

HOWE AND THE MORMONS

When Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet claimed to be about to translate scriptures from golden plates, some people smelling a rat had to take action. Affidavits were collected about his bad character and lies from people who knew him well.

To the suggestion, “The affidavits collected by a Philastus Hurlbut and published by Eber D Howe in *Mormonism Unveiled* prove that the Golden Bible was a scam”, there are some weird and desperate Mormon answers.

The anti-Mormon affidavits collected by Hurlbut which were published in 1834 testify that the Smiths were a family who could not be trusted. The Smiths were into money digging and pretended to find buried treasure that magically disappeared. Some would answer, “But that could be understood as credulity. The Golden Plates were different because they did not disappear and were touched and kept by Joseph Smith. The affidavits say that Joseph’s father-in-law, Isaac Hale forced Joseph to quit digging for money for it was fraudulent but why then did he tolerate the Golden Plates? He even let Joseph translate while Joseph lived under his roof. Was it because he knew they were real?” The plates could disappear all they liked for Smith never looked at them much and nobody else saw them except for a little while. Isaac Hale testified and signed an affidavit that he did not believe in Smith or his plates or his new Bible.

Then some say, “Joseph Smith’s father allegedly stated that he saw the plates and other times he said he didn’t. That was before he had the contact with them that is reported in the Testimony of the Eleven Witnesses. Perhaps he had to lie for some people were desperate to take the Plates from the Smiths. Joseph Smith had wanted a man to make him a chest to lock the Golden Book up in. According to an affidavit by Justice Jonathan Lapham, Joseph said he saw an angel and saw a vision of an angel who told him he could not have them until he wed and brought his wife to collect them. Though the Smiths told superstitious and fabricated stories about the finding of the Plates, this is Joseph’s version and it takes pre-eminence. The Smiths planned to put the Plates on display in the house and make money in doing so. This testifies to their certainty that the Plates were real. Abigail Harris said that Martin Harris once said that he did not care if it was a lie about Mormonism for he would make money out of it. She did not say how he intended to make money. Did Harris mean that he and Smith were going to sell the Plates? He probably did for he knew by then that there was little to be made from the published Book of Mormon and a tiny Church. He was reliable in business matters according to an affidavit signed by fifty-one people in 1831. Smith said once that his firstborn son would see the Plates which never happened and then the revelation came that three friends would see the Plates. Harris was desperate to see the Plates and Smith told him to follow his footprints in the snow into the forest to see if he could find the Plates. Harris found nothing. But Joseph probably thought Harris would not do this for it was too strange and he seems to have been having him on. But Joseph must have been in the forest hiding the Plates. Smith once said that eighteen months after Nathaniel Lewis asked to see the Plates the whole world would see them. This never happened and Smith admitted he was wrong. It is said that the Golden Plates were invented because Joseph’s father spoke of a golden book being found in Canada. Joseph was said to have carried home some nice white sand in his clothes and when his family asked him what he had he said it was a Golden Bible from God that they would be killed by God for looking at. They believed him. First, if the family were that gullible why did they tell so many religious lies knowing that the Bible issued terrible warnings for anybody that did that? Second, they knew they could not listen to Joseph. Third, they would not have seen the shape of a book in his clothes. Smith once asked a minister, Elder Lewis if he should translate the Plates and said that he would show them to the world in a year and a half. Smith really did have golden plates.”

This argument is believing the Smiths when it suits. Also, Harris mortgaged his farm to pay for the publication of the Book of Mormon and did not demand that the Plates be sold to pay for it. Harris would have been reliable in business only if he knew what was going on which he often did but Smith fooled him with promises of religious thrills. There many frauds who promise you things you will never see.

The following is a summary of *Mormonism Unveiled: More Evidence That It Is True* by the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry.

Fawn Brodie thought the testimonies were not real for Hurlbut had been excommunicated from the Church by Smith and had an axe to grind. But there is no evidence that Hurlbut was just out for revenge. If he was, he could still have worked to find the truth about Smith and use it against him. Another problem is that the testimonies use a lot of the same words a lot which seems to indicate forgery or interference with the testimonies. But there are testimonies that say much the same things about Smith that had nothing to do with Hurlbut and they still use the same words. For example, Jesse Townsend, the Presbyterian Minister at Joseph’s hometown, wrote a letter about the Smiths saying similar things and using some of the same words. So it is just a reflection on the education of the people and the way they talked and not a hint of common

authorship. We must remember too that if Hurlbut used the same questions on every person he interviewed the similar wording would have been more or less inevitable. And how do you explain why the witnesses never said they were manipulated or forced by Hurlbut and never took back anything they declared about Joseph and the Smiths? Many of the things in the affidavits were verified by other independent sources. Howe himself ran spot checks on the witnesses before he published his book, just in case. To disparage Hurlbut and then to think that that is the same as making little of his research is illogical because it was not him but the people that were saying these things. Distracting people from the real critic who has the power to crush the lies is a common trick used among fundamentalists.