
Ether 5 — In the Mouth of Three Witnesses — Moroni Speaks to the Translator, and Names the Witnesses to Come

Ether 5: a brief, remarkable chapter in which Moroni, writing around AD 400, speaks directly across time to the man who will one day translate his record. Having sealed up the brother of Jared's vision, Moroni addresses the future translator with precise instructions — touch not the sealed part, but you may show the plates to those who assist the work, and to three in particular, who shall be shown the plates by the power of God and stand as witnesses. He grounds the whole enterprise in the ancient law of witnesses: in the mouth of three the matter shall be established, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost themselves bearing record. It is one of the most direct prophecies of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the book itself — Moroni reaching out of the dust to the translator and the Three Witnesses, generations before they were born.

Ether 5 is one of the shortest chapters in the Book of Mormon and one of the most startling, because in it Moroni stops addressing his general readership and speaks to a single future individual: the man who will translate the plates. Around AD 400, the last Nephite turns from his abridgment to deliver direct, personal instructions to a translator he will never meet — telling him what he may and may not do with the record, and prophesying the witnesses who will stand with it. The chapter is a bridge across fourteen centuries, a message in a buried bottle addressed to its eventual finder. And its substance is the law of witnesses: the Book of Mormon will not come forth on one man's word alone but will be established, as the law of Moses required, *in the mouth of three witnesses* (v. 4) — and behind those three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost bearing their own record. The chapter is brief because its message is precise: instructions for the translator, and the promise of the Three Witnesses.

Hebrew Word Studies

ed / *shenayim-o-shelosha* / *chatham* (עֵד / שְׁנַיִם וְשְׁלוֹשָׁה / חָתָם) — **witness, testimony, the one who attests / "two or three" (the legal formula for established testimony) / to seal, to close up, to affix a seal vv. 3–4, 4, 1.** Three Hebrew ideas anchor this short chapter. *Ed* — witness — is the great legal-covenantal word of the Hebrew Bible. An *ed* is one who attests, whose word establishes a matter in court; the *ed* could be a person, a heap of stones (Gen. 31:48), a song (Deut. 31:19), even God himself (*the Lord be a true... witness*, Jer. 42:5). Moroni's whole chapter is built on the *ed*: the three who will be shown the plates are appointed as *edim* (witnesses), and their testimony, joined to the *ed* of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, *establishes* the record. The Book of Mormon comes forth not as one man's claim but as a matter attested by *edim*, in the full legal sense. *Shenayim o shelosha* — *two or three* — is the exact formula of the law: *at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established* (Deut. 19:15). Moroni invokes precisely this formula (*in the mouth of three witnesses*, v. 4), grounding the coming forth of the record in the Mosaic law of evidence — and the New Testament keeps the same rule (Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). The truth of the plates is not asserted but *established*, in the legal sense, by the required number of witnesses. *Chatham* — to seal — stands behind the *sealed up* portion (v. 1). To *chatham* is to close with a seal, to authenticate and secure; a *chotham* is a signet. The sealed part of the plates is *chatham*-sealed against premature opening, secured until *it shall be wisdom in God*. The chapter thus holds two complementary acts in tension: the *chatham* (sealing) that closes the greatest vision against unworthy access, and the *ed* (witnessing) that opens the rest of the record to the world through the mouths of three. What is sealed is reserved; what is witnessed is established; and both are governed by the wisdom and the law of God.

From the Chapter's Architecture

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