

# FAIR "Idle Tales"? The Witness of Women

[Opening video, a trailer for the *Witnesses* film project.]

Voice 1: "Imagination has the shape of a large rock in the middle of a river against which we are thrown and we have to go one way or the other. Its claims are so audacious, its text is so massive and complex and convoluted."

Voice 2: "If we think that there is a God who intervenes in human lives, then all kinds of things become much more plausible than they were before."

Voice 3: "Why would the Lord pick somebody like Martin Harris or Oliver Cowdery or David Whitmer to be witnesses, to see the angel, to see the plates and their engravings, and to hear the voice of God from heaven declaring that they're true?"

Voice 4: "We can't access the experience of other individuals directly."

Voice 5: "I think that he was a very good story teller. You can interpret that in a lot of ways."

Voice 6: "Well, they don't think that they were deceived. They think that Joseph falls away from his prophetic mission and leadership."

Voice 7: "If there was a conspiracy, Oliver Cowdery was in on it. He was part of it. He was the co-conspirator."

Voice 8: "Oliver you're incredible. He's the second elder of the church, he becomes an assistant to the first presidency. And then you say, 'Oliver. What happened?'"

Voice 9: "I would argue both that he believed what he was saying and that there were no ancient golden plates in the archeological sense of plates that were hundreds or thousands of years old."

Voice 10: "In order to make them disappear, you have to erase all this evidence of a variety of people feeling them, touching them, observing where they were, and just forget all that."

Voice 11: "Critics today are starting to say that it was just 'spiritualized' and that they really didn't see anything and perhaps they even hallucinated about this. And I'm like, 'Are you kidding me?'"

[End video.]

Daniel Peterson: As you can tell, this is a project that I'm involved in and that has occupied a lot of my time recently, and so the witnesses are very, very much on my mind. I'm going to be talking about the witness of women today particularly, as just part of this, because one of the commitments that I'd made and one of the things that I've insisted on is that this project that we're working on will pay attention to the unofficial witnesses to the Book of Mormon as well as to the official eleven. So today I'll talk about the women.

Let's start with the biblical origin of the gender.



**Daniel Peterson**

**August 2019**

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

That's from Genesis, of course. Now one of the things that's given rise to in the church is a folk expression *help meet*. Now I have to confess this is one of my pet peeves. I really hate the term *help meet* because it doesn't make any sense. So we sometimes correct it to *help mate* which makes a little more sense. But when it's talking about making a help meet for Adam it's talking about making a help suitable for Adam. The scriptures also talk about bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Well we don't talk about *fruit meets*. At least I don't think we do.

So this is how it probably should read. This is in the English Standard Version. "Then the Lord God said it is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen 2:18 ESV)

The NIV, "a helper suitable for him." The Septuagint, "a helper according to him." *Boethon kat alton* (βοηθὸν κατ' αὐτόν- Greek). It means according to his nature.

You remember that what happens right after this is there's a parade of animals brought before Adam, and he looks at all of them, and he comes up with names for them. But you know, the giraffes, the dinosaurs, none of them quite fit. They're not the help suited for Adam, and so that's when the woman is created. The man gave names to all livestock and the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. An *adiutor similis ayus* (Latin), "Similar to him" the Vulgate says, and then Eve is created because she is suitable for him.

You see here what I call the parade of the animals, but the woman is not among them. She has to be specially created and especially suited to Adam and fit to be with him. But then, of course, Eve's arrival signals some other changes, and here you see the expulsion from the garden. I'm going to recite a little minor poem from A.E Housman. I didn't clear this with my wife. I recited this to her before we were married, and still we got married. This isn't as funny today, and I take this seriously; it's the "Me too" moment and spouse abuse is not exactly in, if it ever was. A.E Housman, by the way, never married, so he didn't actually do this, but here's a little piece of poetry that didn't make it in to his collected works. It's in a letter to his brother.

When Adam day by day woke up in paradise  
he always used to say, "oh this is very nice."  
But Eve from scenes of bliss transported him for life.  
The more I think of this the more I beat my wife.

Anyway... you remember the story when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise. She took of its fruit and ate and also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate, then the eyes of both were opened. Importantly, the first step is taken by the woman and the woman is punished. And the way in which she is punished is interesting. "Unto the woman he said I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow thy shalt bring forth children and thy desires shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee." Or as the English Standard Version puts it, "To the woman, He said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing, in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband but he shall rule over you."

There's a long and dishonorable history that has followed from this, which is a legacy in too many cases of submission and very often of oppression of women. That will play a role in the story that I'm going to try to tell now, but I'm going to jump far forward in scriptural history and talk about another important case where a woman plays a crucial role: the enunciation in the birth of Jesus. "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto the city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin whose name was Mary."

And then you have the story a little bit later on. Mary here is the first who knows that a new dispensation is beginning. Something really, really important is about to happen: the Christ will be born. And then after all the spectacular events, the shepherds and so on, "all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." [Luke 2:18-19] Mary plays a really crucial role in the story and Luke probably interviewed her or interviewed people who knew her, because it's quite clear that in many points he's talking about how she responded, how she reacted. She's not showing outward signs of it. She keeps and ponders these things in her heart. She's not just a passive observer. She's someone who actually knows, before the men know in many cases, what's about to happen.

Now that is not the main focus of what I'm going to say. I'm trying to set up the case.

The first principal case I want to look at, where women are pivotal witnesses to the story of the unfolding of the gospel, is the testimony of the women at the tomb of Jesus.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise. And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. [Luke 24:1-11 ESV]

Or as the King James puts it, "and their words seemed to them as idle tales and they believed them not. *Liros ta reimata*, "nonsense" the NIV says, "madness" the Wycliffe Bible says, "sheer imagination," JB Phillips, "a fairy tale," the Living Bible, "idle talk and nonsense," the Amplified Bible, The Message: "but the apostles didn't believe a word of it, thought they were making it all up."

Now, we'll come back to that concept in a minute.

Here's another story connected with the resurrection of Christ and his post-resurrection experiences. Mary Magdalene saw Jesus standing and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto a woman,

... why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:15-17)

Now that's an interesting passage, and you see the image that's given rise to this particularly clear example. She has this yearning look on her face. She's wanting to touch Him, and He's waving her off. Stay back, don't touch me.

But that I don't know is not the way this passage should be read. The NIV and the NRSV translate this as "do not hold on to me." We

But that, I submit to you, is not the way this passage should be read. The NIV and the NKJV translate this as “do not hold on to me.” It’s a little different. “*Halt mich nicht fest*” say several German translations. “Don’t hold me fast.” “Hold me not,” says the JST, which very clearly gets it right here. The *Mé mou haptou* of the Greek is in the present imperative tense. Present tense is used for expressing continued action, so this is a prohibition or “stop touching me.” Prohibition in the present demands that an action, already in progress, be stopped. So she IS touching Him. But a better translation still of that verb is not just “touch.” She’s not just reaching out her index finger just to touch and say “are you real” or something like that. Now here’s another translation of it: “stop touching, stop holding on, stop grasping me.” The verb can have the meaning of “adhering to something.” So my image of this is something like what the NASB translation says: “stop clinging to me.” Very, very different. She had thrown herself at Him and you can imagine the emotional scene. She is so astonished to see someone that she’s loved and venerated and so on, who is alive after being clearly dead. She saw Him on the cross. He was dead. Dead in a horrible way. She has thrown herself on Him and He’s trying to peel her off, basically, and saying “look I can’t stay, you know I’m not back permanently. Stop holding on to me, stop grabbing me like that, you’ve got to let me go. I’m going to my Father and your Father” and so on.

At a crucial scene here, it’s women who bear testimony, women who are the first witnesses. Women who bear, in a sense, the first apostolic testimony of the resurrection of Christ. We’ve been hearing before about how women share priesthood responsibilities in some ways with men. Here they are holding an almost apostolic role, if you will. It’s their testimony that comes first.

The ancient world was not fond of the testimony of women, and to illustrate that, I’m going to make a point from a text that doesn’t belong to the New Testament, and some of you may say, “Well of course, we’d expect it from this culture.” Here’s the second Surah of the Quran; it’s a 7<sup>th</sup> Century Middle Eastern text so it still kind of illustrates my point. “Oh you who have believed, when you have contracted a debt for a fixed term write it down. And let a scribe write it down between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write it down as God has taught him to do. So let him write and let the one who has the right to do so dictate. And let him fear God, his Lord, and omit nothing. And if the one who has the right is feeble of intellect or weak or unable to dictate himself, let his guardian dictate in justice. And take as evidence to two witnesses from among your men. But if there are not two men, then take a man and two women from those who are acceptable as witnesses – so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her.” Now that is plainly sexist right? You know, two men or one man and two women, because women are kind of flighty and so on and so forth.

Women had no legal status. Their testimony was inadmissible in court. Not only among Muslims but earlier in first century Judaism. “But let not the testimony of women be admitted on account of the levity and boldness of their sex.” This is from Flavius Josephus.

Women were put in the same category as slaves who were not allowed to testify due to the “ignobility of their soul.”

“Market places and council chambers, and courts of justice, and large companies and assemblies of numerous crowds, and life in the open air full of arguments and actions relating to war and peace are suited to men. But taking care of the house and remaining at home are the proper duties of women. The virgins having their apartments in the center of the house within the innermost doors and the full grown women not going beyond the vestibule and outer courts.” That’s Philo Judaeus, both of these from the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The Talmud took its final form probably in the 400s, although it commenced in the 200s, and it says, “Any evidence which a woman gives is not valid to offer.” This is equivalent to saying that one who rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman.

Then it says, the *Tanna* or *tanaim* taught us an unattributed *misna* here as we learn the *misna* “such and such.” “These people are disqualified from bearing witness as they are considered wicked and guilty of monetary transgressions, one who plays with dice, those who lend money with interest, those who fly pigeons, and merchants who trade in produce of the sabbatical year. And Canaanite slaves are disqualified. This is the principle. For any testimony for which a woman is not fit, these too are not fit.”

Although, in certain cases, a woman’s testimony is accepted. For example, testimony concerning the death of someone’s husband. That’s nice! The woman can testify “my husband is dead” right? In most cases, her testimony is not valid.

On John Bullingham, a prominent British Jesuit and Anglican priest, a follower of the Royal Obedience Movement, this

Sir John Polkinghorne is a very noted British physicist and Anglican priest, a fellow of the Royal Society. He says this:

Perhaps the strongest reason of taking the stories of the empty tomb absolutely seriously lies in the fact that it is women who play the leading role. It would have been very unlikely for anyone in the ancient world who was concocting a story to assign the principal part to women since, in those times, they were not considered capable of being reliable witnesses in a court of law. It is surely much more probable that they appear in the gospel accounts precisely because they actually fulfilled the role that the stories assigned to them, and in so doing, they make a startling discovery.

The point here is that this is actually an argument for the credibility of the story because had the author been simply inventing a fictional story, he wouldn't have chosen women. He would have chosen somebody else, somebody respectable, like a man.

And you see that really clearly in Paul's formulation of the evidence for the resurrection. You remember Paul's recitation of the witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter that we often look to for baptism for the dead and doctrine about the resurrection. But he starts the chapter off this way in verse 3 (chapter 15 in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians),

... I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And he was buried, he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And he was seen of Cephas, (or Peter) then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am.

Now that's a really impressive list. You've got various mentions of the apostles, 500 brethren who saw him or who saw the resurrected Christ, but who's missing from the list? The women aren't there. Paul is a trained Pharisaic lawyer, and by the standards of his day, they didn't count, so he leaves them out. It's all men. All of his witnesses.

So at this pivotal moment, one of the most important moments in history of the gospels, the history of humankind, the resurrection of Christ, the crucial witnesses, in many ways the first witnesses, are women. But there's a prejudice against allowing them to testify formally.

I'm just going to kinda take a detour here. Just as I began throwing this together, there were a couple of other women whose witnesses, even though they're not Latter-day Saints and not in the scriptures, appeal to me, and I wanted to mention them. One is Julian or Julianna of Norwich in England. She was an English Anchorite who died very early in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest surviving book in the English language to be written by a woman is by her. It's called *The Revelations of Divine Love*, and the classic line from that is her sense, above all the doctrinal things and so on, that everything is going to be okay with the gospel. This is what she writes: "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." That's the concluding line of her book. It's like the end of the hymn "Come, Come Ye Saints" right? That for the faithful, everything in the end will turn out all right.

I'm going to surprise you with maybe another choice. While I was thinking about women and their witnesses, I thought about this one, Saint Joan of Arc. In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, late in the Hundred Years' War, Jean d'Arc (Joan of Arc) claimed to have received visions: the Archangel Michael, St Margaret, and St Catherine of Alexandria telling her to support the as yet uncrowned Charles the 7<sup>th</sup> of France, and thereby free France from English domination. Now I'd always thought that this was a nice story until I saw a play at BYU, written by Leilani Larson, called *Angels Unaware*, a story of Joan of Arc in 2006, in which she took those angels as serious from a Latter-day Saint perspective, post death, post mortem people — the real St Catherine of Alexandria and so on, who'd been called upon to help this French girl and make things work for her. And I thought, "You know, could this story be true? I mean God does things that we don't always know about. Could this be a true story of angelic intervention on behalf of this French girl?"

Let me tell you who was impressed by her. There's a young boy by the name of Coley Taylor who told this story late in his life. He approached the aged Mark Twain one day, after noticing the author, very famous, standing alone on a stone bridge in Redding, Connecticut. Twain was a familiar figure around the town and young Coley had always wanted to talk to him to express his admiration for him. "I was glad," he says, "that he was alone." He wrote an article about this. "I had wanted to tell him how much I had enjoyed Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn."

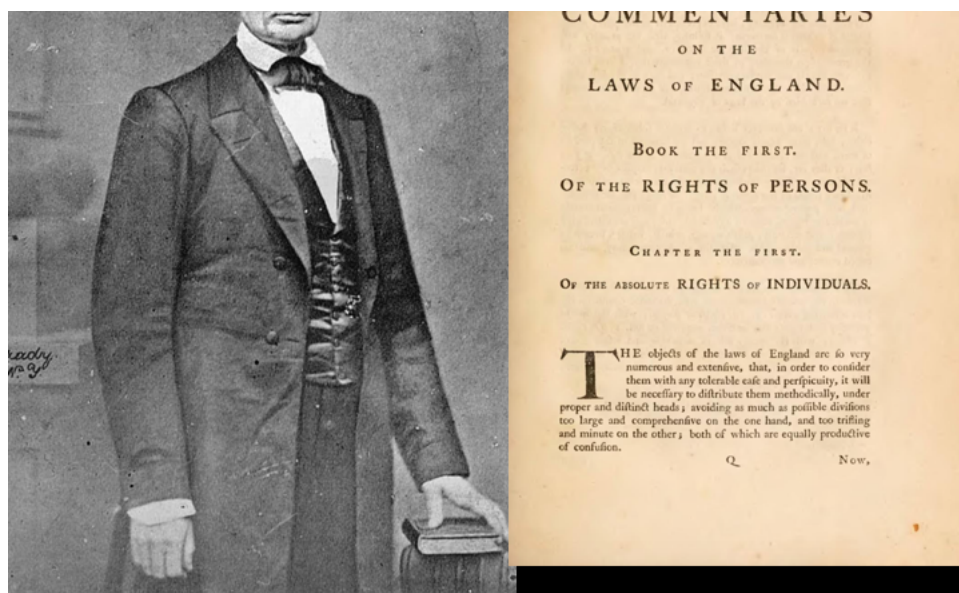
But Twain's response to the young boy's was shocking. "I had never seen him so cross. I can see him yet, shaking that long forefinger at me," Taylor recalled. "You shouldn't read those books about bad boys!" Twain scolded him. "Now listen to what an old man tells you. My best book is my recollection of *Joan of Arc*." This is his last novel. "You are too young to understand and enjoy it now, but read it when you are older. Remember then what I tell you now. *Joan of Arc* is my very best book." Now most literary critics have not agreed with him but he made that same comment at other settings. "I like *Joan of Arc* best of all of my books," he said shortly before his death, "and it is the best; I know it perfectly well. And besides, it furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others; twelve years of preparation, and two years of writing. The others needed no preparation and got none."

Now this is very odd. She was a visionary and he was a notorious religious skeptic, very likely an atheist. His background was Protestant, anti-Catholic, and he hated the French. Couldn't stand them.

She was French, died a Catholic martyr, and in 1920 became a Catholic Saint, but he was really, really impressed with her story, and if anything tempted him to abandon his religious cynicism, I think it was Joan of Arc. In his epigraph to the novel, Twain wrote, "The only person, of either sex, who has ever held supreme command of the military forces of a nation at the age of seventeen." That's a pretty remarkable story however you look at it. Now Twain was almost certainly unaware of the prophet Mormon. Mormon had become the leader of his people's army in his 16<sup>th</sup> year. That is at 15. Almost certainly because of his lineage and, like Saint Joan, because of his religious stature.

I want to talk about women's testimony in America. This is where I'm coming to my real theme.





The great 18<sup>th</sup> English barrister and jurist Sir William Blackstone—you see his Commentaries of the Laws of England here that Abraham Lincoln studied by firelight to become a lawyer; classic, classic book. He was a major proponent of the idea of women’s exclusion from jury service. *Propter defectum sexus*, that is, “based on the defect of sex.” It’s the same attitude. Can’t trust them, they’re not competent to serve on juries. Until 1919, women were automatically disqualified from serving in trial juries in England and Wales. And even after 1919, gender prejudice had the practical effect of keeping women from service as jurors even when they were legally permitted to.

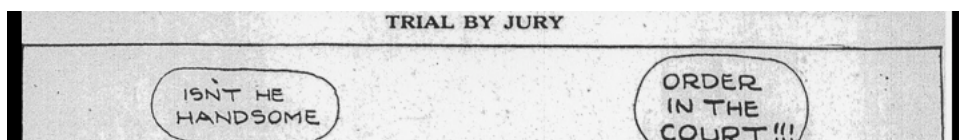
I want to give you some examples of how women jurors were regarded. Here’s an illustration of how ridiculous a women jury would be. Look at the way they’re dressed. Can you take anybody like that seriously? (This is a 1902 cartoon.)



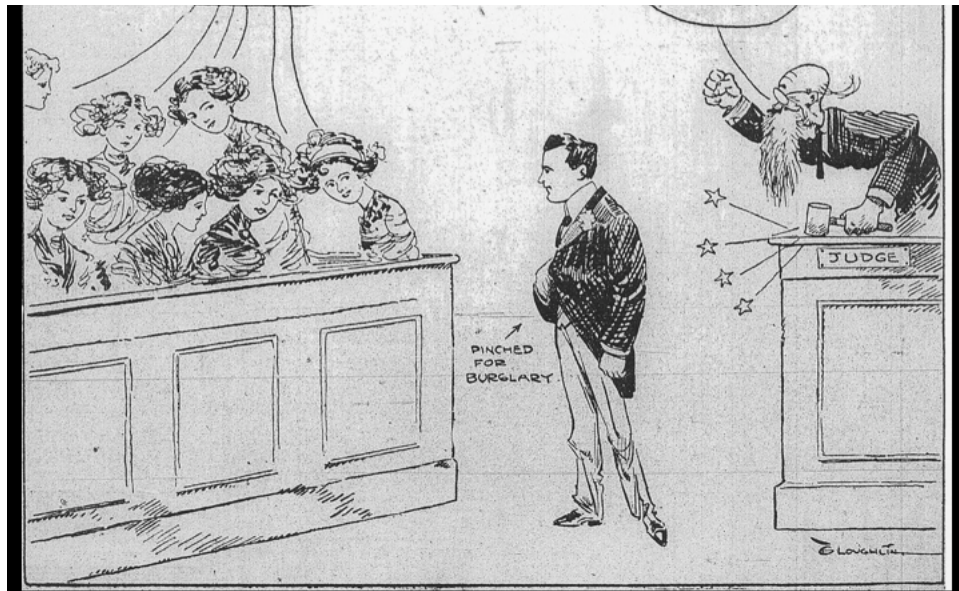


Blackstone’s beliefs were integrated in to the legal systems of the US and other English heritage jurisdictions. The notion of female jury service was resisted because of their supposed lack of intelligence, their emotional instability and need to tend to domestic duties. Women it was contended were too sensitive, too incompetent to be jurors.

Here’s an example of it. They’re swayed by non-intellectual issues, right?

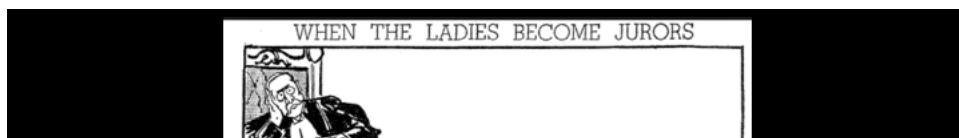






I want to give you a brief timeline of suffrage and admission to jury service. You'll be astonished, I was, at how late these things changed. 1869, Wyoming territory grants women the right to vote on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1869. 1870, Utah territory grants women the right to vote on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, only about two months later or thereabouts.

This is how women and their children would be distractions to the serious nature of the deliberations of a jury.





In 1870, remember Wyoming territory given women the right to vote. In 1871 they're disenfranchised. In 1870, they're removed from jury duty. 1879, the Supreme Court *Scotter vs. West Virginia*, it says that States have the right to bar women from juries. 1883, Washington territory grants women the right to vote and the right to serve as jurors. 1887, the right to serve as jurors is taken away. 1887, Utah territory congress disenfranchises Utah women by the 1887 Edmunds-Tucker Act, taking away their right to vote and any legal rights they have in that regard. 1895, Utah has a proposed state constitution and ratifies it, granting women the vote, but it's very much against—this seems wrong for Utah, which seems a very patriarchal and sexist state—but Utah grants women the vote very, very early after the Federal government has taken it away from Utah women. 1896, President Cleveland claims Utah a state so Utah women can vote.

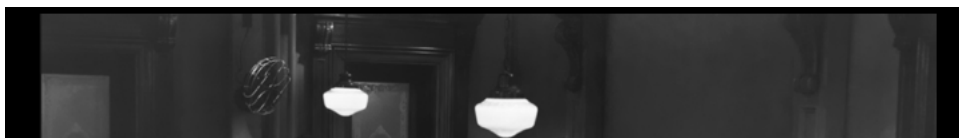
Now here's an example of what juries would be like if men behaved like women. They're all so emotional. They just can't make a rational decision.





1898, the Utah state legislature grants women the right to serve on juries. It's the first state in the Union to grant that right to women. 1898, this is pretty late. 1917-1919, Canada gives most women the right to vote in Canada. The Native American women are excluded. 1918, the United Kingdom, women gain the right to vote, but only if they own sufficient property in their own names or if they're university graduates and they're 30 years of age. 1920, the U.S gives women national women's suffrage finally. 1928, the United Kingdom gives women full suffrage. 1942, though, *Glasser vs the United States*, the Supreme court rules against defendants, that all-male juries are acceptable.

Think of this film, some of you may remember it, 1957, *Twelve Angry Men*. Think about the title. This is about a jury do you remember? Not the *Twelve Angry Men and Women*; *Twelve Angry Men*. There are only men on this jury in 1957. A classic court room drama and it still shows its sexist presuppositions.





The last state in the Union to grant women the right to serve on a jury was Mississippi. Maybe that's not a surprise, but in 1968. 1968! In 1971, Switzerland gave women the right to vote in national elections.

So this is an amazingly recent development in many countries. Can there be any serious question that I would ask is to why there are no women among the official 1830 witnesses to the Book of Mormon. How seriously would they have been taken?

Most Latter-day Saints are aware of the testimonies of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and they are a pretty powerful thing. That's what this movie is going to be to a large degree about.

Let me tell you an experience I had years ago. I was debating in a group of five Latter-day Saints against five evangelicals before the Evangelical Philosophical Society. The national meeting was in Denver that year. I remember at one point William Lane Craig. That name will mean something to a few of you anyway. He is probably the leading evangelical philosopher in the United States – very, very bright guy. I really do admire him. He at one point said, “Look, the difference between Christianity and Mormonism”—that's the way he put it —“the difference between Christianity and Mormonism is that Christianity has eleven credible witnesses for its central event, the resurrection of Christ. And Mormonism has got nothing like that. I was the one to respond to him, and I thought, oh, thank you, thank you! You just painted a target on your back.

Of course, not only do we have reputable witnesses, we have eleven of them, right? So that was fun. I could see as soon as he said that, Richard Mouw, who was an evangelical, the head of Fuller Theological Seminary, who was the moderator for the debate, was sitting out in front of me, and he just looked at me, and he knew that Craig had just put a target on his back. And I'm not one to pass it up.

These eleven men, impressive as they are, were not the only people besides Joseph Smith who had direct encounters with the gold plates. There are the official witnesses, all male, as you see.

I want to give you a few examples of the women whose testimonies we can call upon.

I'll try to be quick here. First of all is a Mrs. Palmer. That's as well as we know her. She gives a rather naïve account. She grew up not far from the family of Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith, and she speaks with simple eloquence of the Prophet's character, but also the enmity that his claims aroused, even among people of otherwise good will. I'm quoting her now:

My father owned a farm near that of the Smith family in New York. My parents were friends of the Smith family, which was one of the best in that locality – honest, religious, and industrious, but poor. My father loved young Joseph Smith and often hired him to work with his boys. I was about six years old when he first came to our home. I remember going into the field on an afternoon to play in the corn rows while my brothers worked. When evening came I was too tired to walk home and cried because my brothers refused to carry me. Joseph lifted me to his shoulder and with his arm thrown across my feet to steady me and my arm about his neck, he carried me to our home.

I remember the excitement stirred up among some of the people over Joseph Smith’s First Vision and of hearing my father contend that it was only the sweet dream of a pure minded boy. One of our church leaders came to my father to remonstrate against his allowing such close friendship between his family and the Smith boy, as he called him. My father defended his own position by saying that Joseph was the best help he had ever found.

Not until Joseph had had a second vision and began to write a book, which drew many of the best and brightest people of the churches away, did my parents come to a realization of the fact that their friend the churchman had told them the truth. Then my family cut off their friendship for all of the Smiths. For all of the family followed Joseph, even the father, intelligent man that he was, could not discern the evil he was helping to promote. My parents then lent all the aid they could in helping to crush Joseph Smith, but it was too late. He had run his course too long. He could not be put down. There was never a truer, purer, nobler boy than Joseph Smith before he was led away by superstition.

That’s an interesting kind of witness to the character of the family as opposed to the rumors that circulated about them elsewhere.

Martin Harris’s first wife, Lucy Harris, is typically remembered among Latter-day Saints for her opposition to her husband’s involvement with the Book of Mormon, and most dramatically, as the chief suspect, the leading suspect in the case of the lost 116 manuscript pages. The story is a bit more complex than that, however. Lucy Harris was ill. It’s likely that her severe deafness left her insecure and even perhaps somewhat paranoid. So she deserves some charity. Moreover, her apparent fear that Palmyra’s boycott of the Book of Mormon would lead to financial ruin for both her husband and herself was plainly not groundless.

More to my point here, though, Lucy Mack Smith recalled that early in the process of recovering the Book of Mormon, Lucy Harris offered to help Joseph publish it, but “only if I can get a witness that you do speak the truth.” Joseph reminded her that only God can bestow such a witness, and Mrs. Harris went away “highly displeased.” But Lucy Smith’s narrative goes on to recount that on the very next day Mrs. Harris returned with a very different attitude. She said that a personage had appeared to her during the previous night, who told her that inasmuch as she had disputed the servant of the Lord and said that his word was not to be believed and asked him many improper questions, that she had done that which was not right in the sight of God, after which he said, “Behold here are the plates. Look upon them and believe.” She then described the record very minutely. Lucy Harris gave Joseph 28 dollars, worth somewhat more than 750 dollars in 2019, which appears to make her perhaps the very first donor toward the publication of the Book of Mormon. Maybe we haven’t thought of her in that light, but there she is.

Here’s another one – Lucy Mack Smith. She’s an important witness to the official witnesses. She had, for example, seen the chosen three leave their encounter with the angel and the plates. And years later she recalled the scene that ensued at their return:

When they returned to the house it was between three and four o’clock p.m. Mrs. Whitmer, Mr. Smith and myself, were sitting in a bedroom at the time. On coming in, Joseph threw himself down beside me, and exclaimed, “Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am: the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, who has testified to them, and they will have to be witnesses to the Smiths of what I have said, for now they know for themselves that I do not

testified to them, and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said, for now they know for themselves, that I do not go about to deceive the people, and I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear, and it rejoices my soul, that I am not any longer to be alone in the world." Upon this [she says], Martin Harris came in: he seemed almost overcome with joy, and testified boldly to what he had both seen and heard. And so did David and Oliver, adding that no tongue could express the joy of their hearts, and the greatness of the things which they had both seen and heard.

Martin Harris particularly, she recalls in a variant account, seemed altogether unable to give vent to his feelings and words. He said:

I have now seen an angel from heaven, who has of a surety testified of the truth of all that I have heard concerning the record and my eyes have beheld him. I have also looked upon the plates and handled them with my hands and can testify of the same to the whole world. But I have received for myself a witness that words cannot express, that no tongue can describe, and I bless God in the sincerity of my soul that he had condescended to make me, even me, a witness of the greatness of his work and designs in behalf of the children of men. [She says] Oliver and David also joined with him in solemn praises to God for his goodness and mercy.

But Lucy Mack Smith had, with her two sons Hyrum and Samuel, joined the Presbyterian Church. By the way, the account was mentioned the other day of Joseph's response when he comes in from the First Vision. You remember, she says, "Are you all right?" as he looks a bit tired. He says, "Oh, I am well enough off. I've learned for myself that Presbyterianism isn't true." And I thought, that is such a teenage response. "You all right?" "Yep, I'm OK."

No [expansion]. With some of my kids at certain points, "So where have you been?" "Somewhere." "Who were you with?" "Oh, somebody." "What were you doing?" "Something." "Are you OK?" You just had the most colossal vision in human history maybe. "Yeah, I'm OK. But I've learned for myself that your church isn't true." That just seems really, really authentic to me.

So she's a member of the Presbyterian Church, and then, though, when the Book of Mormon is being printed, a delegation comes from the Presbyterian Church intending to persuade them to disavow the book. The spokesman for the group addressed the mother, but he received no satisfaction from Lucy Mack Smith. "Deacon Beckwith," Lucy said, "if you should stick my flesh full of faggots and even burn me at the stake, I would declare as long as God should give me breath, that Joseph has got that record. And I know it to be true." The spokesman for the group turned his attention to Hyrum, asking if he didn't think it possible that he had been deceived. "No sir," Hyrum responded, "I do not." Finally, when Samuel (younger brother) rather defiantly quoted a passage from Isaiah about blind watchmen and shepherds that cannot understand, the church leaders left. But they didn't leave the Smith family alone. They suspended them as members of the Presbyterian Church, and this is just the beginning of worse things.

But here is the thing: Lucy Mack Smith is not simply operating on the basis of hearsay. She may herself have even viewed the plates uncovered. Henry Caswall, who is a normally unreliable witness, a British clergyman, is quite hostile, visited Nauvoo in 1842. And he quotes her as saying:

I have seen and handled the golden plates. They are about eight inches long, about six wide. Some of them are sealed together and not to be opened. Some of them are loose. They are all connected by a hole which passes through a ring at the end of each plate and are covered with letters beautifully engraved.

But his quotation is an outlier. No one else quotes her as saying that. There is collaboration in other sources. So I'm inclined to agree with Larry Morris that he got it wrong, but that's not all there is. She definitely claims to have examined (that's her word) the Urim and Thummim and

found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as old-fashioned spectacles.

She also encountered the breastplate:

It was wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief so thin that I could see the glistening metal and ascertain its proportions without any difficulty. It was concave on one side and convex on the other and extended from the neck downwards as far as the center of the stomach of a man of extraordinary size. It had four straps of the same material for the purpose of fastening it to the breast, two of which ran back to go over the shoulders, and the other two were designed to fasten to the hips. They were just the width of two of my fingers, for I measured them. And they had holes in the ends of them to be convenient in fastening.

That is, there is a real artifact there. She's not hallucinating. She's touching and holding a real, tangible object.

Now Emma Smith. Moroni told Joseph Smith to bring his oldest brother Alvin when the time came to recover the plates. But Alvin died young at the age of only 25 in 1823. So Joseph was told at that point that a replacement would be given for Alvin. And he was told, "You will know her when you see her." Well that person turns out to be Emma Hale. At midnight on the appointed date, Joseph and his new bride Emma arrived at the Hill Cumorah with Joseph Knight Sr.'s wagon. That's my claim to fame. That's an ancestor of mine. So we go back pretty early. We haven't done well since then, but we go back early – Joseph Knight Sr.'s wagon. Joseph goes off alone to retrieve the plates and returns with them under his coat. When the plates arrive at the Hale home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Emma serves as her husband's first scribe taking dictation.

Joseph Smith III interviewed his mother in February 1879, two months before her death. She was 74. Before leaving, he read his transcript to her, and she confirmed its accuracy, so we can rely on this one. She was already at the point that she marries Joseph an experienced schoolteacher, and she said that at the time the Book of Mormon was translated, her husband "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon."

During an interview with Edmund C. Briggs, 1856, she recalled that when Joseph was dictating to her and came to proper names, "if I made a mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time." And again in that interview with Joseph III two months before her death, she testified to her eldest son:

The Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity. I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired, for when acting as a scribe your father would dictate to me hour after hour, and when returning after meals or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off [this has been quoted earlier, but it's worth repeating] without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this, and for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.

But what about the plates themselves? Emma Smith moved them from place to place on the table "as it was necessary on doing my housework," she says. At times she had to "lift and move the covered plates" when she swept and dusted. Now that doesn't sound to me like a spiritual experience revision. I've tried it on my wife. I've told several of you, when she complains, "Look at all those papers and books that are piling up by your side of the bed," I've told her, "You're having a vision. You're just seeing them with your spiritual eyes. You should be grateful to be having this kind of revelation. They're not really there."

This is very matter-of-fact stuff. She's moving the plates around, and she says they were heavy.

So, Joseph III's questions and her answers:



Question: Had Joseph not a book or manuscript from which he read or dictated to you?

Answer: He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.

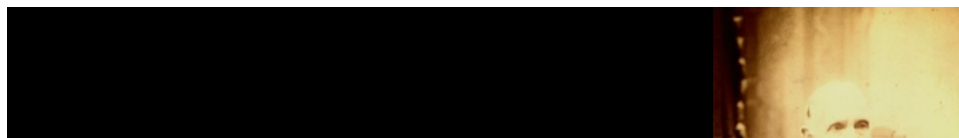
Question: Could he not have had and you not know it?

Answer: If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me.

Question: Are you sure that he had the plates at the time you were writing for him?

Answer: The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of 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 metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.

So I've said before that she seems to be spending quality time with the plates. I mean, Joseph isn't there, and she's feeling through the cloth, and I've always wanted to ask her, "Come on, Emma. There's no one in the room. They're covered by a thin cloth. I know what I would have done and probably been stricken dead on the spot, but I would have looked. And she says, "I know he had the plates," and you can tell, according to one description, she feels the rings, she feels the edges of the plates. She moves them, and she can feel the top plates scrape along the one below. She's really devoting some attention to this. So here you have a witness to the very matter-of-fact existence of a tangible object that is there. This is not in some sort of spiritual ecstasy. It's while cleaning the house, which for most of you, I'm willing to bet, is not spiritual ecstasy.







Now on to his sister, of whom we could not get a good picture. Here she is when she is very, very old. This is Catharine Smith, or Catharine Smith Salisbury. She, Catharine, hefted the covered plates on several different occasions. She seems often to have emphasized what Chris Heimerdinger calls their physicality. She said they were very heavy, recalled her grandson Herbert Salisbury. He also said that “she told me while dusting up the room where the Prophet had his study, she saw a package on the table containing the gold plates on which was engraved the story of the Book of Mormon. She said she hefted those plates and found them very heavy, like gold, and also rippled her fingers up the edge of the plates and felt that they were separate metal plates and heard the tinkle of sound that they’d made.”

This may be a duplicate of the Emma story. We’re not sure. But this is how her grandson remembers. If it’s accurate, though, and including the night on which the plates were first brought to the Smith home from Cumorah, Catharine was able to heft the plates on at least three distinct occasions, minimally two.

Other elements of a transmitted testimony are much more secure. In her article entitled “An Angel Told Him,” Joseph Smith’s aged sister tells about Moroni’s talk. The 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1895 Kansas City Times reported a speech given by Catharine Smith Salisbury about that same event:

Mrs. Salisbury [the newspaper’s correspondent told his readers] is a very old woman now, 83 years of age. But she claims to recall the time of the wonderful vision as vividly as though it were but yesterday. [She would have been 10 years old when Moroni came.] I can remember, she said, the time that this work commenced, my brother had the vision, that he saw the angel and talked with him. After he’d had his first vision he lay in bed one night studying what he had seen. And his room became light, and it grew lighter and lighter until an angel descended and stood at the side of his bed. He had not touched the floor, but he stood in the air. He was dressed in white raiment of whiteness beyond anything Joseph had ever seen in his life and had a girdle about his waist. He saw his hands and wrists, and they were pure and white, and he talked with him.

Of all the accounts of the visitation, only Catharine’s mentions the angel’s “girdle.” And only Catharine mentions that Joseph had been reflecting that evening on his earlier First Vision. These facets of a narrative may well reflect what he himself told her but never committed to writing. But very much as in Joseph’s own account, she mentions the unparalleled character of the light in which the angel was enveloped. You’ll recall how Joseph struggled to express the brightness and glory of the light he perceived, limited as he is to images taken in from his experience in a world that was still, in the title of William Manchester’s book about 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, *Lit Only by Fire*. He had no electric comparisons to make. Recalling the first visit of Moroni, Joseph said,

The room was lighter than at noonday. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I'd ever seen, nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description and his countenance truly like lightning.

Or this account of his First Vision:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. When the light rested upon me I saw two personages whose brightness and glory defy all description.

He repeatedly says, "I couldn't describe it. It was brighter than anything I can compare it to." And Catharine picks up that same idea, brighter than anything, any comparison that can be made.

Now William, who was about 12 ½ years old at that time, remembered that Moroni told Joseph to call his father's house together and communicate to them the visions he had received. Both Joseph's sister Catharine and his mother remember that Joseph was afraid that his father wouldn't believe him, and the angel assured him that his father would believe every word. And so it turned out: "I obeyed. I returned to my father in the field and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied that it was of God." Now his sister Catharine remembering the day more than 70 years later recalls the sequence of events somewhat differently, having Joseph go to the house and ask his father and two brothers to come to him there. And very understandably, given the nature of the news, the discussion of the father and his three sons may have been a lengthy one that carried over from the harvest field into the house. Whatever the case, the 10-year-old girl was struck by the seriousness of the conversation that day:

He went to the house and sent for father and my two brothers. And they came to the house and sat and talked quite a spell. I wondered at it. I was young, and I didn't know what they were talking about, because I knowed they were so busy with their harvesting.

This is important enough they're taking a break from crucial, urgent work that has to be done. And Catharine remembered Joseph's arrival home in 1827 when she was 14 and that the plates were wrapped up in his frock.

When he got to the door he said, "Father, I've been followed. Look and see if you can see anyone." He then threw himself on the bed and fainted, and when he came to he told us the circumstances. He had his thumb put out of place, and his arm was very lame.

Catharine's grandson, Herbert Salisbury, remembered his grandmother relating that when Joseph came in the house, he was completely out of breath. She took the plates from him and laid them on the table temporarily and helped revive him until he got breathing properly and also examined his hand and treated it for the bruises on his knuckles. In striking the last mobber, who was trying to take the plates (this is Lucy Mack Smith speaking):

he dislocated his thumb, which however he did not notice until he came within sight of the house, when he threw himself down in the corner of the fence in order to recover his breath. As soon as he was able he rose and came to the house. He was altogether speechless from fright and the fatigue of running.

And Mary Salisbury Hancock, Catharine's granddaughter, remembered Catharine relating the same episode when Joseph, with the plates in his possession, had been chased by a mob:

Hearing an unusual commotion outside, Catharine flew to the door, threw it open just as Joseph came rushing up, panting for breath. He thrust a bundle into our arms and in a gasping voice whispered hoarsely, "Take these quickly and hide them." Then he disappeared into the darkness. Closing the door, Catharine ran hurriedly to the bedroom where she and Sophronia slept. Sophronia

threw back the bedding, and Catharine put the bundle on the bed, quickly replacing the bedding. Both of them lay down on the bed and pretended to be asleep. The mob, failing to find Joseph outside, returned to the house to search, but they didn't disturb the girls since they appeared to be sleeping.

What kind of a witness is she? Is she credible? The Illinois Senator Orville Berry, not LDS in any sense, wrote a tribute to Catharine Smith Salisbury not long after her death in her late 80s on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1900:

There resided in this country until her death Catharine Smith Salisbury, sister of the Prophet. The writer knew her personally, has been in her house many times, has grown up from boyhood days with her sons and grandsons, and the world would be wonderfully well-off if all women were as good as Catharine Smith Salisbury.

So her testimony should be taken very, very seriously.



And now another. You're familiar with this painting, which made its debut here last year. David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses, related that his mother, Mary Mussleman Whitmer, saw the plates quite independently of anybody else and under the most matter-of-fact of circumstances, again not in a state of religious ecstasy or spiritual transport, but very matter-of-factly. The entire of family of Peter Whitmer Sr. had become acquainted with Joseph Smith in 1828 through David, who was the fourth of nine Whitmer children. Eventually a substantial part of the translation of the Book of Mormon occurred at the Peter Whitmer farm near Fayette, New York, and later of course on April 6, 1830, the Church was organized there. During that period, the place was a hive of activity. Joseph Smith and his wife Emma and Oliver Cowdery were boarding with the Whitmers, and other people, including curiosity seekers, were constantly coming and going. Much of the burden of coping with them fell upon Peter's wife Mary, and some of you women will sympathize with this:

My father and mother had a large family of their own [David later explained]. The addition to it therefore of Joseph, his wife Emma, and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. Although she had never complained, she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so.

A granddaughter’s account, as published by Royal Skousen in *The Interpreter* a while back, adds some very specific and very human details of the story, relating that Mary Whitmer was irritated when Joseph and Oliver took breaks from translating and “skated rocks on a pond.” She thought they might just as well carry her a bucket of water or chop a bit of wood, and she was about to order them out of her house. Now we know that he used to do that. Martin Harris talks about going down to the river when Joseph needed a break and skipping a stone on the river or on the lake. So it’s very human. But you know, Mary Whitmer’s question, “Well why can’t they just fetch me some water while they’re doing this?” It’s understandable. So one day though, probably in June 1829, when she is going to milk the cows in the family barn and where David happened to know the plates were concealed at the time, she met an old man, as she described him, who said to her in David’s account of the story, “You’ve been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you’re tired because of the increase of your toil. It is proper therefore that you should receive a witness, that your faith may be strengthened.” Thereupon, David said, “He showed her the plates.” And this unexpected encounter “completely removed her feeling of being overwhelmed,” said her son, “and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities.”

Afterwards Mary was able to describe the plates in detail. John C. Whitmer, her grandson, reportedly himself heard his grandmother tell of this event several times. He summarized her experience in more detailed fashion as follows:

She met a stranger carrying something on his back that looked like a 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, that is the translation of the Book of Mormon, she was filled with unexpressable 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 witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

So she is actually the first witness. Did you notice that? The other witnesses come later.

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.

Five of Mary Whitmer’s sons became official witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery, one of the Three Witnesses and the principal scribe during its dictation, baptized her into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Seneca Lake on April 18, 1830, when the Church was less than two weeks old, and he married her daughter Elizabeth Ann in December of 1832. The Whitmers gathered to Missouri with the Latter-day Saints, and there Mary died at 78 years of age in 1856, still a faithful believer in the divine origin of the gold plates and the book that had been translated from them—another really important witness and the witness of a woman.

Here’s what Royal Skousen has to say:

The most interesting aspect of this story is that Mary Whitmer’s difficulty with the household situation was more than just being tired from all the extra work. She was irritated by Joseph and Oliver’s indifference to all the work she was doing, but they’re not helping out, instead skipping rocks for relaxation. So she was about to order them out of her home. Thus Moroni’s intervention was perhaps more purposeful than we might have previously thought. Undoubtedly many others exerted much effort on behalf of providing help to Joseph and Oliver, such as Emma Smith had just done in Harmony, Pennsylvania, for the previous three months. Here however, Moroni needed to deal with a more difficult situation, one that could have forced Joseph to find another place and a secure one, to do the translating. Moroni and the Lord weren’t in the habit of just showing the plates to people to encourage them to act as a support team for the work of the translation. But this was a crisis, and it had to be dealt with, and so Mary Whitmer has a vision or a showing of the plates.

It's a remarkable thing. So here we have, although they're not among the official witnesses, we have a number of unofficial witnesses whose stories I insist must be told in this film that we're doing and in the products related to it that we're going to be producing, because they're in some ways just as important, and they are very tangible. You can't dismiss them as visionary experiences. Moving plates in order to clean the kitchen is not a visionary experience. Going out to milk the cows and encountering an old man who has a knapsack with golden plates in them is not a visionary experience. She didn't pray for hours to get into a state to experience that. She was just going out to milk the cows, which my father, who had to do that when he was growing up on a farm in North Dakota, assured me was not a spiritual experience at all.

In fact I might close on a very unsolemn note. My father was concerned growing up as a Lutheran boy in North Dakota and having to milk cows. His mother, a Norwegian immigrant, had taught him that he was not to swear. But he said when you're milking cows, and just when you get the pail full of milk and the cow sticks his incredibly filthy hoof in your milk pail, or the cow hits you in the face with its incredibly filthy tail, he says you just have to swear. And so his concern was that his city cousins, who didn't have to milk cows, were going to go to heaven, and he was not. It raised the question of divine justice in a really acute way for him. And so I'm just suggesting based on what my father tells me about milking cows, and some of you have firsthand experience with this, that you don't go out to milk the cow in the mindset that it will bring you a divine vision.

These are I think extraordinarily important witnesses because they come from a different perspective than an official witness's. They are unofficial witnesses who saw things and experienced things under very matter-of-fact, very tangible, sort of mundane situations. And that to me is evidentially powerful. Of course, we can't prove the Book of Mormon true, but my word, the witnesses are hard to get around. They seem to me—and there probably about twenty of them or more if you put them all together who had these experiences with the plates and the angel and so on and so forth—they are very difficult to get around. Fawn Brodie can do no better than to say of, if I remember right, Mary Whitmer's own experience, “Joseph must have marveled at his ability to induce visions in others.” Well, that's no kind of explanation. That's just brushing it aside, and she can't be brushed aside that easily, nor can the others. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

## Q&A

Daniel Peterson: I'm not sure this is a question. It's a command. “Imagine how long it would have taken the world to know of the resurrection if left to men.” I'd better not comment on that one.

“I'm wondering if the man in that cartoon that the women were calling handsome was Ted Bundy?” I have no answer for that one either!

### **Q: “How can we work with millennials to better understand these concepts and disregard presentism?”**

Well, I think part of the problem is that many people aren't hearing this story of the witnesses. I can't tell you how many conversations I've had and how many interactions online I've had with people who have told me, “Well, when I realized the witnesses never claimed to have actually seen the plates with their actual eyes or to have held them with their actual hands then I just dismiss them.” But in order to say that you've got to ignore what the witnesses actually said. When Hyrum Smith was quoted the other day as saying, “I have only two eyes and only two hands, I held the plates with these hands, I saw them with these eyes,” I don't know how much more clearly he could have said that.

So I think one of the reasons that I want to do this film is I want to tell the story as powerfully as I can to get it right out there. People can still reject the testimony of the witnesses but I don't want them to reject that testimony on the basis of a misunderstanding of it. I want them to know what it is they're rejecting. The witnesses did claim to hold the plates, the Eight did, they did claim to see them with their actual eyes. There's nothing mysterious about this. David Whitmer was standing at the table when a man came to him. “Well, maybe

their actual eyes. There's nothing metaphorical about this. David Whitmer pounding the table when a man says to him, "well, maybe they were far away and he didn't see them very clearly?" "Young man," he bangs the table and says, "the angel was closer to me than you are. I was not deceived, I know what I saw, it was no hallucination!" Somehow, we have not told that story as well as we should have, I think, in the last few decades and so people are spiritualizing it and allegorizing it and dismissing it as imagination and the witnesses refused to be dismissed that way.

**Q: “Why have the plates, or the Urim and Thummim at all, if they were never used by Joseph Smith to translate the Book of Mormon?”**

I think partly because of their evidentiary value. Joseph could have been making this up, right, but there are these solid objects made out of gold. They're a gold alloy and they're there. You can't fantasize that into existence. And you have other people who can testify that they were there.

Also, speculative, but I think it was Royal Skousen who suggested to me that Joseph, if he didn't have to have the plates in his presence to translate, nevertheless they had to be close. They could be covered in the next room, or something like that, but they had to be close. And he, sort of laughingly, compared it to the idea of an iPhone hotspot or something like that. I have no idea of how the Lord does this but it seems to me that that would have reassured Joseph too if you're ever wondering, "Am I hallucinating this?" Well, then you remember you've got a 40 or 60 pound metal object in the next room and you think, "No... I'm not! This is real. This is as tangible as it gets. In fact, it's downright heavy, so you're not making it up." He knows he didn't make the plates, he couldn't have made the plates.

**Q: “Can you elaborate why the Queen of Sheba and Esther’s stories are in the Bible despite the culture at the time?”**

I have no idea why. Well the Queen of Sheba I think was designed to illustrate the wide extent of Solomon's rule and his fame. That even Sheba, which is about as far away as you could go, even she took him seriously, his empire was that big.

And the story of Esther is to illustrate a moral point. By the way, I should probably tell you that I'm not sure that Esther is true history. It's the only book of the Bible, or Old Testament, that doesn't show up in the Dead Sea Scrolls and there are some real problems with it, historically speaking. For one, the king of Iran at that time was forbidden to marry anybody who wasn't a member of certain Persian royal family or aristocratic family lines. So the idea that he married Esther is problematic. Even today, Jews don't take it very seriously on the whole. They have the festival of Purim, which is done with parties and it's like Halloween. They reenact the story of Haman, Mordecai, and Esther, and it's all for fun. It's the only book in the Old Testament where the word "God" doesn't appear, so there are a lot of reasons for wondering how seriously to take Esther. But it's a great little novella. It's a fun story. The Jews are almost destroyed and then rescued and it's a great account.

[Lightly edited for readability and clarity.]



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