



Type: Book Chapter

Witnesses Concerns & Questions

Author(s): Jim Bennett

Source: *A CES Letter Reply: Faithful Answers For Those Who Doubt*

Published: Sandy, UT; n.p., 2018

WITNESSES

Concerns & Questions

At the end of the day? It all doesn't matter. The Book of Mormon Witnesses and their testimonies of the gold plates are irrelevant. It does not matter whether eleven 19th century treasure diggers with magical worldviews saw some gold plates or not. It doesn't matter because of this one simple fact:

JOSEPH DID NOT USE THE GOLD PLATES FOR TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON

“[The gold plates] are a powerful, resonant, sacred object that can be (compared) to other sacred objects in other religions ... and that it has profound religious meaning. Joseph — or the Lord — came closest to offering concrete evidence of supernatural intervention in the provision for witnesses of the plates.”

– LDS HISTORIAN AND SCHOLAR RICHARD BUSHMAN, BOOK OF MORMON LANDS CONFERENCE, 2010. DR. BUSHMAN DOES NOT AGREE WITH JEREMY RUNNELLS

SHORT ANSWER:

The testimony of the Book of Mormon Witnesses has withstood the test of time in remarkable ways, and your response to them is deeply marred by your selective reliance on a handful of second-hand, very late hearsay sources that contradict the over 200 firsthand accounts that don't support your assumptions.

It's also extraordinarily dishonest of you to continually re-quote different sections from the same sources and pretend they come from different accounts.

LONG ANSWER:

Many of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates, including all of the Three Witnesses, were, at some point in their lives, deeply disaffected with the Prophet Joseph Smith. Yet all remained true to their testimonies, even though they had significant incentive to expose Joseph's "fraud." Their testimonies have been under attack for nearly two centuries, and yet they still hold up.

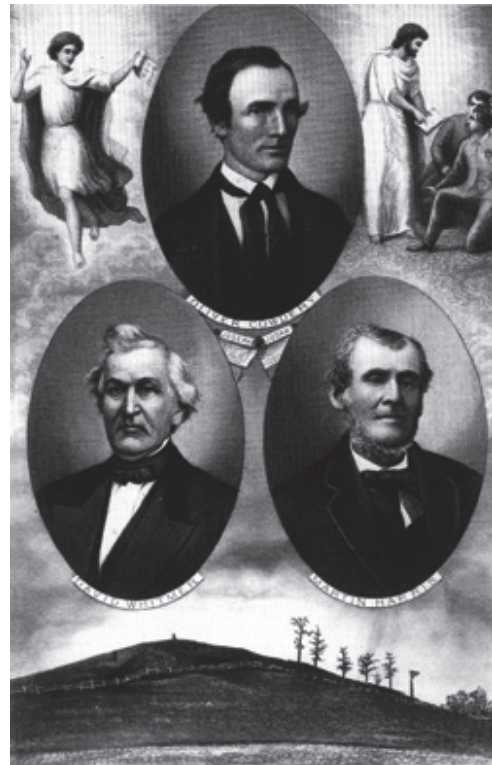
There are over 60 firsthand accounts by these witnesses that describe the physical reality of the gold plates, and they do so without the kind of "spiritual eye" nonsense that is included in all of your second-hand, hearsay accounts, many of which were written decades after the fact by people who did not know any of the witnesses personally. A great deal of what you've written in this section is not just sloppy scholarship on your part; it isn't scholarship at all.

The testimony of the Three and Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon is a key part to the testimonies of many members of the Church.

Is it? I have never heard the Three or Eight Witnesses mentioned in a testimony meeting in all my 50 years of churchgoing. I think the Witnesses are solid and powerful, but I doubt that their accounts are central to the testimonies of most members.

Some even base their testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon on these 11 witnesses and their claims.

If they do, then they're not following the instructions of the Book of Mormon itself, which counsels members to base their testimonies on the witness of the Holy Ghost. That's not to discount the value of the testimony of these 11 witnesses, which are remarkably consistent



The Three Witnesses
Their testimony still holds up

and reliable, but rather to emphasize that this kind of evidence ought to confirm faith rather than establish it.

As a missionary, I was instructed to teach investigators about the testimonies of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon as part of boosting the book's credibility.

I wasn't. None of the six discussions I taught made any reference to Book of Mormon witnesses, although I'm older than you. Yet the new discussions that replaced the ones I taught made no mention of the Witnesses, and "Preach my Gospel" makes no mention of the Book of Mormon witnesses. While it's possible that your mission president was off on his own program on this one, the testimony of the Book of Mormon Witnesses has not been and is not now part of the curricula missionaries are instructed to teach to investigators.

There are several critical problems for relying and betting on these 19th century men as credible witnesses.

The problems you proceed to enumerate are based largely on the premise that these people are, in fact "19th century men" who believed things common to many 19th Century men. How could the Book of Mormon have had any witnesses who were not "19th century men," given that it came forth in the 19th Century?

MAGICAL WORLDVIEW

In order to truly understand the Book of Mormon witnesses and the issues, one must understand the magical worldview of people in early 19th century New England.

Yes, one must. And you clearly don't. Your attempt to discredit these men is riddled with presentism. You keep assuming that they were as ridiculous to their contemporaries as they are to you, which they were not. You aren't understanding them; you are harshly judging them by applying 21st Century expectations to a 19th Century reality.

These are people who believed in folk magic, divining rods, visions, second sight, peep stones in hats, treasure hunting (money digging or glass looking), and so on.

People then – and people now – believed and believe in a number of harmless superstitions. Why does this disqualify them from being instruments in the hands of the Lord? The evidence suggests that belief in folk magic left Joseph and Oliver open to the idea of genuine revelation.

Many people believed in buried treasure, the ability to see spirits and their dwelling places within the local hills and elsewhere. This is one reason why treasure digging as a paid service was practiced.

What are the other reasons?

Joseph Smith, his father, and his brother Hyrum had engaged in treasure hunting from 1820–1827.

I'm glad you've changed this from your previous version, where you claimed that treasure hunting was their "family business," which it was not. Their family business was farming, at least according to the tax receipts. In any case, your dates suggest a documented precision to Joseph's treasure hunts that can't be sustained by the record.

Joseph was hired by folks like Josiah Stowell, who Joseph mentions in his history.

It's disingenuous to say that "Joseph was hired by folks like Josiah Stowell" when we only have record of Joseph being hired by one "folk" – i.e. Josiah Stowell. If you can produce other clients for this non-existent treasure hunting business, that would bolster your case considerably.

As for Josiah Stowell, Joseph worked for him for less than a month digging for silver with no success, until he "finally... prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it." (JS-H 1:56.) Hardly a long-term career pursuit.

In 1826, Joseph was arrested and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York on the complaint of Stowell's nephew who accused Joseph of being a "disorderly person and an imposter."

Joseph was neither arrested nor brought to trial. He was called to appear at a preliminary hearing which was quickly dismissed with no charges filed. The matter was so insignificant that it was never raised again, even as Joseph was forced to confront a host of other far more serious legal charges throughout his life.

It would not have been unusual during this time for a neighbor, friend, or even a stranger to come up to you and say, "I received a vision of the Lord!" and for you to respond, in all seriousness, "Well, what did the Lord say?"

Should they have responded without seriousness? You clearly think this is ridiculous, and you refuse to allow for the possibility that your flawed presentist sensibility isn't the appropriate vehicle for judging what is or isn't unusual in a 19th Century context.

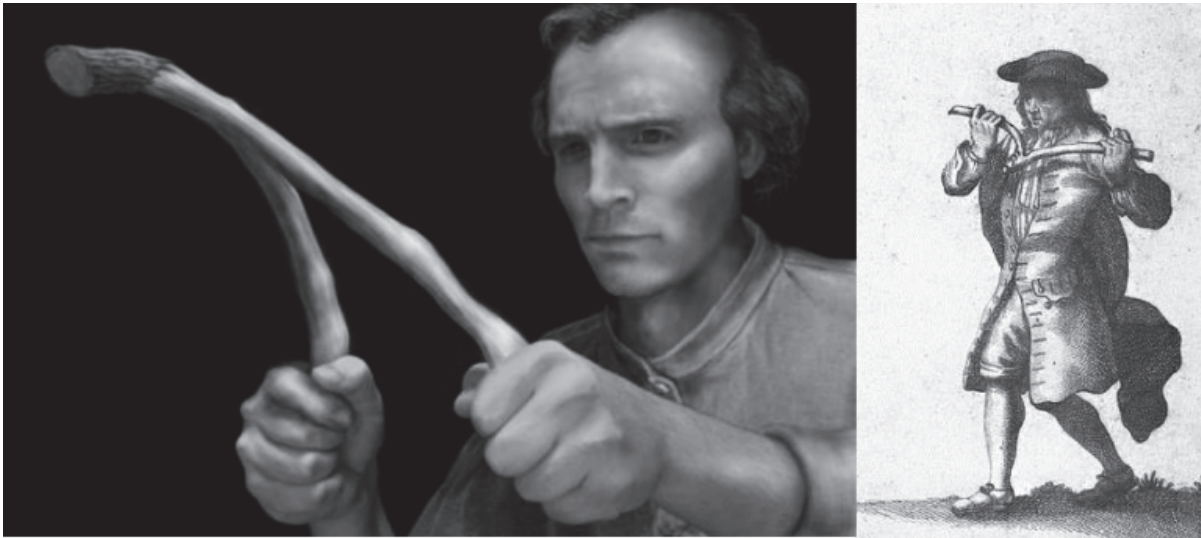
This is one of the reasons why 21st century Mormons, once including myself, are so confused and bewildered...

... and presentist. You do not understand, even in the smallest degree, that people living in a different time and a different culture can reasonably perceive the world in a way that is starkly different from the way you perceive it, and that doesn't make them stupid or even wrong.

... when hearing stuff like Joseph Smith using a peep stone in a hat...

A WHAT?!!

... or Oliver Cowdery using a divining rod or dowsing rod such as illustrated below:



For my part, I am a 21st Century Latter-day Saint, and I find this neither confusing nor bewildering. I find it evidence that Joseph and Oliver lived in a different place and time and believed in harmless superstitions that were common to their era.

My wife was a missionary in Chile. In almost every home she visited, including homes of Church members, people had an inflated brown paper bag in the center of the main living area, because they were convinced that the bag kept bugs away. They also chastised her for drinking cold drinks on a hot day, or hot drinks on a cold day, as they insisted that would make a person “chueca,” which roughly translates as “crooked.” Both of these ideas have no factual basis and are firmly in the realm of superstition, yet members who believe them don’t get denied temple recommends.

The use of divining rods (such as the one above) is actually mentioned in the scriptures.

And why shouldn’t it be? D&C Section 1 tells us that the Lord speaks to his prophets “in their **weakness, after the manner of their language**, that they might come to understanding.” [Emphasis added.] If the Lord is able to make a connection to Oliver by means of a harmless superstition, doesn’t that fit the bill of communicating with people in their weakness and their level of understanding?

In Doctrine & Covenants 8, the following heading provides context for the discussion:

“Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. In the course of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Oliver, who continued to serve as scribe, writing at the Prophet’s dictation, desired to be endowed with the gift of translation. The Lord responded to his supplication by granting this revelation.”

I should note that since you first wrote your letter, the Church has published a new history that says the following:

They returned to work, and Oliver began to wonder if he could translate as well. He believed that God could work through instruments like seer stones, and he had occasionally used a divining rod to find water and minerals. Yet he was unsure if his

rod worked by the power of God. The process of revelation was still a mystery to him.

Joseph again brought Oliver's questions to the Lord, and the Lord told Oliver that he had power to acquire knowledge if he asked in faith. The Lord confirmed that Oliver's rod worked by the power of God, like Aaron's rod in the Old Testament. He then taught Oliver more about revelation. "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost," He declared. "Behold, this is the spirit of revelation."

- *Saints, p. 64*

So now, as you "expose" the Church's supposed suppression of this information, you now have to account for the fact that it is explicitly discussed in an official, widely publicized history that all members are encouraged to read.

The revelation states, in relevant part:

D&C 8:6-11

(Emphasis Added)

*6. Now this is not all thy gift; for you have another gift, which is the **gift of Aaron**; behold, it has told you many things;*

7. Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you.

*8. Therefore, doubt not, **for it is the gift of God; and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works**; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, **for it is the work of God**.*

*9. And, therefore, **whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that I will grant unto you**, and you shall have knowledge concerning it.*

*10. Remember that **without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith**. Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not.*

*11. Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and **that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred**; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you.*

I think the truly relevant part of this section is in two verses preceding these:

2. Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

3. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation...

This is a magnificent revelation, and you seem to have missed the point of it completely. Had you taken the time to understand those verses, you might have realized that warm, fuzzy feelings during cartoons don't mean that Mufasa is a historical figure.

You emphasize some interesting language here that has little to nothing to do with the divining rod. For instance, “without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith” is pretty good advice, with or without a rod. And the translation of ancient records doesn’t seem to be linked to the rod at all.

From the D&C 8 account, we don’t really know much about what exactly the “gift of Aaron” is that Oliver Cowdery received.

From the Church’s recently published history in *Saints*, though, we absolutely do, as referenced above.

What is “the gift of Aaron”? The text provides several clues:

As referenced above, so does the Church’s recently published and widely publicized history.

- Oliver has a history of using it, since “it has told [him] many things.”

“[Oliver] believed that God could work through instruments like seer stones, and he had occasionally used a divining rod to find water and minerals.

- *Saints, the Church's recently published and widely published history, p. 64*

- It is “the gift of God.”

“The Lord confirmed that Oliver’s rod worked by the power of God, like Aaron’s rod in the Old Testament.”

- *Saints, the Church's recently published and widely publicized history, p. 64*

- It is to be held in Oliver’s hands (and kept there, impervious to any power).

That’s not actually what the revelation says. It says it can’t be taken out of his hands, not that it can withstand a nuclear blast.

- It allows Oliver to “do marvelous works.”

“The Lord confirmed that Oliver’s rod worked by the power of God, like Aaron’s rod in the Old Testament.”

- *Saints, the Church's recently published and widely publicized history, p. 64*

- It is “the work of God.”

Sorry, what’s the difference between the “work of God” and the “gift of God?”

- The Lord will speak through it to Oliver and tell him anything he asks while using it.

Again, not actually what the revelation says. At no point does the Lord say he will

talk through the rod.

- It works through faith.

Again, not actually what the revelation says. It says that “without faith you can do nothing.” That would imply that the rod requires faith, but this is a much broader lesson here.

- It enables Oliver to translate ancient sacred documents.

The revelation doesn't say this at all.

With only these clues, the “gift of Aaron” is difficult to identify.

Good thing, then, that the Church has actively identified it in its recently published and widely publicized history on page 64.

The task becomes much easier, however, when we look at the original revelation contained in the Book of Commandments, a predecessor volume to the Doctrine & Covenants, used by the LDS Church before 1835.

It also becomes easier when you read page 64 of *Saints*, the Church's recently published and widely publicized history.

Specifically, [Section 7 of the Book of Commandments](#) contains wording that was changed in the [Doctrine & Covenants 8](#).

Does it not strike you as ironic that you are linking to two websites owned and maintained - and actively publicized - by the Church to prove that the Church is suppressing this information?

The term “gift of Aaron” was originally “rod” and “rod of nature” in the Book of Commandments:

*“Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the **gift of working with the rod**: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this **rod of nature**, to work in your hands.”*

– [The Book of Commandments 7:37](#) (emphasis added)

So, what is the “gift of Aaron” mentioned in D&C 8?

Well, according to the recently published history that the Church is actively encouraging all of its members to read, it's a dowsing rod.

It is a “rod of nature.”

Which, as the Church is now telling all of its members in its recently published and widely

publicized history, is a dowsing rod.

What is a “rod of nature”?

Well, according to the recently published history that the Church is actively encouraging all of its members to read, it is a dowsing rod. But go ahead, the suspense is killing me, as you seem to think you’ve discovered something the Church is actively trying to hide, despite the fact that all the sources you link to were created and maintained, at great expense, by the Church that’s supposedly keeping this information from its members, who are being encouraged to study a new, easy-to-read history that puts this information on page 64.

It is a divining rod or dowsing rod...

A **WHAT?!!**

as illustrated in the above images...

... and repeatedly mentioned in Church sources being actively promoted to the general membership.

... which Oliver Cowdery used to hunt for buried treasure.

Nope. Dowsing rods were used to find water. There’s no source that tells us of Oliver Cowdery hunting for buried treasure with a dowsing rod, or, really, hunting for treasure at all. If you knew of one, you’d link to it, and you don’t.

Cowdery’s use of a divining rod to search for buried treasure...

... didn’t happen. Or, at least, we have no record of it happening. And aren’t you the guy who says that if it wasn’t written down, it couldn’t have happened and no one could have known about it?

... evokes similar images of Joseph Smith hunting for treasure with a peep stone in a hat.

A **WHAT?!!**

My flabbergasted reaction aside, you have no record that the stone was in a hat when used for treasure hunting. The hat was used for translation so Joseph could read off of the stone without extraneous light. There’s no mention of a hat in any treasure hunts, and you don’t get to alter the historical record willy-nilly just to make Oliver and Joseph look weirder than they actually were. And, really, to a 19th Century observer, they weren’t weird at all. You keep applying your culture to theirs and judging them harshly for not being like you. That’s, again, terrible scholarship.

Thankfully, the Lord doesn’t do that. He speaks to his servants “in their weakness, after the

manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.” (D&C 1:24) These were things that both Joseph and Oliver understood, so the Lord was more than willing to use them for his purposes. The fact that it is strange to our culture shouldn’t allow us to smugly condescend to those whose manner is different than ours.

Remember Ammon talking to King Lamoni about the Great Spirit in [Alma 22](#)? Lamoni’s understanding of God was mingled with superstition, but rather than condemn Lamoni for his superstitions, he built on the common ground in his incorrect tradition to lead Lamoni to a better understanding. That’s the way the Lord has always worked, and that’s all he’s doing here by indulging Oliver’s interest in dowsing rods. Aaron’s rod worked miracles in the Old Testament, where the Lord indulged Moses’s use of a rod to part the Red Sea, strike rocks to bring forth water, and raise up with a serpent wrapped around it in order to heal Israel. Could God have accomplished all those things through Moses without using a rod? Of course. But using the rod was apparently helpful to Moses, so God worked through Moses in his weakness, and after the manner of his language and understanding. I don’t see why that’s a problem.



The Rod of Aaron
It sprouted flowers. Now that’s weird.

The revision to “gift of Aaron” connects the dowsing rod to Moses’s rod, thereby leading Oliver to a greater understanding of the Lord’s purposes. It’s a rather elegant teaching method, it seems to me, to communicate by means of commonly understood iconography.

Oliver also wished to use his divining rod, in the same way Joseph Smith used his stone and hat, to translate ancient documents.

None of the revelations state that Oliver used his rod in his attempt to translate.

Doctrine & Covenants 8 indicates that the Lord, through Joseph Smith, granted Oliver’s request to translate using a...rod.

No it... doesn’t. The rod was not specified as an instrument of translation. You are making an assumption and therefore possibly misreading the revelation.

If Oliver Cowdery’s gift was really the use of a divining rod – and it was –

.. as the Church explicitly mentions in its newly published and widely publicized history...

... then this tells us that the origins of the Church are much more rooted in folk magic and superstition than we’ve been led to believe by the LDS Church’s whitewashing of its origins and history.

A history they have gone to great lengths to publicize to the membership at large. It's pretty hard to whitewash a history you keep publishing for the world to see.

As for being "rooted in folk magic," that's a pretty silly charge. Folk magic was a point of entry, not a doctrinal foundation. The Lord used harmless superstitions to establish enough common ground to help Joseph and Oliver receive genuine revelation. None of the doctrines of the Church, even the very early Church, teach folk magic as religious principles.

But if past whitewashing is the problem, let's return to the version of history that you remember. To the right is one of the pictures you provided that represented your "whitewashed" understanding of how Joseph translated.



Joseph began to translate the writing on the gold plates. Joseph did not know what the writing meant. God helped him. Joseph used the Urim and Thummim to understand the words. We can read what he translated. It is called the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith—History 1:62

See? Now THAT makes a lot more sense, what with Joseph wearing a pair of granny spectacles attached to a suit of armor and all. That's how translation is supposed to be done – two rocks and a coat of armor, not one rock and a hat. (That's sarcasm, obviously, but this picture accurately represents at least part of how the translation took place.)

Do you see yet just how petty your objection is? From my perspective, this "whitewashed" picture looks even weirder than the rock in the hat. But since this culturally fits your own expectations, it's acceptable to you, buviout something that uses something more akin to a 19th Century person's cultural expectations is entirely unacceptable. Presentism, thy name is Runnells.

WITNESSES

We are told that the witnesses never disavowed their testimonies...

Which is both true and not unimportant. At different points in their lives, all of the Three Witnesses were bitterly opposed to Joseph Smith and could have profited greatly from exposing him as a fraud. They never did, even at great personal cost to their own reputations. David Whitmer never came back and had plenty of nasty things to say about Joseph, yet he never once denied his testimony and reaffirmed it on his deathbed.

... but we have not come to know these men or investigated what else they said about their experiences.

We haven't? Who's "we?" People in and out of the Church have scrutinized the Three and Eight Witnesses for the better part of two centuries. Maybe you haven't, but don't drag "we" into this.



MARTIN HARRIS

There are 11 witnesses to the Book of Mormon: Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, Hiram Page, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. – who all shared a common worldview of second sight, magic, and treasure digging – which is what drew them together in 1829.

No, what drew most of them together was that they were related to each other. We have no record of any of them engaging in treasure digging or “second sight.” Oliver used a dowsing rod, and Hiram Page had a seer stone of his own. Other than that, there’s no evidence of any similarly harmless superstitions being engaged in by any of these men. Folk magic was not the defining characteristic of these people’s lives.

The following are several facts and observations on three of the Book of Mormon Witnesses:

Most of what follows is hearsay, not fact, and you ignore over 60 firsthand accounts from these witnesses that contradict the specious hearsay that forms the bulk of your objection.

Martin Harris was anything but a skeptical witness.

No, Martin Harris was a remarkably skeptical witness. He swapped out Joseph’s seer stone with another one to test its veracity. The reason we don’t have the lost 116 pages is that he begged Joseph to have something tangible to satisfy his wife’s skepticism. He undertook an expensive journey to New York to have an academic – Charles Anthon, to be precise – verify the particulars of the translated characters. The record shows that he was constantly looking for external validation of Joseph’s claims, which is what skeptical witnesses do.

He was known by many of his peers as an unstable, gullible, and superstitious man.

That reputation befell him largely as a result of his belief in Mormonism. Prior to his acceptance of a religion his neighbors despised, he was a well-respected and wealthy

landowner with a stellar reputation. Even after the Mormons got him, a virulent anti-Mormon critic [conceded](#) that “only his [belief in Mormonism] was Martin deemed insane; on other subjects he exhibited all of his former clearness of brain; he could drive a good bargain, and manage his farming matters as well as ever.” Another non-Mormon contemporary of Martin [reported](#) that “There can’t anybody say a word against Martin Harris. Martin was a good citizen . . . a man that would do just as he agreed with you.” None of that jibes with a reputation for instability or gullibility.

As for superstition, the 19th Century standard is quite different from today’s standard, and anyone willing to hang out with the Mormons probably got tarred with that particular brush. Even after he cast his lot with the Mormons, he had a reputation for honesty. As one critic wrote, “How to reconcile the act of Harris in signing his name to such a statement [i.e. the Testimony of the Three Witnesses], in view of the character of honesty which had always been conceded to him, could never easily be explained.” That comes from your old friend Pomeroy Tucker, who was certainly no fan of Harris or the Church.

In any case, this is all ad hominem nonsense. If it was a fraud, Martin, no matter how unstable, gullible, or superstitious he was, he had plenty of opportunity and motive to come clean. In fact, if he truly was gullible and unstable, it’s likely that he would have cracked under pressure, and there was plenty of pressure on him to expose Joseph as a fraud.

Brigham Young once said of Martin:

“As for Martin Harris, he had not much to apostatize from; he possessed a wild, speculative brain. I have heard Joseph correct him and exhort him to repentance for teaching false doctrines.”

[– Brigham Young Addresses, Vol. 4, 1860 -1864 , Elden J. Watson, p.196-199](#)

This is an oddly uncharitable quote from Brigham that doesn’t seem to be found online anywhere but the CES Letter. Still, according to the poorly-formatted document you provide, this was apparently said in 1862, when Martin was out of the Church and Brigham, bless his heart, was not above gratuitously insulting people he deemed his enemies. When Martin made overtures to rejoin the Church in 1870, Brigham made arrangements to bring him to Utah, where he was rebaptized and all was forgiven.

This quote comes after the Brigham offered the following story about Oliver Cowdery:

A gentleman came to Oliver Cowdery, in Michigan, and begged the privilege of asking a few questions.

"You have been a Mormon?"

"Yes."

"Did you believe Joseph Smith to be a prophet of God?"

"Yes."

"How is it with you now, do you still believe the Book of Mormon to be true?"

"I do not."

"I thought as much."

Oliver Cowdery was a very steady, calm, slow, and correctly spoken man. He replied, "Do not misunderstand me, sir. I mean by that expression that in this matter I am past belief, for I have a perfect knowledge of the truth of the Book of Mormon, that God revealed to Joseph Smith the plates on which it was engraven, and aided him to translate it." This testimony was borne by Oliver Cowdery when he was not a member of this church.

Despite Brigham's unfortunate penchant for ad hominem attacks, it's ridiculous to cite him as a skeptic of Martin's testimony of the Book of Mormon.

Reports assert that he and the other witnesses never literally saw the gold plates, but only an object said to be the plates, covered with a cloth.

"Reports" assert this, do they? Because the overwhelming majority of contemporaneous reports assert that this is nonsense, not the least of which is the report published at the beginning of every edition of the Book of Mormon – i.e. the Testimony of the Three Witnesses, of which Harris was one. And while that testimony is the best known report that directly contradicts your reports in every respect, it is far from the only one.

Richard Lloyd Anderson, a scholar who spent a great deal of his life studying the witness's accounts, said the following:

I have in my files, over the years, about fifty so-called interviews with Oliver Cowdery. "Interview" is a contact, basically, where they said something about The Book of Mormon, it might be detailed; it might be a speech; it might be something he wrote, and so on. And, in the case of David Whitmer, a long interview.

So, here are the statistics about... did I say fifty? Thirty for Oliver Cowdery; a minimum of seventy for David Whitmer; about fifty for Martin Harris; and a minimum of forty—probably one and a half times that much.

So I've got about two hundred times when one of the witnesses said, "I did sign the statement." "The statement means what it says." "I saw the angel." "I saw the plates." Or in the case of the eight witnesses, "I handled the plates." So two hundred very positive and specific statements in many cases and I'm dealing today with about eight or ten documents [that say otherwise], in other words, five percent. And the question is: "Do you believe the 95 percent or do you believe the five?"

I believe the 95 percent, and you believe the five. This is a problem not just because there are nearly ten times as many firsthand accounts supporting the idea that the witnesses actually saw and handled the plates than there other accounts, but that the accounts that deny the physical reality of the plates are generally late, second-or-third-hand hearsay accounts, some

from people who never met or spoke to Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, or David Whitmer.

Additionally, Martin Harris had a direct conflict of interest in being a witness.

That's a nonsensical statement. Either he was a witness or he wasn't. "Conflict of interest" is a legal term of art that has no bearing on whether or not someone witnesses something.

He was deeply financially invested in the Book of Mormon as he mortgaged his farm to finance the book.

He lost that farm, too, yes? When he was excommunicated and disaffected with Joseph Smith, his financial losses would have given him extra incentive to deny his testimony. Why didn't he?

The following are some accounts of the superstitious side of Martin Harris:

"Once while reading scripture, he reportedly mistook a candle's sputtering as a sign that the devil desired him to stop. Another time he excitedly awoke from his sleep believing that a creature as large as a dog had been upon his chest, though a nearby associate could find nothing to confirm his fears. Several hostile and **perhaps unreliable** accounts told of visionary experiences with Satan and Christ, Harris once reporting that Christ had been poised on a roof beam."

—"Martin Harris: Mormonism's Early Convert," BYU professor Ronald W. Walker, p.34-35 [I added some emphasis there for you.]

Please quote Professor Walker's next paragraph:

Yet despite these eccentricities, more than a dozen of Harris's Palmyra contemporaries left descriptions of the man that describe his honor, honesty, industry, peacefulness, and respectability, his hard-headed, Yankee shrewdness and his growing wealth.

So much of the negative information comes from people eager to discredit Martin that it's impossible to sort out what's true and what's nonsense. If the best indictment you can come up with is that once got weirded out by a sputtering candle and he had a bad dream about a dog, I don't think you're making a particularly compelling case that the guy was a loon.

"No matter where he went, he saw visions and supernatural appearances all around him. He told a gentleman in Palmyra, after one of his excursions to Pennsylvania, while the translation of the Book of Mormon was going on, that on the way he met the Lord Jesus Christ, who walked along by the side of him in the shape of a deer for two or three miles, talking with him as familiarly as one man talks with another."

—John A. Clark letter, August 31, 1840 in *Early Mormon Documents 2:271*

I should note here at the outset that you quote this John A. Clark letter several more times in this section, and each time you do, you try to make it look as if you've found a different

source to discredit Martin Harris. That's terribly dishonest pseudo-scholarship.

This quote can also be found in John A. Clark's book *Gleanings by the Way*, page 258, a book dedicated to exposing the "Mormon delusion" by highlighting the thoroughly debunked and discredited theory that the Book of Mormon was copied from Solomon Spaulding's lost manuscript. (Everyone now knows it was copied from *View of the Hebrews*, *The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain*, and *The First Book of Napoleon*, with sprinkles of Captain Kidd, obscure African maps, and names from Keokuk, Iowa, the land of your youth.)

Clark is a worthless source. He never met Martin Harris, and there is every reason to believe this second-hand hearsay story is a complete fabrication.

"According to two Ohio newspapers, shortly after Harris arrived in Kirtland he began claiming to have 'seen Jesus Christ and that he is the handsomest man he ever did see. He has also seen the Devil, whom he described as a very sleek haired fellow with four feet, and a head like that of a Jack-ass.'"

– Early Mormon Documents 2:271, note 32

See? This is the same source - John Clark again. But you omit his name in the second citation to give the impression that you found someone other than an unreliable non-witness to corroborate your case against Martin Harris. This is another John Clark hearsay fable. Next.

Before Harris became a Mormon, he had already changed his religion at least five times.

Nope. Your link takes us to the Wikipedia article about Martin Harris, which sources this bogus assertion by referencing the Dialogue Article "Martin Harris, Mormonism's Early Convert," pp. 30-33. Remember that one? You just linked to it a few paragraphs earlier, which makes that just one more of your own sources that you've never read.

Nowhere in pages 30-33 of this article – or anywhere else in the article, for that matter – does Ronald Walker make this claim.

Richard L. Anderson, however, has [this to say](#) about the subject.

The arithmetic of Martin's five religious changes before Mormonism is also faulty. The claim comes from the hostile Palmyra affidavits published by E. D. Howe; G. W. Stoddard closed his in sarcasm against Martin Harris: "He as first an orthodox Quaker, then a Universalist, next a Restorioner, then a Baptist, next a Presbyterian, and then a Mormon." Palmyra sources do not yet prove that Martin was a Quaker, though his wife probably was. And no evidence yet associates Martin with the Baptist or Presbyterian churches. Note that the other two names are religious positions, not necessarily churches—philosophical Universalists dissent from traditional churches in believing that God will save all, and Restorationists obviously take literally the many Bible prophecies of God's reestablished work in modern times. An early Episcopal minister in Palmyra interviewed Martin and reduced his five positions to two: "He had been, if I mistake not, at one period a member of the Methodist Church, and subsequently had identified himself with the

Universalists.” Of course Martin could have been a Universalist and Restorationer simultaneously. (Anderson 1981, 168-169)

After Joseph’s death, Harris continued this earlier pattern by joining and leaving 5 more different sects, including that of James Strang (whom Harris went on a mission to England for)...

And it didn’t last long. They actually pulled Martin out of the Strangite mission field, because Martin’s only interest was in the Book of Mormon, not Strang. As soon as he was yanked off of Strangite missionary duty, Harris abandoned and repudiated the Strangites.

... other Mormon offshoots, and the Shakers.

His repeated affiliations with splinter groups demonstrates an eagerness to cling to the testimony of the Book of Mormon, which never wavered. Since he refused to accept plural marriage and the authority of the mainstream Church, he was clearly seeking some way to stay true to his testimony when he could not stay true to Joseph. His flirtation with the Shakers didn’t last long, and he eventually found his way back to full fellowship with the Saints, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Not only did Harris join other religions, he testified and witnessed for them.

No, he testified and witnessed for the Book of Mormon.

It has been reported that Martin Harris “declared repeatedly that he had as much evidence for a Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon” (The Braden and Kelly Debate, p.173).

“It has been reported” is a pretty way of saying “somebody made something up.” The Braden and Kelley debate took place thirteen years after Martin Harris’s death, and it was the first time anyone made this charge. Nobody reported Martin saying such a thing during his lifetime. The person making the charge had never met Harris and had no way to substantiate this allegation, which means you don’t, either.

In addition to his devotion to self-proclaimed prophet James Strang...

His devotion was to the Book of Mormon, not to Strang. The Strangites booted him out not long after he joined.

In addition to devotion to self-proclaimed prophet James Strang, Martin Harris was a follower to another self-proclaimed Mormon prophet by the name of Gladden Bishop. Like Strang, Bishop claimed to have plates, Urim and Thummim, and that he was receiving revelation from the Lord. Martin was one of Gladden Bishop’s witnesses to his claims.

A gross exaggeration. Martin never gave any witness that Gladden Bishop actually had any plates or a Urim and Thummim or anything else. His testimony in this splinter group, as in all the splinter groups he joined, was focused on the Book of Mormon and his original witness, and that’s it.

If someone testified of some strange spiritual encounter he had, but he also told you that he...

- Conversed with Jesus who took the form of a deer

As noted above, it's highly unlikely Martin ever said this.

- Saw the devil with his four feet and donkey head

Martin almost certainly didn't say this, either.

- Chipped off a chunk of a stone box that would mysteriously move beneath the ground to avoid capture

First time you've mentioned this one. Source, please?

- Interpreted simple things like a flickering of a candle as a sign of the devil

Hearsay and dubious, but harmless even if it's accurate.

- Had a creature appearing on his chest that no one else could see

More like woke up from a bad dream. (Also dubious hearsay.)

...would you believe his claims? Or would you call the nearest mental hospital?

I'd do neither. Instead, I'd verify my sources for these claims, as all of them are either grossly exaggerated or altogether bogus.

With inconsistencies...

The inconsistencies are between your hearsay nonsense outnumbered 10-1 by consistent firsthand accounts.

... a conflict of interest...

What does that even mean?

If I saw a rabbit yesterday, the fact that I own rabbits does not give me a "conflict in interest" in being a witness to a rabbit. This is a truly stupid objection.

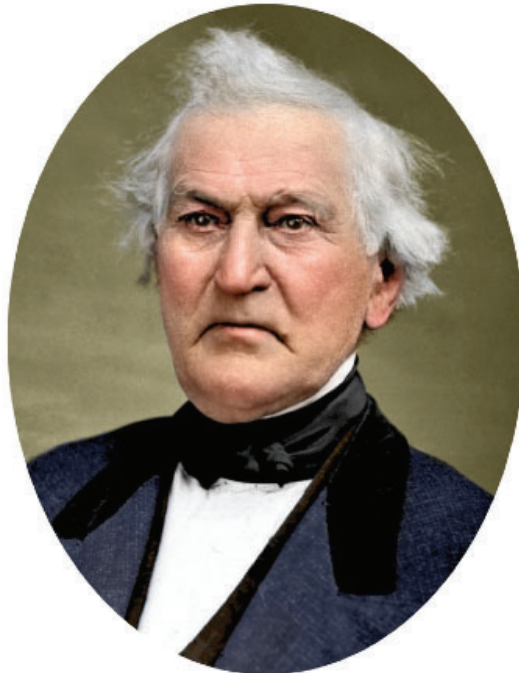
... magical thinking, and superstition like this...

Which is actually just presentism on your part...

... exactly what credibility does Martin Harris have and why should I believe him?

With all the faults and statements that you falsely attribute to him, all the while ignoring the

voluminous evidence that Harris was a well-respected man known for his honesty and good character, no one would believe the testimony of such a caricature, because the straw man you've created bears little or no resemblance to the actual Martin Harris.



DAVID WHITMER

“David claimed in early June 1829 before their group declaration that he, Cowdery, and Joseph Smith observed ‘one of the Nephites’ carrying the records in a knapsack on his way to Cumorah. Several days later this trio perceived ‘that the Same Person was under the shed’ at the Whitmer farm.”

– An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins, p.179

I can find no 1829 version of this story. Dan Vogel reports that Whitmer told this story “with varying detail” beginning in 1877, almost 50 years after the fact. So many of the statements you rely on to discredit David Whitmer come from a time when he was severely disaffected with Joseph, and that disaffection coupled with advanced age makes it difficult to sort out what’s reliable and what’s not.

“In 1880, David Whitmer was asked for a description of the angel who showed him the plates. Whitmer responded that the angel ‘had no appearance or shape.’ When asked by the interviewer how he then could bear testimony that he had seen and heard an angel, Whitmer replied, ‘Have you never had impressions?’ To which the interviewer responded, ‘Then you had impressions as the Quaker when the spirit moves, or as a good Methodist in giving a happy experience, a feeling?’ ‘Just so,’ replied Whitmer.”

– Interview with John Murphy, June 1880, EMD 5:63

Nice try. Whitmer himself quickly issued a statement to directly refute this account of the story immediately after it was published.

His statement:

Unto all Nations, Kindreds, tongues and people unto whom this present Shall come.

It having been represented by one John Murphy of Polo Mo. that I in a conversation with him last Summer, denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

To the end therefore, that he may understand me now if he did not then, and that the world may know the truth, I wish now standing as it were, in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God, once for all to make this public Statement;

That 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 adhered to that testimony.—

And that no man may be misled or doubt my present views in regard to the same, I do now again affirm the truth of all my statement[s], as then made and published.

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear; It was no Delusion. What is written is written, and he that readeth let him understand.

A young Mormon lawyer, James Henry Moyle, who interviewed Whitmer in 1885, asked if there was any possibility that Whitmer had been deceived. “His answer was unequivocal... that he saw the plates and heard the angel with unmistakable clearness.” But Moyle went away “not fully satisfied...It was more spiritual than I anticipated.” – Moyle diary, June 28, 1885, EMD 5:141

Sounds like that’s more Moyle’s problem than Whitmer’s. The full Moyle interview provides a distinct physical context for the angel’s appearance:

He said that they (Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris) were out in the primitive woods in Western New York; that there was nothing between them and the Angel except a log that had fallen in the forest; that it was broad daylight with nothing to prevent either hearing or seeing all that took place...he did see and hear the Angel and heard the declaration that the plates had been correctly translated; that there was absolutely nothing to prevent his having a full, clear view of it all. I remember very distinctly asking him if there was anything unnatural or unusual about the surroundings or the atmosphere. He answered that question. I do not remember exactly the words he used, but he indicated that there was something of a haze or peculiarity about the atmosphere that surrounded them but nothing that would prevent his having a clear vision and knowledge of all that took place. He declared to me that the testimony which he published to the world was true and that he had never denied any part of it.

(James Henry Moyle, statement, 13 September 1938; in Dan Vogel (editor), *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 1996–2003), 5 vols, 5:146-147.)

The idea seems to be that Moyle wanted some kind of concrete description of the “haze or peculiarity” and was unsatisfied when Whitmer couldn’t directly explain the spiritual element of the vision in more mundane, down-to-earth terms. Both Moyle and Whitmer would be surprised to see this exchange used to support a contention that Whitmer didn’t actually see the plates or the angel.

Whitmer’s testimony also included the following:

“If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon; if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens and told me to ‘separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so it should be done unto them.’”

– David Whitmer, [An Address to All Believers in Christ](#) (promoting his Whitmerite sect)

If David Whitmer is a credible witness, why are we only using his testimony of the Book of Mormon while ignoring his other testimony claiming that God Himself spoke to Whitmer “by his own voice from the heavens” in June 1838 commanding Whitmer to apostatize from the Lord’s one and only true Church?

In June, 1838, David Whitmer had already been excommunicated from the Church for two months. The voice from God, therefore, wasn’t telling him to “apostatize from the Lord’s one and only true Church,” as he was already in a state of apostasy when the voice from heaven reportedly spoke to him. Apostasy tends to warp one’s spiritual perceptions.



OLIVER COWDERY

Like Joseph and most of the Book of Mormon witnesses, Oliver Cowdery and his family were treasure hunters.

No, they weren't. By profession, Joseph Smith and his family were farmers, and Oliver Cowdery was a schoolteacher. There is no record of Oliver Cowdery engaging in treasure hunting, either professionally or as an amateur treasure hunting hobbyist.

Oliver's preferred tool of trade, as mentioned above, was the divining rod.

And there is no record of what he did with that divining rod. Most people who used such rods used them to try to find water to dig wells, not find buried treasure.

He was known as a "rodsman."

He was? You put the word in quotes – can you therefore give me a contemporary firsthand source that labeled him as such? Because he was actually known as a "schoolteacher." And, later, a "lawyer." Although "lawyer" is arguably a far more pejorative term than "rodsman."

Along with the witnesses, Oliver held a magical worldview.

You offer this arbitrary, presentist label as if it's self-explanatory and it somehow disqualifies Oliver from being a serious person. Oliver was quite accomplished, both in and out of the Church, and he was also highly respected, both in and out of the Church, and his career demonstrates that he was a rather practical man, not some wannabe wizard, as you seem to be implying.

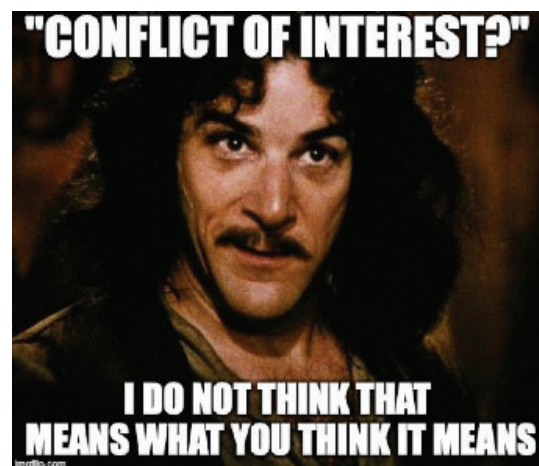
Also, Oliver Cowdery was not an objective and independent witness.

What on earth is an "objective and independent witness?" Witnesses either see things or they don't. If I see a banana on the sidewalk, my objectivity and independence have no bearing on whether I've seen a sidewalk banana or not.

As scribe for the Book of Mormon, co-founder of the Church, and cousin to Joseph Smith, a conflict of interest existed in Oliver being a witness.

As I mentioned earlier, this isn't a thing. "Conflict of interest" is a term used to describe people who, say, stand to gain private financial rewards for their action in official public capacities, or lawyers who represent or influence clients on opposite sides of a dispute. It has nothing to do with witnessing anything. You either witness something or you don't.

To paraphrase Inigo Montoya, you keep using that phrase, but I do not think it means what you think it means.



SECOND SIGHT

People believed they could see things as a vision in their mind. They called it “second sight.”

Which people? Some people? All people? Only crazy people?

We call it “imagination.”

We do? Are you including me in this? Because when I use my imagination, I don't see things as visions in my mind and believe they're real.

It made no difference to these people if they saw with their natural eyes or their spiritual eyes as both were one and the same.

And you think that's the same thing as a 21st Century understanding of the word “imagination” that *we* all believe? Do you personally know anyone who claims that what they see in their imagination is just as real as what they see what their eyes? I don't.

As mentioned previously, people believed they could see spirits and their dwelling places in the local hills along with seeing buried treasure deep in the ground.

Which people? Short people? Fat people? Psoriatic people? Because none of the Three Witnesses believed this, or, if they did, you have no documentation that they did.

This supernatural way of seeing the world is also referred in Doctrine & Covenants as “the eyes of our understanding .”

“The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened. We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber.”

That's the verse you link to to show that the phrase “the eyes of our understanding” has reference to visions of “buried treasure deep in the ground?” They're talking about something happening right in front of them (“[he was] standing upon the breastwork of the [Kirtland Temple] pulpit, before us”) not underground treasure miles away.

There is absolutely no support in the actual text of D&C 110 for your bizarre interpretation of this phrase.

If the plates and the experiences were real and tangible as 21st century Mormons are led to believe, why would the witnesses make the following kind of statements when describing the plates and the experience:

“While praying I passed into a state of entrancement, and in that state I saw the angel and the plates.” – EMD 2:346-47

“I never saw the gold plates, only in a visionary or entranced state.” – EMD 2:346-47

They wouldn't. Those two statements are part of a single quote attributed to Martin Harris after his death by Anthony Metcalf, who referred to Joseph Smith as a “pretend prophet” and was trying to discredit the Church. They contradict everything Martin Harris had to say firsthand about the experience, and it is extraordinarily unlikely that Harris would suddenly change his story so radically when being interviewed by an antagonistic critic. That's why no credible historian, in or out of the Church, accepts these bogus hearsay slanders as reliable.

Martin Harris, in the last years of his life, had this to say:

“The Prophet Joseph Smith, and Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer and myself, went into a little grove to pray to obtain a promise that we should behold it with our eyes **natural eyes**, that we could testify of it to the world” (EMD 2:375). [Emphasis added, strikethrough in original.]

Deliberate use of the phrase “natural eyes” is in direct contradiction to your straw-man premise of “second sight” or “eyes of our understanding.”

Or how about this one:

“Gentlemen, do you see that hand? Are you sure you see it? Are your eyes playing a trick or something? No. Well, as sure as you see my hand so sure did I see the angel and the plates.” (Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981), 116)

Why do you ignore everything Martin Harris actually said and instead take the word of a hostile critic citing posthumous hearsay at face value?

“He only saw the plates with a spiritual eye” – *Joseph Smith Begins His Work, Vol. 1, 1958*

More posthumous hearsay from John Gilbert, a hostile critic of the Church written in 1892, seventeen years after Martin's death and at least sixty years after this likely-bogus confession allegedly took place.

“I saw them with the eye of faith.”

– John A. Clark to Dear Brethren, 31 Aug. 1840, *Episcopal Recorder* (Philadelphia) 18 (12 Sept. 1840): 98

Third time you've cited John Clark. He's no more reliable now than the first two times you cited him.

“As shown in the vision” – Zenas H. Gurley, Jr., *Interview with David Whitmer on January 14, 1885*

You're splitting hairs here. Describing a visit from an angel as a “vision” does not preclude that it was a literal experience. We refer to Joseph Smith's “First Vision,” but we do not deny that the Father and the Son were physically present for the experience with that description.

“...when I came to hear Martin Harris state in public that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundation was sapped & the entire superstructure fell in heap of ruins, I therefore three week since in the Stone Chapel...renounced the Book of Mormon...after we were done speaking M Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city throught [sic] a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight was false, if it had not been picked out of—— [him/me?] but should have let it passed as it was...”

– Letter from Stephen Burnett to “Br. Johnson,” April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2

Another hearsay statement from a bitter Church critic that is demonstrably false on its face. He claims Martin and the other witnesses admitted this in public, which is extraordinarily curious, as such a damning admission would no doubt have prompted a wave of apostasy and a great deal of consternation that would surely have made its way into someone else’s journal. As it stands, without any shred of corroborating evidence that Martin made such a public statement, there’s every reason to believe that Burnett is making this up.

The foreman in the Palmyra printing office that produced the first Book of Mormon said that Harris “used to practice a good deal of his characteristic jargon and ‘seeing with the spiritual eye,’ and the like.” – [Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress, p.71](#)

This is a longer version of *precisely the same hearsay, 60+-years-after-the-fact quote from John Gilbert* that you cited *just four quotes earlier!* Not only is it a new source, it’s *not even a new quote!*

Why only quote the same statement from Gilbert twice? Why not break this into three quotes to give an even greater illusion of credibility?

Two other Palmyra residents said that Harris told them that he had seen the plates with “the eye of faith” or “spiritual eyes”
– EMD 2:270 and 3:22

The first comes from John A. Clark again - the *fourth* time you’ve quoted him, and the second time you have used this same quote. He’s no more reliable now than he was the first three times, and his “eye of faith” statement doesn’t gain credibility by repetition.

The second comes from a Presbyterian pastor who was hostile to the Church and never met Martin Harris, and it comes with an admission that it is hearsay that came to him by way of gossip – the pastor never heard Martin say “spiritual eyes,” as Martin had left Palmyra before any such supposed confession took place.

John H. Gilbert, the typesetter for most of the Book of Mormon, said that he had asked Harris, “Martin, did you see those plates with your naked eyes?” According to Gilbert, Harris “looked down for an instant, raised his eyes up, and said, ‘No, I saw them with a spiritual eye.’” – EMD 2:548

And there it is! Ladies and gentlemen, we have a **John Gilbert trifecta!**

This is the **same exact quote used three times in a row, presented as if it were three different statements.** You have also quoted John A. Clark four times and used his exact same “eye of faith” statement twice. So you say we ought to reject Martin Harris based on the statements of seven different witnesses: John H. Gilbert, John H. Gilbert, John H. Gilbert, John A. Clark, John A. Clark, John A. Clark, and John A. Clark.

Unbelievable. And pathetic.

If these witnesses literally really saw the plates like everyone else on the planet sees tangible objects...why strange statements like, “I never saw them only as I see a city through a mountain”? What does that even mean?

It means Stephen Burnett made it up.

I’ve never seen a city through a mountain. Have you?

No, but I’ve seen you pretend that two guys are actually seven different guys.

Why all these bizarre statements from the witnesses if the plates were real and the event literal?

Why so few actual statements if you have to pretend two men are seven men?

These aren’t “bizarre statements from the witnesses.” The witnesses never made these statements. These are run-of-the-mill lies from two cranks making stuff up over half a century after the fact.

Why would you need a vision or supernatural power to see real physical plates that Joseph said were in a box that he carried around?

You wouldn’t. That’s why the Eight Witnesses describe the utterly mundane experience of having “seen and hefted” the plates, minus any supernatural power. And none of them denied their testimonies, either.

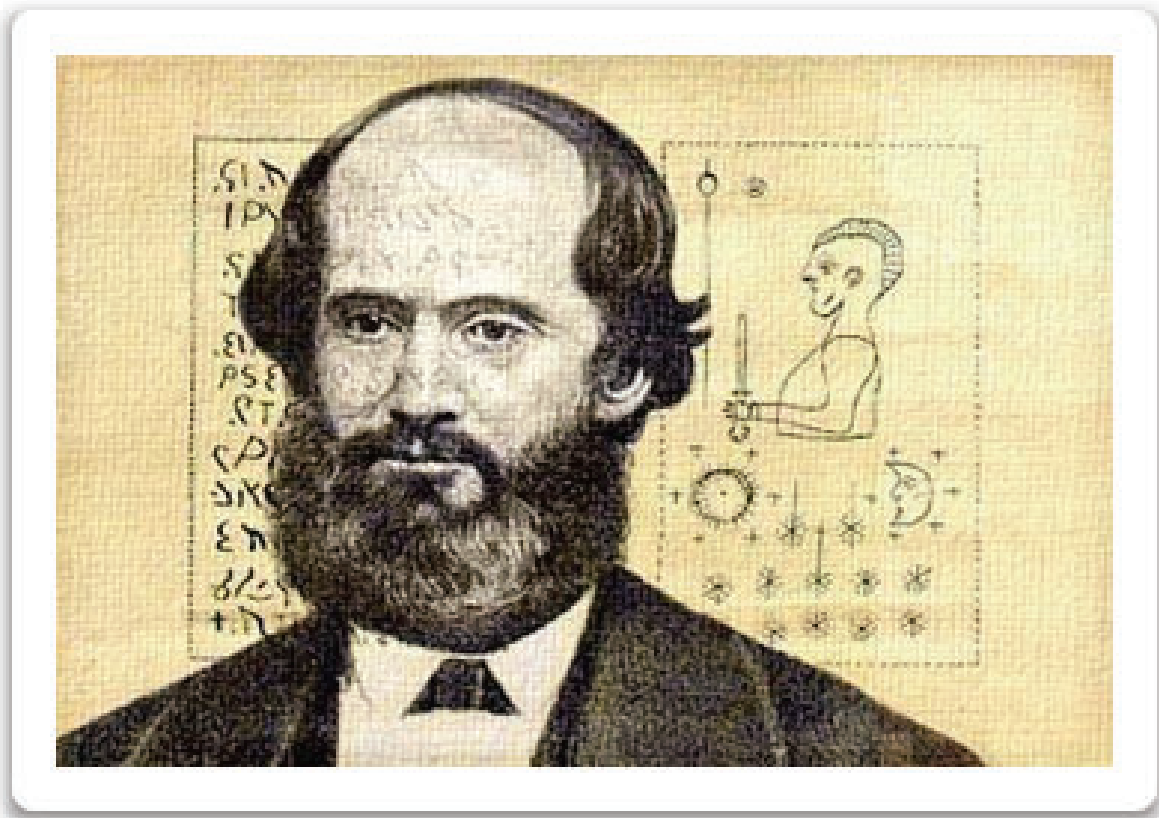
When Martin Harris was asked, “But did you see them [plates] with your natural, your bodily eyes, just as you see this pencil-case in my hand? Now say no or yes to this.” Martin answered, “I did not see them as I do that pencil-case, yet I saw them with the **eye of faith**; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me, though at the time they were covered over with a cloth.” – [Origin and History of the Mormonites, p.406](#) 16

John A. Clark returns for a fifth encore, ladies and gentlemen, to say precisely what he said in two of his previous four appearances in Jeremy's narrative. And yet none of Martin Harris's 50 firsthand contemporaneous accounts that directly contradict Clark's hearsay are ever cited in the CES Letter. Tell me again who it is that's suppressing the truth?

Why couldn't Martin just simply answer "yes"?

Perhaps he did. We'll never know, because every firsthand report of what Martin actually said is deliberately excluded from the CES Letter.

JAMES STRANG AND THE VOREE PLATES WITNESSES



This should be good for a laugh.

James Strang and his claims are absolutely fascinating.

If you're fascinated by pale imitations and weak retreads.

He was basically Joseph Smith 2.0 – but with a twist.

And the twist is – Strang's church went nowhere and now has less than 300 followers.

Like Joseph, Strang did the following:

- Claimed that he was visited by an angel who reserved plates for him to translate into the word of God. “The record which was sealed from my servant Joseph. Unto thee it is reserved.”

And unlike Joseph, Strang had no other witnesses to this angel or to any of his revelations.



*The Entirety of the Strangite Movement as of 2005
Less than 300 followers in Vorhee, Wisconsin*

- Received the “Urim and Thummim.”

And unlike Joseph, nobody else ever saw his Urim and/or Thummim.

- Produced 11 witnesses who testified that they too had seen and inspected ancient metal plates.

And unlike Joseph, there was nothing remotely supernatural about the experience. 11 people watched Strang dig up eighteen paper-sized plates that had likely been buried there by Strang the night before.

- Introduced new scripture. After unearthing the plates (the same plates as Laban from whom Nephi took the brass plates in Jerusalem), Strang translated it into scripture called the “Book of the Law of the Lord.”

And unlike Joseph, who translated a 265,000-word, complex, internally consistent 1,000-year history in sixty days despite being functionally illiterate, the well-educated Strang took a decade to produce a book about a fifth as long with no coherent narrative.

– Established a new Church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite). Its headquarters is still in Voree, Wisconsin.

And unlike Joseph, Strang's church dwindled to the point where it had “had around three hundred members in 1998.”

- Like the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Law of the Lord has the testimony of its Witnesses in its preface:

TESTIMONY

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, to whom this Book of the Law of the Lord shall come, that James J. Strang has the plates of the ancient Book of the Law of the Lord given to Moses, from which he translated this law, and has shown them to us. We examined them with our eyes, and handled them with our hands. The engravings are beautiful antique workmanship, bearing a striking resemblance to the ancient oriental languages; and those from which the laws in this book were translated are eighteen in number, about seven inches and three-eighths wide, by nine inches long, occasionally embellished with beautiful pictures.

And we testify unto you all that the everlasting kingdom of God is established, in which this law shall be kept, till it brings in rest and everlasting righteousness to all the faithful.

*SAMUEL GRAHAM,
SAMUEL P. BACON,
WARREN POST,
PHINEAS WRIGHT,
ALBERT N. HOSMER,
EBENEZER PAGE,
JEHIEL SAVAGE.*

And unlike Joseph, none of these witnesses report any supernatural or even spiritual experience or event. These plates were on public display until the turn of the century – plenty of other people saw them, too. They were not in any identifiable language, and they rival the Kinderhook plates for evidence of authenticity, or lack thereof.

In addition to the above 7 witnesses, there were 4 witnesses who went with Strang as they unearthed the Voree Plates:

TESTIMONY OF WITNESSES TO THE VOREE PLATES

1. On the thirteenth day of September, 1845, we, Aaron Smith, Jirah B. Wheelan, James M. Van Nostrand, and Edward Whitcomb, assembled at the call of James J.

Strang, who is by us and many others approved as a Prophet and Seer of God. He proceeded to inform us that it had been revealed to him in a vision that an account of an ancient people was buried in a hill south of White River bridge, near the east line of Walworth County; and leading us to an oak tree about one foot in diameter, told us that we would find it enclosed in a case of rude earthen ware under that tree at the depth of about three feet; requested us to dig it up, and charged us to so examine the ground that we should know we were not imposed upon, and that it had not been buried there since the tree grew. The tree was surrounded by a sward of deeply rooted grass, such as is usually found in the openings, and upon the most critical examination we could not discover any indication that it had ever been cut through or disturbed.

2. We then dug up the tree, and continued to dig to the depth of about three feet, where we found a case of slightly baked clay containing three plates of brass. On one side of one is a landscape view of the south end of Gardner's prairie and the range of hills where they were dug. On another is a man with a crown on his head and a scepter in his hand, above is an eye before an upright line, below the sun and moon surrounded with twelve stars, at the bottom are twelve large stars from three of which pillars arise, and closely interspersed with them are seventy very small stars. The other four sides are very closely covered with what appear to be alphabetic characters, but in a language of which we have no knowledge.

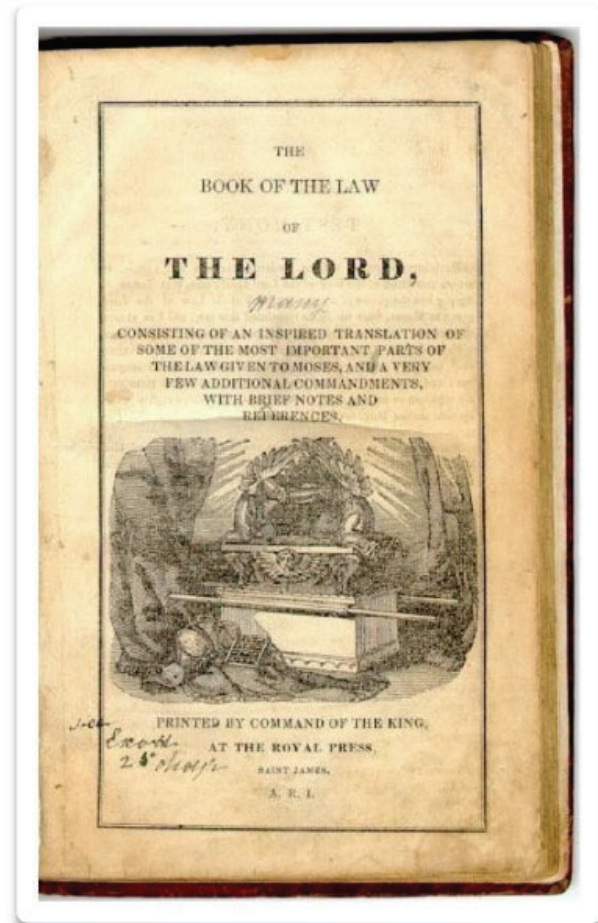
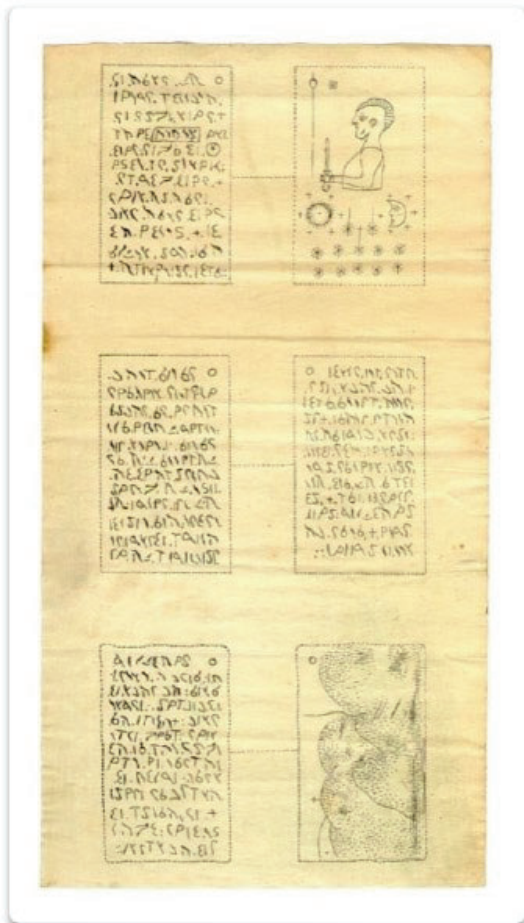
3. The case was found imbedded in indurated clay so closely fitting it that it broke in taking out, and the earth below the soil was so hard as to be dug with difficulty even with a pickax. Over the case was found a flat stone about one foot wide each way and three inches thick, which appeared to have undergone the action of fire, and fell in pieces after a few minutes exposure to the air. The digging extended in the clay about eighteen inches, there being two kinds of earth of different color and appearance above it.

4. We examined as we dug all the way with the utmost care, and we say, with utmost confidence, that no part of the earth through which we dug exhibited any sign or indication that it had been moved or disturbed at any time previous. The roots of the tree stuck down on every side very closely, extending below the case, and closely interwoven with roots from other trees. None of them had been broken or cut away. No clay is found in the country like that of which the case is made.

5. In fine, we found an alphabetic and pictorial record, carefully cased up, buried deep in the earth, covered with a flat stone, with an oak tree one foot in diameter growing over it, with every evidence that the sense can give that it has lain there as long as that tree has been growing. Strang took no part in the digging, but kept entirely away from before the first blow was struck till after the plates were taken out of the case; and the sole inducement to our digging was our faith in his statement as a Prophet of the Lord that a record would thus and there be found.

AARON SMITH,
JIRAH B. WHEELAN,
J. M. VAN NOSTRAND,
EDWARD WHITCOMB.

And, again, unlike Joseph, there's nothing supernatural or even spiritual in this testimony. There's also absolutely no reason to doubt it or renounce it. I'm pretty sure these guys actually did dig up the plates Strang had buried the night before. The greatest mystery to unravel is "how did he make it look like the ground hadn't been disturbed?"



And there they are. Very cool. Now you're a witness, too!

Like Joseph, Strang had a scribe (Samuel Graham) who wrote as Strang translated.

And unlike Joseph, Strang, who was well-educated, didn't actually need one. His use of a scribe was just one more way to imitate Joseph.

Along with several of the witnesses, Graham was later excommunicated from Strang's Church. There is no **direct evidence** that any of the above 11 Strang witnesses ever denied their testimony of James Strang, the Voree Plates, Strang's church or Strang's divine calling.

I added some emphasis there to highlight your hypocrisy on this point. Because every piece of hearsay that could possibly prove embarrassing to Martin Harris is cited by you as

unimpeachable gospel even if it comes from conversations that took place decades after the fact and after Harris was dead, but the contemporaneous hearsay that had two of the witnesses denouncing Strang as a fraud and one of them admitting he helped Strang forge the plates is only indirect evidence, so you can conveniently ignore it.

The hearsay in question, as quoted by from the [infallible Wikipedia](#):

Some have insisted that the Voree plates were forged by Strang. Isaac Scott, an ex-Strangite, claimed that Caleb Barnes, Strang's former law partner, said that he and Strang had fabricated them from a tea kettle belonging to Strang's father-in-law, as part of a [land speculation](#) scheme they had hatched.[13]

According to Scott, Barnes and Strang "made the 'plates' out of Ben [Perce]'s old kettle and engraved them with an old saw file, and ... when completed they put acid on them to corrode them and give them an ancient appearance; and that to deposit them under the tree, where they were found, they took a large auger ... which Ben [Perce] owned, put a fork handle on the auger and with it bored a long slanting hole under a tree on 'The Hill of Promise,' as they called it, laying the earth in a trail on a cloth as taken out, then put the 'plates' in, tamping in all the earth again, leaving no trace of their work visible." [13]

You have to be consistent. If you believe the hearsay that says Martin Harris talked to a deer he thought was Jesus, you also have to believe the hearsay that said the witnesses helped forge these bogus plates. This hearsay actually comes from people who knew Strang. Most of the anti-Harris hearsay comes six decades later from people who never met him.

As for denying this testimony, what's to deny? They dug up the homemade plates that Strang had buried the night before. I have no reason to doubt it, because it's a mundane, everyday sort of event. Similarly, when I was twelve years old, someone put a dead fish in my tent at Boy Scout camp. I've never denied my testimony of that event, and I never will.

[Every single living Book of Mormon witness besides Oliver Cowdery accepted Strang's prophetic claim of being Joseph's true successor and joined him and his church.](#)

Which is very peculiar if they actually knew Joseph Smith was fraud. Why seek out a successor to a bogus prophet after the bogus prophet dies? Their interest in perpetuating the cause of the Book of Mormon demonstrates that their belief in it was wholly sincere.

Also, it's not true. Only two of the Eight Witnesses followed Strang – Hiram Page and John Whitmer. In any case, they were all quickly disillusioned and abandoned Strang completely.

[Additionally, every single member of Joseph Smith's family except for Hyrum's widow also endorsed, joined, and sustained James Strang as "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator."](#)

And then walked away after they realized he wasn't what he claimed to be.

What does this say about the credibility of the Book of Mormon witnesses if they were so easily duped by James Strang and his claims of being a prophet called of God to bring forth new scripture from ancient plates only to later turn out to be a fraud?

It says they still believed in Joseph's prophetic mission and the veracity of the Book of Mormon, one after Joseph was gone and they could have profited greatly from exposing him as a fraud. That strengthens their testimony of the Book of Mormon considerably.

NO DOCUMENT OF ACTUAL SIGNATURES

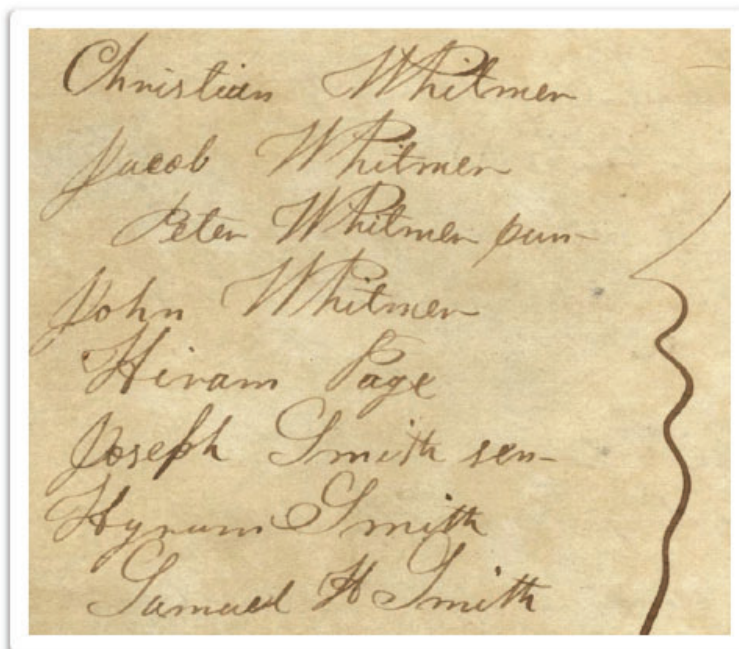
The closest thing we have in existence to an original document of the testimonies of the witnesses is a printer's manuscript written by Oliver Cowdery. (you can see black/white photo on *Joseph Smith Papers* [here](#))

Again, at the Church's own website, no less! More suppression?

Every witness name except Oliver Cowdery on that document is not signed; they are written in Oliver's own handwriting. Further, there is no testimony from any of the witnesses, with the exception of David Whitmer, directly attesting to the direct wording and claims of the manuscript or statements in the Book of Mormon.

Which means what, exactly? Every witness repeatedly reaffirmed their testimonies throughout their lives in a variety of settings. The statement was not a legal document, so no signatures were necessary. Certainly there's no record of any witness disputing any details of the statement.

Closest Original to Testimony of Witnesses



And isn't Oliver's penmanship lovely?

While we have “testimonies” from the witnesses recorded in later years through interviews and second eyewitness accounts and affidavits, many of the “testimonies” given by some of the witnesses do not match the claims and wording of the statements in the Book of Mormon.

Not true at all. What, now you’re just going to re-quote the same hearsay again?

For example:

Testimony of Three Witnesses (which includes Martin Harris) states:

“...that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon;”

Martin Harris:

“...he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them...”

– Letter from Stephen Burnett to “Br. Johnson,” April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2

Yep, that’s exactly what you’re going to do. Thank you for providing citation for this bogus hearsay quote the third time you cite it, as someone may have missed it the first two times around.

You cite Martin Harris, as if the quote that follows is firsthand, and then your quote begins with “he said he had hefted...” This is not a quote from Martin Harris. Every firsthand quote from Martin Harris reaffirms his testimony, so you repeat the same small handful of tired second-hand hearsay quotes instead.

Dude, this is getting ridiculous.

“I did not see them as I do that pencil-case, yet I saw them with the eye of faith; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me, though at the time they were covered over with a cloth.”

– Origin and History of the Mormonites, p. 406

Third time’s a charm, I guess. This is the third time you have used this precise quote, and the fifth time you have quoted John Clark. You don’t have a lot of ammunition here. Ironically, even when you include secondhand hearsay, there are less than half as many CES Letter witnesses against the Book of Mormon as there are original witnesses to the gold plates.

There is a difference between saying you “beheld and saw the plates and the engravings thereon” and saying you “hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them” or that the plates “were covered over with a cloth” and that you “did not see them as [you] do that pencil-case, yet [you] saw them with the eye of faith” or “with a spiritual eye.”

But there is no difference between these quotes and previous four or five times you cited them.

When I was a missionary, my understanding and impression from looking at the testimony of the Three and Eight Witnesses in the Book of Mormon was that the statements were legally binding documents in which the names represented signatures on the original document similar to what you would see on the original US Declaration of Independence.

It was? Why? It certainly wasn't my impression, and it certainly isn't anything that is taught by the Church. Why or how would these testimonies serve any binding legal purpose? These weren't affidavits; they weren't notarized. Nobody was going to introduce this stuff into a court of law. It's your weird assumption here that's the problem, not the testimony.

In any case, the Witnesses claimed that they did sign the original manuscript, most of which was destroyed via water damage. Only about 25% of it survives, so, yes, the original document was lost. That's bad news if any of these witnesses needs to use the original to apply for a loan or something, but it has no bearing on the veracity of their testimony whatsoever.

This is how I presented the testimonies to investigators.

Then, sorry to be blunt, but you were kind of a weird missionary who was off on his own program. No reference to the witnesses was found in the six discussions I taught, and I've since reviewed "Preach My Gospel," which is the current lesson plan, and it, too, makes no mention of the witnesses, let alone the supposedly legally binding nature of the document they signed.

According to the above manuscript that Oliver took to the printer for the Book of Mormon, they were not signatures.

And nobody has ever made any attempt to pretend that they were.

Since there is no document or evidence of any document whatsoever with the signatures of all of the witnesses, the only real testimonies we have from the witnesses are later interviews given by them and eyewitness accounts/affidavits made by others, some of which are shown previously.

And previously and previously and previously. (And previously.) But the only ones which are cited in the CES letter are a small handful of dubious hearsay statements which would be laughed out of a court of law.

From a legal perspective, the statements of the testimonies of the Three and Eight witnesses hold no credibility or weight in a court of law as there are a) no signatures of any of the witnesses except Oliver, b) no specific dates, c) no specific locations,

Good thing they were never intended to be presented in a court of law, then.

And, by the way, when I present the CES Letter to investigators, I do so having been under the impression that it is a legally binding document in which your name represented a signature on the original document similar to what you would see on the original US Declaration of Independence. Yet I can find no signature of yours, no evidence that it was ever notarized, changing dates and no location. Your letter would never have any credibility or weight in a court of law. Can we therefore assume that the whole thing is nonsense?

and d) some of the witnesses made statements after the fact that contradict and cast doubt on the specific claims made in the statements contained in the preface of the Book of Mormon.

You have precisely three such statements, all unreliable hearsay, you have previously presented the same three statements a total of twelve times. Previously.

CONCLUSION

“THE WITNESSES NEVER RECANTED OR DENIED THEIR TESTIMONIES”

Neither did James Strang’s witnesses; even after they were excommunicated from the church and estranged from Strang.

That’s because they had nothing to recant. They really did see the fake plates they dug up, just as a bunch of people saw the fake Kinderhook plates. The people who saw the Kinderhook plates have never recanted the fact that they saw them, just as I have never recanted my fish-in-a-tent story.



*A Dead Fish, Like Unto the Dead Fish I Witnessed In My Tent
I cannot and will not recant!!*

Neither did dozens of Joseph Smith's neighbors and peers who swore and signed affidavits on Joseph and his family's characters.

Were any of them asked to recant? Were any of them challenged on the veracity of their statements, or persecuted or ridiculed for making such statements? Maybe some of them thought better of their positions later on and changed their mind, but we'll never know, because as far as the record goes, they were never given any formal opportunity to recant.

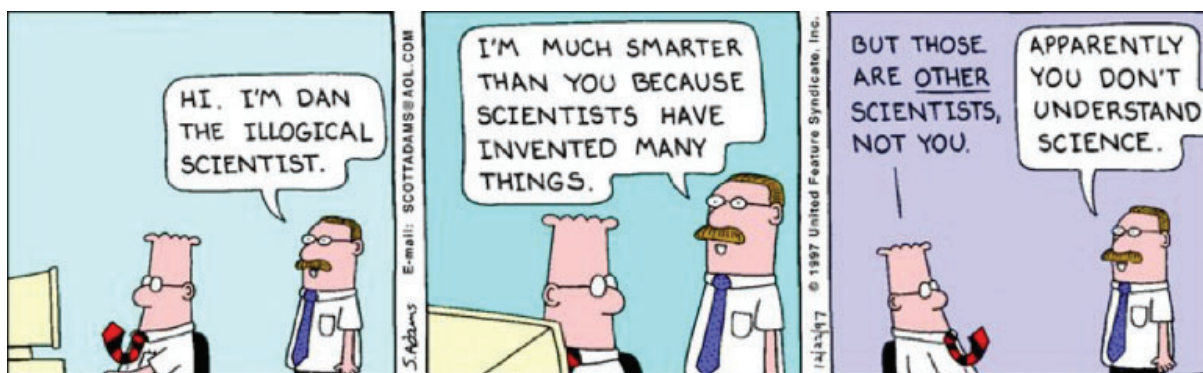
Neither did many of the Shaker witnesses who signed affidavits that they saw an angel on the roof top holding the *Sacred Roll and Book* written by founder Ann Lee. Same goes with the thousands of people over the centuries who claimed their entire lives to have seen the Virgin Mary and pointing to their experience as evidence that Catholicism is true.

There are also thousands of witnesses who never recanted their testimonies of seeing UFO's, Big Foot, the Loch Ness Monster, Abominable Snowman, Aliens, and so on.

It simply doesn't mean anything. People can believe in false things their entire lives and never recant. Just because they never denied or recanted does not follow that their experience and claims are true or that reality matches to what their perceived experience was.

The logical conclusion to this principle is that no witness on any subject can ever be believed, because there have been lots of false witnesses who have born testimony of ridiculous things. If we apply this warped logic to the CES Letter, we have to throw out everything you say, because people have written letters about religious topics that have later proven to be incorrect.

You and Dan the Illogical Scientist should hang out and swap stories.



For the record, I served my mission in Scotland and visited Loch Ness several times. Each time, there was a guy in a kilt standing in front of Urquhart Castle who made a living telling tall Nessie tales for tips, and the stories were different with every visit. (I think he was drunk.) Furthermore, none of his stories were signed or notarized, which would get them thrown out in a court of law.

PROBLEMS

1. In discussing the witnesses, we should not overlook the primary accounts of the events they testified to.

Then why do you do precisely that as you consistently and eagerly overlook all of their own primary accounts in favor of hearsay statements from decades after the fact?

The official statements published in the Book of Mormon are not dated, signed (we have no record with their signatures except for Oliver's), nor is a specific location given for where the events occurred. These are not eleven legally sworn affidavits but rather simple statements pre-written by Joseph Smith with claims of having been signed by three men and another by eight.

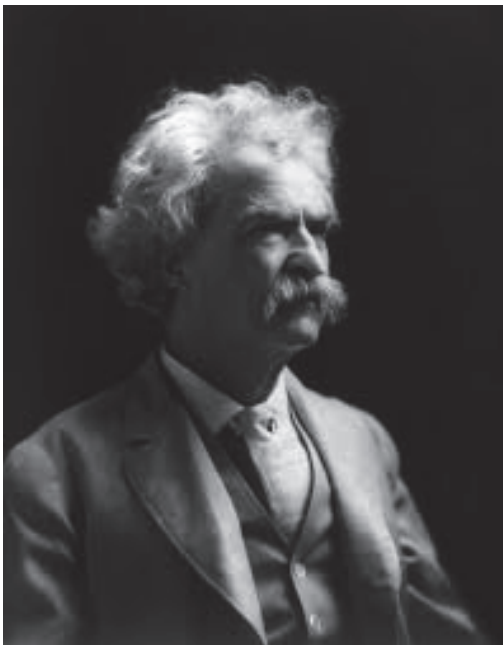
I'm sorry, but didn't you just say this? How is this charge in any way different from what you said a page or two ago? It was a goofy charge then, and it's a goofy charge now. Nobody other than you has ever presumed this was somehow a legally binding document. (Perhaps you ought to quote Stephen Burnett again.)

2. All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, excepting Martin Harris, were related by blood or marriage either with the Smiths or Whitmers. Oliver Cowdery (married to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer and cousin to Joseph Smith), Hiram Page (married to Catherine Whitmer), and the five Whitmers were related by marriage. Of course, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. were Joseph's brothers and father.

Mark Twain made light of this obvious problem:

"...I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified." – *Roughing It*, p.107-115

Mark Twain is awesome. Have you read what he had to say about Mormon women?



Our stay in Salt Lake City amounted to only two days, and therefore we had no time to make the customary inquisition into the workings of polygamy and get up the usual statistics and deductions preparatory to calling the attention of the nation at large once more to the matter.

I had the will to do it. With the gushing self-sufficiency of youth I was feverish to plunge in headlong and achieve a great reform here—until I saw the Mormon women. Then I was touched. My heart was wiser than my head. It warmed toward these poor, ungainly and pathetically “homely” creatures, and as I turned to hide the generous moisture in my

eyes, I said, “No—the man that marries one of them has done an act of Christian charity which entitles him to the kindly applause of mankind, not their harsh censure—and the man that marries sixty of them has done a deed of open-handed generosity so sublime that the nations should stand uncovered in his presence and worship in silence.

As to the fact that all the witnesses were related, I’m not quite sure what your point is. This is only really an issue with the Eight Witnesses, not the the Three Witnesses, who weren’t related except in the case Oliver Cowdery, who was third cousin to Joseph’s mother, making him Joseph’s third cousin once removed. (I’m curious as to how many of your third cousins once removed you know personally.) Citing Oliver’s marriage to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer does not support your argument at all, as the marriage took place in 1832, two years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The supernatural nature of the experience of the Three Witnesses is a far bigger deal than the more mundane experience of the Eight Witnesses, and, in any case, this is just one more ad hominem attack that doesn’t address the particulars of their testimony.

3. Within eight years, all of the Three Witnesses were excommunicated from the Church. This is what Joseph Smith said about them in 1838:

“Such characters as...John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them.” – History of the Church Vol. 3, Ch. 15, p. 232

This is what First Counselor of the First Presidency and once close associate Sidney Rigdon had to say about Oliver Cowdery:

“...a lying, thieving, counterfeiting man who was ‘united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs in the deepest dye, to deceive, cheat, and defraud the saints out of their property, by every art and stratagem which wickedness could invent...”
– February 15, 1841 Letter and Testimony, p.6-9

What does it say about the witnesses and their characters if even the Prophet and his counselor in the First Presidency thought they were questionable and unsavory?

It says the witnesses, being personally insulted, had even more incentive to stick it to Joseph Smith and expose him as a fraud, which they could have done easily. Why didn’t they?

4. As mentioned in the above “Polygamy/Polyandry” section, Joseph was able to influence and convince many of the 31 witnesses to lie and perjure in a sworn affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist.

As mentioned above, this is not accurate. The 31 witnesses signed an affidavit – wait, do we have their original signatures? – stating that Joseph was not engaged in John C. Bennett’s “spiritual wifery,” which he was not, and that he was not an adulterer, which he also was not. No lie and no perjury.

Is it outside the realm of possibility that Joseph was also able to influence or manipulate the experiences of his own magical thinking, treasure digging family and friends as witnesses?

I would think so, yes. Joseph spurned them, insulted them, and kicked them out, and they faced personal and financial ruin for refusing to recant. If their testimony was based solely on Joseph's manipulations, their disaffection provided them with every reason to expose him as a fraud at the earliest opportunity.

5. If the Prophet Joseph Smith could get duped with the Kinderhook Plates thinking that the 19th century fake plates were a legitimate record of a "descendent of Ham," how is having gullible guys like Martin Harris handling the covered gold plates going to prove anything?

Joseph was not duped by the Kinderhook Plates, and Martin saw the plates and the angel, contrary to the sixth(!) time you have invoked this piece of unreliable hearsay.

James Strang's claims and Voree Plates Witnesses are distinctive and more impressive compared to the Book of Mormon Witnesses:

Utter nonsense. No angels, no voice from heaven, no Urim and Thummin, Liahona, or Sword of Laban. Nothing supernatural. Far less distinctive and completely unimpressive.

- All of Strang's witnesses were not related to one another through blood or marriage like the Book of Mormon Witnesses were.

Nor were any of the Three Witnesses, barring a third cousin.

- Some of the witnesses were not members of Strang's church.

None of the Three or Eight Witnesses were members of Joseph's church, because the church was not yet organized when they wrote their testimonies.

- The Voree Plates were displayed in a museum for both members and non-members to view and examine.

Because there was nothing ancient, valuable, supernatural, or particularly remarkable about them.

- Strang provided 4 witnesses who testified that on his instructions, they actually dug the plates up for Strang while he waited for them to do so.

Digging is hard.

- They confirmed that the ground looked previously undisturbed.

Just as my tent looked undisturbed when I found the dead fish in it. We've been over this already. I cannot and will not recant!

7. The Shakers and Ann Lee:

The Shakers felt that “Christ has made his second appearance on earth, in a chosen female known by the name of Ann Lee, and acknowledged by us as our Blessed Mother in the work of redemption” (*Sacred Roll and Book*, p.358). The Shakers, of course, did not believe in the Book of Mormon, but they had a book entitled *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book; From the Lord God of Heaven, to the Inhabitants of Earth.*



Cool! They look like they’re doing the dance in the “Thriller” video.

More than 60 individuals gave testimony to the *Sacred Roll and Book*, which was published in 1843. Although not all of them mention angels appearing, some of them tell of many angels visiting them. One woman told of eight different visions.

Here is the testimony statement (page 304 of *Sacred Roll and Book*):

We, the undersigned, hereby testify, that we saw the holy Angel standing upon the house-top, as mentioned in the foregoing declaration, holding the Roll and Book.

*BETSEY BOOTHE.
LOUISA CHAMBERLAIN.
CATY DE WITT.
LAURA ANN JACOBS.
SARAH MARIA LEWIS.*

SARAH ANN SPENCER.

LUCINDA MCDONIELS.

MARIA HEDRICK.

So we shouldn't accept the testimony of Book of Mormon witnesses because the Shakers, who no longer exist and whose central claims have been completely discredited by the passage of time, claimed to see angels? How is that anything but a non sequitur? Each testimony should be evaluated on its own merits. As it stands, the Shakers no longer exist, so I don't see much value in reviewing their testimonies.

Joseph Smith only had three witnesses who claimed to see an angel. The Shakers, however, had a large number of witnesses who claimed they saw angels and the Sacred Roll and Book.

And the Shakers no longer exist, which pretty much destroys the credibility of Shaker witness claims.

There are over a hundred pages of testimony from "Living Witnesses."

And yet the Shakers aren't living any more – it's a completely dead and discredited movement. Are you arguing that we ought to resurrect the dead Shaker movement based on these witnesses?

The evidence seems to show that Martin Harris accepted the *Sacred Roll and Book* as a divine revelation.

No, it doesn't, no matter how many times you recycle the same tired hearsay quotes. (I think it's four for this one.)

Clark Braden stated: "Harris declared repeatedly that he had as much evidence for a Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon" (The Braden and Kelly Debate, p.173).

Braden, who never met Harris, passed along this uncorroborated hearsay years after Harris's death and decades after Harris allegedly said it. I resent having to type that again, as this is the fifth time you've quoted this. You may enjoy repeating yourself, but I find it tedious.

Why should we believe the Book of Mormon witnesses but not the Shakers witnesses?

Because time has conclusively demonstrated that the Shaker witnesses were wrong, based on the fact that the Shakers no longer exist. There is no reason to consider the Shaker witnesses in evaluating the Book of Mormon witnesses. Each should be evaluated on their own merits.

What are we to make of the reported Martin Harris comment that he had as much evidence for the Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon?

We are to make that you are obsessed with unreliable hearsay nonsense and enjoy repeating yourself. (For a sixth time with this quote.)

In light of the James Strang/Voree Plates witnesses,

who claimed to see something as mundane as a fish in a tent,

the fact that all of the Book of Mormon Witnesses – except Martin Harris – were related to either Joseph Smith or David Whitmer,

which is overblown – third cousin once removed? – and largely irrelevant,

along with the fact that all of the witnesses were treasure hunters who believed in second sight,

which is not true,

and in light of their superstitions and reputations...

which were mild superstitions in line with conventional 19th Century thinking, and the undeniable fact that they enjoyed very good reputations for honesty and good character,

why would anyone gamble with their lives in believing in a book based on anything these men said or claimed or what's written on the testimonies of the Witnesses page in the Book of Mormon?

Sorry, who's gambling their lives by believing in the Book of Mormon? Certainly not you or me. You know who was? The Three and Eight Witnesses, who experienced massive persecution and personal ruin for refusing to back down from their testimonies.

The mistake that is made by 21st century Mormons is that they're seeing the Book of Mormon Witnesses as empirical, rational, nineteenth-century men instead of the nineteenth-century magical thinking, superstitious, and treasure digging men they were.

No, the mistake is that presentist 21st Century ex-Latter-day Saints like you condescend to 19th Century men and distort harmless beliefs in antiquated superstitions into something more significant than they actually were.

They have ignored the peculiarities of their worldview, and by so doing, they misunderstand their experiences as witnesses.

It's very easy to misunderstand witnesses when you ignore everything they actually said in favor of a handful of hearsay statements that you repeat ad nauseum, each time pretending they're something new.

At the end of the day? It all doesn't matter.

It doesn't? Then why are you wasting my time?

The Book of Mormon Witnesses and their testimonies of the gold plates are irrelevant.

They are? Then why didn't you say so? I could have moved on to the next chapter.

It does not matter whether eleven 19th century treasure diggers with magical worldviews saw some gold plates or not.

Well, it matters somewhat that you misrepresent farmers and schoolteachers as professional treasure diggers, as your eagerness to label them in the most negative light possible demonstrates your unwillingness to engage this issue with any attempt to keep an open mind.

It doesn't matter because of this one simple fact:

Let me guess: A rock? A hat?

JOSEPH DID NOT USE THE GOLD PLATES FOR TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON



sigh

I honestly do not understand why the rock in the hat is such a huge obstacle for you. If Joseph had translated the record by means of plucking his own eyebrows and lighting them on fire, it would make no difference to me whatsoever. The product of the method, not the method itself, is what matters. You have not come anywhere close to discrediting the Book of Mormon with repeated whining about rocks in hats.

I won't bother reposting here the language you plagiarized from the graphic in your last version of the CES Letter. After this section, I've had it with vain repetition.
