

**Witnesses of the Book of Mormon — Insights Episode 27:
The Hiram Page Revelations**

David Whitmer: You said anyone could receive revelation.

Joseph Smith: That is true.

David Whitmer: You encouraged it.

Joseph Smith: That is also true. This, however, is not true.

Oliver Cowdery: How do you know that?

Joseph Smith: Because these words are at variance with the order of God's house. Does Hiram Page have authority to speak in the name of the Lord?

Oliver Cowdery: You said even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.

Joseph Smith: Yes, but all things must be done in order. Only one can speak for the Lord.

Steven C. Harper, *Professor of Church History & Doctrine, Brigham Young University:*

The first time we meet Hiram Page in the Church historical record is as the subject of a revelation, a revelation to Oliver Cowdery. Hiram has a seer stone, and he's receiving in it revelations about where Zion will be located and how the Church should be organized, and how it should function.

David Whitmer: He prophesied great things through the stone. He knows the location of the city of Zion.

Joseph Smith: He has been deceived, and you have been deceived. You flirt with apostasy.

Joseph Smith: No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelation in this church excepting my Prophet Joseph Smith. Thus saith the Lord.

Stephen C. Harper: Well, at the time Hiram Page is a teacher in the Aaronic priesthood, and Joseph would have had no problem if he received revelations through his seer stone about how to be the best teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood he could possibly be.

John C. Turner, *Professor of Religious Studies, George Mason University:*

So, Hiram Page presents himself as a new revelator, as an additional revelator. And Joseph is forced to clarify that while all men and women can seek and receive revelations from God, only he can receive those revelations which are authoritative for the Church as a whole.

Stephen C. Harper: When those revelations are about Zion, and the Lord's plans for the latter days, and how the Church should be organized, that's out of order; and that's the term that the Lord uses in the revelations.

John C. Turner: You can totally understand how this issue emerges. You have a new prophet with visions and revelations. While other individuals might seek revelations and visions as well, the result would be ecclesiastical chaos, where you would have lots of prophets and no followers.

Stephen C. Harper: The Lord speaks through Joseph to Oliver and says, 'Oliver, the implication here is either Joseph's revelations are from the Lord, or Hiram's are, but they're not both. You've got to decide which. You know which. I want you to go see Hiram and tell him his revelations are not coming from the Lord and help him understand the order of the Church.'

Camry Bagley Fox: Welcome to our series on the witnesses of the Book of Mormon. My name is Camry Bagley Fox, and we are back with Daniel Peterson, the president of the Interpreter Foundation and executive producer of the *Witnesses* project. Thank you for being here.

Daniel Peterson: Delighted to be here.

CBF: So, in the film we saw this conflict with Hiram Page receiving revelations and Oliver Cowdrey and David Whitmer believed him, right? So, what does that say about them?

DP: I think it says a great deal about their sincerity. I mean one of the standard arguments, kind of abandoned by serious historians in recent years, has been that the witnesses, some or all of them, are insincere, they're in on the con, something like that. The one who's usually thought to be in on the con, if you're going to go that way, is Oliver Cowdrey. The fact that Oliver Cowdrey, and David Whitmer, believe the revelations that Hiram Page is receiving through his seer stone is to me really interesting evidence that they're sincere. I mean IF they know that these purported revelations through a seer stone are fake, the last thing in the world they are going to do

is believe that Hiram Page is getting real revelations through a seer stone. If they are con artists, they're not going to fall for a con that's almost identical to their own.

But they really believe it. And they believe it because Hiram Page is a relative, he's a brother-in-law; he seems to be receiving genuine revelations. It's even possible, I suppose, that he was, in a way, depending on the source of the revelations.

CBF: So, what does that say about Hiram Page, that he was receiving these revelations? Especially as members of the Church, we're taught that we can receive revelation.

DP: Right. I have no doubt that he was having SOME kind of experience. I mean, if I want to get into Latter-day Saint terms here, I might say, 'Well, if the devil wants to intervene early on a dispensation, what's he going to do but muddy the waters about who gets revelations and what they say?' That's a really, really good tack to take, and maybe is the way he went. But the fact that Hiram believes these revelations to be true, again shows he's not in on some sort of con. And he takes the rebuke, by the way. He's faithful for another while in the Church. When he leaves, it's not over that, it's over other issues, partly just to be loyal to his extended family who, the Whitmers, all leave the Church.

He takes the rebuke, he backs away. He doesn't go on persisting in these purported revelations, which says to me something about his sincerity and his willingness to follow the lead of the prophet Joseph Smith, and that's important, I think.

It's a really interesting phenomenon to have these people experimenting in those early days with revelation. They had been assured modern revelation is possible, so they believe that. And they accept it. And so, they begin to receive revelations for themselves, and I think they do. But the question is, who receives revelation for the Church? When Oliver Cowdrey is called to lead the mission to the Lamanites in 1830 and 31 in the winter, he is set apart as the leader and he's told to direct the others by inspiration. So, they really believe that inspiration is possible. Again, if they were fakes, they'd know it wasn't because they've been faking it all along, but they believe that they received it and that others can receive it too.

The Church is learning at that early stage, 'Exactly how does this work?' Once the gifts are back, once revelation is possible, does everybody just get it and then everything's chaos because you can't tell who's really receiving inspiration and who's not? Or is there an organizational channel through which the revelation should come? The Church has to grow into that, has to learn how to do it. It's a very small group at that time. But nowadays, with a church of millions, we know that it wouldn't work to have everybody out there off on his or her own, receiving revelations, and trying to direct the Church. It just wouldn't work. But they're still learning that, early on.

CBF: Thank you.