

## **Testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses**

The testimonies of the witnesses were meant to provide an independent verification of the fact that the Book of Mormon was translated from ancient golden plates. The Three received a glorious vision, wherein an angel showed them the plates, and a heavenly voice testified that the book was translated by the gift and power of God, and the work was of God. The Eight had a much more prosaic experience – Joseph showed them the plates, which they were allowed to handle and inspect. They had no glorious vision, but the evidence of their own eyes suggested to them that the plates were ancient and unlike anything they would expect Joseph to have in his possession. Together, these witnesses give us a diverse perspective on the fact that the Book of Mormon came about just as Joseph claimed.

I have no particular desire to comment on the admissibility of the testimonies. I accept them as they stand, because they support truths that I know through spiritual means. My present intent is simply to discuss the content of the testimonies.

Both testimonies are prefaced as declarations to the world. This simply reflects the fact that in both cases the witnesses knew they were responding to divine instruction to testify to important truths. However, the introductory “Be it known...” in both testimonies should reinforce in our minds the seriousness of what the witnesses were trying to say.

The Three witnesses then explain the content of the record, and the witness from God of the truth of what they saw. They describe their experience as “marvelous.” I have always seen in that word an admission that they know their story is unusual, and perhaps hard to believe, but they reaffirm that they have been commanded of God, and they obey the commandment.

Their concluding statement explains what they expect the result of bearing testimony to be – that they will enjoy eternal blessings. Many have commented on how, although all of the Three at some point became disaffected from the church, they never recanted their testimony. A review of what they wrote about eternal consequences should make clear that they felt there was no possibility of changing. They may not have been able to keep up with the kingdom of God on the earth, but they knew what they had seen.

The Eight witnesses, as I mentioned earlier, have a much different testimony. They simply saw Joseph present them with the plates, which they describe. Their testimony carries none of the overtones of eternal truth about which the Three are so emphatic; they simply state an experience very amenable to physical observation and explanation. Although there are none of the supernatural trappings to their experience, yet it is just as powerful, because they were able to inspect the physical object – the plates – and form their opinions under very ordinary circumstances. Even if one were to believe that Joseph somehow overwhelmed the Three witnesses with a fabulous presentation, the Eight could only be described as “underwhelmed.” They saw what they saw, and they related it.

There is wisdom in these two different accounts. Certainly they gave Joseph a sense that he was no longer the sole witness of the nature and existence of the plates. We should also consider what they mean for us. The plates and the visions, in the wisdom of God, are not shown to millions. But eleven very ordinary men, whom we would consider good neighbors and friends, saw and bore record. We don't have to worry about the historicity of the plates nor the translation – that is witnessed for us. We have only to get our own testimony of the truths contained in the record, which we can do through prayer.