

ENGAGING GOSPEL DOCTRINE (EPISODE 174)

LESSON 01

“The Keystone of Our Religion”

Hook	We talk often about the importance of the Book of Mormon. In this lesson we will talk about why and how it is important.
Manual Goal	To help class members understand how the <u>Book of Mormon</u> is the keystone of our religion and how abiding by its precepts helps us draw nearer to God.
EGD Goal	To help class members honestly evaluate their relationship with the Book of Mormon and explore how they can improve it.

The focus of this lesson should be to prepare class members to get the most they can out of their Book of Mormon reading this year. (bring up anything you want from the Intro episode)

I. Sunday School

- a. Framing: Focus should be to prepare class members to get the most they can out of the Book of Mormon reading this year. Use this reading and the overview from the Introductory lesson
- b. Reading commentary
- c. Lesson: The Book of Mormon and you
 - i. What is your relationship with the Book of Mormon? Start where you ARE. Be honest. Don't feel badly about the natural gifts God has or hasn't given you. Do you love it? No? That is ok. Does it interest or bore you? Does it thrill or trouble you? How well do you understand it? Where you are is ok. The Book of Mormon is worth committing time and energy to. But how much you drink of it in what proportion to other sources of spiritual nourishment... that will differ.
 - ii. Why is the Book of Mormon important? (Originally it was used as evidence of Joseph's prophetic calling, and still functions that way. Reading it can also bring us closer to God... that is its core purpose)
 1. Outcome, "by their fruits", Alma 32 (Reading it brings you closer to God)

2. Content (Book of Mormon contains important truths)
 3. Implications (Joseph is a prophet, LDS Church is guided by God, etc)
 - iii. How does the Book of Mormon contain the “fullness of the Gospel”? (It doesn’t have temple ordinances, which is a fascinating point. But it does focus on love, caring for those in need, and is saturated with a witness of Christ’s Atonement. Is that the Gospel in full?)
 - iv. Full reading
- II. Scripture Study
- III. Study Notes
- a. What does “true” mean? How do the dots connect?
 - i. Book of Mormon is inspired
 - ii. Jesus Christ is the Savior
 - iii. Joseph Smith is a prophet
 - iv. The LDS Church is the kingdom of God on the earth
 - v. The LDS Church is exactly the way God wants it (spoiler: it isn’t)
 - b. What was the nature of the “witnesses”?

Witnesses: Two perspectives:

<https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-11-number-2-2010/evaluating-book-mormon-witnesses> (Steven Harper acknowledges the issues, which is a responsible academic move. His is a believer’s position and argument worthy of respect)

The testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses printed in each copy of the Book of Mormon are some of the most compelling evidence in favor of its miraculous revelation and translation. Here we have depositions by eleven men of the gold plates’ existence and by three of an angelic visitation. The three saw and the eight “hefted” the plates. For believers, that approaches proof of Joseph Smith’s miraculous claims. But some have questioned the nature of the witnesses’ experiences, arguing that they were supernatural and visionary.^[1] The witnesses, this argument asserts, did not see or touch ancient artifacts as we see or handle trees or chairs but only through unreliably subjective “spiritual eyes,” rendering their statements null and void. To arrive at an independent judgment, seekers need to examine the evidence for themselves and draw their own conclusions about its meaning and importance. I will quote the witnesses’ own statements that are not in

the Book of Mormon and then provide a sampling of the wide variety of hearsay accounts. Then, with particular attention to the assumption that seeing with spiritual eyes negates one's witness, I will analyze the statements as an historian who chooses to believe in the testimonies of the Book of Mormon witnesses and end with an invitation to my readers to join me in making that informed choice.

<http://signaturebooks.com/book-of-mormon-witnesses-revisited/>

One purpose of ["The Validity of the Witnesses' Testimonies" [which] appeared in 2002 in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*,¹] was to challenge the apologetic use of these testimonies, particularly the assumption that the experience of three witnesses was, in the words of emeritus Brigham Young University professor Richard L. Anderson, a "natural-supernatural appearance of the angel with the plates"²—in other words, it was an objective and physical visitation of an angel rather than a subjective and inward vision—and that the eight witnesses saw and handled the plates in a completely natural and a non-visionary manner. My investigation showed that subsequent statements by David Whitmer and Martin Harris made it clear that their experiences with the angel and plates were more subjective than their published group statement implied, and that the naturalistic-wording of the Testimony of Eight Witnesses is misleading.

Harris later said the angel and plates were seen with "spiritual eyes" and Whitmer that they were only seen "in the Spirit." In other words, it was a visionary or extrasensory experience.⁵

In similar fashion, it is a mistake to attempt to reconstruct the historical situation behind the Testimony of Eight Witnesses based solely on its simplistic and non-historical wording.

Since there is no account detailing exactly how the eight witnesses came to see and handle the plates near the Smith cabin in Manchester, New York, there are several possible reconstructions, which I explored in my 2002 essay. "Assuming the experience of the eight witnesses was visionary," I said, "there are at least three possible scenarios to explain how they both saw and handled the plates."¹⁵ First, there is Palmer's view that the witnesses saw and handled the plates in vision. Second, as some former Mormons told Thomas Ford, Joseph Smith may have produced an empty box and the witnesses were induced to see the plates. In this instance, handling of the plates necessarily refers to previous exposure to the covered plates of at least some of the

witnesses. Third, the box Joseph Smith showed the witnesses contained a set of fake plates or some other material of similar weight and the witnesses viewed the plates supernaturally or clairvoyantly through the box. In this instance, the witnesses could claim that they had both seen and hefted the plates. Fourth, it is also possible that a set of fake plates were presented concealed in a cloth, which would allow for all the elements to occur on the same day to all the men. This would be similar to Harris's statement that in addition to his vision of the angel and plates, "he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box [or] with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain."¹⁶

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/benjaminthescribe/2016/01/me-the-blog-and-book-of-mormon-gospel-doctrine-lesson-1-changes/>