

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

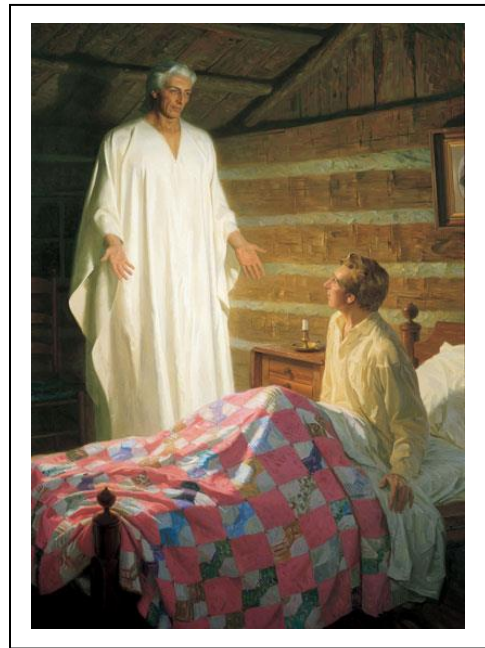
Moroni and the Golden Plates

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1

Mormon apologists have long since claimed that attacks against the Book of Mormon have experienced a kind of “mission creep” since its publication in 1830.¹ They suggest that Mormon critics began by labeling the Book of Mormon “bungling and stupid,”² Joseph Smith a “perfect ignoramus,”³ and they claimed that “any blunderhead, with the Bible at his side, might have written [it] . . .”⁴

One of their latest claims is that as Mormon Church membership mushroomed, and it became clear the Book of Mormon is pretty complex, a second theory necessarily emerged: namely a vast conspiracy with multiple authors nefariously re-working a plagiarized text.⁵ This so-called Solomon Spalding-forgery theory flourished for decades, but lost favor in 1884—or so they claim—when the original Spalding manuscript (said to have been forged) was re-discovered. Spalding’s novella and the Book of Mormon were found to have as much in common as John’s Revelation and *Don Quixote*.⁶



¹ Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction: ‘In the Hope That Something Will Stick’: Changing Explanations for the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): xi–xv.

² “The Mormons,” *Religious Herald*, April 9, 1840; cited in Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 86.

³ David I. Burnett, *Evangelical Inquirer*, 7 March 1831, 218, 219, in Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: self-published, 1942, 1951), 2:112.

⁴ Daniel P. Kidder, *Mormonism and the Mormons* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1842), 330, in Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:199.

⁵ Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville: by the author, 1834), 100, in Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:131; Orvilla S. Belisle, *The Prophets; or, Mormonism Unveiled* (Philadelphia: Smith, 1855), 53–55, Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:202–3.

⁶ L. L. Rice, letter, 28 March 1885, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1914), 68, in Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:210. For more on the Spalding theory, see Matthew Roper, “The Mythical ‘Manuscript Found’,” *FARMS Review* 17,

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These same Mormon apologists say that critics, more recently, have lauded Joseph Smith as a “religious genius”⁷—*evil* genius to some⁸—whose book teems with “impressive literary, theological, psychological, and spiritual qualities,”⁹ or one whose delusory motives for writing it are best explained by esoteric psychoanalysis.¹⁰ Whether Joseph was an ignoramus, madman, or an evil religious genius, critics maintain that the Book of Mormon cannot be a historical record taken from Golden Plates.

2

In 1820, Joseph Smith had his First Vision in which he claimed that he saw God the Father and Jesus Christ. A few years later he said that he was visited by an angel who identified himself as Moroni and told him of an ancient record. Joseph was shown the location of the gold plates in this vision. After four annual visits from the Angel Moroni, Joseph Smith was entrusted with the plates and the Urim and Thummim for the purpose of translation.

THE GLASS LOOKER

That being said, the second vision of Joseph Smith of the Angel Moroni and the giving of the Golden Plates must be understood in light of his treasure digging activities.¹¹ From about 1819, Smith regularly practiced scrying, a form of divination in which a “seer” looked into a seer stone to receive supernatural knowledge.¹² Smith usually practiced crystal gazing by putting a stone at the bottom of a white stovepipe hat, putting his face over the hat to block the light, then divining information from the stone.¹³ Smith and his

no. 2 (2005): 7–140; Matthew Roper, “Myth, Memory, and ‘Manuscript Found,’” *FARMS Review* 21, no. 2 (2009): 179–223; Matthew Roper and Paul J. Fields, “The Historical Case against Sidney Rigdon’s Authorship of the Book of Mormon,” *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 113–125. **NOTE: These recommended resources are Mormon, and therefore biased.**

⁷ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 80, 96.

⁸ Loftes Tryk, *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* (Redondo Beach, CA: Jacob’s Well Foundation, 1988).

⁹ Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), vii.

¹⁰ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), ix, in Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:420; James Black, *New Forms of the Old Faith* (London: Nelson and Sons, 1948), 248. Black’s analysis was that Smith was “not a deceiver, rather a person with a dissociated personality.”

¹¹ Harrod, Allen F. (2011), *Deception by Design: the Mormon Story* (Bloomington, Indiana), 83.

¹² “When Joseph Smith first began to use his seer or “peep” stone he employed the folklore familiar to rural America. The details of his rituals and incantations are unimportant because they were commonplace, and Joseph gave up money-digging when he was twenty-one for a profession far more exciting.” (Brodie 1971, 21).

¹³ Harris, Martin (1859), “Mormonism—No. II”, *Tiffany’s Monthly*, 5 (4), 164; Mather, Frederic G. (1880), “Early Days of Mormonism”, *Lippincott’s Magazine*, 26 (152), 199. According to an account of an interview with Joseph Smith Sr., the 14-year-old Joseph borrowed a stone from a person working as a local crystal

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father achieved "something of a mysterious local reputation in the profession—mysterious because there is no record that they ever found anything despite the readiness of some local residents to pay for their efforts."¹⁴

In 1822, Willard Chase, neighbor of the Smiths, employed Joseph and Alvin to assist him in digging a well. In the process of digging, Joseph Smith discovered a strange looking stone resembling a child's foot. Young Joseph studied the stone, placed it in his old hat and buried his head in the rim, claiming he could see things by means of it. The stone has been described as having "a whitish, glassy appearance, though opaque, resembling quartz."¹⁵ After borrowing the stone from Chase, Smith established a reputation for being able to discover hidden or lost items, a reputation fostered by his boastful family.¹⁶

In late 1825, Josiah Stowel, a well-to-do farmer from South Bainbridge, Chenango County, New York, who had been searching for a lost Spanish mine near Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania with another seer, traveled to Manchester to hire Smith "on account of having heard that he possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye."¹⁷ Smith agreed to take the job of assisting Stowel and Hale, and he and his father worked with the Stowel-Hale team for approximately one month, attempting, according to their contract, to locate "a valuable mine of either Gold or Silver and also...coined money and bars or ingots of Gold or Silver".¹⁸

Meanwhile, Joseph Smith boarded with an Isaac Hale (a relative of William Hale), and fell in love with Isaac Hale's daughter Emma, a schoolteacher he would later marry in 1827. Isaac Hale, however, disapproved of their relationship and of Smith in general. According to an unsupported account by Hale, Smith attempted to locate the mine by

gazer (Lapham, [La]Fayette (1870), "Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, Forty Years Ago. His Account of the Finding of the Sacred Plates", *Historical Magazine* [second series], 7, 306) which reportedly showed him the underground location of another stone near his home, which he located at a depth of about twenty-two feet. According to another story, in either 1819 Tucker, Pomeroy (1867), *Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism*, New York: D. Appleton.19) or 1822 Howe (1834, 240), while the older Smith males were digging a well for a Palmyra neighbor, they found an unusual stone Harris (1859, 163), described as either white and glassy and shaped like a child's foot or "chocolate-colored, somewhat egg-shaped." Roberts, B. H., ed. (1930), *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, Brigham Young University Press, 1:129). Smith then used this stone as a seer stone. Tucker (1867, 20).

¹⁴ Ostling, Richard; Ostling, Joan K. (1999), *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 25.

¹⁵ Tucker (1867, 19).

¹⁶ Howe (1834, 240-241,244-245, 263).

¹⁷ Vogel, Dan (2004), *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 69.

¹⁸ Wade, B. (April 23, 1880), "[An Interesting Document](#)", *The Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 19 (8).

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burying his face in a hat containing the seer stone; however, as the treasure hunters got close to their objective, Smith said that an enchantment became so strong that Smith could no longer see it.¹⁹ The failed project disbanded on November 17, 1825;²⁰ ^[27] however, Smith continued to work for Stowel on other matters until 1826.

Then, in 1826 Smith was arrested and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York, on the complaint of Stowel's nephew who accused Smith of being "a disorderly person and an imposter."²¹ Court records show that Smith, identified as "The Glass Looker," stood before the court on March 20, 1826, on a warrant for an unspecified misdemeanor charge,²² and that the judge issued a *mittimus* for Smith to be held, either during or after the proceedings.²³ Although Smith's associate Oliver Cowdery later stated that Smith was "honorably acquitted,"²⁴ the result of the proceeding is somewhat unclear, with some claiming he was found guilty, others claiming he was "condemned" but "designedly allowed to escape," and yet others (including the trial note taker) claiming he was "discharged" for lack of evidence.²⁵

By November 1826, Josiah Stowel could no longer afford to continue searching for buried treasure; Smith traveled to Colesville, New York, for a few months to work for Joseph Knight Sr.,²⁶ one of Stowel's friends. There are reports that Smith directed further excavations on Knight's property and at other locations around Colesville.²⁷ Joseph Smith later commented on his working as a treasure hunter: " 'Was not Joseph Smith a money digger?' Yes, but it was never a very profitable job for him, as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it."²⁸

Events of this kind would later come back to haunt Joseph Smith and damage his credibility as a Prophet. He sensed this later and tried to cover up these occult practices by denying that he had been a money digger. His version was that Stowel enlisted him to dig. In addition to directing the digging for gold by use of his seer stone Smith was also admiring the 21-year-old daughter of Isaac Hale. Although Joseph claimed to be able

¹⁹ Howe (1834, 262–266).

²⁰ Howe (1834, 262).

²¹ Vogel (2004, 81).

²² Hill (1972, 2); Brodie (1971, 16).

²³ Hill (1972, 5).

²⁴ Cowdery, Oliver (1835), "Letter VIII", *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, 2 (1), 200.

²⁵ Hill (1972, 5).

²⁶ Jessee, Dean C., comp. (1984), *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 32.

²⁷ Vogel (1994, 227, 229).

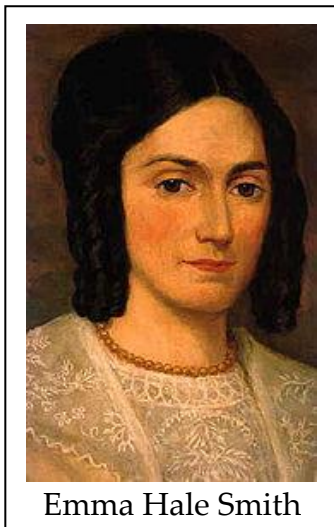
²⁸ Smith, Joseph Fielding (1976), *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 120; Quoted in Brodie (1971, 20–21).

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to find lost treasure no success stories were recorded to sustain his pretense. In addition to searching out items seen and unseen, he would ultimately claim the ability to divine the future, the mysterious, and the miraculous.²⁹

JOSEPH ELOPES WITH EMMA

When Joseph returned to Palmyra empty-handed, he left a disappointed Josiah Stowel in South Bainbridge and a distrustful Isaac Hale in Harmony. Over the next two years Joseph returned to visit Emma, finally mustering up enough courage to ask her father for her hand in marriage. Isaac Hale was a devout Methodist of impeccable moral character who resoundingly rejected his daughter's suitor knowing his penchant for the occult use of his seer stone.



Emma Hale Smith

However, Joseph was not to be denied. He soon returned when Isaac was away from home to entice Emma to elope with him, which she does in January of 1827. Joseph and Emma were married by Justice of the Peace Squire Tarbill (Tarbel) in South Bainbridge, New York.³⁰

Joseph was unwilling to face his strong-willed new father-in-law, so he took his new bride to the impoverished home of his parents, where living conditions were far more meager than that which Emma was accustomed. No record exists to suggest that Emma rebelled in their poverty, but the time soon came when she wrote her father asking for some of her furniture, clothing and household items that she had left behind at her elopement. Isaac Hale received her request with favor and in due time the young couple stood before the tearful eyes of a now mollified father. Peter Ingersoll, friend and confidant of Smith, accompanied the couple to the Hale home, assisting them in moving the requested items.

However, Joseph and Emma were not to depart until Hale extracted a commitment from young Joseph that he would cease his occult practices of stone-gazing—a pledge Joseph afterwards confided in Ingersoll that he planned to keep. The sincerity of that commitment cannot now be ascertained, but Joseph's expressed fear to Ingersoll was that his family would make the promise exceedingly difficult to keep.³¹

²⁹ Harrod (2011, 84).

³⁰ Roberts, B.H. 1-6. *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965, 1:82.

³¹ Harrod (2011, 84).

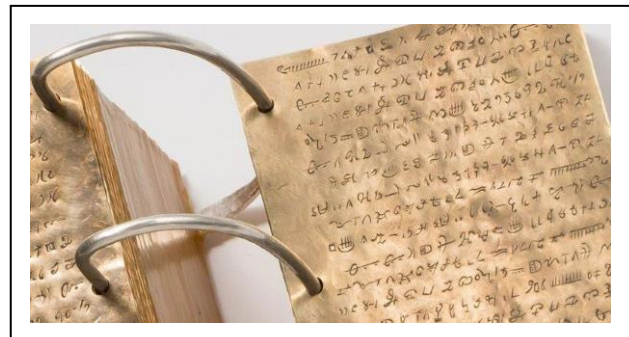
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One soon discovers that Joseph's resolve—if it ever was sincere—was nevertheless short-lived. Once home, Joseph's first steps back into occult practices took place in an event he later related to Ingersoll as a joke on his family. While passing through the woods he discovered some unusually beautiful white and in a hollow log. He immediately tied up several quarts in his frock coat. As Joseph passed through the kitchen his family at the supper table began to quiz him on the contents of his coat. Whereupon, Joseph told them that it was a golden Bible retrieved from the earth, an idea Smith told Ingersoll that he got from Canada.³²

"If there was a personal motive for Joseph Smith Jr's revelations," wrote Mormon scholar Richard Lyman Bushman, "it was to satisfy his family's religious want and, above all, to meet the need of his oft-defeated, unmoored father."³³

MORONI AND THE GOLDEN PLATES

The emergence of the Book of Mormon from its hiding place began on September 21, 1823. That night, the angel Moroni appeared to a young Joseph Smith, told him that "God had a work for [him] to do."³⁴ That work would involve translating "a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent"—what we know today as the Book of Mormon.³⁵



The next day, on September 22, Joseph went to the hill and "made an attempt to take [the plates] out" but was forbidden by Moroni, who reminded him that "the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived." Joseph would have to wait "until four years from that time" but was to "come to that place precisely in one year from that time" and to return each year "until the time should come for obtaining the plates."³⁶ Moroni's annual visits occurred generally around the time of the Israelite harvest festival season.³⁷ The initial

³² Howe (1834, 234-237).

³³ Bushman, Richard Lyman (2007). *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. New York: Vintage Books (A Division of Random House, Inc., 27.

³⁴ Joseph Smith—History 1:33.

³⁵ Joseph Smith—History 1:34.

³⁶ Joseph Smith—History 1:53.

³⁷ It is also the fall equinox, which some have argued is evidence of "magical" influence on Joseph Smith. See D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, revised and enlarged edition (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1998), 141–144; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City,

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visit on September 21 in 1823 coincided with that year's celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. In 1824, September 22 was the eve of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and the beginning of the fall festivals. In 1825, September 22 was precisely Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). In 1827, when Moroni finally delivered the plates to Joseph,³⁸ his timing on September 22 coincided exactly with Rosh Hashanah, also known as the Feast of Trumpets.³⁹

"At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates On the twenty-second day of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, having gone as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me"

Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith

7

Thus, the Golden Plates were received in the early morning hours of September 22, 1827 (about 8 months after his Marriage to Emma Hale on Jan. 18). Joseph borrowed a horse and wagon from a Mr. Knight. At Hill Cumorah he met Moroni who gave him final instructions and a warning, "that I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected."

Joseph did not show the Golden Plates to anyone until after they had been translated, although many people, including friends and family, handled the plates through the cloth in which he kept them concealed. Soon after he got the plates, rumors of their existence spread throughout the area. Attempts were made to steal the plates, but Joseph kept them well hidden.

Mormons have been taught that the Golden Plates were taken from Joseph Smith for a time when Martin Harris, who was working as scribe, lost the first 116 pages of the

UT: Signature Books, 2004), 43. Joseph Smith was involved in treasure seeking and other "magical" practices, and perhaps saw significance in this timing. Mark Ashurst-McGee, "[Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian](#)," *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 34–100 suggests that Joseph Smith's understanding of Moroni and his mission likely included elements of the "treasure guardian lore," while still recognizing that Moroni was a divine messenger from the Lord. Yet Ashurst-McGee felt the connection to treasure seeking and the timing of Moroni's visits has been overstated (see pp. 92–94). On Joseph Smith and treasure digging/"magic", see Richard Lyman Bushman, "Joseph Smith and Money Digging," in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laure Harris Hales (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016), 1–5; Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 3–134.

³⁸ Joseph Smith—History 1:59.

³⁹ In 1826, Rosh Hashanah was October 2, so none of the Jewish holidays landed on September 22. These dates were checked online at <http://www.colelchabad.org/Calendar.htm>

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translation while keeping them at his home to show his wife. The angel Moroni took the plates and the Urim and Thummim until Joseph repented for his carelessness. When Joseph got them back Martin Harris was no longer allowed to serve as scribe. The translation was completed with Oliver Cowdery as scribe, at which time the Golden Plates were delivered back to the angel. Since that time many people have speculated concerning the location of the Golden Plates. The explanation most accepted by Mormons is that they are in the possession of God. Mormons believe that the last known location of the Golden Plates has been recorded by Brigham Young in the *Journal of Discourses*:

Brigham Young, on June 17, 1877, related the following:

"I lived right in the country where the plates were found from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and I know a great many things pertaining to that country. I believe I will take the liberty to tell you of another circumstance that will be as marvelous as anything can be. This is an incident in the life of Oliver Cowdery, that he did not take the liberty of telling such things in meeting as I take.

"I tell these things to you, and I have a motive for doing so. I want to carry them to the ears of my brethren and sisters, and to the children also, that they may grow to an understanding of some things that seem to be entirely hidden from the human family. Oliver Cowdery went with the Prophet Joseph when he deposited these plates. Joseph did not translate all of the plates; there was a portion of them sealed, which you can learn from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the Hill Cumorah, which he did.

"Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. He says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light, but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in corners and along the walls.

"The first time they went there the Sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: 'This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ.' I tell you this is coming not only from Oliver Cowdery,

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but others who were familiar with it, and who understood it... I take the liberty of referring to those things so they will not be forgotten and lost."⁴⁰

THE GOLD PLATES AFTER TRANSLATION

After the translation was completed, there were several witnesses appointed to testify of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Three Witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris) were shown the plates by the angel. Eight more witnesses were shown the plates by Joseph Smith and allowed to touch and examine them. Each of the witnesses swore to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and never recanted their testimony as long as they lived. Their testimony is printed in every copy of the Book of Mormon.

However, in a revelation recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants* 17:2, these Three Witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris) were told that it was by faith they would obtain a view of the plates. This event did not take place in the room where Smith had allegedly been translating the plates, but out in the woods. It was after retiring to the woods that Smith and the three men tried “to obtain, by fervent and humble prayer,” the fulfillment of that revelation. One might ask why they needed prayer to see a tangible, physical object. When praying did not result in a “manifestation of divine favor,” Martin Harris excused himself, thinking he was the hindrance. Once he left, the remaining three men prayed again and an angel stood before them holding the Golden Plates. Smith then went to find Harris who was a “considerable distance” away. The two men then prayed and the “same vision” was opened to their view.⁴¹ Eight more men insisted they, too, “saw” the plates, but again the evidence suggests that they saw them with spiritual eyes or in “vision.”

In addition, there were several women who claimed to have seen the Golden Plates and have recorded their experiences in their journals. Joseph’s younger sister Katherine reported that when he first brought home the Golden Plates, after being attacked by several unknown assailants on the way, she took the package containing the plates from him and laid it on a table until he could catch his breath again.

Joseph’s wife Emma, in an interview with their son Joseph III in 1879, described her own experiences with the plates as follows:

Q. Are you sure that [Joseph] had the plates at the time you were writing for him?

⁴⁰ *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38.

⁴¹ *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 1:52–55.

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A. The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and 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 sometime thumb the edges of a book. [Another except from this same interview appears in the October 2011 *Ensign*, pp. 8-9.]

In 1842, a visitor to Nauvoo wrote about a conversation with Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, in which she affirmed: "I have myself seen and handled the golden plates; they are about eight inches long, and six wide; some of them are sealed together and are not to be opened and some of them are loose. They are all connected by a ring which passes through a hole at the end of each plate, and are covered with letters beautifully engraved." However, other accounts say that Lucy saw the plates only when they were wrapped in cloth and felt them in that condition.

When Joseph, Emma, and Oliver moved in with the Whitmer family to finish the translation, the mother there, Mary Musselman Whitmer, found that her workload had significantly increased. Her grandson told the story this way:

My grandmother in having so many extra persons to care for, besides her own large household, was often overloaded with work to such an extent that she felt it to be quite a burden. One evening, when (after having done her usual day's work in the house) she went to the barn to milk the cows, she met a stranger [identified in another version as Moroni] carrying something on his back that looked like knapsack. At first she was a little afraid of him, but when he spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone, and began to explain to her the nature of the work which was going on in her house, she was filled with inexpressible joy and satisfaction. He then untied his knapsack and showed her a bundle of plates, which in size and appearance corresponded with the description subsequently given by the witness to the Book of Mormon. This strange person turned the leaves of the book of plates over, leaf after leaf, and also showed her the engravings upon them; after which he told her to be patient and faithful in bearing her burden a little longer, promising that if she would do so, she should be blessed; and her reward would be sure, if she proved faithful to the end. The personage then suddenly vanished with the plates, and where he went, she could not tell. From that moment my

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grandmother was enabled to perform her household duties with comparative ease, and she felt no more inclination to murmur because her lot was hard.⁴²

For many Mormons, the method of how the Golden Plates were translated is irrelevant when compared to the testimony of eleven witnesses who say they actually saw the plates. This too, however, becomes a suspicious part of Mormon history when we decipher what they meant by “seeing.” Mormon historian Marvin Hill concedes that the “evidence is extremely contradictory in this area, but there is a possibility that the three witnesses saw the plates in vision only.”⁴³

A PLAUSIBLE CONCLUSION

When one considers the incredible nature of Joseph Smith’s claim of a visit from an angel which he originally referred to as Nephi—and only later as Moroni—and his account of the finding of the Golden Plates, one has to wonder, “Is it true?” In point of fact, Mormons are basing their eternal salvation of whether or not Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God or a shyster of the first magnitude. “Is it true?”

From the very beginning of Mormonism, Mormon leaders have repeatedly stated the obvious truth that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (and their 200+ splinter groups) stands or falls upon whether Joseph Smith’s First Vision and his encounter with Moroni and the Golden Plates really happened.

The most likely answer is that *none of this ever took place!* Given his history as a gold digger and a glass looker, it is far more likely that this was just another of Joseph’s get-rich-quick schemes. There are just too many problems with both of these events for them to have actually occurred.

However, there remains one possible and plausible explanation. It is an established fact that Joseph Smith was known to dabble in the occult. In so doing he opened himself upon to the spirit world and demonic attack. Could it be that on that fateful night of September 21, 1823, Joseph really was awakened by an angelic being that appeared in his bedroom?



⁴² Welch, John W. ed. (2005), *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*. Provo: Brigham Young University Press.

⁴³ “Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 7, 4 (1972): 83.

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Could it be that what Joseph mistook to be an Angel of Light was actually a demon instead? Remember, 2 Corinthians 11:14 says, “even Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (ESV).

So, the question remains, “Is it true?” *No, it is not!*
