



John Bytheway:	00:00:00	Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of Follow Him. I'm here today with my very faithful and diligent co-host. Therefore, it is proper that Hank Smith should be our co-host today. Is that right, Hank?
Hank Smith:	00:00:13	Hey, I know that quote John, I know that quote.
John Bytheway:	00:00:15	We're doing another Voices of the Restoration episode, Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. We brought with us again a familiar face, if you've been watching. Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat. Thanks for coming back again with us, Dr. Gerrit,
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	00:00:29	And thanks for having me back.
John Bytheway:	00:00:31	This topic can answer the question, "did Joseph really have plates and who actually saw them?" Who is willing to say no, no, no. I actually saw them and I'm glad they're doing this little Voices of the Restoration because we get to see Dr. Dirkmaat so many time. Wow. So, thanks for coming back. Help us introduce this, Witnesses of the Book of Mormon topic today.
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	00:00:57	Well, I love this section of the Come Follow Me manual. First of all, I love the whole idea of bringing individuals testimonies and voices to the events that we're studying. But in particular, the selection that they've chosen here in the manual is from Lucy Mack Smith's book. She portrays an explanation of the aftermath of the witness event that we generally don't hear. I love the fact that they said one of the things we need to have is we need to highlight the testimony of people that say the plates are real. This is real. This is a miraculous thing that's going on with the translation. But Joseph isn't just dictating it from his head. He isn't reading it off of some kind of manuscript somewhere. He didn't memorize everything that there was to know about something and then regurgitate it back. There are real plates. There is really the gift and power of God operating

through Joseph in order to give this translation. And the testimony of the three and eight witnesses is such that it makes refuting Joseph Smith's prophet-hood incredibly difficult,

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| Hank Smith: | 00:02:20 | Especially the fact that a lot of them walk away from him, but not from their experience. |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 00:02:26 | All three of the three witnesses are going to Apostatize and be disaffected, at least for a time. Two will return, but one won't. A healthy portion of the eight witnesses, as well, will also apostatize. It really is the case that these people maintain their testimonies throughout their life. Now, you're always gonna have people that will claim that they had conversations with them where they said they didn't believe, but you don't get to have any from them themselves. None of them ever deny their testimony. It's always someone saying something in a Missouri newspaper like, uh, I talked to David Whitmer last month and he told me he didn't even see the plates. And then, you know, you have David Whitmer responding angrily with his own article saying—that he may understand me now, if he did not, then I have never denied my testimony. There's a key reason why the witnesses matter so much for the restoration. And we could get into all kinds of things about it— between Joseph's own psychological relief that someone else has actually seen the plates. |
| | 00:03:35 | He can finally show them. To defending the truths that Joseph is bringing forth. There are many, many, many people who throughout the course of time have claimed to have some kind of communication with God. There are many people who believe that they've been inspired by God. There are people who believe that they've been visited by angels or talked to God. When you're a historian, we don't try to demonstrate the veracity of someone's claim like that. So, you take someone like Anne White to, she said she received revelations from God telling her that the whole Christian world was worshiping on the wrong day, that really God intended Christians to worship on Saturday. This is where the Seventh Day Adventist Church originates. And as a historian, when she says, I received this revelation from God, you don't write a book trying to prove that she didn't really have that experience. You just say, this is what she said happened. |
| John Bytheway: | 00:04:41 | This is what she said, yeah. |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 00:04:42 | You don't spend the time on-like I know she said this happened, but I'm pretty sure that's not what happened, because that's not what I think. That's not what a historian does. And when |

you're doing history, you simply allow people to present what they said happened. And you faithfully recount that. As a Latter-day Saint, how do I deal with these other claims to miraculous visions? Well, I don't really know what happened with Anne White, but it's easy for us to simply say, I'm sure she earnestly believed that God had communicated with her. And you don't have to believe it. You can simply say, you know, she was honest. She believed that. She was a good person and maybe that's what her inspiration was. But with Joseph Smith, his truth claims are entirely different than essentially almost every other person claiming to have religious communication with God. And that's because of the plates. You can't just think that you have 70, 80 or however many pounds of gold plates. You either have them or you don't have them.

00:05:59 It's not a matter of, well, I'm sure it was common at one time for people to try to dismiss Joseph's visions as well. Maybe he was just, you know, maybe he was sick or maybe he was, uh, anemic and he had an iron deficiency and he passed out. And so he just thought that he saw God. Okay. I mean, I guess that's a plausible explanation except there's a giant stack of metal plates sitting there. I don't know of the iron deficiency that suddenly allows a giant stack of plates to be on your table and that for other people to feel those plates. And, and then I'm kind of being facetious about it, but the point is, Joseph has plates that Joseph has something is actually not even refuted by most non Latter-day Saint scholars anymore because there are so many people who aren't fans of Joseph Smith, who feel them, who lift them.

00:06:57 Maybe they don't see them, but you know, Isaac Hale is saying he lifts the box the plates are in. He says that in an affidavit attacking Joseph Smith. So Joseph clearly has something, and that's the conclusion that scholars outside of our faith come to. So that he has something is very different than simply Martin Luther saying, I felt inspired by God that true salvation came from having faith alone. Joseph is saying, an angel appeared to me. First of all showed me in vision, but told me that there were sacred plates that contained this sacred record and told me that God wanted me to go get them. And I went and got them. And here they are. And these plates, I then translated by the gift and power of God through these interpreters, these stones that he provided. And so the gold plates are tied directly to Joseph Smith's entire claim to prophethood.

00:07:57 It makes it hard to have the watery position because it's easy for other people to say, you know, I'm sure Joan of Ark really believed that God was communicating with her. But Joseph

either has plates or he doesn't have plates. And by all historical records, you have to say he has something. Well, what is the something that he has? He says that, that something is sacred records delivered to him by an angel of God. And not just him saying it. A shared collective vision where David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery and Joseph all see the angel at the same time. All have the angel show them the plates. So now we're not just saying that, that Joseph Smith is lying about whether or not he had plates. Well, now it's also David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery. But wait, there's more, because then after that event, he's gonna have the same experience in another shared, collective visionary experience with Martin Harris.

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So now Martin Harris is seeing the angel at the same time, Joseph is seeing the angel. Martin Harris is seeing the plates at the same time Joseph is seeing the plates. David Whitmer is seeing the angel Oliver Cowdery—all at the same time. So it becomes very difficult to simply dismiss the entire thing. Now you can. You can, and detractors of the faith do. Well, yeah, that's 'cause they were just all liars. Okay, well what's your evidence that they are liars? Because I don't want to believe it. Okay, well that's not evidence. That's called an opinion. Opinions are different than evidence. Opinions are what you want to believe and evidence is what you actually have sources for. They're not the same thing. It would be very difficult for anyone to argue that any of those three witnesses didn't really believe an angel appeared to them. They repeat it throughout their life. They are challenged on it and repeat it. They repeat it after their apostasy from our church. It is a central part of what they believe. So I think the nature of the witnesses is such that it doesn't allow a casual, and to borrow a phrase from, you know, President Nelson, a lazy approach to the Restoration. If you want to claim that Joseph Smith is just a liar and he just made everything up, then you better come with a better explanation than just that. Because you have these shared witnesses.

Hank Smith:

00:10:46

It's not just three Gerrit, you have three, the eight, then you have Lucy Mack, then you have Mary Whitmer, then you—are all these people liars? Are-Josiah Stowell?

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:

00:10:55

And not all of them see the plates. It's true. But many more people than the ones who see the plates actually interact with and feel the plates. I was just reading an old newspaper article from the 1880s the other day. Where, this is gonna come as a surprise to all of your listeners, but Latter Day Saints were not well spoken of in the 19th century. Almost every article you read, um, it's a surprise. I know today people only say positive

things, but back then they were willing to say the vile and negative things. But, and it was a Harmony resident recounting that her brother had stopped by and actually felt the plates through a pillowcase. And it's like, so you actually have many people, who appear to have felt and seen the physical reality of the plates. And then as Hank mentioned, you have others that will witness that they actually saw them like Josiah Stowell.

00:11:50 Josiah Stowell will say that when Joseph is handing the plates through the window and he's got a covering on them, you know the covering slips off a little bit. Yeah. And he actually sees the plates. You have other people like Emma who certainly know the physical reality of the plates. She feels the plates. She moves them. She knows the plates are sitting there on her kitchen table. They are absolutely there. Now she is never allowed to look at them, to see them, but she knows he's got plates. She knows. Same with Lucy Mack. They're able to see and feel the reality of the plates. I think that's the reason why God set up the three and eight witness experiences the way he did. It's interesting because it's actually more powerful to me today than I think it would've been in the 19th century, because we become far more secular as a society.

00:12:53 We are not as inclined to believe in the miraculous, as a society. Now, of course there's all kinds of people listening that definitely do. But as a society, we've moved away from using religion to explain the unexplainable. And we've moved more toward, well, there has to be a scientific explanation for everything. So, the way that someone today who doesn't want to accept that the plates really were from God and the way that Joseph Smith really had his miraculous experiences, the way that they would try to denigrate that or to explain it away, they would take the three witness experience and they would say, well, I'm sure they all thought that they saw an angel and maybe they thought that they saw plates. But that was a vision. It was a visionary experience. And maybe it was just something where you can even hear people that are super detractors say things like, well, they were probably just all inebriated and..

Hank Smith: 00:13:56 They all had mushrooms for dinner. Right? Yeah.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:13:59 Exactly. Magic mushrooms. And so, the argument from someone for the three witnesses today, the antagonistic argument would be they all clearly seem to think that they saw it, but of course they didn't because angels don't exist and neither, neither does God or whatever. But it was a vision. It was just in their mind. They collectively in their mind thought they saw it. Okay, well then what do you say about the eight

witnesses whose experience is entirely tactile, is entirely physical, is entirely removed from the supernatural?

- John Bytheway: 00:14:34 Which was so brilliant. I mean, I love that there was a totally different way that they experienced seeing the plates, then the three witnesses. For some it was an angel and a very spiritual revelation type thing. And for others it was, see that right there? Walk up there. See that? Those are the plates right there.
- Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:14:54 Yeah. It really does answer both criticisms. Because if all you took was the eight witnesses account, which again, very difficult to refute, you have eight people who are all on record saying, I lifted plates, I felt plates. I saw plates. I hefted and know of a surety that the said Smith... They are adamant about the physical reality of these gold plates. So how would a detractor attack that? They would say, well, I'm sure Joseph had something. Maybe he found some like copper printing plates out in the woods. And even though...
- John Bytheway: 00:15:36 You know, people are always doing that.
- Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:15:30 Oh yeah, people are just discarding them everywhere. Or you know, if, if someone's even more antagonistic, they'll say, well, Joseph must have manufactured the plates. He stole a bunch of tin from a local tin smith and figured out how to work it into sheets of metal himself and created a bellows and then etched it and then found a way to tarnish the tin to make it look like it was gold.
- 00:15:59 And, look so much like gold that you could fool someone like Martin Harris who certainly knows what gold looks like. At some point it's easier to believe that an angel brought it to him because there's so many things that you have to believe to get to that point. But someone would say, well, maybe Joseph Smith has something that he either mistakenly believes is from God or that he deliberately fabricated to try to fool people it came from God. So that's how someone would respond to the eight witnesses. The problem is the three witnesses. The two arguments work together. The eight witnesses affirm that there is something. There is something physical and real, and it is not a vision. And I'm not suffering from an iron deficiency. These are real plates. The three witnesses affirm. And that something, that something that we know he has, is from God. And the translation, by the way, is correct.
- John Bytheway: 00:17:00 I love what you've done here, especially with—at the very beginning you said something about like the first sections of the

Doctrine and Covenants, the backstory is all of this—got the plates and now what do I do? And then translation and everything. The human side of Joseph comes out in this part that Lucy Mack Smith wrote. So right at the very beginning of the manual is this excerpt from Lucy Mack Smith. It was between three and four o'clock. Mrs. Whitmer, and Mr. Smith, and myself were sitting in a bedroom. I sat on the bedside. When Joseph came in, he threw himself down beside me. Okay, he's 20 something, right? You run into a room and you jump on something. Right? He threw himself down beside me. Father, mother, said he, you do not know how happy I am. The Lord has caused the place to be shown to three more besides me who have also seen an angel and will have to testify to the truth of what I have said.

00:17:54 For they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people. And I do feel as though I was relieved of a dreadful burden, which was almost too much for me to endure. But they will now have to bear a part. And it does rejoice my soul that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world. I love that. 'cause you think, yeah, what would it be like to be defending? No, really, I...And then to have these others see it and okay, you guys gotta bear your witness to the world now. And then she continues, I'm sorry. Martin Harris then came in. He seemed almost overcome with excess of joy. He then testified to what he had seen and heard as did also the others, Oliver and David. Their testimony was the same in substance as that contained in the Book of Mormon

Hank Smith: 00:18:45 And John, Gerrit. That whole circumstance right there, wouldn't he be doing this as a big act to three people who already believe him? There is no reason for him to go into the bedroom and go, oh, you can't tell you how relieved I am to people who already believe me.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:19:03 That's how wide the conspiracy goes. I mean, even Lucy's part of it.

00:19:06 So they, when they concocted this whole thing, that's the reality of is that everything about what we have from Joseph Smith's writings, all of the documents that we have, that well over 10,000 documents and the, the thousands and thousands of pages, they all point to the fact that Joseph Smith absolutely believes that he was called by God. There is no little journal entry off to the side. That's like mental note. Talk to Oliver about ways to continue to deceive people that he saw plates. I mean, you don't have any of those things. You have what appear to be someone who absolutely believes that they were

called by God, and the witnesses are in that same boat. They will lose their faith in a lot of things over the course of time. They'll lose their faith in Joseph over the course of time, but they won't lose their faith in the fact that, at least the three witnesses, that they saw an angel and they saw the plates were the eight witnesses that they hefted and lifted and leafed through those plates.

Hank Smith: 00:20:12 Gerrit, would it be fair to say that if I am reading from someone maybe online who comes at this with the premise that Joseph, he knows he is lying, he knows he's not a prophet. He knows none of this is happening. If I'm listening to someone who has that premise, can I know that they have not really done the research on this? There's no way you can make that claim because there's no evidence.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:20:37 Well, I would say first and foremost, what are that person's qualifications? I mean, before you listen to anybody who's telling you some wonderful new theory about where the Book Mormon came from, or who Joseph Smith really was, the first thing before you read, the next word should be, is this published somewhere? Did other historians see this argument and think, my goodness, this is so incredible. How is it only on a YouTube back channel? If we're trying to learn in what you're saying, you're in a secular fashion. If I wanna learn about just the facts behind Joseph Smith, well, they're not gonna be found on someone's ex-Mormon subreddit. They're not gonna be found on a place where non-experts are having a discussion. You're not going to find actual historians, who actually publish in the field that will be saying things like, it's clear that Joseph Smith was just lying about everything and that Joseph Smith was a fraud.

00:21:45 And all the evidence points to that. Now look, you can find later statements from people in Palmyra who will say, oh yeah, the Smiths, they were always known as being a bunch of liars. You, can find those, but you don't find that in Joseph Smith's writing. You don't find it in his letters. You don't find it in his journals. When you have historians who treat the prophet, who aren't Latter-day Saints, they do the historically responsible thing. And that is, take what Joseph says and believes seriously. trust. Unless you have evidence to the contrary, it's irresponsible to argue that someone doesn't believe what they say they believe. Now, it does happen in history sometimes that people will say they believe things and then in their private journal they're like, I don't believe this is all, this is I, I only said that because I was trying to win votes. That happens.

00:22:40 But it doesn't happen with Joseph Smith. We don't have him giving this sermon and then later in his journal saying, yeah, I don't actually believe any of this stuff. I'm just trying to push this along. Yeah. I would say it's very important. I know people have questions. Everyone has questions about things that they care about. And if you care about the gospel, you're going to have questions. Especially in a world where there are so many different voices that are trying to speak to us. To say, no, no. You should know this. If you knew what I knew, then you wouldn't believe. Well, if what you're trying to do is to actually gain more knowledge that it's important that you try to do it in a way that is responsible, because you wouldn't do this with any other area of your life. You wouldn't trust your medical health to just someone who had a big following online.

00:23:35 You wouldn't trust non-expert for any other area of your life. Don't trust your testimony to 'em. I have a PhD in history. I've written and published on Joseph Smith for years now, for decades at this point. Your faith should be placed in the Savior, Jesus Christ. Your faith should be in following what the current prophet of the church has to say. If you feel like I am ever saying something that is the opposite of those things, well don't listen to me. I am a historian. I have the ability to say, this is what the sources say happened in the past. Your faith should be something that you desperately guard. If this is true, if this restoration is from God and it is, but just for rhetorical purpose, if this is true, it's the most important thing in anyone's life. It's more important than literally anything if this is true.

00:24:47 So we should treat it like that. We should treat it as if it is so incredibly precious. And I would say to people who are struggling, if you find yourself spending more time reading antagonistic things about Joseph and about the early history and all these new things from someone special—their special insights that no historians publish because they're not good insights—then you are reading the actual revelations or reading the Book of Mormon. Well, what do you think is gonna happen to your faith? Do you think that if you continually go to someone who is attacking your faith, who is making claims about your faith that are detrimental, do you really think that your faith is gonna somehow increase? Of course it's not. If you really want to know, did Joseph Smith receive these revelations? Read them. Read them, and the Holy Spirit will touch your heart and tell you these are from God.

John Bytheway: 00:25:54 I think that's what the prophet Joseph wanted us to do. What was his famous statement? God hath not made anything known unto Joseph, but what he will make known unto the 12. And

even the least saint as fast as he's able to bear them, something like that. Go ask yourself. I love that.

Hank Smith: 00:26:14 Gerrit, can I ask you a question and just see where you go with this?

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:26:18 It's very dangerous, but yes.

Hank Smith: 00:26:20 Yeah. It's interesting to me that the primary antagonist argument today is the ludicrous idea that Joseph Smith had plates. How silly, how crazy, how stupid do you have to be to believe this? Yet the enemies of Joseph Smith in 18– the late 1820s

John Bytheway: 00:26:36 Mm-hmm. They all believed.

Hank Smith: 00:26:38 Were the exact opposite. They were wholeheartedly believed he had plates and wanted to get them.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:26:46 I mean, a great example of this is Lucy Harris. Lucy Harris goes down to Harmony and ransacks Emma's home. You come for a nice house visit and, she spends a day rifling through every drawer and looking under every nook and cranny of Emma's home in Harmony, desperate to find the plates. And then when she can't find them in the house, she's out digging up the yard, trying to find them. She's out everywhere looking for them. I would say that those are not the actions of someone who believes plates don't exist. But you know what happens in the aftermath of that? She goes back up to Palmyra and attempts to undertake, apparently, a legal case against Joseph Smith for fraud because he doesn't actually have any plates. And you see this wild vacillation from people breaking into Joseph's home to try to find the plates. People assaulting him as he is coming home with the plates to try to steal the plates to, well, yeah, he never had any plates.

00:27:58 I'm either committing a home invasion, or actually you don't even have any. I mean, those couldn't be further apart. And frankly, the actions of people breaking into his home and trying to find them, belies the later argument that, oh yeah, everyone knew that Joseph Smith was a liar. Everyone did just, everyone did. Really, that's why they were breaking into his house? Seems like if everyone knew that Joseph Smith was a liar, then when he said, I have gold plates, nobody would be breaking into his house.

Hank Smith: 00:28:30 Everyone would laugh and go about their business.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	00:26:33	Yeah, you would just say, I mean, look, we all probably have people in our own lives who uh, are a little bit hesitant on the truth. And when they say something, it doesn't change my life at all. They're like, oh, you know this happened. I'm like probably not. That's what I think to myself.
	00:28:45	Probably not, and I just go about my business. But it is this wild swinging pendulum from he must have something to, he lied and never had anything and they skipped the step in between. Right? That well, he had something. It's just not really from God. I mean, 'cause that would be the next step. But I've always wondered, Joseph doesn't comment on this, but it must have been frustrating that— The first two years I had these, you people are desperate to steal them from me. You are assaulting me. You are breaking into my home. I'm hiding them as I'm about to be mobbed going out of Palmyra to get out of town. And now you all say, I never had 'em in the first place. I mean, it would seem a frustrating thing, which kind of goes to the point of what John read. You know how relieved Joseph was when finally this burden wasn't his anymore.
John Bytheway:	00:29:49	Hmm.
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	00:29:50	His alone.
John Bytheway:	00:29:51	When I introduced Hank, I called him my very faithful and diligent co-host. And there are the three witnesses. There are the eight witnesses. There's Joseph Smith of course, which adds up to 12, which is kind of cool. But then we have this story about Mary Whitmer. Could you tell us more about that, Gerrit? That's where that phrase very faithful and diligent comes from— that describes Hank so well.
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	00:30:16	This is uh, in the Voices of the Restoration. It's in that second part of your lesson here. This is the experience that's later told about Mary Whitmer seeing the plates. For the Whitmers, they got involved heavily in the translation of the Book of Mormon, but in a very rapid time period. I mean, they went from not really knowing a whole lot about the translation to having the translation take place in their home and all of the accompanying— really within just days. I mean, it is Joseph and Oliver writing to David Whitmer saying, Hey, things are getting a little rough here in Harmony. There's mounting opposition. Can we move to your dad's place there in Fayette? And can we translate there? And by the way, can you bring your wagon down to get us? 'cause we don't have any way to get there. There's nothing better than the friend who not only needs your help moving but also needs your truck. I, I need, Hey, is there

any way you can help me move on Saturday? Yeah, yeah. Where are you moving? Yeah, Texas. Okay. Yeah. And I'm gonna need to borrow your truck too. Okay. That you know.

Hank Smith: 00:31:33

And can you drive? Can you drive?

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:31:35

Yeah, exactly. I need you to drive. But that's essentially what happened. And you have the accounts of David Whitmer sharing this idea with his family and they're not super happy about it. And David Whitmer, they're in the middle of their planning season and David Whitmer has the field miraculously plowed and plastered for him, and he then goes down to get them. But when he comes up, what was already the busiest time of the year, I mean, you can go find any farmer and ask them, I'll bet you guys are just kicking back in June. You have nothing to do. I grew up working on farms in Idaho. June and July are not sit back and rest times for farmers. Maybe sometime in January if you don't have any cattle, but it's the most intense time of everything that you're doing to provide for yourself.

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And so the household itself is already incredibly busy. Now, if you are a woman in the 19th century, it most likely, most often is going to fall upon you as the perceived role, to provide meals, to do laundry for not only the majority of the family, but also for the people that are your guests. Benjamin Franklin said that fish and house guests stink after three days, right? I mean, look, I don't care who you are. You could go on a trip with your best friend in the entire world. If it's a two-week trip by day eight, you're like, if he clears his throat one more time, I'll shove him out of the car, I will open the door of his...He's my best friend. I've known him my whole life. I will push him out on the highway if he clears his throat. Again, it is difficult amidst all of the hard work that already was going on on the Fayette farm, to now have two other adult males that are there, who by the way aren't doing any of the work in the fields.

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That means maybe they are sometimes, but primarily they appear to just be translating. And then of course to have Emma come later on as well. On top of all these mouths that you have to feed on top of all this laundry you have to do, now you're playing the hostess. And by the way, it's the busiest time of the entire year. I think for Mary, she had the very, very natural reaction of, what is going on? Why is my workload so much more than it was at the busiest time of the year because of some idea of these plates. And by the way, everyone says that Joseph is worshipping the devil. And you know, so all the, if she were to talk to anybody about it, they would say, well, what do

you get when you have some kind of imposter come live at your house?

00:34:29 I mean, she would've only heard negative things from the outside. And so, in the midst of this, we don't know exactly when it happened. Obviously, it happened when they were there and they were translating. It's a later reminiscent account. Someone looking back and saying this would happen. An old man comes and appears to her, what the source says, and shows her the plates and tells her that you, because she's been faithful, that she is gonna have a view of these things. You do have these other people who saw the plates and not just saw the plates, apparently saw an angel. I mean, this was not Joseph Smith Sr. that was said, Hey, here's the plates. It was apparently a miraculous visitation. There's actually in our church records, there's another record of another person seeing the plates and seeing the angel. And this is Lyman Johnson.

00:35:26 Now, Lyman Johnson is one of the original members of the Quorum of the 12 Apostles. In fact, he's actually the most original member of the Quorum of the 12 apostles because he's the first one that gets ordained in the earliest days of the church. The way they structured seniority in the quorums was not by when you were ordained, but by how old you were. So that doesn't mean that he was the most senior apostle, but he certainly was the first that was ordained. And by the way, while I'm talking about that, let me just go off on a tangent, because that's what bad historians do. The three witnesses calling was so important that as you get further in the revelations, you're going to study doctrine and covenant Section 18, where it is the three witnesses that are given the power by God to select the Quorum of the 12 apostles.

00:36:23 And in fact, they're the ones given the power to ordain them apostles. The three witnesses have a very elevated position. I digress as I knew I would. It's good to know who I really am. The experience that Lyman Johnson had was: he hears about the plates, hears about the witnesses, and apparently prays to God and asks to have the same experience. And has the same experience. So, this would've been in 1831 or 32. Joseph's already given those plates back. They're already well on their way to trying to figure out how to get things built in Zion. And Lyman Johnson has this miraculous experience that he apparently talks about publicly. You have people that are converted that he says, I saw the angel and I saw the plates. Now unfortunately, Lyman Johnson is also going to apostatize, but there are these other witnesses and..

John Bytheway:	00:37:28	Okay, is that an original source? Is that -that Lyman wrote? Or is it others that heard him talk about it?
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	00:37:34	<p>Yeah, it's primarily other people. So, Lyman Johnson, we do have people saying that they were converted by Lyman Johnson and Lyman Johnson's talking about it. But our best source for that actually comes from Brigham Young, who talks about Lyman Johnson having that experience. This is what Brigham Young, he describes this. Now of course, Brigham Young, he knows Lyman Johnson really well. And the really interesting aspect of Lyman Johnson is even though he apostatizes surrounding the whole Kirtland Safety Society fiasco, he continues to move where the church moves. He's actually one of the founders, or he considered one of the founders of Keokuk, Iowa. I don't know if anyone's ever been to Keokuk. Yeah, it's a great place to find a Walmart if you're visiting Nauvoo. But it's across the river there. He builds what people believe to be the first brick building in Keokuk, even though he is, he's not a member.</p>
	00:38:39	<p>Now, of course, other people in his family are still members like his sister, Mirinda, who's married to Orson Hyde. And Heber C. Kimball gives this account that when he was leaving to go on a mission, even though Lyman Johnson had apostatized, when Lyman Johnson found out that he was going on his mission to England, that Lyman Johnson gave him a cloak. And he was like, I wore that cloak back and forth from England, you know, multiple times. Lyman's brother Luke, also apostatized. As he was also one of the original members of the corner of the 12 Apostles. But he will come back into the church and will come to Utah and actually be the first bishop of Tooele. He's the only apostle we know that was an apostle and then became a bishop. Brigham Young, he talks about this and in 1864 sermon that he's giving, so this is in the midst of the American Civil War.</p>
	00:39:35	<p>This is what he said. I have heard Lyman Johnson say he stayed at my house after they came home from England and met with the 12. And Lyman said, if I could believe Mormonism as I once did, I would give my right hand. I would not care for one farthing, whether it was true or not, I would never ask the question. I want happiness and the peace. I want comfort and constellation in my bosom. When I believed Mormonism and Joseph was a prophet I was just as happy as any man that ever lived. And since I've given up my religion, I am as miserable as any man can be. He says he was a man that was visited with a revelation. When Joseph came to Ohio and preached to them, they believed and he was baptized. And Lyman went and he prayed for himself and he asked the Lord to give him the same</p>

manifestation. And the revelation that he gave to Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris and David Whitmer concerning the Book of Mormon. And Lyman said that the angel came to him and laid before him the plates. And he really thought he took up the plates and handled them and they conversed with each other. And soon the vision passed away. And he testified of that for years. That's Brigham Young recounting Lyman Johnson's experience there.

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| John Bytheway: | 00:40:57 | What does that tell you, Lyman? Well, what can you connect the two somehow? I know I was happier when I was. So what does that, what do you think that means? |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 00:41:08 | I have no way of explaining why. |
| Hank Smith: | 00:41:08 | I don't know if the Lord did it on purpose, but we've got our three witnesses, our eight witnesses, 11 witnesses. We've got a woman named Mary. It sounds like a reboot of the resurrection, doesn't it? |
| John Bytheway: | 00:41:23 | Was it George Mitten who wrote something about– the Book Mormon is a type of Christ? |
| Hank Smith: | 00:41:28 | Yeah. |
| John Bytheway: | 00:41:29 | He was entombed. He came out, he was wrapped in linen maybe, you know. Yeah. Like the plates were at at time. 12 witnesses plus a woman named Mary. Sometimes people ask, well, how come Emma didn't see the plates? Well, 'cause her name wasn't Mary. Because it needs to match on my PowerPoint. That's why. |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 00:41:51 | And you'll get to this when you get to section 25, you know, it really is a great background of that section. Imagine if you are Emma, you aren't kind of, sort of involved. I mean, your entire life has been completely turned upside down by the fact that you have embraced what Joseph is saying is happening to him. And not only that, you aren't some person sitting on the sidelines. You are one of the scribes of the translation. You are sitting next to Joseph as he is miraculously producing these words that you are writing down. Now, Martin Harris is gonna lose those, but you're writing them down. And the guy who lost the pages, he gets to see the plates. But you, his faithful wife, doesn't. D&C 25 will open up by saying: Murmur not because of the things that you have not seen. And the Lord says it's because there's a wise purpose in him that they've been kept back. |

00:42:52 I don't know exactly what all the wise purpose is, but I can tell you from my perspective, it makes Emma's later testimonies seem all the more honest and truthful when it regards the translation. Because she's giving these interviews, she's telling people, she's writing letters that Joseph Smith had plates and that Joseph Smith translated them since. That's the point, is to prove that her husband really was a prophet. Why doesn't she just say, oh yeah, yeah, I saw the plates. Well, is someone gonna be able to check up on that? I mean, if the point is to convince people that this is really true and she was lying about it, then why wouldn't you just tell the bigger lie? Why wouldn't you just say, oh yeah, I saw the plates. He really had them. Instead, she's very careful about it. I felt the plates, I saw the plates on the table. They were there, they were real. I touched them. I could feel the, the ridges. And to me it almost makes her testimony even more powerful because again, does Joseph have plates? Emma is saying that he does. That he absolutely has plates and she isn't lying about it. 'cause the lie would be, yeah, I saw them. That's the lie though. If you're trying to convince people, then say that you saw them, they can't check that. But in fact, she's saying they're physical, they're real. But I didn't see them.

John Bytheway: 00:44:17 We often quote Emma when she said that at the time Joseph couldn't write a well worded coherent letter. I'm just wondering if while Emma was a scribe, she was going, I have never heard Joseph talk like this. And if that was in evidence for her?

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:44:38 Part of what she says, it was a marvel to me as it was to anyone else. 'cause she knows Joseph best. She's the one who relates the story that they're translating. And Joseph dictates something about the walls of Jerusalem and Joseph stops and asks Emma because she's far more educated. Are there walls around Jerusalem? And Emma's like, yeah, of course there's walls around Jerusalem. But, you're right again for her, I think it is incredibly miraculous because I know my husband, I know what he has the ability to do and not do. He's doing something that he doesn't have the ability to do. I think for a lot of people, I think Martin Harris felt the same way. I think everyone who's connected to the miraculous translation of the Book of Mormon, they know that they're experiencing something that is beyond the ability of Joseph Smith.

Hank Smith: 00:45:38 I want to quote Emma here. There's a great article, I'm sure both of you have read it. Our friend Anthony Sweat wrote, **Hefted and Handled: Tangible Interactions with Book of Mormon Objects**. He quotes Emma, he says, other than Joseph Smith, the person who had the most interaction with the tangible reality of the plates was the prophet's wife Emma

Smith. She later recalled that after Joseph obtained the record, the plates lay in a box under our bed for months. But I never felt at liberty to look at them. In a later interview with her son, Joseph Smith III, Emma recounted that when she and Joseph arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania, she had given Joseph a small linen tablecloth to wrap the plates in. Emma explained that the plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in this cloth. She also recalled, I once felt of the plates as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline in shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book. That's pretty specific. She says later in the interview, My belief, this is what Gerrit just said, these are her words. My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity. I have not the slightest doubt of it.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:46:59 Yeah, she bears a powerful witness and knows it closer than any detractor who will try to say that, that he didn't really have them. Right. Again, another person that you have to stack up in the long list of everyone who's part of the conspiracy. If you're claiming that Joseph didn't really have plates and didn't really translate them.

Hank Smith: 00:47:22 And is willing to go through as difficult of a life as anyone.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:47:26 William McClellan, another one of the original members of the Quorum of the 12 Apostles who will also apostatize and, and he becomes quite a problematic figure over the course of his life. In his various attempts to start his own church, he recounts something that one of the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon goes through in Missouri. He talks about just how awful it was for Hiram Page, when the mobbing and the violence happened. This is what he said, he said in 1833 when mobbing ran triumphant in Jackson County, Missouri, I and Oliver Cowdery fled from our homes for fear of personal violence. On Saturday the 20th of July, the mob dispersed, agreeing to meet again on the next Tuesday. They offered \$80 reward for anyone who would deliver Cowdery or McClellan in independence on Tuesday. I think he's quite proud of himself. I don't know if they wanted him.

00:48:22 I said to them, brethren, I have never seen an open vision in my life, but you men say you have, therefore you positively know. Now you know that our lives are in danger every hour. If the mob can only catch us, tell me in the fear of God, is that Book of Mormon true? Cowdery looked at me with solemnity depicted in his face and said, brother William, God sent his holy angel to

declare the truth of the translation to us and therefore we know. And though the mob kill us, yet we must die declaring its truth. David Whitmer said, Oliver has told you the solemn truth for we could not be deceived. I most truly declare to you it's truth, said I, boys, I believe you. I can see no object for you to tell me falsehood. Now when our lives are in danger, eight men testified to the handling of that sacred pile of plates and from which Joseph Smith read off the translation of that heavenly book.

00:49:21 So here's another account he gives. So that's with David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery. This with Hiram Page at the same time. While the mob was raging in Jackson County, Missouri in 1833, some young men ran down Hiram Page in the woods, one of the eight witnesses, and commenced beating him and pounding him with whips and with clubs. He begged, but there was no mercy. They said that he was a damn Mormon and they meant to beat him to death. But finally, one of them said to him, if you'll deny that damn book, we'll let you go. Said he, how can I deny what I know to be true? Then they pounded him again when they thought he was about to breathe his last, they said to him, now what do you think of your God when he don't save you? Well said he, I believe in God.

00:50:16 Well said, one of the most intelligent among them. I believe the damn fool will stick to it through until we kill him. Let us let him go. But his life was nearly run out. He was confined to his bed for a length of time. So much for a man who knows for himself knowledge is beyond faith or doubt, it is a positive certainty. So here Hyrum Page is brutally beaten over the fact that he refuses to recant his experience at seeing the Book of Mormon, being one of the witnesses to it. He will actually be asked later in life directly. So we actually have a letter from Hyrum Page. So that's William McClellan saying what happened, and he appears to be a witness of some of those events. Here we have a letter from Hiram Page where he's asked specifically about whether or not you still say that you saw those gold plates.

00:51:12 This is in 1847. He says, you want to know my faith relative to the Book of Mormon and the winding up of wickedness as to the Book of Mormon? It would be doing injustice to myself and to the work of God of the last days, to say that I could know a thing to be true in 1830. And to know that same thing to be false in 1847. To say my mind was so treacherous that I'd forgotten what I saw. To say that a man of Joseph's ability, who at that time did not know how to pronounce the word Nephi, could write a book of 600 pages as correct as the Book of Mormon without supernatural power. And to say that those

holy angels who came and showed themselves to me as I was walking through the field to confirm me in the work of the Lord of the last days, three of whom came to me afterwards and sang a hymn in their own pure language. Yea, it would be treating the God of heaven with contempt to deny these testimonies with too many others to mention here. So, Hiram Page, even though we always list him as one of the eight witnesses who only saw the plates, he says he actually also saw angels. That angels also came to him individually to tell him that the plates were from God.

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| John Bytheway: | 00:52:34 | Wow. And sang a hymn with him. |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 00:52:36 | I don't know what the hymn was, it was probably, you know, in the leafy treetops, I don't know. |
| John Bytheway: | 00:52:42 | Yeah. When your life is on the line, and I think of Joseph in Liberty jail too. You know, just, okay, never mind guys. Okay. Forget it. And when they're beating you with the intent to beat you to death like Hyrum Page and they give you a chance. I mean the distinction that you made earlier, people left the church, but they never left their testimony of what they saw. That's personalities. But they never left. No, I saw the plates. I saw the Book of Mormon. |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 00:53:10 | Yeah, you, you had a similar reaffirming of their testimony from Hyrum Smith after the horrors of the incarceration in Missouri, when he is finally able to get out of prison, he writes a letter to the church where he recounts a lot of things that happen. But also he places it in the context of being someone who actually felt and lifted the plates. He says, you may judge what my feelings were when I escaped from those whose feet were fast to shed blood. And when I again was privileged to see my beloved family who had suffered so many privations and afflictions, not only while in Far West, but likewise in moving away in the inclement season of the year. Thus, I've endeavored to give you a short account of my suffering while in the state of Missouri. But how inadequate is language to express the feelings of my mind, while under them, knowing that I was innocent of crime and that I'd been dragged from my family at a time when my assistance was most needed. |
| | 00:54:18 | If you remember, Hyrum's wife was incredibly ill during the entirety of his incarceration. So sick that she couldn't even come visit him. At least not regularly. So things are going to be a problem when you're being driven out of your home by a mob. They're even more of a problem when your family's already not well to begin with. But he said I had been abused. I was thrust |

into a dungeon and confined for months on account of my faith and the testimony of Jesus Christ. However, I thank God that I felt a determination to die rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had born testimony to. Whatever my lot had been cast, I can assure my beloved brethren that I wasn't able to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself as ever I did in my life. My confidence in God was likewise unshaken. I knew that He who suffered me along with my brethren to be thus tried that He could and that He would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies. And in His own due time, He did so. For which I desire to bless and praise his holy name.

John Bytheway: 00:55:33

Hmm. So, you got a testimony when times were easy and you've got a testimony when times are really, really tough. It didn't change 'cause it was, it was what happened.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:55:48

And for these witnesses, I mean they're going to have the stink of Mormonism, right? That the antagonism surrounding Latter-day Saints hanging around their neck their entire lives. Even after they leave the faith, the fact that they were ever affiliated with it is going to be something that Oliver Cowdery likely loses his election. As he's trying to be elected to a state office, he loses by only a few votes because his opponent ties the fact that he used to be a Mormon leader around his neck at a time when Latter-day Saints are thoroughly despised and hated. So, you don't have any reason for these men to continue to defend their testimonies even after they're out of the church. Now, we don't have records from all of them. Christian Whitmer and Peter Whitmer, Jr., they die so early in the restoration. They are the Whitmer that don't apostatize because they died before the great Whitmer Apostasy happens in 1837, 1838.

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And so we don't have records of them later in life talking about it. You have Oliver Cowdery saying, you know, these are great men who, who always maintained their testimony. And then with some others you don't have direct statements. You have people, like their children, saying, oh yes, my dad always affirmed that he saw the plates. But the records we have is that these witnesses are certain that they saw plates, certain that this is a work from God, and certain that the Book of Mormon is the word of God.

John Bytheway: 00:57:26

I like what you just said because I think that reading the Book of Mormon 200 years later and seeing the testimony of the witnesses, we forget that they signed that and then they had to go on with their lives and they had to go on living in their communities and they had to go on interacting with people in

their communities and like you said, and running for office and then having the consequences of that.

- Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 00:57:48 I'm sure that you have many listeners to your podcast who are in areas where there are not very many Latter-day Saints where they're the only one in the high school, or they're the only ones that they know that they're driving 25 minutes to get to the closest church building, or even further. Probably at times they feel like they are isolated and alone in their testimony and in their belief in the Restoration. Early witnesses, in fact, all of the early members are similar in a lot of ways. These men are signing their names to those documents in the summer of 1829. There's not 17 and a half million members in the summer of 1829. There's not even a church in the summer of 1829. There's no evidence that anyone is going to believe any of this at all. Outside of the Smith family, outside of the Knight family and outside of the Whitmer family people who believe are pretty few and far between.
- 00:58:57 So they are in the face of all kinds of opposition, all kinds of nay saying and comments that denigrate and attack their character. They are saying, we believe this to be true. People today like to believe that the leaders of the church, they testify that they believe just because that's, you know, that's why they're important. And now they're famous and they're, of course they're gonna say that because they're part of it. Just first of all, a terrible argument. But second of all, in the earliest days of the church, no one knew that it was going to be successful at all. Certainly, the people making fun of it when it was organized thought that it was going to collapse and it didn't collapse and it continued to grow. These witnesses, it's just a great point you make, John, that they made these testimonies in a world that thoroughly rejected everything they said and they didn't have the stability of the church to lean back on and say, well, at least there's these other people that believe. They had just their families, they had Joseph, and a whole world that said, this is all lies.
- 01:00:09 The book's never gonna get published. The book, if it is published, no one's going to read it. You're all servants of Satan and all these other things that are being said and they still sign their names to that document.
- Hank Smith: 01:00:19 Sometimes we think they can see the future, they can see this huge church so that leans on them and loves them. None of that, none of that is reality to them.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	01:00:30	My guess is Hiram Page didn't know as he was being beaten to death by a Missouri mob that he'd be mentioned in a podcast talking about his testimony. That's what my guess is.
Hank Smith:	01:00:44	He's sitting there like, he's like, I can't deny. What will they say on the show? Yeah. Uh, right.
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	01:00:51	Yeah. One more I wanna share is John Whitmer. John Whitmer gets asked, so he's one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon and John Whitmer apostatizes, he's not a member of the church. So later in life someone asked him, come on, you didn't really have plates. We all know. These later witnesses, by the way, when they're making these comments in the 1850s and sixties and seventies and eighties. They are making them in a world that believes, as a scientific fact, that Joseph Smith stole the Book of Mormon text from the Solomon Spalding manuscript. Because in the mid 19th century, all the way up to the end of it, basically, the claim made by antagonist Eber Howe and Philastus Hurlbut, the entirety of the Book of Mormon actually came from this former preacher's novel that he wrote. That was so widely believed that if you read encyclopedia entries, the Encyclopedia Britannica from the 1860s, it will say that the real origin of the Book of Mormon is from the Solomon Spalding manuscript.
	01:02:00	So when these witnesses are being asked, do you still believe? Do you still hold to your testimony in the 1860s and 1870s? They're being asked in the context of everybody knows that it's a fraud that everyone knows. We, we know. It just came from a book. We know, we know. Joseph just copied it from a book. So just say he copied it from a book. This is the letter that John Whitmer wrote: As for giving all the particulars that I know of the Book of Mormon. I could not on one sheet of paper therefore permit me to be brief. Second, from what you have written, I conclude that you've read The Book of Mormon together with the testimonies that they're thereto attached, in which testimonies you read my name subscribed as one of the eight witnesses to said book. That testimony was, is, and will be true, hence forth and forever. And he underlines was, will, true in his letter back.
Hank Smith:	01:03:00:	It's fantastic.
John Bytheway:	01:03:02	And you talked about this in our last episode about the Solomon Spalding manuscript. So, people can listen to that. But that's what everybody thought. Ah, that's where it came from.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	01:03:09	So you have to have a way to explain where the Book of Mormon came from. You know, as I talked about in our previous episode. Early on it was easy to just simply say only a stupid person would believe, but then thousands of people believe. So, you can't just say that everyone's stupid. I mean you can, but it's not a terribly great argument. They want to have what they think is a plausible explanation. This claim made by Philastus Hurlbut, that most of the Book of Mormon and all the names in it and all the major things in it, come from this novel that he claims to have found. It gives people who want to have an excuse for why they reject the Book of Mormon and why they allow this kind of venom towards the Latter-Day Saints, why it's okay to persecute them.
	01:03:58	It gives them this justification. Well, your whole religion's just a, it's a fraud. So, so yeah, of course we can persecute you 'cause your whole religion's made up on this fake idea of a book. And then when they eventually find the actual Solomon Spalding manuscript, there's not even names that are similar. It's in no way similar to the actual Book of Mormon. That whole argument dies down. And there has to be new arguments made about where the book actually comes from because the Book of Mormon today is still not just a testament of Jesus. It is the greatest evidence that Joseph Smith was who he said he was. Where did that book come from? And yeah, people invent all kinds of fun theories. They want to try to find a way to explain it. They want some Unisom. They wanna be able to sleep at night.
	01:04:53	They want to be able to figure out, well, this is where it came from. So, they'll run the gambit from saying, well, I don't really think the Book of Mormon's that great a literature. Okay, your opinion's duly noted and also wrong. next. Well, I think that Sidney Rigdon actually secretly was converted in Ohio previously and concocted the scheme with Joseph. And secretly went there and they secretly wrote it all and then he went back and then pretended to get converted. Look, I guess if that's what helps you sleep at night, you're gonna need several sleeping pills because the reality is you don't have any evidence for that; Outside of people later making conjecture and making claims. You don't have any contemporary sources for that. And I think that that's the reason why the Book of Mormon will always be this focal point of people trying to attack the church because what do I do with it?
	01:05:50	And very often these witnesses, they may not be being beaten in a field in Missouri anymore, but they are very often attacked by people who know that the witness's testimonies undermine

their antagonistic attack. You wanna say that Joseph Smith just made it all up. But what you're really saying is that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer and Martin Harris and all of the eight witnesses and Mary Whitmer and all of the other people, you're, what you're really saying is they all collectively made it all up because they all had these shared either physical or visionary or both experiences.

- Hank Smith: 01:06:31 I just wanted to throw a couple other quotes out there that I've brought today. This is again from, Hefted and Handled, that article from Anthony Sweat. He tries to create, I think a comprehensive list of everyone. I mean, the list gets longer and longer. Every time you look at it, you're like, oh, that person said that. Oh, that you got Catherine Smith who said she moved and hefted to the plates in a box. She rippled the fingers of the edges of the plates. You've got William Smith who was a teenager at the time. He said he was there. You've got a Mr. Beeman, maybe an Alva Beeman that Martin Harris says, oh yeah, he lifted the box. Isaac Hale says he lifts the box in it. And I love this one. This is from a different article called Evaluating the Book of Mormon Witnesses by our friend Steven Harper.
- 01:07:20 The last surviving of the three witnesses, David Whitmer, spoke for all of them in 1887. I will say once more to all mankind that I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof. I also testified to the world that neither Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris ever at any time denied their testimony. They both died reaffirming the truth of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I was present at the death bed of Oliver Cowdery and his last words were, brother David, be true to your testimony of the Book of Mormon. Gerrit, we could keep going.
- Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 01:08:02 Yeah, when Oliver Cowdery, before he died, when he is re-baptized into the church and speaks to the conference of the church, assembled there in Iowa, he again refutes many of these false claims. Friends and brethren, my name is Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery. In the early history of the church, I stood identified with her and was one in her councils. I wrote with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon, save a few pages as it fell from the lips of the prophet Joseph Smith as he translated it, by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, or as it is called by that book, Holy Interpreters. I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands, the gold plates from which it was translated. And I also beheld the interpreters. That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr. Spalding did not write it. I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the prophet.

Hank Smith:	01:09:05	It's wonderful. And I, I love what you said earlier, the frustration of Joseph Smith saying, you were attacking me when you thought I had them and now you're attacking me again saying he never had them.
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	01:09:16	I find Doctrine and Covenants section five, right around what we're studying here, that the experience of Doctrine and Covenants section five is a very helpful thing for all of us when it comes to our own faith and the experience of miracles and witnesses. Because our tendency and our belief is to think, well, if I saw the gold plates, if I had an angel appear to me, then I would believe. I mean, why are all these other people getting miracles? Where's mine? That if only I had something powerful and miraculous, then I would believe and I could be convinced that this is true. And what the Lord teaches Joseph Smith in Doctrine and Covenants section five, is Martin Harris desperately wants to see the plates. Joseph wants to show him the plates 'cause there's impending legal issues surrounding it. What he tells him in in section five verse seven is: Behold if they will not believe my words, they would not believe you, my servant Joseph if it were possible that you should show them all these things which I've given, which I've committed unto you.
	01:10:29	People will say, even antagonists or non Latter-day Saints will say, well, I mean I guess if I saw the gold plates, then I'd believe. Why don't you show me the plates? Well, actually you wouldn't believe because the same thing that makes you not accept the revelations as being the word of God. Or reading the Book of Mormon, the same thing that makes you not believe that that is another testament of Christ. The same thing that would make you see the plates and immediately start to say, well, probably he manufactured them. The reality is we know throughout the course of scripture there are people who witness incredible miracles and just as incredibly immediately turn their back. I love the steadfastness of the witnesses. They are certainly, many of them disaffected from the church for a time, but in that disaffection, they will not deny that plates are real and that they saw an angel.
John Bytheway:	01:11:31	Quick question, Hank, where's the Tony Sweat article?
Hank Smith:	01:11:34	It's on the Religious Study Center. Yeah, we can just link it in our show notes though. The great Lisa, we'll take care of that. Here's a fun one that Dr. Sweat mentions. He shares an 1870 account from Edward Stevenson, a church member in Utah who traveled back to Palmyra, New York. He said he questioned a local farmer about the origin of the Book of Mormon. The man told him, oh, he had seen some good sized flat stones that had

rolled down and lay near the bottom of the hill. That had occurred after the contents of the box had been removed. And these stones were doubtless the ones that formally composed the box the Book of Mormon came from. So, this farmer said, oh yeah, that's where they all rolled down to the bottom. They're not there anymore, but I remember seeing them. Isn't that great?

John Bytheway: 01:12:20 I wish that were in the Church History Museum. That'd be nice to have this.

Hank Smith: 01:12:22 Yeah. Yeah. Gerrit, I know a question that comes up when I'm talking about the three witnesses, especially from someone who's pretty new to church history. They say something to the effect of, well, how could these three have left the church at all after having this incredible experience? How could they ever walk away? How do you address that? I'm sure you've had that question before.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 01:12:49 First and foremost, life is a long time and early 19th century, Latter-day Saints faced enormous amounts of difficulties and problems. When you're a Latter-day Saint in 2025, there's a pretty established way that things have been done and that they are going to be done. But for them, they don't have that luxury. They don't know what the next 200 years are going to bring. They don't have that inertia and that social construct around them. There's a lot more gray areas when it comes to things. In the sense that one of the issues that some of the witnesses find, you know, that really contributes to some of their leaving the church is the difficulty surrounding the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society. And then also the difficulties for people like David Whitmer and John Whitmer of trying to run the church in Missouri when you're a thousand miles away from the rest of the church.

01:13:56 So if you write a letter to Joseph Smith and say, Hey, we really need to know what we should do about this. At best, you are two months away from an answer. Well, that becomes pretty difficult to respond to things as they come up. So, there were stresses, there were jealousies, there were tensions. Eventually these things are going to culminate in some people leaving the church or being excommunicated. And the Whitmers were a very, very tight knit family. They all came into the church together and they all went out of the church together. Oliver Cowdery and Hiram Page are both married into the Whitmer family by the time of David Whitmer's excommunication. It would take too long to go through each individual case, but in the heat of the very, very difficult years of 1837 and 1838, that's

when most of these happen. That can be troubling to someone like, well, I don't understand.

01:15:01 Why would David Whitmer leave the church? Well, when we're talking about the testimony of the Book of Mormon, it should only strengthen what it is we believe about it. Because David Whitmer is saying that he thinks Joseph Smith's no longer a prophet, that Joseph has gone too far, that—David Whitmer is saying many negative things about Joseph Smith. Well, the easiest way to destroy Joseph Smith would've been for David Whitmer to say Joseph never had any plates. I just told people that he did, but he didn't have any. It's not like I saw an angel. He wrote that and then put my name on it. I never saw an angel. Instead, his criticisms of Joseph Smith about how the church was being run, about how the finances were handled. His criticisms of Joseph Smith always stopped incredibly short of the Book of Mormon and the gold plates. That, as David Whitmer testifies: And so, we see that the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man.

01:16:16 And that's him late in life saying that. That's David Whitmer nearly deceased, affirming despite his criticisms that Joseph absolutely had plates, that they absolutely came from God and that they were absolutely translated by the power of God.

Hank Smith 01:16:35 He doesn't seem to connect the Book of Mormon and the church together like we do.

Gerrit Dirkmaat 01:16:39 I think for early Latter-day Saints, remember they're all coming out of a Protestant worldview for all of these Latter-day Saints, they were all Protestants before they became Latter-day Saints. And for them, the written word of scripture trumped everything on earth. So your pastor might be a great pastor, but if the Bible says something different than what he said, pastor's wrong. What had developed for 300 plus years in Protestantism at this point was this idea that the scriptures alone contained the word of God.

01:17:18 And you might have incredible teachers, you might have the greatest philosopher, thinker, teacher, wonderful believer, but if the scriptures disagree, then the only source of divine and revealed knowledge is actually the scriptures. I honestly think that that plays a lot into this. It was really hard for people coming out of this sola scriptura worldview to say, actually there's a person, there's a prophet who trumps the scriptures. That's hard for some Latter-day Saints today. It is hard for Latter-day Saints today, when a prophet teaches something that

they think is contradicted by the scriptures. Imagine if you were born and raised to believe that nothing is true outside of the scriptures. You actually see this very early on with Oliver Cowdery. In 1830, the church is organized and they present what is today Doctrine and Covenants section 20 to the first church conference. So, the church is organized in April.

01:18:27 Then they have a conference in June and in that June conference they present Doctrine and Covenants Section 20, uh, which you know is the Articles and Covenants of the church. They present it to the church. The church all approves it. I mean, I say the church, it's like 25 people, whatever, however many people there, there's like 50 people there probably. But the church, you know, they all unanimously approve it as absolutely being the word of God. Well then Joseph goes back home to Harmony, thinks everything's going fine. And he gets a letter from Oliver Cowdery where Oliver Cowdery accuses him of teaching false doctrine. And what he's doing is he's pitting the Book of Mormon against Joseph's revelation, which is D&C 20. Because in Cowdery's mind the written words in the Book of Mormon, they trump anything that Joseph says. And that's a normal and natural mentality for Oliver to have.

01:19:22 'cause that's what he would've been told from the time he was a child. And it took, only with great difficulty, Joseph says when he goes up to Fayette, he finds it's not just Oliver Cowdery that thinks that he is taught false doctrine. It's the entire Whitmer clan. And Joseph says he couldn't even get them to reason calmly on the subject. So, he tries to bring it up and they're yelling at him apparently. So that's why I kind of have a soft spot in my heart for Christian Whitmer because he is one of the eight witnesses. He doesn't apostatize because he passes away before the great Whitmer apostasy. But Joseph says, at length, I was able to convince Christian Whitmer that the revelation was accurate. And with his help, I was able to convince everyone else. That always gives me a little bit of a soft spot in my heart for Christian that when the whole rest of his family was absolutely opposed to Joseph, Christian was still on Joseph's side.

01:20:21 So it does make you wonder, had Christian lived, would he have apostatized with the others? I don't know. He'd stood up to his family once before, maybe he would again. But that early on, that was in 1830. It arose because of this question that frankly all Latter-day Saints to one degree or another have to deal with. And that is, we are not traditional Protestants. We don't believe that all the truth that you have to have or all truth that exists is in the Bible or even in the Book of Mormon. There are many

things that are true that aren't in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is absolutely the word of God, but it doesn't describe baptisms for the dead in the Book of Mormon. That doesn't mean that the baptisms for the dead are false. It means that truth is continually being revealed.

01:21:20 And I think that that played a lot in those difficulties because it's easy for us to say, I don't know what you guys are doing. If there's a problem between what you think and the prophet, you go with prophet. And their world is not that. Now of course the Lord's gonna say that. He's gonna repeat it in multiple revelations, but you often do find people citing scripture as the reason why they're breaking with Joseph as the justification. There are a lot of different reasons and reconciliation for Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery, takes a very long portion of their life. Joseph will be dead before that happens. Now Oliver is actually probably on his way back before Joseph dies. He's already in correspondence with Latter-day Saints. He's already expressing positive things about Latter-day Saints and expresses great regret when he finds out that Joseph was murdered.

01:22:20 But I think the takeaway from the fact that the three witnesses and then some of the eight witnesses Apostatized, the real takeaway is, what greater way to prove that their testimony is true. If they no longer are in the church, they no longer follow Joseph. They no longer think that he is a prophet, but they're certain that those gold plates are from God. And they are certain that that translation is from God. In a different sort of a way, proves the point of what they're saying when they no longer have anything to gain. They are certain that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. Certain that they saw plates, certain that they saw angels.

Hank Smith: 01:23:06 I wonder. Joseph Smith, to a lot of Latter-day Saints today is larger than life. We sing the songs right and we have the movies about him and you know Martin Harris and the Whitmers and Oliver. They're dealing with the human Joseph from day to day. And I wonder if that has any impact.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 01:23:26 I am sure that it does. They say don't meet your heroes. Right? I mean, I think the reality of life is we're all sinners. We all make mistakes. We all say things we wish we hadn't said. We all do things we wish we hadn't done. We all at some point are desperate on our knees begging God to forgive us. And I do think that that is more difficult. To know someone who is doing these great things, but to also see them when they are not so great to see them when they're angry to see them. I think that that human nature, I'm sure plays a part in it. So maybe he is

also wrong about whether or not we should be putting money into this property.

Hank Smith: 01:24:15

I saw him lose his temper.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 01:24:17

Got in a fist fight with William Smith, which frankly I wish I could trade places with Joseph. I'd be ready for that punch. The nature of life is that it's messy. We don't know everything that's going on inside someone's mind. We don't know what things they are struggling with. We don't know whatever the actual cause of them saying, you know what? That's it. I'm stepping away from the faith. They are not stepping away entirely. They're stepping away from being in the church, but they're not stepping away from being certain of their testimonies.

Hank Smith: 01:24:57

It reminds me of Elder Bednar telling the story of being called as president of Rick's College. And his son looked at him and said, really? You? We know the people closest to us. We see them.

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 01:25:10

And no one has lived a perfect life outside of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hank Smith: 01:25:14

Right?

Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: 01:25:15

Which means that any single person that we ever take a close enough examination to, we are going to find their flaws and we are going to, if we choose to throw off whatever mantle of charity we should be wearing and attack them on the grounds of every little thing that they did wrong. But Joseph taught the Sisters in the Relief Society in 1842, how important mercy was. That if you would, that God would be merciful to you. You need to be merciful to others. It is a great marker of how close we actually are to the Savior. How willing we are to forgive others their faults. How willing we are to say, yeah, he's not perfect, but he's still a good guy. Yeah, she's made some mistakes, but she's still a wonderful person. Our willingness to bear with, as Joseph said, bear with the faults of mankind.

01:26:13

When you're close to the Lord, you desperately want everyone to be able to repent. When we've been wronged and we're upset, we want justice. We want it and we want it bad. President Faust once said, I am frank to admit, when I'm on my knees, I don't ever pray for justice for myself. Right, he, he's only praying for mercy. We need to offer that same grace. Every one of us wants God to judge us based upon our best day,

based upon who we were. When we finally left some sins behind the one time I finally got it right. Please God see me as that son and not the sinning one. And yet often when we look at other people, we do the exact opposite. We say who they are on their worst day is who they are and who they will forever be. Joseph very much believes in the Atonement, so that's part of the reason why he has arms open for people to return. He's excited at the prospect of people returning.

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| John Bytheway: | 01:27:27 | There's a story told about Stephen Covey that he received an assignment where he would be in touch with some of the highest leaders of the church. Somebody said, well, don't let it shake your testimony when you get to know these people. And Stephen Covey's best answer, he said, they didn't give me my testimony and they can't take it away. I like that idea of what this is all about is a testimony of The Book Mormon, is a testimony of Jesus Christ. It's another witness of Christ. And that's what this is the whole purpose of the book Mormon, this other testament of Christ, which is the stated purpose. |
| Hank Smith: | 01:28:05 | Yeah. Gerrit, before we let you go, tell us how things are going over at the Standard of Truth podcast with Dr. LeDuc. Give us an update. |
| Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat: | 01:28:14 | Well, things are going good. I mean a paltry pittance compared to the Follow Him Podcast. But Standard of Truth Podcast is a podcast that is designed to try to help people answer some of the questions they have about church history. To help people increase in their faith and knowledge. And yes, my co-host Dr. Richard LeDuc, for a long time he was, you know, just MBA Richard. He was working on his PhD and he completed it and defended. So now we get to give him that title and you know, I joked around with him on one of our last episodes that now he's just making everyone call him Doctor, you know, you're in the drive through of McDonald's and they're like, will that be all sir? And he is like, will that be all Doctor? |
| Hank Smith: | 01:29:00 | Oh, that's great. If anybody wants to go check out Standard of Truth, you can go to standardoftruth.com . Uh, you can get it wherever you get your podcasts. And it is wonderful and we appreciate Gerrit taking his time from his podcast to come over and help us with ours. |
| John Bytheway: | 01:29:14 | We hope a lot of people will check out Standard of Truth. Like it's so wonderful that there are so many voices of the restoration, right? Hank that, there's so many voices that are faithful, that are rejoicing in what we've been given right now. |

Hank Smith:	01:29:29	No, I don't think we see Gerrit for a couple weeks, but he'll be back. I think we're gonna talk about Emma Hill Smith and her history. So, I'm excited for that. Wonderful.
John Bytheway:	01:29:37	In <i>Preach My Gospel</i> , there's a couple of paragraphs there that I really like and it says, throughout history, God has reached out to his people and made his well-known through a prophet. Throughout history, people have had a pattern of rejecting him. And then it says it's consider our evidence that God has reached out again to a prophet. The prophet's name is Joseph Smith and the evidence is the Book of Mormon, which you can read about and pray about. Yeah, I love that idea. He's reached out again and this time he brought 600 pages with him. Right? Consider our evidence and that's what we've been talking about today. Thank you Gerrit for being with us again today. We'll look forward to the next time.
Dr. Gerrit Dirkmaat:	01:30:23	Thank you so much for having me.
John Bytheway:	01:30:25	Absolutely. Please join us again for another episode of Follow Him.