

## None of the witnesses ever denied their testimony.

This is often presented as the ultimate proof of the Book of Mormon's divine origins. An unwavering, lifelong testimony from eleven men who saw and handled the golden plates.

The Testimony of Three Witnesses.

*Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris.*

The Testimony of Eight Witnesses.

*Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jun. John Whitmer,  
Hiram Page. Joseph Smith, Sen. Hyrum Smith. Samuel H. Smith.*

# But what really became of the Eight Witnesses?

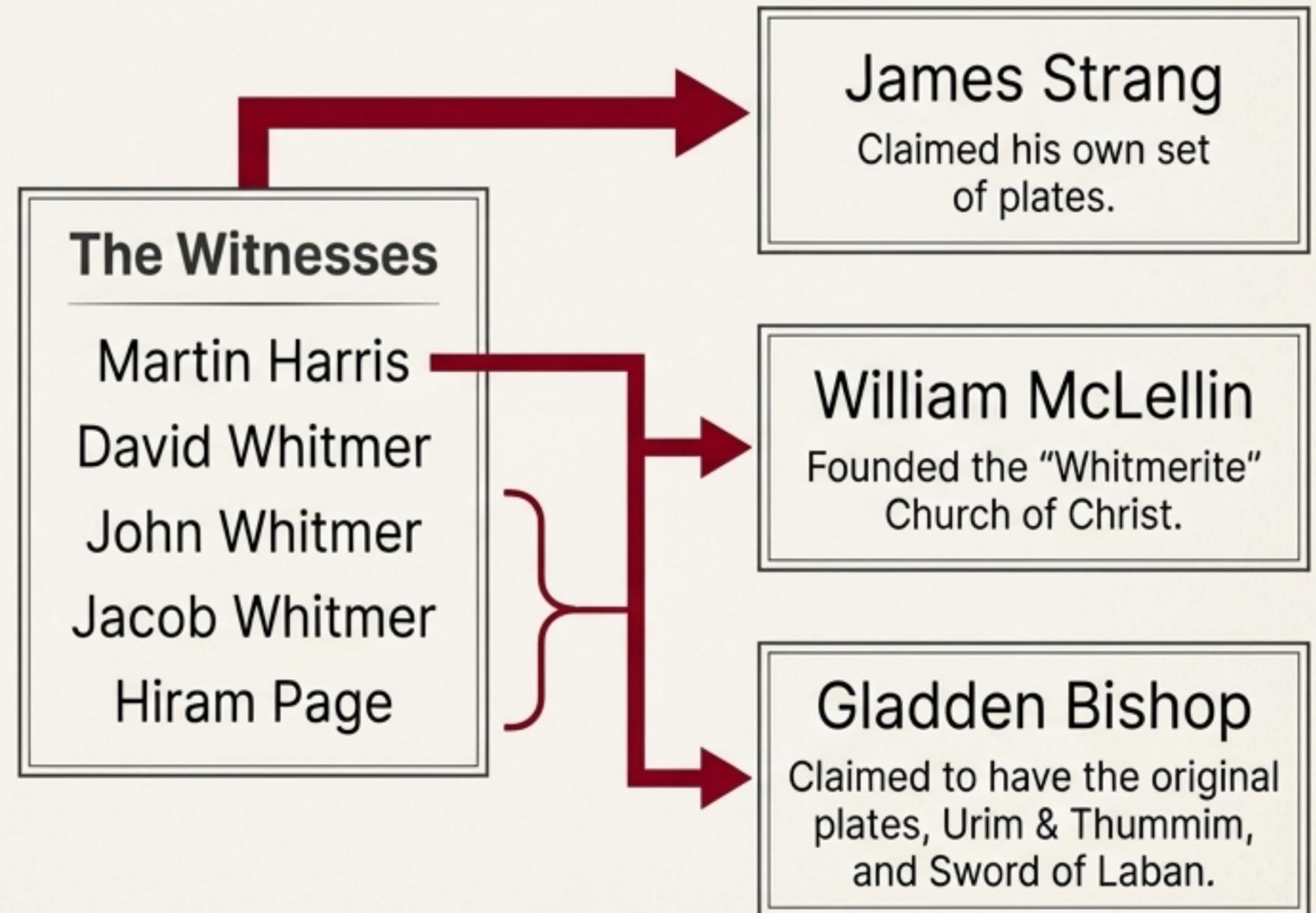
The claim that “none denied” their testimony is less impressive when examining their lives. Of the eight men who claimed to have handled the plates, very few remained with the church Joseph Smith founded.

**Five of the eight** died during or just after Joseph Smith’s lifetime. The remaining **three all broke with the church.**

<b>Christian Whitmer</b>	Died in 1835		1835
<b>Peter Whitmer Jr.</b>	Died in 1836		1836
<b>Joseph Smith Sr.</b>	Died a patriarch of the church in		1840
<b>Hyrum Smith</b>	Died alongside Joseph Smith in		1844
<b>Samuel H. Smith</b>	Died one month after his brothers in		1844
<b>Jacob Whitmer</b>	Excommunicated		1838
<b>John Whitmer</b>	Excommunicated		1838
<b>Hiram Page</b>	Left the church		1838

# If they were chosen for a divine witness, why were they so easily led astray?

Many of the official witnesses did not simply leave the church; they actively joined and promoted schismatic movements led by other charismatic figures who also claimed to have plates and revelations. This pattern raises serious questions about their credibility and judgment.



# The Strangite Endorsement: A Crisis of Credibility

James Strang produced 11 witnesses for his own set of plates. His movement was not a fringe group; it was endorsed by the majority of the surviving Book of Mormon witnesses and Joseph Smith's own family.

## Key Followers of James Strang (1846-1847)

### The Three Witnesses

David Whitmer  
Martin Harris

### The Eight Witnesses

John Whitmer  
Jacob Whitmer  
Hiram Page

### The Smith Family

William Smith (Joseph's brother)  
Lucy Mack Smith (Joseph's mother)  
Sophronia Smith  
Katherine Smith  
Lucy Smith

"I am satisfied that Joseph appointed J.J. Strang. It is verily so."

— *Lucy Mack Smith*,  
in an 1846 letter

# The stories don't align: Where did the Eight Witnesses see the plates?

The official, unified “Testimony of the Eight Witnesses” in the Book of Mormon papers over significant contradictions in the historical record about the event’s location. The participants themselves gave conflicting accounts.

## The Grove Account



“Lucy Mack Smith said that the eight witnesses repaired to a grove and there they saw the plates.”

## The House Account

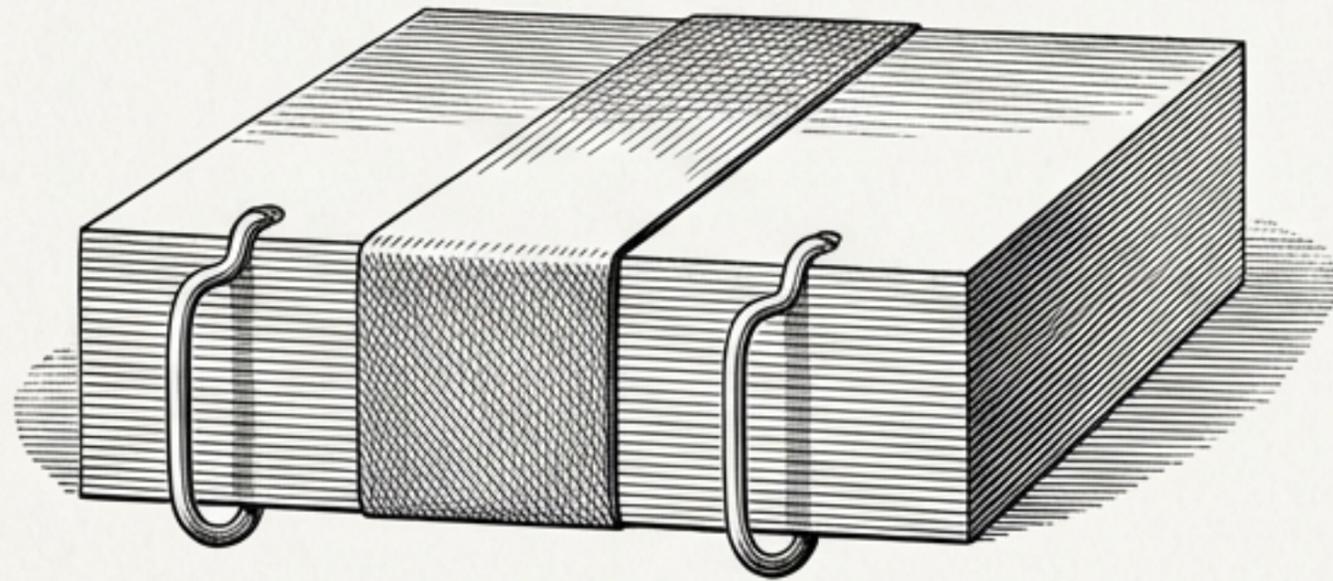


“John Whitmer said that four of the eight witnesses viewed the plates in Joseph Smith’s house... [he] is not sure where the other four witnesses saw the plates.”

# What did the plates actually look like?

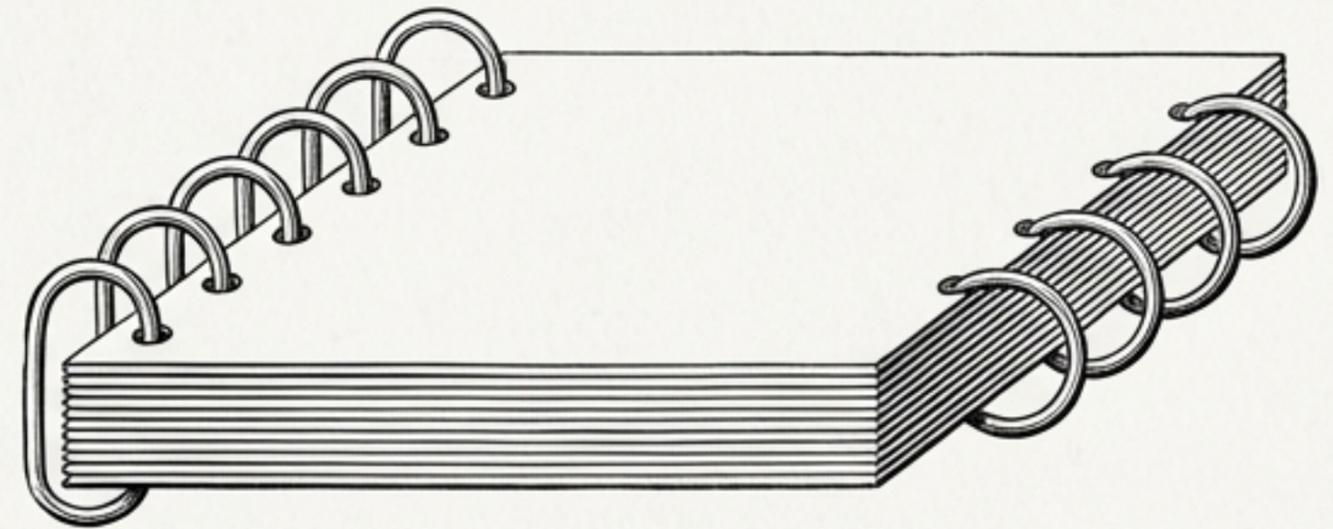
Descriptions of the plates vary dramatically, not just in minor details, but in fundamental aspects like size, shape, and even color. This suggests they were either describing different objects or no single, consistent object at all.

## Standard Account (Multiple Witnesses)



**Block for Approximately 6x8x6 inches)**

## Joseph Smith Sr.'s Description



**Long of time or 5-6 or Description**

“Josiah Stole said the plates were of a “greenish cast.” • Orson Pratt claimed the plates were stained with a “black hard stain.””

# **As thick as paper, or as thick as tin?**

The witnesses could not even agree on the basic metallic properties of the object they claimed to have handled. Their descriptions range from thin and pliable to thick and rigid.

**“Pliable like thick paper”**

– Emma Smith

**“Thick as parchment”**

– David Whitmer

**“Of the thickness of plates of tin”**

– Martin Harris

**“Not quite as thick as common tin”**

– Orson Pratt

# A Tale of Two Interviews: Did the Witnesses Actually Sign the Testimony?

David Whitmer, the last surviving of the Three Witnesses, gave contradictory accounts of how the famous witness statement was signed. In his own interviews, he vacillated on whether the witnesses signed it themselves or had Oliver Cowdery sign for them.

## 1878 Interview with Orson Pratt & Joseph F. Smith

When asked if they signed it themselves, Whitmer replied,

“Each signed his own name.”

## 1885 Interview with James Henry Moyle

Whitmer stated,

“The witnesses did not sign the original manuscript, though they were present and ordered Oliver Cowdery to sign for them.”

Moyle adds in his diary, “The writing itself indicates that.”

# The experience was “more spiritual than I anticipated.”

Beyond inconsistencies in the details, a significant amount of evidence suggests the witness experience was not a straightforward, physical event. Multiple accounts describe it as a vision, an impression, or an experience that took place “in the spirit.”

**“[David Whitmer] says he did see them and the angel and heard him speak but that it was... through the power of God and was possibly in the spirit... I was not fully satisfied with the explanation. It was more spiritual than I anticipated.”**

— James Henry Moyle, from his personal diary after interviewing David Whitmer.

# A Pattern of Visionary Language

At least 13 separate accounts from various individuals report that the witnesses described their experience in non-literal, spiritual terms.

- **Stephen Burnett**: “vision or imagination”
- **Jesse Townsend**: saw plates with “spiritual eyes”
- **John A. Clark**: saw plates with the “eye of Faith”
- **John H. Gilbert**: saw plates with a “spiritual eye”
- **Ruben P. Harmon**: saw them “only in a spiritual vision”
- **John Murphy**: experience was an “impression”; the angel had “no appearance or shape”
- **Anthony Metcalf**: “of course we were in the spirit when we had the view”
- **Zenas H. Gurley**: “it was only a holy Vision”
- **Theodore Turley**: plates were shown by “a supernatural power”
- **Thomas Ford**: The Eight Witnesses “looked into an empty box and were persuaded that they saw the plates”
- **Edward Stevenson**: The Witnesses were “favored with a vision”
- **Anthony Metcalf (re: Martin)**: passed into a “state of entrancement”
- **James Henry Moyle**: the experience was “possibly in the spirit”

# Joseph Smith's story was a product of its time.

The idea of a lost civilization in America burying ancient records on metal plates was not a unique concept revealed to Joseph Smith. It was a popular and widespread belief in the 19th-century American frontier, fueled by speculation about the ancient "Mound Builder" civilizations.

According to Dan Vogel, the literary phrases of Joseph Smith's day in 1823 described how the ancient mound builders... were thought to have preserved their writings. They were said to have fashioned books of brass connected together by rings... in stone boxes.

— According to Dan Vogel

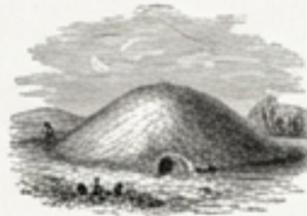
# A Rich History of Buried Metal Records

Numerous books, articles, and accounts available in Joseph Smith's environment described the discovery of metal plates and buried records associated with ancient inhabitants of America.

**1775**  
James Adair describes brass and copper plates found among Native Americans.



**1805**  
Rev. Thaddius Mason Harris writes of "plates of copper" found in mounds.



**1811**  
Claudius Buchanan writes that lost tribes of Israel kept their history on "plates of brass."



**1816**  
The Philadelphia Portfolio reports "thin plates of copper rolled up" discovered in a mound in a West Virginia mound.



**1816**  
Rev. Thaddius Mason Harris writes of "plates of copper" found in mounds.

**1823**  
John Haywood describes "two or three plates of brass with characters inscribed" found in a West Virginia mound.



**1823**  
Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* tells of Indians who "buried it [a book]" with an Indian chief."



**The Apocrypha**  
The Smith family Bible contained 1 Maccabees, which describes historical records being written on "tables of brass."



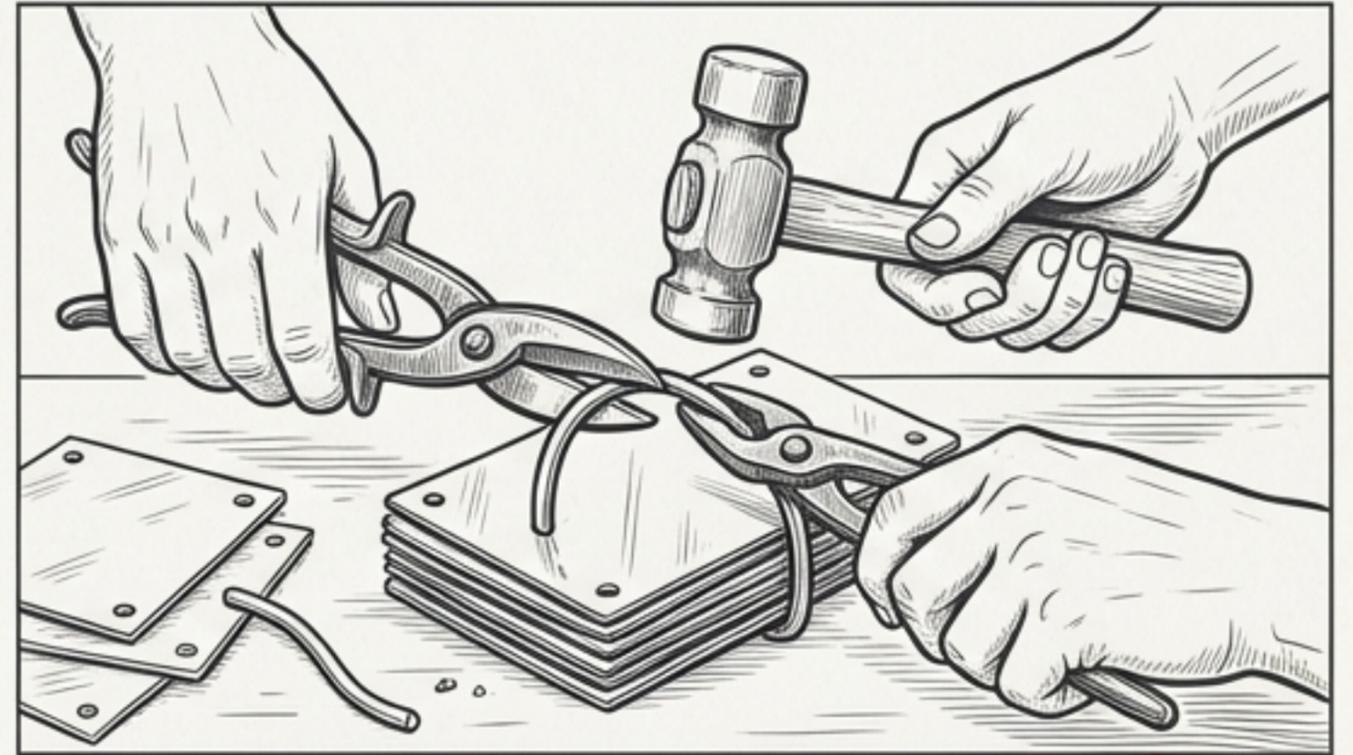
# Creating the Plates: A Plausible Reconstruction

It is entirely plausible that Joseph Smith could have constructed a physical prop. Historian Dan Vogel posits that Smith's story of fighting off three assailants and dislocating his thumb was a cover story for an injury sustained while bending the metal rings to bind his homemade plates.

## The Cover Story



## The Reconstruction



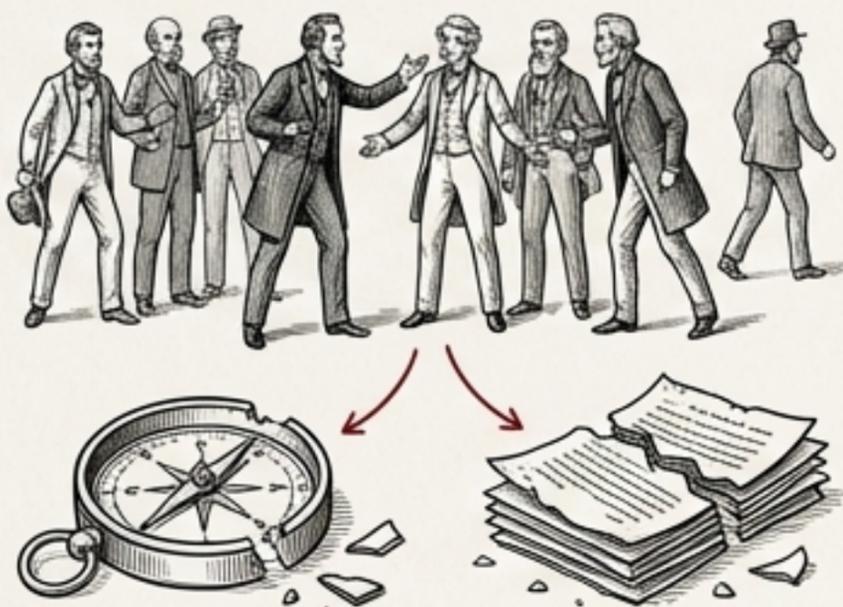
● “Using tools available in the 1820s, it took me about two hours to create this set of plates.” – Trent Told, experienced metalsmith ●

# An Unraveling of a Testimony

The testimony of the Book of Mormon witnesses does not hold up to scrutiny. It is not a story of eleven unwavering men, but a complex history of unreliable narrators, contradictory accounts, and ideas borrowed from the surrounding culture.

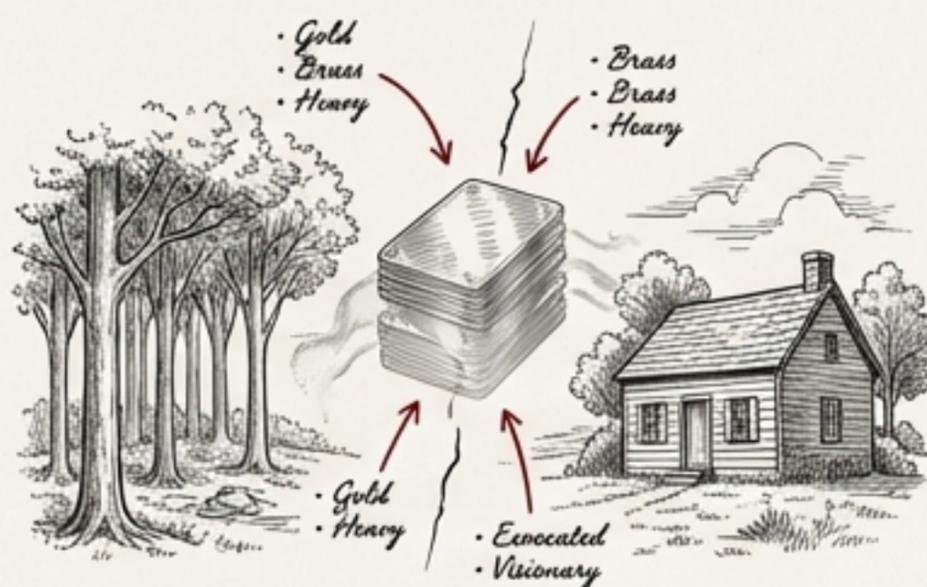
## Unreliable Messengers

- High rates of excommunication and attrition.
- Endorsed rival prophets like James Strang.
- Demonstrated poor spiritual discernment.



## An Inconsistent Message

- Contradictory accounts of location (grove vs. house).
- Conflicting descriptions of the plates' appearance.
- Strong evidence for a non-physical, visionary experience.



## A Common Premise

- The idea of buried records was a widespread trope.
- Metal plates were a common feature of 19th-century speculation.
- The story fit perfectly within its cultural milieu.



# Even if the plates were real, the problems remain.

Ultimately, the debate over the witnesses is a distraction from the text itself. A physical set of plates would not change the fundamental issues with the Book of Mormon.

- It would not explain the **thousands of significant changes** made to the text since 1830.
- It would not explain the vast **anachronisms** (steel, horses, chariots, etc.).
- It would not erase the extensive sections lifted from the King James Bible, including its translation errors.
- It would not resolve the lack of supporting archaeological or DNA evidence.



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Believing scholars today acknowledge the Book of Mormon is a 19th-century text. The evidence within the book itself is more revealing than any testimony about its container.