



Joseph Smith



Samuel Smith



Lucy Mack Smith



Hyrum Smith



Hiram Page



The Three Witnesses
Martin Harris David Whitmer Oliver Cowdery



Rhoda Greene
(Brigham Young's sister)



Sally Parker



William McLellin



Rebecca Williams

Knowing Is Nice but Not Enough

Here are some accounts of early Church members who heard testimonies from the Book of Mormon witnesses.

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Hearing the testimony of a Book of Mormon witness could be the next best thing to seeing the gold plates or an angel. Many early Church members had that opportunity.

What follows are the accounts of several members who spoke with the Book of Mormon witnesses. We will see, however, as President Russell M. Nelson taught, that gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon is “nice, but it is not enough!”¹

Rebecca Williams: “Their Word Is Believed”

Rebecca Swain Williams heard several Book of Mormon witnesses in Ohio beginning in 1830. She bore her testimony to her father and brothers: “I have heard the same story from several of the [Smith] family and from the three witnesses themselves. I heard them declare in public meeting that they saw a Holy Angel come down from heaven and brought the plates and laid them before their eyes.”

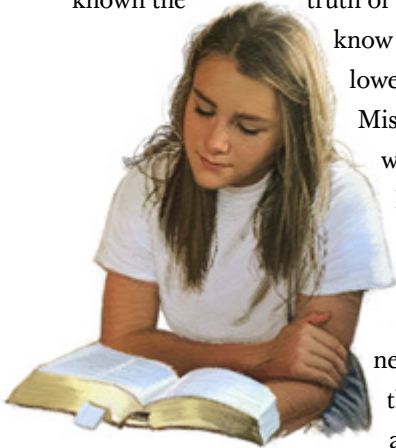
When her family members rejected her testimony, Rebecca did not cower. She continued to love them, pray for them, and value her father’s good counsel. She also continued to testify to him that the Book of Mormon witnesses told the truth: “They are men of good character and their word is believed. . . . They have seen an angel of God and conversed with him.”²

In the late 1830s, a period of widespread dissent in the Church, Rebecca remained faithful, choosing to abide by the precepts of the Book of Mormon.³

William McLellin: “Bound . . . to Acknowledge the Truth”

One morning in 1831 a young schoolteacher named William McLellin heard that some men on their way to Missouri would be preaching about a new book that was

described as “a Revelation from God.” He hurried to hear them. He listened to David Whitmer testify that he had “seen an Holy Angel who made known the truth of this record to him.” He deeply desired to



know whether their testimonies were true. He followed them 400 miles (644 km) to Independence, Missouri, where he met and interviewed other witnesses, including Martin Harris and Hyrum Smith.⁴

William interviewed Hyrum for hours. “I inquired into the particulars of the coming forth of the record,” William recorded. The next morning, after praying to be directed to the truth, he realized that he was “bound as an honest man to acknowledge the truth and validity of the Book of Mormon.”⁵

In the following years, William’s faith was tested and strengthened by his choices and by the persecution the Latter-day Saints suffered. When Saints in Jackson County, Missouri, were attacked, William’s friend Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses, was clubbed and whipped by men who said they would let him go if he would deny the Book of Mormon. “How can I deny what I know to be true?” Hiram said, and they beat him again.

William was strengthened by Hiram’s testimony—and understandably terrified of being beaten. When William heard that men in the area were offering a reward for the capture of him and Oliver Cowdery, they left town to hide in the woods with David Whitmer. There William interviewed two of the Three Witnesses. “I have never seen an open vision in my life,” he said, “but you men say you have, and therefore you positively know. Now you know that our lives are in danger every hour, if the mob can only catch us. Tell me in the fear of God, is that Book of Mormon true?”

“Brother William,” Oliver said, “God sent his holy angel to declare the truth of the translation of it to us, and therefore we know. And though the mob kill us, yet we must die declaring its truth.”

David added, “Oliver has told you the solemn truth, for we could not be deceived. I most truly declare to you its truth!”⁶

David, Martin, Hiram, Oliver, and William each came to know that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by the power of God. They knew that the gospel written on the gold

plates was true. But later they let frustrations with Joseph fester until they stopped living by the teachings of the Book of Mormon.

Having witnessed their choices, the Prophet Joseph testified not only that the Book of Mormon was true—“the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion”—but that we “would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”⁷

Sally Parker: “Strong in the Faith”

Sally Parker was a neighbor of Lucy Mack Smith in Kirtland, Ohio. “She told me the whole story,” Sally wrote. When she asked Lucy if she had seen the plates, “[Lucy] said no, it was not for her to see them, but she hefted and handled them and I believed all she said for I lived by her eight months and she was one of the best of women.”

In 1838, Sally heard Hyrum Smith share his witness too: “He said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.”⁸



In the late 1830s, as many people were leaving the Church, Sally Parker lamented the loss of their fellowship and renewed her determination to abide by the precepts of the Book of Mormon. “I mean to hold on to that faith which is like a grain of mustard seed,” Sally wrote. “I feel the power of it in my heart now.”

I am as strong in the faith as I was when we were baptized and my mind is the same. I mean to hold on by the gospel till death.”⁹

Rhoda Greene: “He Had the Spirit of God”

Lucy Mack Smith spoke in general conference in 1845, after all of the Book of Mormon witnesses in her family had died of illness or been killed. She told a story from her son Samuel’s first mission.

Samuel, one of the Eight Witnesses, visited the home of Rhoda Greene, whose husband was on a mission for another church. Samuel asked Rhoda if she would like a book. “It is a Book of Mormon that my Brother Joseph translated from plates out of the ground,” he explained.

Rhoda accepted a copy of the book to read and show her husband. When Samuel returned later, Rhoda told him her husband had no interest, and she could not buy the book. Sad, Samuel took the book and began to leave. Rhoda later told Lucy that Samuel then paused and looked at her. “She never saw a man look so,” Lucy said in her conference talk. “She knew that he had the Spirit of God.”

“The Spirit forbids me taking this book,” Samuel told Rhoda, who knelt and asked Samuel to pray with her. She kept the book, read it, and received a testimony of it. So, eventually, did her husband. They chose to abide by its precepts throughout their lives.

“And thus the work began,” Lucy testified, “and then it spread like a mustard seed.”¹⁰

Rhoda Greene is my ancestor. I am edified by her testimony of the Book of Mormon and by the recorded testimonies of the witnesses and those who heard them. I am strengthened by their choices to abide by what the Book of Mormon teaches.

Each of us can be modern-day witnesses of the



Book of Mormon, when the Holy Ghost confirms to us the truth of the book. Shortly before leaving for my mission, I finished reading the Book of Mormon, then knelt and prayed simply but with real intent, a sincere heart, and faith in Jesus Christ (see Moroni 10:3–4). I felt a powerful impression that conveyed, “You already know it’s true.” It came with peace I have never desired to resist. I have known since that the Book of Mormon is true.

That is not enough, however. President Russell M. Nelson taught: “Whenever I hear anyone, including myself, say, ‘I know the Book of Mormon is true,’ I want to exclaim, ‘That’s nice, but it is not enough!’ We need to feel, deep in ‘the inmost part’ of our hearts, that the Book of Mormon is unequivocally the word of God. We must feel it so deeply that we would never want to live even one day without it.”¹¹ President Nelson’s teachings are true. My ongoing effort to live by the teachings of the Book of Mormon has brought me closer to God than anything else. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 63.
2. Rebecca Swain Williams to Isaac Swain, Youngstown, New York, June 12, 1834, spelling standardized. See transcription and photographs of the letter in Janiece Johnson, “Give Up All and Follow Your Lord,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2002), 97–102.
3. See also Janiece Lyn Johnson, “Rebecca Swain Williams: Steadfast and Immovable,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2011, 38–41.
4. See *The Journals of William E. McLellin: 1831–1836*, ed. Jan Shipp and John W. Welch (1994), 29–33.
5. *The Journals of William E. McLellin*, 33, capitalization standardized.
6. In *William E. McLellin’s Lost Manuscript*, ed. Mitchell K. Schaefer (2012), 165–67.
7. Joseph Smith, in Introduction to the Book of Mormon. For an analysis of this teaching, see Scott C. Esplin, “Getting ‘Nearer to God’: A History of Joseph Smith’s Statement,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (2007), 40–54.
8. In Janiece L. Johnson, “‘The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling’: Sally Parker’s Weave,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2005), 116, 115.
9. In Johnson, “‘The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling,’” 117.
10. Lucy Mack Smith, “This Gospel of Glad Tidings to All People,” in Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (2017), 24.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?” 63.