

1. Overview: The testimony of the **three** and **eight** witnesses to the gold plates is often considered a key component of the Book of Mormon's credibility. However, the witnesses, by their own admission, seemed to have only seen the angel and plates in a visionary state in their minds (as Joseph Smith suggested to them) and not with their natural eyes as members are taught. Additionally, several issues call into question the witnesses' reliability. For example, all the witnesses had close ties to Joseph and his family. Martin Harris had a substantial financial stake in the success of the Book of Mormon. Moreover, in subsequent years, many of the witnesses ended up leaving the Church and following other leaders and religions. By 1847, none of the surviving eleven witnesses were affiliated with the LDS Church. If they believed Joseph Smith's miraculous revelations from God were true, why did they leave the Church?

2. Magical Worldview: In order to understand the Book of Mormon witnesses and the relevant issues, one must understand the magical worldview people held in early 19th Century New England. People of that day believed in folk magic, divining rods, visions, second sight, peep stones, treasure hunting (money digging or glass looking), and so on. (Alan Taylor, *The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830*.) B.H. Roberts stated:

It may be admitted that some of [Smith's ancestors] believed in fortune telling, in warlocks and witches... In deed it is scarcely conceivable how one could live in New England in those years and not have shared in such beliefs. To be credulous in such things was to be normal people." (Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 26-27.)

In the years preceding the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, Jr. and his father, Joseph Sr., were referred to as "money diggers," as they had a family treasure hunting business from 1820-27. Joseph was hired by individuals like Josiah Stowell, who Joseph mentions in his **history**. Joseph Jr. openly shared his alleged supernatural ability to see treasure and other hidden objects through a peep stone. William Stafford, a neighbor and fellow treasure seeker gave the following account:

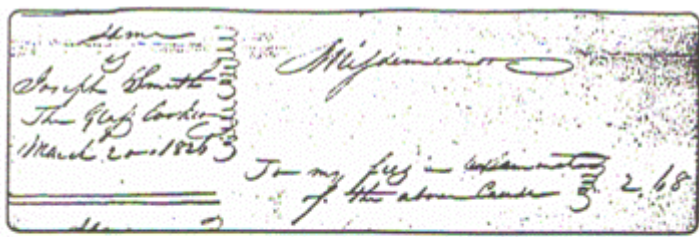
"Joseph, Jr., could see, by placing a stone of singular appearance in his hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light; at which time they pretended he could see all things within and under the earth, — that he could see within the above mentioned caves, large gold bars and silver plates — that he could also discover the spirits in whose charge these treasures were, clothed in ancient dress."

In the same affidavit, Stafford recalled a time when the Smiths made a circle on the ground and put hazel sticks around it to ward off evil spirits. They added a steel rod to the center of the circle, dug a trench, and then "the older Smith consulted his son who had been 'looking in his stone and watching the motions of the evil spirit.' " However, according to Stafford, they "made a mistake in the commencement of the operation; if it had not been for that, we should have got the money." (William Stafford, affidavit, as quoted in *Mormonism Unveiled*, by E.D. Howe, pp. 237-239.)

Stafford's statements are supported by B.H. Roberts, who stated: "Now, most historians, Mormon or not, who work with the sources, accept as fact Joseph Smith's career as village magician. Too many of his closest friends and family admitted as much, and some of Joseph's own revelations support the contention." (Roberts, *Treasure Seeking Then and Now*, *Sunstone*, v. 11, p. 5.)

Not everyone in that day believed in Joseph's ability to find buried treasure. In 1826, Joseph was **arrested** and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York, for trial for fraud. He was arrested after Josiah Stowell's nephew accused Joseph of being a "disorderly person and an imposter." Specifically, Joseph was charged with seeking lost treasure under false pretenses (i.e., that he was guided through supernatural powers and a special peep stone). Joseph was convicted of the crime (which was a misdemeanor). A copy of the judgment, which is included below and signed by Joseph, referred to

Joseph as “The Glass Looker.” Hugh B. Nibley stated “if this court record is authentic it is the most damning evidence in existence against Joseph Smith.” [Recent evidence](#) corroborates the authenticity of the court records.



same [i.e. The People]	Misdemeanor
vs	
Joseph Smith	To my fees in examination
The Glass Looker	of the above cause 2.68
March 20, 1826	

Joseph’s apparent belief in the supernatural was not unique. For example, Oliver Cowdery often utilized a [divining rod or dowsing rod](#) as a source of information. In fact, Cowdery’s divining rod is mentioned in the scriptures. 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.”

The revelation found in [D&C 8: 6-11](#) states that Cowdery is blessed with the “**gift of Aaron**.” The text does not define the gift of Aaron but does provide several clues: (1) Cowdery has a history of using it, since “it has told [him] many things”; (2) it is “the gift of God”; (3) it is to be held in Cowdery’s hands (and kept there, impervious to any power); (4) it allows Cowdery to “do marvelous works”; (5) it is “the work of God”; (6) the Lord will speak through it to Oliver and tell him anything he asks while using it; (7) it works through faith; and (8) it enables Cowdery to translate ancient sacred documents.

Even with these clues, the “gift of Aaron” remains difficult to identify. The task becomes much easier, however, when analyzing the original revelation contained in the Book of Commandments, a predecessor volume to the Doctrine and Covenants, which was used by the LDS Church before 1835. [Section 7 of the Book of Commandments](#) contains wording that was changed in the [Doctrine & Covenants 8](#). The term “gift of Aaron” was originally referred to as the “gift of working with the 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.” [Book of Commandments 7:3](#)

The historical record demonstrates that the “gift of Aaron” mentioned in D&C 8 is a “rod of nature” (or a divining rod or dowsing rod as illustrated in the above images), which Oliver Cowdery used to hunt for buried treasure. Cowdery’s use of a divining rod to search for buried treasure evokes similar images of Joseph Smith hunting for treasure with a stone in a hat. Oliver also wished to use his divining rod in the same way Joseph Smith used his stone and hat: to translate ancient documents. Doc-

trine & Covenants 8 indicates that the Lord, through Joseph Smith, granted Oliver's request to translate using a divining rod. This is only one of many examples providing insight into the folk magic and superstition prevalent among the Church at its inception.

3. Analysis of Three Witnesses: The Church often emphasizes that the three witnesses never disavowed their testimonies of the Book of Mormon. To place this claim in its proper context, it is important to analyze each witness and discuss what other statements they made about their experiences. The following is an analysis of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon:

Martin Harris

A compelling analysis of Martin Harris' personality and credibility can be found [here](#). LDS leaders paint Martin Harris as a smart businessman with an unwavering testimony of the Book of Mormon. Harris, however, was known by many of his peers as unstable, gullible, and superstitious. Moreover, Harris acknowledged 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. Harris believed Joseph when told that if he were to look upon the plates God would strike him dead, so he dared not look.

Before discussing his statements with respect to the Book of Mormon, two important factors are worth noting. First, Harris had a direct conflict of interest in being a witness; he was deeply invested financially in the Book of Mormon as he mortgaged his farm to finance the book. Second, Harris was incredibly superstitious. Consider the following accounts:

- "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." (BYU professor Ronald W. Walker, *"Martin Harris: Mormonism's Early Convert,"* p.34-35)
- "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)
- According to two Ohio newspapers, 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)

Before Harris became a Mormon, he had already [changed his religion](#) at least five times. After Joseph's death, Harris continued this earlier pattern by joining and leaving five more different sects, including James Strang's congregation, other Mormon offshoots, and the Shakers. In fact, Harris even served a mission in England for James Strang's church.

During Harris' lifetime, he claimed to have experienced the following:

- Conversed with Jesus, who took the form of a deer;
- Saw the devil, who had four feet and donkey head;
- Chipped off a chunk of a stone box that mysteriously moved beneath the ground to avoid capture;
- Interpreted simple things like a flickering of a candle as a sign of the devil;

- Experienced a creature jumping on his chest that no one else could see.

Consider, for a moment, if an individual testified of experiencing some miraculous spiritual encounter, but also claimed to have experienced the preceding events. Would you believe these claims? With inconsistency, conflict of interest, magical thinking, and superstition like this, it is difficult to view Harris as a credible witness to the Book of Mormon.

Regardless, Martin Harris' statements make it clear that he never physically saw the gold plates. Specifically, Harris made the following statements:

- In 1838, Harris told an Ohio congregation: "I never saw the gold plates only in a visionary or entranced state." (Early Mormon Documents, 2:346-47, quoted from *Insider's View of Mormon Origin*, p. 198.) This statement, made in the wake of the Kirtland banking scandal, caused a great deal of dissention among Church members and induced five influential members, including three apostles, to leave the church.
- In March 1838, disillusioned church members confirmed that Harris had publicly admitted that none of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon had ever seen or handled the gold plates—although Harris had not been present when Whitmer and Cowdery first claimed to have viewed them. These church members also claimed that Harris's recantation, made during a period of crisis in early Mormonism, induced five influential members, including three apostles, to leave the church.

Specifically, church leader Stephen Burnett wrote in a letter to apostle Lyman E. Johnson in 1838, which stated in pertinent part: "I have reflected long and deliberately upon the history of this church & weighed the evidence for & against it - loth to give it up - but 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 [Cowdery] nor David [Whitmer] & 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 foundations was sapped & the entire structure fell a heap of ruins" (Stephen Burnett to Luke S. Johnson, April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith's Letterbook, Vogel, 2:290-92).

- When questioned whether he (Martin Harris) saw the plates and engravings with his bodily eyes, he said, "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 with a cloth." (Early Mormon Documents, 2:270; see also [Origin and History of the Mormons](#), p. 406)
- During the printing of the first edition of the Book of Mormon, Harris was in the print shop while the type was being set for the testimony of the three witnesses. The printer, John Gilbert, asked him if he had seen the plates with his naked eye. Harris said, "No, I saw them with the spiritual eye." (John H. Gilbert, *Memorandum*, September 8, 1892.)
- Harris said he never saw the plates in the traditional sense, rather, he saw them as he saw a "city through a mountain." (*Early Mormon Documents*, Vol. 2, pp. 291-92.)
- Near the end of his life, Harris said that he had seen the plates in "a state of entrancement." (Early Mormon Documents, 2:347.)

David Whitmer

A compelling analysis of David Whitmer's personality and credibility can be found [here](#). Like Martin Harris, Whitmer could be considered both gullible and superstitious. For example, in early June 1829 (before seeing the gold plates), he claimed that he, Cowdery, and Joseph Smith observed "one of the Nephites" carrying the plates 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. (Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, p.179).

With respect to the gold plates, consider the following:

- 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 the interviewer asked 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)
- Whitmer later testified that he did not see the plates literally with his natural eyes, rather, he said he saw the plates “by the eye of faith” handled by an angel. (*Palmyra Reflector*, March 19, 1831)
- A Mormon lawyer, James Henry Moyle, interviewed Whitmer in 1885 and 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)

The fact that the Church touts Whitmer’s testimony of the Book of Mormon seems to indicate that it finds him to be a credible individual. If that is the case, how does the Church explain the following statement Whitmer made in 1887: “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.” (Address to all Believers in Christ, p. 27, 1887.)

The Church asks members to believe Whitmer when he claims that Joseph Smith was inspired, but to reject his statements when they depart from a convenient narrative.

Oliver Cowdery

There is no direct evidence that Cowdery denied his testimony of the Book of Mormon. There is, however, a great deal of **circumstantial evidence** that he did so. Cowdery’s law partner, Judge W. Lang, and former apostle, William McClellan, both said that Cowdery admitted to them that the Book of Mormon was a hoax.

Regardless, like Joseph and most of the Book of Mormon witnesses, Cowdery and his family were treasure hunters. Cowdery’s preferred tool of trade was the divining rod. He was known as a “rodsman.” Along with the witnesses, Cowdery held a magical mindset. Cowdery was not an objective and independent witness. As scribe for the Book of Mormon and cousin to Joseph Smith, Cowdery had a conflict of interest in serving as a witness.

If, in fact, members view Cowdery was a credible witness, other problems arise. Like Harris and Whitmer, Cowdery also left the Church. Moreover, in a letter dated January 21, 1838, Cowdery accused Joseph of having an affair with 16-year-old Fanny Alger, writing: “When he [Joseph Smith] was there we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger’s was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth in the matter, and as I supposed was admitted by himself.” (Letter written by Oliver Cowdery and recorded by his brother Warren Cowdery; see photograph in [The Mormon Kingdom](#), vol. 1, page 27.)

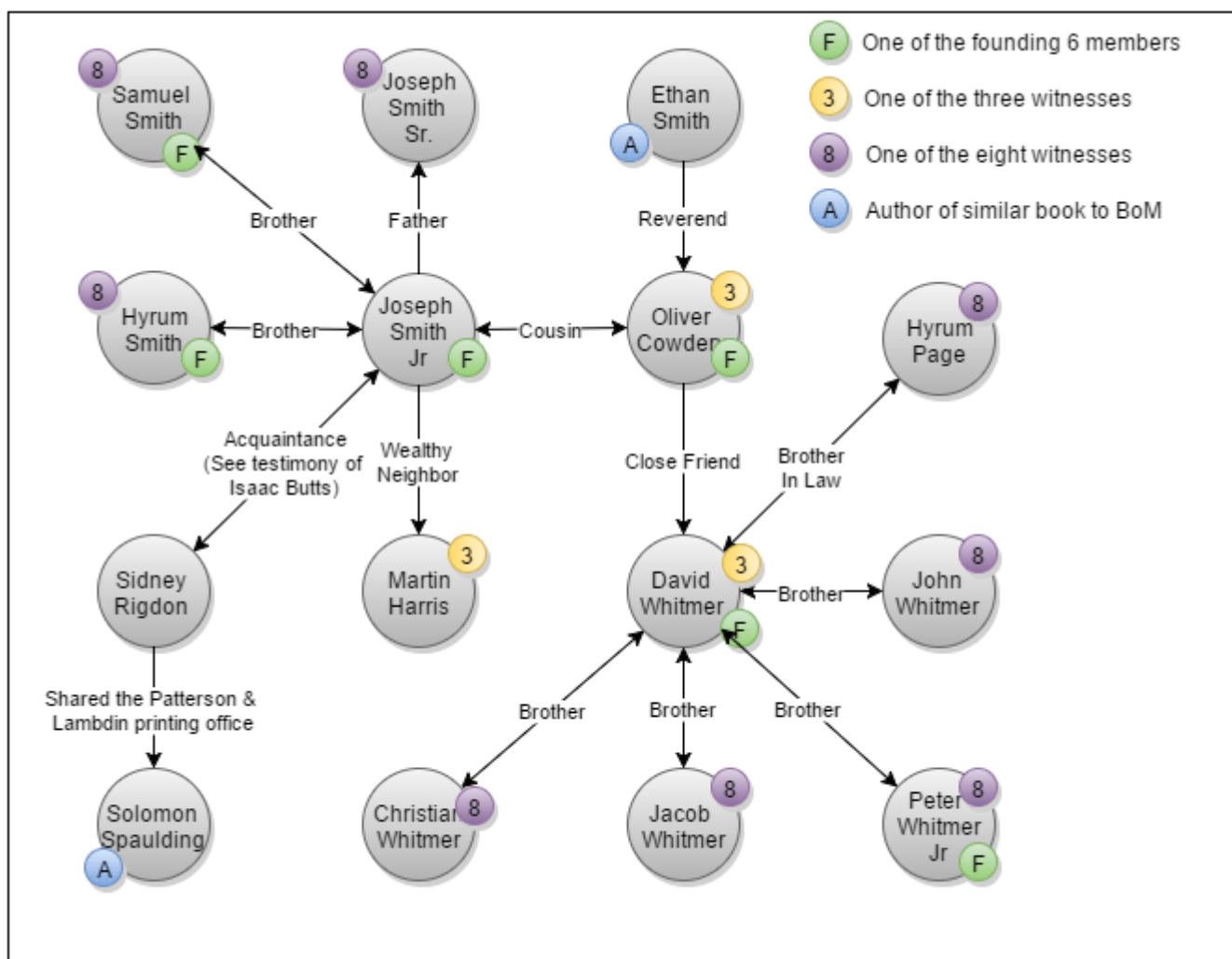
As with Whitmer, the Church asks members to believe Cowdery’s statements that bolster Church doctrine but reject those statements that undermine Joseph Smith’s credibility.

4. Analysis of Eight Witnesses: In view of the totality of the evidence, the testimony of the eight witnesses is also suspect. Three of the eight witnesses were members of Joseph’s immediate family

(including his father, Joseph Smith Sr., and two brothers, Hyrum Smith and Samuel Smith). The following is a list of the remaining five witnesses:

- **Jacob Whitmer:** Left the Church in 1838.
- **John Whitmer:** Excommunicated in 1838.
- **Hiram Page:** Left the Church in 1838 when members of the Whitmer family were excommunicated.
- **Christian Whitmer:** Died in 1835, three years before his entire family left the church or were excommunicated.
- **Peter Whitmer, Jr.:** Died in 1836, two years before his entire family left the church or were excommunicated.

5. Close Relationship Between BOM Witnesses and Joseph Smith: All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, with the exception of Martin Harris (who was one of the Smith’s neighbors), were related by blood or marriage either to the Smiths or Whitmers. The following graphic shows the close relationship between Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon witnesses as well as authors of books similar to the Book of Mormon:



6. Witnesses Saw Gold Plates Via Second Sight: In Joseph’s day, people believed in seeing things as a vision in their mind. They called it “second sight” or viewing objects/events with “spiritual eyes.” Today, we would refer to second sight as using our imagination. In Joseph’s day, it apparently made little difference if they saw things with their natural or spiritual eyes. This supernatural way of seeing the world is also referred in Doctrine and Covenants as “*the eyes of our understanding.*”

If the golden plates were real and tangible as the Church teaches, why would the witnesses make the following kinds 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.” (Martin Harris, (Anthony Metcalf, *Ten Years Before the Mast*, n.d., microfilm copy, p. 70–71))
- “I never saw the gold plates, only in a visionary or entranced state.” (*Early Mormon Documents*, 2:346–47)
- “He only saw the plates with a spiritual eye.” (*Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. 1, 1958)
- “As shown in the vision.” (Zenas H. Gurle, Interview with David Whitmer on Jan 14, 1885)
- “Never saw the plates with his natural eyes but only in vision or imagination” (Letter from Stephen Burnett to “Br. Johnson,” April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2.)
- “I did not see them uncovered, but I handled them and hefted them while wrapped in a tow frock.” (*Early Mormon Documents* 1:497)
- “They were shown to me by a supernatural power” ([History of the Church Vol. 3, Ch. 21, p. 307–308](#))
- “... 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)
- 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](#))
- Two other Palmyra residents said that Harris told them that he had seen the plates with “the eye of faith” or “spiritual eyes.” (*Early Mormon Documents* 2:270 and 3:22)
- 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.’” (*Early Mormon Documents* 2:548.)

7. No Document of Witnesses’ Signatures: The closest thing we have in existence to an original document of the Book of Mormon witnesses’ testimonies is a [printer’s manuscript written by Oliver Cowdery](#). None of the witness names on that document are signed, rather, they are written in Cowdery’s handwriting. Further, there is no testimony from any of the witnesses directly attesting to the actual wording and claims contained in the testimony prefacing the Book of Mormon.

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 the witnesses do not match the claims and wording of the statements in the Book of Mormon.

8. James Strang and the Voree Plates Witnesses: James Strang is one of three individuals (along with Sydney Rigdon and Brigham Young) who attempted to lead the Church following Joseph Smith's death. Strang made a number of claims that implicate the Book of Mormon and its supposed witnesses. In fact, Strang claimed to have found the brass plates (that Nephi took from Laban) and translated them. Like Joseph Smith, Strang did the following:

- Claimed he was visited by an angel who reserved the brass plates for him to translate into the word of God. "The record which was sealed from my servant Joseph. Unto thee it is reserved."
- Received the Urim and Thummim.
- Produced 11 witnesses who testified that they saw and inspected the ancient metal plates.
- Introduced new scripture from the brass plates that are now referred to as the **Voree Plates**. After unearthing the plates (the same brass plates Nephi took from Laban), Strang translated the plates into scripture called the "**Book of the Law of the Lord**."
- Established a new Church: **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite)**. Its headquarters is still in Voree, Wisconsin.

Like the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Law of the Lord has the testimony of its Witnesses in its preface, entitled "Testimony," which reads as follows:

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.

The Testimony was then signed by the following seven witnesses: Samuel Graham, Samuel P. Bacon, Warren Post, Phineas Wright, Albert N. Hosmer, Ebenezer Page, and Jehiel Savage.

In addition to the above seven witnesses, four additional witnesses were with Strang when the **Voree Plates** were unearthed. The following link contains the "**Testimony of Witnesses to the Voree Plates**," which bears a number of striking similarities to the Book of Mormon story.

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

9. Book of Mormon Witnesses and Joseph Smith's Family Sustained Strang as Prophet: Notably, every living Book of Mormon witness except Oliver Cowdery accepted Strang's prophetic claim of being Joseph's true successor and joined Strang's church. Additionally, Joseph's brother, William Smith, stated that all members of Joseph's family, except for Hyrum's widow, sustained Strang as "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator." In fact, Lucy Mack Smith wrote a letter to Reuben Hedlock stating: "I am satisfied that Joseph appointed J.J. Strang. It is verily so." (Palmer, *Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, p. 211.) What does this say about the credibility of the Book of Mormon witnesses if they were so easily duped by Strang's fraudulent claims?

10. Problems with Church's Reliance on Witnesses: There are many problems with the testi-

monies and corresponding arguments in support of the **Three** and **Eight** Witnesses. For example:

- **“The Witnesses never recanted or denied their testimonies”:** Neither did the witnesses to the Voree plates, even after they were excommunicated or estranged from Strang’s church. Neither did dozens of Joseph Smith’s neighbors and peers who signed affidavits as to Joseph’s misconduct and deception. 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 (which later turned out to be fraudulent). Same goes with the thousands of people over the centuries who claim to have seen the Virgin Mary and point to this experience as evidence that Catholicism is true. Many people wholeheartedly believe the Book of Mormon witnesses because they have difficulty believing that these witnesses were lying or had been deceived. Using that same logic, one could also make the case for Big Foot. Likewise, thousands of people claim to have been abducted by aliens. In fact, there were seven witnesses to the abduction have **Travis Walton**. All seven witnesses passed lie detector tests and none of them have ever recanted their story.
- In discussing the witnesses, we should not overlook the primary accounts of the events they testified to. The official statements published in the Book of Mormon are not dated, signed (there is no record with their signatures), and there is no specific location given for where the events occurred. These are not 11 legally sworn affidavits; rather they are simple statements pre-written by Joseph Smith with claims of having been signed by three men and another by eight.
- All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, with the exception of Martin Harris, were related by blood or marriage either to 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.
- Within eight years after allegedly seeing the gold plates, 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**) What does it say about the witnesses and their character if even the prophet thought they were questionable?
- As mentioned in the above **Polygamy/Polyandry section**, Joseph was able to influence and convince up to 31 witnesses to lie and perjure themselves in a sworn affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist. Is it outside the realm of possibility that Joseph was also able to influence or manipulate the experiences of his own superstitious family and friends as witnesses (particularly Mormon men who already believed in second sight and who already believed that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God)?
- James Strang’s claims and witnesses to the Voree plates are distinctive and more impressive compared to the Book of Mormon Witnesses. For example:
 - None of Strang’s witnesses were related to one another through blood or marriage like the Book of Mormon Witnesses.
 - Some of the witnesses were not members of Strang’s church.
 - The Voree Plates were displayed in a museum for both members and non-members to view and examine.
 - Four witnesses testified that they dug up the plates for Strang while he waited for them to do so. They confirmed that the ground looked previously undisturbed.

11. Conclusion: It seems as if any unbiased observer would have difficulty placing much, if any, weight in the testimony of the three and eight witnesses in light of the fact that (1) these same witnesses also believed James Strang to be a prophet and the Voree plates to be of divine origin; (2) all of the Book of Mormon witnesses except Martin Harris were related to either Joseph Smith or David Whitmer; (3) all of the witnesses came from a superstitious era and believed in second sight; and (4) virtually all of the 11 witnesses not related to Joseph Smith left the Church.

Regardless, the testimonies of the three and eight witnesses are rendered irrelevant by virtue of the fact that Joseph Smith did not use the gold plates in translating the Book of Mormon.