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## The Testimony of Incidental Witnesses

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE TESTIMONY OF INCIDENTAL WITNESSES.

In addition to the testimony of the Three Witnesses and the testimony of the Eight Witnesses to the fact that Joseph Smith was in possession of the Nephite plates, the Urim and Thummim and the breast plate, I present also the testimony of persons who may be said to have become acquainted with these facts in an incidental way.

When the strong sympathy and mutual confidence subsisting between the Prophet and his mother, Lucy Smith, is taken into account, it would be more than passing strange if she did not in some substantial way have personal knowledge of her son being in possession of the Nephite plates, and the things found with them. That she had this knowledge appears in the sequel. In 1845, while residing at Nauvoo "Mother Smith," as she was affectionately called by the Saints, dictated her memories to Mrs. Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, which are now published under the title, "History of the Prophet Joseph, by his Mother, Lucy Smith."<sup>d</sup> In her account of her son's movements on the night of the 21st, and the morning of the 22nd of September, 1827—the day Joseph Smith obtained possession of the Nephite record—Lucy Smith states that in consequence of having visitors

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<sup>d</sup>See Improvement Era, Vol. V. Mother Smith's Memoirs were first published by Orson Pratt in Liverpool, England, in 1853, under the title "Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations." As "Mother Smith" dictated chiefly from memory, there were some inaccuracies in her work, as first published by Elder Orson Pratt. Afterwards the work was corrected by a committee of which the late George A. Smith, Church Historian, was chairman. It is this revised copy from which the Era edition was published in 1902, and which is cited in these notes.

at their home—these visitors were Mr. Joseph Knight and Mr. Josiah Stool—she was detained until past midnight of the 21st, in her domestic duties; that while so engaged Joseph came to her and asked if she a chest with a lock and key. She surmised instantly for what use he wanted it, for evidently the family knew the appointed time had come to secure the plates. A few minutes after Emma Smith, the Prophet's wife, passed through the room, dressed for riding, and a few minutes later she and Joseph departed with the horse and wagon of one of their guests, Mr. Joseph Knight. The family was astir early in the morning and Mr. Knight was somewhat exercised on finding his horse gone, and Mother Smith did not feel at liberty to say who had taken him. Meantime the Prophet Joseph returned with the horse and wagon. And now the statement of the Prophet's mother:

I trembled so with fear, lest all might be lost in consequence of some failure in keeping the commandments of God, that I was under the necessity of leaving the room in order to conceal my feelings. Joseph saw this, and said, "Do not be uneasy, mother, all is right—see here I have got a key." I knew not what he meant, but took the article of which he spoke into my hands, and examined it. He took it again and left me, but said nothing respecting the record. \* \* \* That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was indeed, nothing more nor less than the Urim and Thummim, and it was by this that the angel showed him many things which he saw in vision; by which also he could ascertain, at any time, the approach of danger, either to himself or the record, and on account of which he always kept the Urim and Thummim about his person.<sup>e</sup>

After relating the particulars about the Prophet bringing home the plates and securing them she makes the following statement:

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<sup>e</sup>History of the Prophet Joseph Smith, by Lucy Smith, ch. xxiii.

Soon after this, he came in from work, one afternoon, and after remaining a short time, he put on his great coat, and left the house. I was engaged at the time, in an upper room, in preparing some oilcloths for painting.<sup>f</sup> When he returned, he requested me to come down stairs. I told him that I could not leave my work just then, yet, upon his urgent request, I finally concluded to go down and see what he wanted, upon which he handed me the breast plate spoken of in history. It was wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief, so thin that I could feel its proportions without any difficulty. It was concave on one side and convex on the other, and extended from the neck downwards so far as the center of the stomach of a man of extraordinary size. It had four straps of the same material, for the purpose of fastening it to the breast, two of which ran back to go over the shoulders, and the other two were designed to fasten to the hips. They were just the width of two of my fingers; (for I measured them), and they had holes in the end of them, to be convenient in fastening. After I had examined it, Joseph placed it in the chest with the Urim and Thummim.<sup>g</sup>

I next call attention to a statement made by Parley P. Pratt concerning an item of experience when performing a brief mission among some branches of the Church in western New York in company with the Prophet Joseph. He says:

Arriving in Geneseo, we met with the other Elders who had started from Kirtland on the same mission, and with others who were local, and held a general conference. Among those whose hospitality we shared in that vicinity (Geneseo) was old Father Beaman and his amiable, interesting family. He was a good singer, and so were his three daughters; we were much edified and comforted in their society, and were deeply interested in hearing the old gentleman and Brother Joseph converse on their early acquaintance and history. He [Beaman] had been in-

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<sup>f</sup>Lucy Smith followed the business of hand painting oil-cloth covers for tables, stands, etc., see her History of the Prophet, ch. xvii.

<sup>g</sup>History of the Prophet Joseph Smith, by Lucy Smith, ch. xxiv.

timate with Joseph before the first organization of the Church; and assisted him in preserving the plates of the Book of Mormon from the enemy, and had at one time had them concealed under his own hearth.<sup>h</sup>

In consequence of the worldly circumstances of his father, the Prophet was under the necessity, at times, of finding employment away from home. In the month of October, 1825, he hired with an old gentleman by the name of Josiah Stoyal, who lived in Chenango county, in the state of New York, and was put to work, with other hands, by the old gentleman, to search for a silver mine which the traditions of the neighborhood said had been opened by the Spaniards near Harmony, Susquehanna county, state of Pennsylvania. It was here that the Prophet made the acquaintance of the Knights, who were well-to-do farmers and millers in that neighborhood. It appears from all the circumstances that the Prophet took Josiah Stoyal and Joseph Knight into his confidence<sup>i</sup> as to the time when he was to receive the plates of the Book of Mormon, and hence their

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<sup>h</sup>Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, p. 117.

<sup>i</sup>The fact that the Prophet took these two men into his confidence is supported by the testimony of Mr. John Reid, Esq., in a speech before the state convention held in Nauvoo, at which Joseph Smith was nominated to be president of the United States. Mr. Reid had known the Prophet in an early day when he was working for Mr. Stoyal in Chenango county, and thus speaks of him: "After living in that neighborhood about three years, enjoying the good feelings of his acquaintances, as a worthy youth, he told his particular friends that he had had a revelation from God to go to the west about eighty miles, to his father's, in which neighborhood he would find hid in the earth an old history written on golden plates, which would give great light and knowledge concerning the destiny of all nations, kindreds, and tongues; he said that he distinctly heard the voice of him that spoke. Joseph Knight, one of the fathers of your church, a worthy man and my intimate friend, went with him. \* \* \* In a few days his friends returned with the glad news that Joseph had found the plates and had gone down to his father-in-law's for the purpose of translating them." (History of the Church, Vol. I., p. 94.),

presence at the Smith residence on the morning of the 22nd of September, 1827. Messrs. Knight and Staal had business at Rochester, New York, and in leaving their home in Chenango county, so timed their journey that they arrived at the Smith residence on the 20th of September and remained there for a number of days;<sup>j</sup> and were not only present when Joseph Smith obtained the records, but were there when he brought them to the house a day or two later. And now the testimony of Mr. Staal. Under date of December 19, 1843, a Mrs. Martha L. Campbell, writing to the Prophet Joseph Smith, at the request of Mr. Staal, and for him, says:

Brother Smith:—

By request of Brother Staal I now sit down to write you. He is quite unwell and is sometimes fearful that he cannot stand it through the winter, and wishes me to say to you that he wants your prayers and the prayers of all the Saints for the recovery of his health to enable him to gather among the Saints; and he also wishes to know if you could receive him as a brother. He says he shall come out [to Nauvoo] next spring if he lives and has health to endure the journey. He says if he remains as well as at present he shall venture to start. He says he has never staggered at the foundation of the work, for he knew too much concerning it. If I understood him right he was the first person that took the plates out of your hands the morning you brought them in, and he observed, Blessed is he that sees and believeth, and more blessed is he that believeth without seeing, and he says he has seen and believeth. He seems anxious to get there [to Nauvoo] to renew his covenants with the Lord.<sup>k</sup>

The whole letter is of interest but this is the only part bearing upon the Book of Mormon, and is referred to as testimony for this reason: It is a wholly undesigned incident in connection with the coming forth of the work, and

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<sup>j</sup>History of Joseph Smith the Prophet, by Lucy Smith, ch. xxiii.

<sup>k</sup>The original of Mrs. Campbell's letter is on file at the Historian's Office, package 4.

is one which occurs under circumstances that render it of first rate importance as testimony. It is a fact directly stated in the history of Mother Lucy Smith that Josiah Stool and Joseph Knight were guests at the homestead of the Smiths from the 20th to the 24th, or 25th of September, 1827; and now a letter written on December 19, 1843, sixteen years later, without any design whatever of corroborating the fact of Lucy Smith's statement, also says that Josiah Stool was at the Smith residence, and that he received the plates from the hands of the Prophet, on the occasion of his bringing them home, remarking at the time, "Blessed is he that seeth and believeth, and more blessed is he that believeth without seeing." So there can be no question but what Josiah Stool had the most palpable evidence that Joseph Smith had the Nephite record; and sixteen years afterwards, though he had neglected his privileges as a member of the Church, and had not followed her fortunes, yet he reaffirms his faith in the work which the Book of Mormon may be said to have inaugurated, and declares that he has "never staggered at the foundation of the work, for he knew too much concerning it." That is, he had too strong evidence of the reality of those facts in which the work had its origin to doubt their truth.

I have laid much stress, but not without good reason, upon the direct testimony of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses to the truth of the Book of Mormon; and of course, their testimony must forever stand as of first importance in the direct external evidences of the book, but I confess also that this incidental testimony appeals strongly to me, and when I think how in harmony it all is with the circumstances surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, to my mind it wonderfully strengthens the direct statements of the other Witnesses.