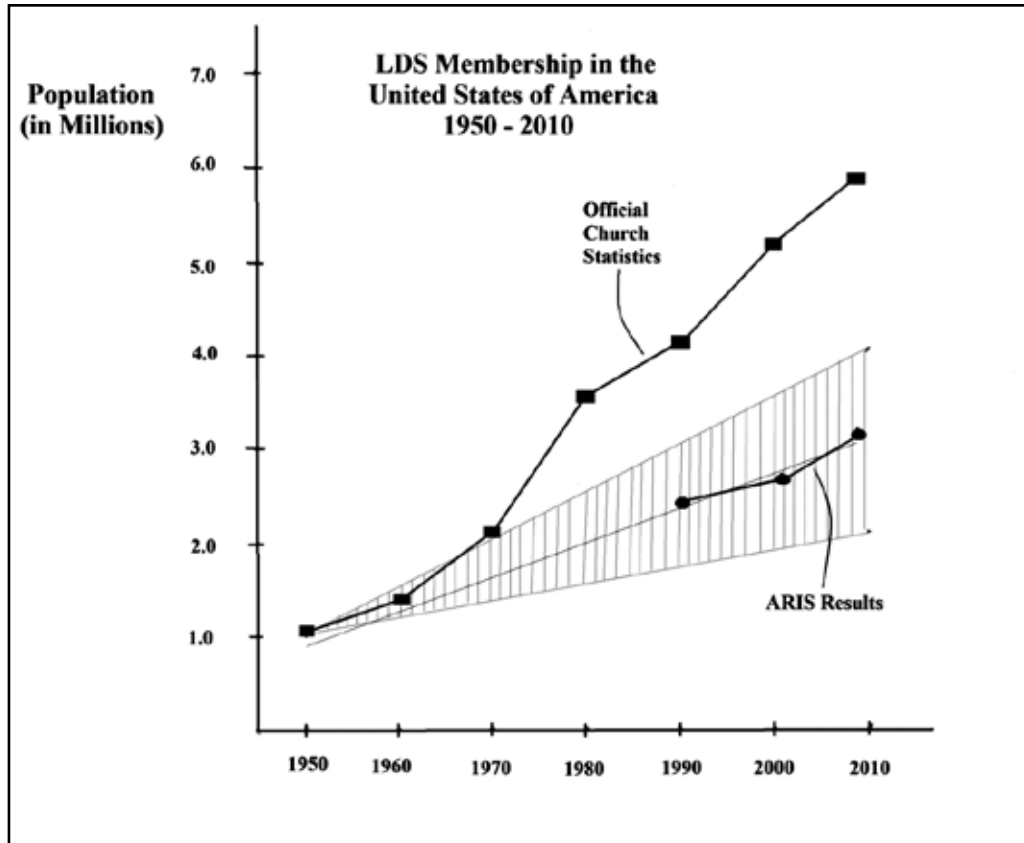
The ARIS raises significant questions about the true number of persons in the USA who understand themselves to be members of the LDS church. Briefly stated, at the beginning of 1990, the LDS church claimed a membership in the USA of 4,175,400, while the ARIS showed that, during 1990, 2,487,000 Americans claimed to be Mormons, a 40% difference. At the beginning of 2001, the LDS church claimed a membership in the USA of 5,208,827, while the ARIS showed that, during 2001, 2,697,000 Americans claimed to be Mormons, a 48% difference. Finally, at the end of 2008, the LDS church claimed a membership in the USA of 5,974,041, while the ARIS showed that, during the year, 3,158,000 Americans claimed to be Mormons, a 47% difference.<sup>2</sup>

This paper places the official statistics of the LDS church and the ARIS results in juxtaposition, attempts to provide some historical context and suggests additional work by persons who may have a stake in the result.

<sup>2</sup> ARIS figures are from ARIS 2008, p. 5 (Table 3); the LDS figures for year-end 1989, 2000 and 2008 are from Association of Religious Data Archives (the “ARDA”), *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, posted at: [http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D\\_1117.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1117.asp) (viewed 1 October 2011). The official December 31, 1989 and January 1, 2009 membership numbers were confirmed by the LDS Church History Library. Email to author, 26 July & 6 September 2011 (originals in possession of author). The official December 31, 2000 membership number is confirmed in *Deseret News, 2003 Church Almanac*, p. 623.

### Comparison of ARIS with Official Statistics

Figure 1 below places the ARIS figures in the context of the official LDS membership statistics for the USA since 1950.



The tabular data is as follows:

Year	Official LDS Memberships in USA <sup>3</sup>	ARIS Survey Identification as Mormon/Latter-day Saints <sup>4</sup>
1950	1,005,346	—
1960	1,488,729	—
1970	2,073,146	—
1980	3,503,000	—
1990	4,175,400	2,487,000
2001	5,208,827	2,697,000
2008	5,974,041	3,158,000

There is a grey shaded wedge indicated on Figure 1. This represents the rate of population growth in the USA and

<sup>3</sup> Official USA membership statistics from 1950 to 1980 were taken from *Deseret News*, *1983 Church Almanac*, p. 272; Sources for official USA membership statistics from 1980 are provided in footnote 2 above.

<sup>4</sup> ARIS 2008, p. 5.

Utah between 1950 and 2010. This is added to indicate the effect of population growth over the post World War II period. The upper line of the wedge represents the rate of growth in Utah which was approximately 300%, from 688,862 in 1950 to 2,763,885 in 2010 and the lower line of the wedge represents the rate of growth in the USA which was approximately 100%, from 151,325,798 in 1950 to 308,745,538 in 2010, according to the US Census Bureau.<sup>5</sup> In 1950, 47% of the total USA membership of the LDS Church lived in Utah.<sup>6</sup> By 1980, the percentage of the US Mormon population in Utah was 29%.<sup>7</sup> By 2000, the Utah portion was 31%.<sup>8</sup>

### Observations

The first observation is that there is a significant difference between the number of Americans that the LDS church claims are Mormons and the number of Americans who claim to be Mormons. This raises a number of questions discussed below.

The second observation is that if the population growth rate wedge is anchored with the 1950 church population, the ARIS results are comfortably explained by population growth in the relevant regions. This would tend to support the validity of the ARIS results while explaining the perceptible growth of the LDS church.

The third observation is that, if the ARIS results are projected backward in time, they nearly intersect with the 1950 and 1960 official LDS statistics. The deviation between the official statistics and the actual and projected ARIS results appears to begin in the 1960s and accelerates during the 1970s. This period corresponds with two vigorous missionary drives within the LDS church – the “Every Member a Missionary” program under President David O. McKay (1951 – 1970) and the “Lengthen Your Stride” program under President Spencer W. Kimball (1973 – 1985).

5 US Census Bureau, *2010 Census Data and Apportionment Data*, posted at: <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/> (viewed 1 October 2011) (interactive maps provide Utah current and USA and Utah historical information); *U. S. Bureau of Census, Eighteenth Decennial Census of Population: 1960*, p. x (Table A) (1950 USA population) & p. 46-8 (Tables 1 & 2) (1950 Utah population).

6 Deseret News, *1983 Church Almanac*, p. 272.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Deseret News, *2003 Church Almanac*, p. 623 (percentage obtained by dividing the Utah total by the USA total).

### Questions

For scholars, the following questions are presented: When, how and why did this overstatement of LDS membership in the USA develop? Is the variation between ARIS and official statistics found in any other religious group in the USA?

For LDS church operational managers, the following questions are presented: How does the church insure that its true population is being measured? Further, are there incentives in the system to overstate the church population? Is a similar overstatement happening in areas outside the United States of America? Professor Lanier Britsch documented an example in the French Polynesian Mission in the 1920s where the church population figures were revised downward by 38% following “a careful census.”<sup>9</sup> D. Michael Quinn documented an aggressive program in the British Mission in the 1960s first to increase the number of members followed by an aggressive program to remove non-believers from the church rolls.<sup>10</sup> In the decade just concluded, the number of stakes—the local LDS administrative unit—in Chile was reduced 36%, from 115 to 74, after the 2002 government census revealed that 103,735 persons identified themselves as Mormon in contrast to the 509,592 members that the LDS church claimed at the end of 2000.<sup>11</sup> The actions in Chile were reported in the

9 R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), pp. 50 – 51.

10 D. Michael Quinn, “I-Thou vs. I-It Conversions: The Mormon ‘Baseball Baptism’ Era,” *Sunstone Magazine* (December 1993), pp. 30 – 44, posted at: <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/093-30-44.pdf> (viewed 1 October 2011).

11 The number of stakes in Chile is from Deseret News, *2003 Church Almanac*, p. 621 (December 31, 2000 figure); “Statistics Chile,” *LDS Church Temples*, posted at: <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/statistics/units/world/country.php?country=Chile> (viewed 1 October 2011) (74 is the 2011 figure); and Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Building Faith: The LDS Church in Chile,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 April 2006, posted at: (viewed 1 October 2011) (74 is the 2006 figure). The Chilean census information is from Republic of Chile, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, *Censo 2002 Sintesis de Resultados*, p. 26, posted at: <http://www.ine.cl/cd2002/sintesisencensal.pdf> (viewed 1 October 2011) (hereinafter “2002 Census”). The official Chile membership statistic is from Deseret News, *2003 Church Almanac*, p. 621. Sometimes a point is made that the 2002 Census only measured the faith of persons 15 years of age and older. According to the 2002 Census, 25.7 percent of the

May 2006 issue of the *Salt Lake City Messenger*. It is worth noting that the LDS church currently (October 2011) claims a Chilean membership of 563,689.<sup>12</sup>

For LDS spiritual leaders, the question is: Why is there such a significant drop-off in affiliation with the church after baptism? A person becomes a member of the LDS church through adult baptism (actually, the eighth birthday is the minimum age). Baptism is delayed so that the candidate can make the decision in his or her own judgment. A member who does not attend regularly is commonly referred to as “inactive.” One who rejects the decision made at baptism into the LDS church is considered an “apostate.” The ARIS question addresses whether one is affiliated with a faith tradition, not the level of activity within that faith. If the official LDS church statistics represent primarily baptized persons, then the ARIS figures represent significant levels of rejection of the baptismal decision by persons once Mormon. To be specific, the level of “apostasy” suggested by the ARIS is 40% in 1990, 48% in 2001 and 47% in 2008.

For persons seeking to convert Mormons to traditional forms of Christianity, the question is: How can the leavers be identified? These are persons who are clearly seeking something promised but not found (by them) in the LDS church.

For political planners, the question is the actual electoral strength of the LDS church in the USA. The LDS church has intentionally sought to strengthen its political influence in Washington, DC, since 1903. This is probably a rational response to the experience of the LDS church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Federal government’s active program to prohibit the Mormon practice of polygamy led to the imprisonment of many Mormon leaders and ultimately to the disestablishment of the LDS church by Congress in 1887. Today, the claims of the LDS church must be evaluated in light of the fact that almost one out of every two persons claimed by the LDS church as a Mormon does not in fact claim to be Mormon.

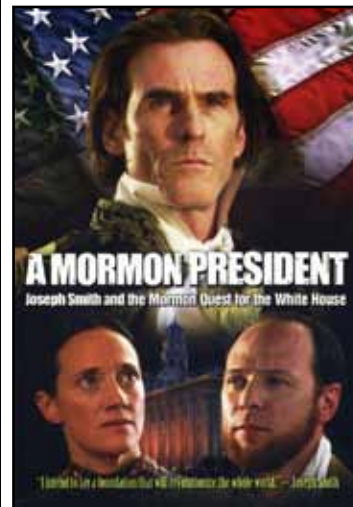
Finally, persons leaving the Mormon church should consider obtaining a formal letter of removal from the church so that they will no longer be counted as a member by the church. Common wisdom is that the LDS church

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population is under the age of 15. 2002 Census, p. 12. If the census figure is increased by this percentage, the number only becomes 130,395, a little more than a quarter of the official membership number.

12 “Country Profile: Chile,” *Newsroom*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, posted at: <http://newsroom.lds.org/country/chile> (viewed 1 October 2011).

will not make this easy and that persistence and diligence is required to bring the process to a successful completion. Information on obtaining a letter of removal may be obtained on the Utah Lighthouse Ministry website at <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/nameremovalletter.htm> and at the “Mormon Resignation” website found at <http://www.mormonresignation.com/>.



***A Mormon President:  
Joseph Smith and the  
Mormon Quest for the  
White House (DVD)***

**Price: \$15.00**  
(plus shipping)

Press release for . . . *A Mormon President, Joseph Smith and the Mormon Quest for the White House*.

According to director Adam Christing, who is both a filmmaker and a member of the Mormon History Association, the widespread opposition to the candidacies of Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman is rooted in the historical battles that have gone on between members of the LDS church and other Americans. He believes that his film will shed light on that rift.

“Most Americans don’t know that the first U.S. Presidential candidate to be assassinated was a Mormon,” noted Christing. “In fact, he was the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith. The Mormon Prophet was murdered a few months after he announced his candidacy in 1844.”

Christing, who is not a member of the LDS church adds: “You can’t really understand the gigantic challenge facing presidential candidates Romney and Huntsman, until you understand the secret world of Joseph Smith, polygamy, and Smith’s political ambition to build a theocracy in the United States.” *A Mormon President* covers the charismatic Mormon Prophet’s run for the U.S. Presidency [in 1844] and the events that led up to his murder by an angry mob. The DVD contains a “bonus feature” that examines Mitt Romney and other Mormon candidates in the modern age. . . .

Christing says, “The two things you aren’t supposed to talk about in this country are religion and politics. But that’s the explosive combo that makes this such a fascinating subject.” ([amormonpresident.com/media/](http://amormonpresident.com/media/))

## EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS AND EMAILS

**April 2011:** Hello! I've been involved in the LDS church for about 6 months now, and am starting to question many of the doctrines.

**April 2011:** I just been watching your video 'Why Mormons Leave.' I am a Mormon . . . having doubts . . . I have been baptised on Jan 19/2010, . . . I have also been noticing when I stopped reading the Book of Mormons and praying to be guided the right way I was seeing contradictions in the BOM which goes against the bible. . . . I have issues with the temple side of the mormonism, . . . I have done baptism for the dead . . . Also I have felt it was taking me away more from Jesus Christ and as for home teaching I stopped doing it. . . . I also noticed that missionaries don't tell you everything about Mormonism either. Also D&C 132 still talks of polygamy . . . Also I noticed the Mormons want to baptise their new members very quickly . . .

**May 2011:** Ms. Sandra you are a beacon of light to those of us that are leaving or have left. You are a very comforting soul. I don't think that I could ever describe my thankfulness towards you for sitting down with [us] that day! We love you and your ministry!

**May 2011:** I am / was a recent convert to Mormonism. . . . Upon hearing you speak via a youtube video on FaceBook I'm concerned for my Beliefs.

**May 2011:** I was born and raised in the LDS church and served a mission in Brazil. I left the church after returning from my mission a year early because I could no longer pretend that I had a testimony. While serving a mission I realized that I was a salesmen for the church and nothing more. This did not sit comfortably with me at all and it was ruining my emotional well-being.

You're website is most helpful and has helped me to get over my last few emotional hurdles of any connection with the church. Thank you very much.

**June 2011:** I just wanted to get back to you and tell you thanks again . . . Things are going well for me. I have explained my position [not believing Mormonism any more] to my wife, and she listened and now even sees things as I do. Its great to be working together on this now.

**June 2011:** I am lds but don't believe anymore. I feel very depressed and don't think Jesus is real. I am on the fence as to whether there is even a God. . . . Thank you so much for all your hard work. Even though i doubt the very existence of god, I can at least say I am free from the bondage that is the LDS church.

**June 2011:** Thank you for providing so much invaluable reading material as I slowly, painfully studied my way out of Mormonism almost 8 years ago. You're a saint to the Ex-Mo community.

**June 2011:** I always find the Messenger to be interesting and well researched. Others criticize you and your writings but they never say with specificity what statements you have made that are incorrect. I wonder why.

**June 2011:** Two days ago, I sent my letter of resignation to the LDS church. It was after many years of research and soul searching. I have no doubt that I made the right choice. Your ministry was very helpful in directing me to reading material where I could learn the truth about Joseph Smith and the Mormon church.

**June 2011:** I just wanted to write a quick note and let you know how valuable your work is and how much I believe Sandra (and Jerald) Tanner are truly amazing, national treasures. Thank you for the work you do!

**July 2011:** Have you read the whole Bible, . . . If you love the teachings of Jehovah, of Jesus in the Bible, sure you would love the message in the Book of Mormon, . . .

**July 2011:** While it is very heartening to read [in the newsletter] of the ones who've found your information life-changing, it is also revealing to read those emails/letters from die-hard Mormons. . . . I am astonished at the number of "drive-by" potshots that are taken at you, either to simply volley a few choice nasty words your way, or to make claims ("please fix these idiotic mistakes . . ." "I don't think any of it [ your research and information] is valid . . .") without backing up those statements. It's so very easy to shout out "You're wrong!" but much harder to actually prove it with calm, logical, researched proof. Thank you that in the face of unwarranted persecution that you no doubt face daily, you continue to provide proof in a commendable, Christian manner.

**July 2011:** We have thanked the Lord many times for your research and love for the LDS. It took [my husband] and I 10 years after leaving the LDS faith to finally surrender to the Lord.

**July 2011:** It's been many years, . . . [since] we lived in SLC in the early 80's. . . . We were grieved to hear about Jerald, but incredibly grateful for the few chances we had to chat with the two of you. Those conversations did so much to shape our faith for decades to come. We think of you often and you're still our hero.

**July 2011:** After reading the boasting of Joseph Smith I pondered it. In fact what he boasted was true. I don't know what the Lord thought of it, good or bad, I'm not the Lord and it's his business. . . . In my youth I went to several Churches seeking one to join and all the literature made every other church out to be wrong. I was looking for a church with Christ at the head not self serving dogma. It was this unresearched misinformation and dishonesty about the beliefs of other churches and the LDS church that when corrected prompted me to become LDS.

**July 2011:** Just a note of thanks for your tireless work on Mormonism. I was one of those faithful LDS guys for most of life who finally got it and got out. You're one of my heroes. Blessings upon you Sandra and your ministry.

**July 2011:** I am disappointed in the book I bought. Like all the rest, its primary assault is on Joseph Smith's character rather than the content of the Book of Mormon. . . . I have several objective reasons for believing that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be. . . . However, I agree that the evidence is not conclusive. . . . If the sealed [portion of the Book of Mormon record] is to be revealed as a book that is read by the power of Christ, as I believe it is, then this generation will see it as the Lord unveils his arm in the sight of all flesh (Isa.52:10). . . . Until then, it is a matter of faith. I certify that the future as described in the Book of Mormon's prophecies is far more likely than the future described by today's Christian evangelists. . . .

**July 2011:** Hello, my wife is struggling with mormonism and their core doctrines. I am searching for literature to aid her in her search for the truth, literature that will lead her to the one book of truth the Bible. [We sent a packet of information]

**July 2011:** Thank you so much for your work. Because of your studies, I was able to equip myself with knowledge and leave the LDS church. God bless you!

**July 2011:** I have been reading about the LDS religion on your website and I really appreciate it. I had been a member all my life up until about 3 yrs ago. My whole family is pretty much LDS and my father is a bishop. My husband and I have 2 girls and we are searching for a church for our family.

**Aug. 2011:** I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I love Jesus Christ as my Savior and my brother. Whether the Bible actually says it or not, I choose to believe he is my brother and I love him as such.

**Aug. 2011:** I've held your Christ guided ministry in high esteem for a lot of years—even though it was so taboo (silly to preach 'free agency' and put bans on so many things) when I started reading articles from ULM. Learned about you from a very good friend and Christian mentor. . . . ULM helped me when I was breaking away from Mormonism back in the early 90's. My husband was also raised (jack) Mormon, and he started going to church w me in '08, and was saved shortly after.

It is wonderful to see God at work! Long before [our daughter] left on her mission God put it in my heart to pray for some solid Christians to come into her life. . . . Thought I knew just how controlling the LDS church was until [our daughter] left on her mission. Phone calls only on Mother's Day and Christmas, cannot plan a trip in her area unless we talk to her mission pres ab it (like that'd happen), and the worst is not being able to contact her personally in the case of a family emergency or death! It's obvious that the LDS have studied carefully for many years how to maintain a grip on young, impressionable people.

**Aug. 2011:** What are you hoping to fulfill here? Does bashing and tearing down another persons faith make you feel strong? Does what you are doing reflect the actions of that which Christ would do? Why do you feel the LDS church is false? I am willing to bet 99% of your "facts" are inaccurate.

**Aug. 2011:** I just wanted to thank you for your ministry and resources—they are very helpful. My wife and I are trying to witness to some Mormons and your site and resources are a great help, thank you.

**Sept. 2011:** I met you 16 yrs ago when my husband . . . and I flew out to Utah from Kansas for our wedding celebration, and your bookstore was our first stop off. I was a baby Christian at the time and fresh out of the Mormon Church. It was your book "Mormonism—Showdown or Reality" that had greatly influenced my husband (who used it to witness to me) . . . . I want you to know that your and Jerald's work will always be appreciated

**Sept. 2011:** Thank you for your book and all your video's on youtube :) I am an ex- Mormon . . . , I was born into the church and have 5 generations of SLC Temple worthy Mormons before me. I am 34 now . . . This year I finally had my name removed from the Church records. . . . Now I am Free, . . . Free from the church and Free in Christ!

**Sept. 2011:** I went to the Mormon church today for the sacrament meeting. I felt so out of place. I literally felt uncomfortable sitting there. None of the testimonies were about Jesus Christ.

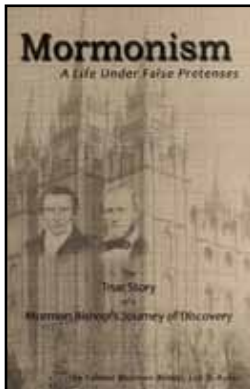
**Sept. 2011:** [From a Mormon] I just want to thank you for all the information your site has provided on the prophesy made by Joseph Smith on the constitution "hanging by a thread" it looks like it is NOW come TRUE!

**Sept. 2011:** Sandra, I met you several year ago at your ministry. Have since had numerous conversations with Lynn Wilder [former BYU professor, now Christian] who is helping my wife with her transformation out of Mormonism. Your site has also helped her understand what she had never known about her religion.

**Sept. 2011:** . . . traditional Christianity, the evangelicals and the fundamentalists, are no more the way of Jesus, than LDS has become, so there is a need for the LDS community, world-wide, to return to *most* of the original goals of LDS—all of the emotionally and spiritually healthy ones—dump the junk, restore God's original intent for LDS, and thereby end the spiritual darkness.

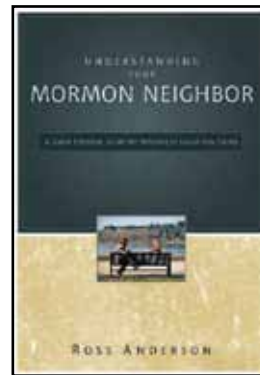
**Sept. 2011:** I'm a Mormon on the edge. I got back from my mission a year ago and I have studied deeper into the history of Joseph Smith and thanks to your website I've facts that really put Mormonism into a perspective.

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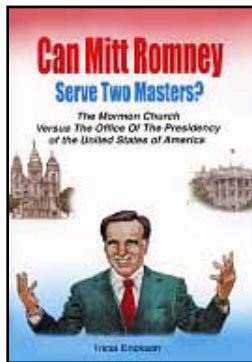
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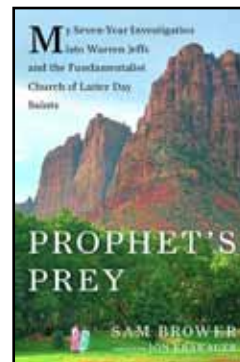
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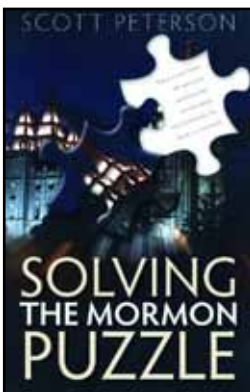
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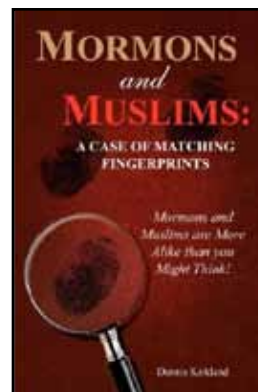
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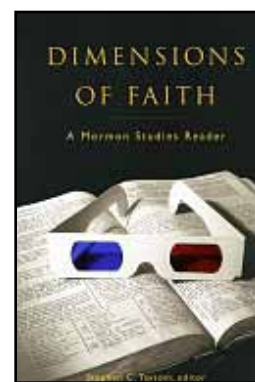
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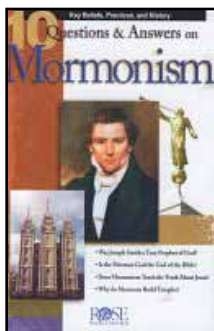
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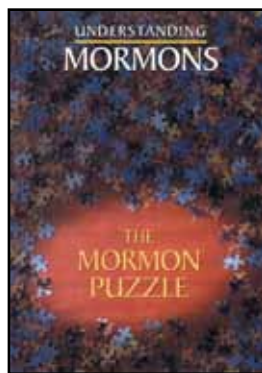
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