

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Macmillan Publishing Company
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney



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that it was the event that “ancient prophets have long since pointed out” (*T&S* 6 [Nov. 1, 1845]:1011).

Therefore, while the sermons reflected a sense of urgency, their tenor was clearly optimistic. If the Saints were being driven, it was to their destiny. President Young spoke of “a crisis of extraordinary and thrilling interest,” and admonished the Saints to “wake up, wake up” and accept “the present glorious emergency” (*T&S* 6 [Nov. 1, 1845]:1019). Orson Pratt saw the approaching exodus as “long looked for, long prayed for, and long desired.” They were on the threshold, he declared, of “one of the grandest and most glorious events yet witnessed” in the Church (*MS* 6 [Dec. 1, 1845]:191–92).

Numerous extant sermons from Nauvoo also suggested additional reasons for the exodus. A move west would permit greater expansion and continued growth. In the western wilderness the Church could more easily fulfill a divine commitment to take the gospel to the LAMANITES. The mass migration would be a test separating the wheat from the chaff, a purifying furnace bringing greater unity and strength to the Church.

Later, in the Rocky Mountains, pioneer Latter-day Saints came to see the exodus from Nauvoo as a key to who they were and what they could become.

[See also *History of the Church: c. 1844–1877.*]

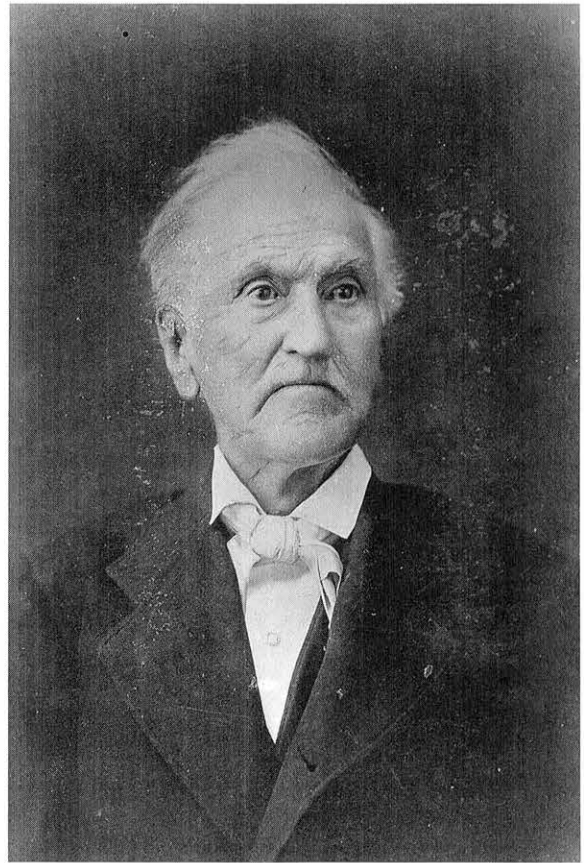
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REED C. DURHAM, JR.

WHITMER, DAVID

David Whitmer (1805–1888) was one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon whose testimony has been printed in all published copies of the book (*see* BOOK OF MORMON WITNESSES). Although Whitmer was excommunicated from the Church in 1838, he never repudiated his testimony



David Whitmer (1805–1888), the most interviewed of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. An individualist who was doggedly unwavering in his testimony of the spiritual manifestations received in June 1829, he was known as an honest, conscientious, and guileless man. Courtesy Library-Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

of the Book of Mormon, reaffirming it thereafter on at least seventy recorded occasions.

David Whitmer was born to Peter Whitmer, Sr., and Mary Musselman Whitmer near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on January 7, 1805. In 1809 the family moved to Fayette, New York, where they worked a large farm. He learned about the Book of Mormon from Oliver COWDERY, who was scribe for Joseph SMITH during the translation. When persecution grew severe in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where the two were working, Whitmer invited Joseph, Oliver, and Joseph’s wife, Emma, to his family’s house in Fayette. The translation of the Book of Mormon was completed there in June 1829.

In the same month, Joseph Smith told David Whitmer that he, along with Cowdery and Martin HARRIS, another supporter of the work, were to be

witnesses of the Book of Mormon. In answer to their prayers, an angel appeared to them near the Whitmer house and showed them the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. An account of this experience comprises the Testimony of the Three Witnesses in the Book of Mormon. David's brothers, Christian, Jacob, John, and Peter, Jr., were four of the Eight Witnesses to whom Joseph Smith showed the plates without an angelic visitation and whose testimony also appears in the book.

In 1829, David, John, and Peter, Jr., received revelations through Joseph Smith calling them to missionary work (D&C 14:6; 15:6; 16:6). In April 1830 the Church was organized in Peter Whitmer, Sr.'s, house (see ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH, 1830). However, David's close association with Joseph Smith did not prevent occasional chastisement. A revelation in 1830 warned Whitmer, "Your mind has been on the things of the earth more than on the things of me, your Maker, and the ministry whereunto you have been called; and you have not given heed unto my Spirit, and to those who were set over you, but have been persuaded by those whom I have not commanded" (D&C 30:2). In view of Whitmer's later separation from the Church, this statement seems prophetic.

When the Church moved from New York in 1831, the Whitmers went with the Saints to Kirtland, Ohio, and then to Jackson County, Missouri, which had been designated as Zion, a gathering place for the Saints. By July 1832, the Whitmers had settled along the Big Blue River in Kaw Township (now Kansas City). To their great disappointment, the hopes for Zion were short-lived. The differences between the Latter-day Saints and the local settlers erupted into open conflict. On one occasion, a mob threatened to kill Whitmer and other Church leaders if they did not admit that the Book of Mormon was a fraud. Whitmer absolutely refused.

Driven from Jackson County, the Whitmers settled in adjacent Clay County, Missouri, along with other Latter-day Saint refugees. As their numbers grew, a STAKE was organized and Whitmer became the stake president in July 1834, making him the leading figure in Church administration in the area. By October 1834, David and John Whitmer had moved back to Kirtland, Ohio, to prepare for the spiritual blessing promised to the Saints when the KIRTLAND TEMPLE was completed. In February 1835, in accord with an earlier commission received by revelation, David Whit-

mer with Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris selected the twelve men who constituted the first Quorum of Twelve Apostles in the Church (D&C 18:37–38). Whitmer was also a member of the committee that drafted rules for the regulation of the temple. On the day of its dedication, March 27, 1836, he testified of an outpouring of the Spirit from on high, as the Lord had promised (HC 2:427).

In spite of all their great contributions to the work, by 1838 David and the remainder of the Whitmers had left the Church (Christian and Peter, Jr., had previously died in Clay County). The year 1837 was a time of disillusion and financial trial for the Saints in Kirtland. To help shore up the local economy, Joseph Smith and other leaders organized a banking society (see KIRTLAND ECONOMY). When it failed, many members who lost their savings were embittered. Brigham Young said it was a time when the "knees of many of the strongest men in the Church faltered" (Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844*, Salt Lake City, 1968, p. 16). Even earlier, in February 1837, some dissenters wanted to depose Joseph Smith and replace him with David Whitmer. Whitmer, a proud and stubborn man, was still smarting from conflicts over his leadership in Missouri. In the disciplinary council that excommunicated Whitmer, on April 13, 1838, one of the main charges brought against him was "possessing the same spirit with the Dissenters" (Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record, Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844*, Salt Lake City, 1983, p. 177; see DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES).

After Whitmer left the Church, he moved to Richmond, Missouri, and opened a livery stable, which he ran until 1888. A respected citizen in the community, he served on fair boards, was a member of the city council, and was elected mayor. Over his lifetime, hundreds of visitors inquired about and heard his testimony of the Book of Mormon.

A year before his death Whitmer wrote a pamphlet, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (1887), apparently to justify his separation from the Church. In the pamphlet, he again gave witness to the truth of the Book of Mormon, but claimed that Joseph Smith drifted into errors after completing the translation. Whitmer rejected many later developments in the Church, such as the offices of HIGH PRIEST and PROPHET, SEER, AND REVELA-

TOR; the DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS; and the doctrines of GATHERING and of PLURAL MARRIAGE.

Shortly before his death, Whitmer repeated once more, for the *Richmond Conservator*, what he had written in the *Address*: “I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with that Book, as one of the three witnesses. Those who know me best, well know that I have always adhered to that testimony.” He died in Richmond, Missouri, on January 25, 1888, bearing testimony again on his deathbed of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

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KEITH W. PERKINS

WHITNEY STORE

The Newel K. Whitney store played a major role in the history of the Latter-day Saints in KIRTLAND, OHIO, during the years 1831–1838. When the Prophet Joseph SMITH arrived in Kirtland on February 1, 1831, he strode up to the counter where Whitney was clerking and extended his hand: “Newel K. Whitney, . . . I am Joseph, the Prophet. . . . You’ve prayed me here; now what do you want of me?” (*HC* 1:146).

The Prophet later received a number of significant revelations in the Whitney store, including the WORD OF WISDOM (D&C 89) and two important revelations on PRIESTHOOD (D&C 84, 88). Jo-



Newel K. Whitney Store, at the four corners area in Kirtland (built 1826–1827; photo 1907; restored 1979–1984). Joseph and Emma Smith lived here beginning in the fall of 1832. It became the headquarters of the Church, home of the School of the Prophets in 1833, and the venue of Doctrine and Covenants 84, 87–89, 95, 98, and much of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Photographer: George E. Anderson.