gathered in late afternoon, blackened their faces with mud and gunpowder, and then stormed the jail. In less than two minutes, they overcame feigned resistance from the Greys, rushed upstairs, and fired through the closed door. Hyrum, shot first, died instantly. John TAYLOR, an apostle, tried to escape out a window and was shot five times, but survived to later become the Church’s third President. Only Willard Richards, another apostle, survived unharmed. Trying to go out the window to deflect attention from the two survivors inside, Joseph Smith was hit in the chest and collarbone with two shots from the open doorway and two more from outside the window. His final words as he fell to the ground outside the jail were, “O Lord, my God!” (HC 6:618). As rumors spread that the Mormons were coming, the mob dispersed.

Several times during his last days Joseph Smith told the Saints that while he had enjoyed God’s safekeeping until his mission was fulfilled, he had now completed all that God required of him and could claim no special protection. Early in his career, the Prophet had recorded that the Lord told him, “Even if they do unto you . . . as they have done unto me, blessed are ye, for you shall dwell with me in glory” (D&C 6:30). Church leaders then and now have taught that the shedding of these martyrs’ innocent blood was necessary to seal their testimony of the latter-day work that they “might be honored and the wicked might be condemned” (D&C 136:39).

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MARTYRS

The term “martyr” (Greek martys, “a witness”) in Christianity refers to a person who has suffered death because of his or her Christian witness or commitment and who subsequently has been accorded honors by a church. While Latter-day Saints honor Joseph and Hyrum Smith as martyrs, they do not venerate them in annual celebrations of their death dates, nor do they view them as heavenly intercessors for mortals.

The ancient use of the term “martyr” involves the legal environment—witnesses testifying in a legal proceeding. The basic idea relates to establishing facts or assertions that concern matters beyond the experience of the listeners. The meaning has reference to objective events or to personal testimonies. However, the usual scriptural use carries the additional meaning of revelation by the Holy Spirit, which would empower a witness to bear inspired testimony of religious truths.

OLD TESTAMENT. In the ancient usage, the name of the Mosaic tabernacle was “tent of testi-
mony” or “tabernacle of witness.” The ark within the tabernacle contained the tablets of stone with the Lord’s Ten Commandments, Aaron’s rod that budded, and a pot of manna. These were tokens of the spiritual power of God.

While most references to “witness” and “testify” carry legal meanings, one sees the additional revelatory sense of a witness in Isaiah’s revelation, in which he “saw” the Lord and heard the seraphim cry, gave him an understanding of bearing witness to prophetic matters that are beyond usual human experience (Isa. 6:1–7). Isaiah also recorded a divine commission in which the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, promised to gather his sons and daughters from the ends of the earth. As a result, Israel would come to know the acts of God on their behalf: “Therefore, ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God” (Isa. 43:1–12). Though afflicted and hated for their testimony, it would not be in vain: Generations to come would be blessed by it (Isa. 60:14–15). In another instance, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to purchase a plot of land from his cousin. He summoned legal witnesses, paid for the land with silver according to “law and custom,” and wondered why he should buy land falling to Babylon. The Lord explained that his purchase of land by a deed foreshadowed that later the people of the city would buy and sell land, a prophetic or spiritual witness of their future return from Babylon (Jer. 32:6–44).

NEW TESTAMENT. The terms “record,” “testimony,” and “witness” are used more than two hundred times in the New Testament. In speaking to Pilate, Jesus asserted that he had been born into the world to “bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37; cf. 1 Tim. 6:13). Further, one of Jesus’ discourses illuminating the basis of witnessing identified six foundations for a testimony: Jesus himself, John the Baptist, Jesus’ own works, the Father, the scriptures, and Moses (John 8:14; cf. 5:32–47). Just prior to his ascension, Jesus explained to the apostles that, after the Holy Ghost had come upon them, they would be “witnesses” to him in Jerusalem and the “uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). He had warned them they might be hated, afflicted, and killed for his name’s sake (Matt. 5:10–12; 24:9). The apostles’ association with Jesus during the post-Resurrection ministry satisfied the legal aspect of witnessing, but their testimony of his messianic character would be conferred and confirmed by the Holy Ghost. In a related vein, one’s death could be viewed as a martyrdom for Christ, with eternal rewards to follow, as seen in Revelation 2:8–10; cf. 14:13. Certainly those true to the Savior, and redeemed by him, are his witnesses and are rewarded by him (Rev. 7:13–17).

LATTER-DAY SCRIPTURE. In the Book of Mormon, several persons die and are honored as martyrs. The prophet Abinadi is the most notable example (Mosiah 12:1–17:1). Others include the women and children of Ammonihah who were burned to death for their beliefs (Alma 14:1–10). At the death of those women and children, the prophet Alma assured his friend Amulek that “the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory” (Alma 14:11).

The Doctrine and Covenants teaches that “all they who have given their lives for [God’s] name shall be crowned” (D&C 101:15) and that the blood of the innocent ascends to God “in testimony” (D&C 109:49; cf. 98:13). In this connection, members of the Church refer to the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith as “the martyrdom of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and Hyrum Smith the Patriarch” (D&C 135:1). The Lord spoke through Brigham Young that “it was needful that [Joseph Smith] should seal his testimony with his blood, that he might be honored and the wicked might be condemned” (D&C 136:39; cf. 135).

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MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

Centuries before her birth, Book of Mormon prophets referred to Mary by name in prophecies of her vital mission (Mosiah 3:8). Describing her as “most beautiful and fair above all other virgins” (1 Ne. 11:13–20) and a “precious and chosen vessel” (Alma 7:10), they prophesied that Mary would bear the Son of God and was therefore blessed above all other women. “We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son, even as he chose the