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# Blacks Cursed: Doctrine or Folklore?

## BYU Professor's Racial Comments Stir National Controversy

In June of 1978 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as Mormons or LDS) announced the end of its priesthood restriction for blacks, a practice that had been rigorously defended since the days of Brigham Young, the second president of the LDS Church. Even though a few blacks had been ordained to the priesthood during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS Church, this did not grant them access to the secret LDS temple rituals, thus barring them from the Mormon goal of eternal marriage and advancement to godhood.<sup>1</sup> While it has been thirty-four years since the ban was lifted, the issue is still coming back to haunt the LDS Church. This February, while writing a story on presidential candidate Mitt Romney and the LDS Church's stand on racial issues, a reporter from the *Washington Post* interviewed Randy Bott, a well-respected professor at Brigham Young University:

In his office, religion professor Randy Bott explains a possible **theological underpinning** of the ban. According to Mormon scriptures, the **descendants of Cain**, who killed his brother, Abel, "**were black.**" One of Cain's descendants was Egyptus, a woman Mormons believe was the namesake of Egypt. She married **Ham**, whose descendants were themselves cursed and, in the view of many Mormons, barred from the priesthood by his father, Noah. Bott points to the Mormon holy text

the Book of Abraham [*Pearl of Great Price*, Abraham 1:21-27] as suggesting that **all of the descendants of Ham and Egyptus were thus black and barred from the priesthood.**<sup>2</sup>



Nauvoo Temple in 1847 where Blacks were initially banned from temple rituals.

Professor Bott defended the ban on the basis that blacks were not mature enough at that time for the responsibility:

Bott compares blacks with a young child prematurely asking for the keys to her father's car, and explains that similarly until 1978, the Lord determined that blacks were not yet ready for the priesthood.

At another place in the article we read:

"What is discrimination?" Bott asks. "I think that is keeping something from somebody that would be a benefit for them, right? But what if it wouldn't have been a benefit to them?" Bott says that the denial of the priesthood to blacks on Earth—although not in the afterlife—protected them from the lowest rungs of hell reserved for people who abuse their priesthood powers. "You couldn't fall off the top of the ladder, because you weren't on the top of the ladder. So, in reality the blacks not having the priesthood was the greatest blessing God could give them."<sup>3</sup>

Bott's comments spread like wildfire on the Internet, raising questions about the current teachings of the LDS Church regarding race. The day after the *Washington*

<sup>1</sup> Jessie L. Embry, *Black Saints in a White Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), pp. 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Horowitz, "The Genesis of a church's stand on race," *Washington Post* (February 28, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

*Post* article, February 29, 2012, the LDS Church issued an official statement repudiating Bott's statements as not representative of the church's position: "BYU faculty members do not speak for the Church." The statement continued:

The Church's position is clear—we believe all people are God's children are equal in His eyes and in the Church. We do not tolerate racism in any form.

For a time in the Church **there was a restriction on the priesthood for male members of African descent**. It is not known **precisely why, how, or when** this restriction began in the Church but what is clear is that it ended decades ago. Some have attempted to explain the reason for this restriction but these attempts should be viewed as **speculation and opinion, not doctrine**. The Church is not bound by speculation or opinions given with limited understanding.

We condemn racism, including any and **all past racism by individuals** both inside and outside the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Curiously, this was merely a press release with no names attached, as opposed to an official First Presidency Statement, which would carry the names of the leaders. For an example, see the First Presidency Statement issued regarding baptism for the dead on February 29, 2012.<sup>5</sup>

While the LDS statement condemning racism was applauded by many Mormons, it still seems to be avoiding the basic doctrinal issue of why the priesthood ban was ever instituted in the first place.

Max Mueller, writing for *Slate*, an online magazine, gave this evaluation of LDS teachings and Bott's statements:

Why did the church withhold the priesthood from blacks for over a century? Among the reasons trotted out by church leaders—including church presidents—during that time: Black people are the cursed descendants of ancient Biblical figures; black people committed **premortal perfidy**; black people lacked the intelligence and personal integrity to hold such a sacred office.

**Such past beliefs have never officially been repudiated**. And the failure of the church to repudiate them helped set the stage for the comments made by Bott, perhaps the most popular professor at BYU . . .

For many Mormons, reading Bott's words was like unearthing a theological dinosaur long thought extinct but suddenly rediscovered in the corner of an obscure BYU office. . . .

4 "Church Statement Regarding 'Washington Post' Article on Race and the Church" (February 29, 2012). <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>

5 <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/first-presidency-issues-direction-members-names-ordinances>

Unfortunately, Bott's beliefs, though arcane, represent a strain of Mormonism that has persisted well past the 1978 revelation. For most of the 182-year lifespan of the LDS Church, members of the church hierarchy—the senior-most of which are called prophets and speak to and for God—used similar racist rationalizations for excluding blacks from full membership. . . . The 1978 revelation itself does not address why the ban was instituted in the first place, and the lack of answers from today's Mormon leaders creates a theological vacuum. To fill this vacuum, Mormons turn to the reams of answers provided by past prophets, who led a church in which blacks were not welcome.

Thus, some Mormon parents continue to teach their children beliefs like those proffered up by Bott. . . .

Almost to a person, the Mormons—both black and white—whom I have spoken with since the *Post* story broke were hoping for a "miracle," as one well-known black Mormon called it—i.e., a full repudiation of the church's past racial discrimination **from a church apostle rather than a press release from the public affairs office**. That miracle has not arrived so far.<sup>6</sup>

Also in the *Slate* article, Mueller mentioned that Terry Ball, dean of religious education at BYU, was upset with Bott about his statements:

In an email to several faculty members, Terry Ball, dean of religious education, expressed his disgust with Bott's statements and said he would "deal with Bott professionally."<sup>7</sup>

Curiously, in 2008, Ball himself made similar racial comments. One Internet blogger reported:

Last week Terry Ball, Dean of the College of Religious Education, gave BYU's weekly devotional address. His talk raises many issues relevant to recent discussions . . . He [Ball] then shows how his training confirms and informs his faith by quoting from the end of Isaiah 28, a parable of a farmer. . . . :

"I believe Isaiah wants us to liken the farmer to our Heavenly Father, and the seeds to ourselves, **Have you ever wondered why you were born where and when you were born? Why you were not born 500 years ago in some primitive, aboriginal culture in some isolated corner of the world?** Is the timing and placing of your birth capricious? For Latter-day Saints the answer is **no**. Fundamental to our faith is the understanding that before we came to this earth we lived in a **premortal existence** with a loving heavenly father. **We further understand that in the premortal state we had agency**. And that we

6 Max Perry Mueller, "Is Mormonism Still Racist?" *Slate.com* (March 2, 2012).

7 *Ibid.*

grew and developed as we used that agency. Some, as Abraham learned, became noble and great ones. . . . Others of you are wheat, you've been placed in exceptionally fertile and promising places because God, who knows your special potential, is counting on you to produce so much. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The author goes on to state that he is not accusing Terry Ball of racism but his speech does raise the issue

whether the idea of **nobility in premortality** can ever fully get away from its racist implications. One has to ask what Ball meant by the pejorative reference to “some primitive, aboriginal culture in some isolated corner of the world.” Certainly he's not counting “them” as wheat, since they're not planted in the ripest ground. Ball sets up a chronological, geographical, and cultural hierarchy dependent on **premortals “agency”** . . . If the comment about aborigines is not outright racist, can it be anything other than elitist, colonialist, etc.?<sup>9</sup>

The statements of both Bott and Ball demonstrate how the LDS concept of premortal performance inevitably leads to connecting it with a preferential birth and assignment to race. These professors were simply reiterating the teachings of their past prophets and apostles.

Today the LDS Church seems to be categorizing the teachings of past prophets on racial issues as “folklore.” In an article commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the lifting of the ban on blacks, Sheldon F. Child, of the Council of Seventies, explained to the reporter:

“We have to keep in mind that **it's folklore and not doctrine**,” Elder Child said. “It's never been recorded as such. Many opinions, **personal opinions**, were spoken. I'm just so grateful for this [1978] revelation,” he said, adding he can recall exactly where he was and what he was doing when he heard the news 30 years ago.<sup>10</sup>

But if the leaders' earlier sermons relating to the “curse of Cain” and the ban on blacks holding the priesthood were simply “folklore,” why did it require a revelation to change the practice?

## Smith's View on Race and Skin Color

The first instance of racism in Smith's new religion can be found in the Book of Mormon, published in

8 Jupiterschild, “BYU Religion Dean on Premortal Life, Part I: Race and Nobility,” (March 19, 2008). <http://faithpromotingrumor.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/byu-religion-dean-on-premortal-life-part-i-race-and-nobility/>

9 *Ibid.* A brief report of Terry Ball's speech was in the *BYU Daily Universe* (March 12, 2008).

10 “LDS Marking 30-Year Milestone,” *Deseret News* (June 7, 2008). <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700232679/LDS-marking-30-year-milestone.html>

1830.<sup>11</sup> Here we find the story of a group of Israelites who migrate to America at approximately 600 BC. They soon divide into two groups—the righteous Nephites are described as “white” and “delightful” while the rebellious Lamanites are cursed by God with a “dark” skin, also referred to as a “skin of blackness”:

**2 Nephi 5:21-23:** And he [God] had caused the **cursing** to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. . . . wherefore, **as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightful**, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause **a skin of blackness** to come upon them. . . . And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the **same cursing**. And the Lord spake it, and it was done.”

**Jacob 3:5:** Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and **the cursing which hath come upon their skins**. . .

**Alma 3:6:** And **the skins** of the Lamanites were **dark**, according to **the mark** which was set upon their fathers, which was a **curse** upon them because of the transgression and their rebellion. . .

The descendants of these rebellious people were believed by the early Mormons to be the American Indian.<sup>12</sup> While their dark skin was seen as a sign of God's curse on them, Indians were allowed to join Mormonism and be ordained to its priesthood.

Soon after starting his church in 1830, Joseph Smith began a revision of the Bible. Without knowing either Hebrew or Greek, Smith supposedly relied on divine guidance in correcting the text. Part of his revision is printed in the *Pearl of Great Price* as the Book of Moses, where we find the scriptural roots of the LDS concept of the origin of black people:

**Moses 7:8:** . . . and there was a **blackness** came upon all the **children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people**.

**Moses 7:12:** . . . Enoch continued to call upon all the people, **save it were the people of Canaan**, to repent . . .

**Moses 7:22:** And Enoch also beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam; and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam **save it was the seed of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them**.

Smith seems to have been adapting the racial arguments of his day, which were used to justify slavery,

11 For a chronological treatment of LDS teachings on race, see <http://mormonstories.org/top10toughissues/blacks.html>

12 See “Who are the Lamanites?” *Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 103 (November 2004). <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no103.htm>

when formulating his teaching that blacks were under the curse of Cain.<sup>13</sup>

When Mormons started settling in Missouri in the early 1830's their attitude toward Native Americans and blacks became a concern of their neighbors. Many Missourians worried that Smith's church, founded in New York, was anti-slavery. After the Mormons published an article "Free People of Color"<sup>14</sup> in their *Evening and Morning Star*, the non-Mormons worried that it was meant to encourage blacks to immigrate to the Mormon settlement in Independence, Missouri. To calm local fears, the Mormons immediately printed an "Extra" sheet for the paper, in which they announced:

Having learned, with regret, that an article entitled FREE PEOPLE OF COLOR, in the last number of the Star, has been misunderstood, we feel in duty bound to state, in this Extra, that our intention was not only to stop **free people of color** from emigrating to this state, but to **prevent them from being admitted as members of the Church.**<sup>15</sup>

After a few abolitionists came to the Mormon settlement at Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836, Smith was concerned that this would cause problems between the Mormons and the Southerners. In an article for the *Messenger and Advocate*, Smith laid out his lack of support for the abolitionists and his views on slavery. He wrote:

I have learned by experience that the enemy of truth does not slumber, nor cease his exertions to bias the minds of communities against the servants of the Lord, by stirring up the indignation of men upon all matters of importance or interest; therefore I fear that the sound might go out, that "**an Abolitionist**" had held forth several times to this community, . . . all, except a very few, attended to their own vocations, and left the gentleman to hold forth his own arguments to nearly naked walls. . . .

It is my privilege then to name certain passages from the Bible, pronounced by a man who was perfect in his generation, and walked with God. And so far from that prediction being averse to the mind of God, it remains as a lasting monument of the decree of Jehovah, to the shame and confusion of all who have cried out against the South, in consequence of their holding **the sons of Ham in servitude.** "And he said, Cursed be Canaan: a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." (Gen. 9:25,26). . . . What could have been the design of

the Almighty in this singular occurrence is not for me to say; but I can say, **the curse is not yet taken off from the sons of Canaan**, neither will be until it is affected by as great a power as caused it to come; . . . I do not believe that the people of the North have any more right to say that the South shall not have slaves, than the South have to say the North shall. . . . All men are to be taught to repent; but **we have no right to interfere with slaves**, contrary to the mind and will of their masters.<sup>16</sup>

On Tuesday, January 25, 1842, Joseph Smith commented "that the Indians have greater cause to complain of the treatment of the whites, than the **negroes, or sons of Cain.**"<sup>17</sup> A year later, January 2, 1843, Joseph Smith gave this assessment of blacks:

At five went to Mr. Sollars' with Elders Hyde and Richards. Elder Hyde inquired the situation of the negro. I replied, **they came into the world slaves, mentally and physically.** . . . Had I anything to do with the negro, I would confine them by strict law to their own species, and put them on a national equalization.<sup>18</sup>

Ironically, right at the time Joseph Smith was developing his racial doctrines he allowed the ordination of a black man named Elijah Abel.<sup>19</sup> Abel was "ordained an elder on March 3, 1836, and a seventy April 4, 1841."<sup>20</sup>

In 1842 Smith published his new scripture, the Book of Abraham, in the *Times and Seasons*, the LDS newspaper in Nauvoo, Illinois. This has since been canonized in the *Pearl of Great Price* and reflects Smith's growing racist attitude towards blacks and priesthood:

Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of **Ham**, and was a partaker of the blood of the **Canaanites** by birth.

From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the **blood of the Canaanites** was preserved in the land.

The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of **Ham**, and the daughter of Egyptus, which in the Chaldean signifies Egypt, which signifies **that which is forbidden;**

When this woman discovered the land it was under water, who afterward settled her sons in it; and thus, **from Ham**, sprang that race which **preserved the curse in the land.**

Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of

13 Charles R. Harrell, "This is My Doctrine" *The Development of Mormon Theology* (Greg Kofford Books, 2011), pp. 389-390.

14 *Evening and Morning Star* (July 1833): p. 109.

15 "Extra," *Evening and the Morning Star*, Independence, Missouri, (July, 16, 1833).

16 *Messenger and Advocate*, Kirtland, Ohio, vol. 2, no. 7, (April, 1836); also *History of the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 436-440.

17 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), vol. 4, p. 501.

18 *History of the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 217-218.

19 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Curse of Cain? Racism in the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse, 2004), pp. 37-38.

20 Andrew Jensen, *L.D.S. Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, 1901-1936, p. 577.

**Ham**, and it was after the manner of the government of **Ham**, which was patriarchal.

Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but **cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood**.

Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he **could not have the right of Priesthood**, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through **Ham**, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry. (*Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham, 1:21-27)

LDS author Stephen Taggart observed:

With the publication of *The Book of Abraham* all of the elements for the Church's policy of denying the priesthood to Negroes were present. The curse of Canaan motif borrowed from Southern fundamentalism was being supported within the Church by a foundation of proslavery statements and attitudes which had emerged during the years of crisis in Missouri. . . .<sup>21</sup>

When a reporter asked LDS President David O. McKay in 1961 about the basis for the policy of restricting blacks from priesthood, "he replied that it rested solely on the Book of Abraham. 'That is the only reason,' he said. 'It is founded on that.'"<sup>22</sup> Even though the LDS Church now denounces racism, how are readers to interpret racial statements in the LDS scriptures?<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted that the story of Noah's curse on Ham and Canaan in Genesis, chapter nine, never connects the curse to race, skin color or to Africa. The same can be said of the curse on Cain in Genesis, chapter four. The Bible does not identify the mark placed on Cain as being a black skin. These interpretations arose centuries later in an attempt to justify slavery.

## Teaching on Pre-Mortal Life

Standard Christianity teaches that only Christ existed before mortality (John 8:58; Colossians 1:17) and that man's existence started on earth (Zechariah 12:1; 1 Corinthians 15:46). However, Mormonism maintains that man was first born as a spirit child in heaven to Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother and raised to maturity before being sent to earth. During this premortal

state they believe we were all engaged in a war between Lucifer and Jesus (Abraham 3:21-28). Those who were courageous in "their first estate" were chosen to be leaders on earth (their second estate).<sup>24</sup> This led to the conclusion that one's placement on earth, including race, is a result of that past performance. BYU professor Charles Harrell observed:

In the book of Abraham, the basis of foreordination shifts from God's foreknowledge of a person's future righteousness in mortality to a knowledge of that person's **premortal righteousness**. Here, Abraham sees a gathering of preexistent spirits: "And among all these were many of the noble and great ones." He then records God saying, "These I will make my rulers . . . Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born" (Abr. 3:22-23). Thus, foreordination is explained as being based on **premortal nobility**, without a mention of God's foreknowledge of one's future righteousness—although such foreknowledge is certainly not precluded.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking at the April 1998 LDS Conference, Apostle Richard G. Scott explained:

Your Heavenly Father assigned you to be born into a specific lineage from which you received your inheritance of race, culture, and traditions.<sup>26</sup>

In 1842 Smith was teaching "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression."<sup>27</sup> By extension, then, one would not expect the blacks to be cursed solely on the basis of Cain's sin. This led to the speculation that blacks must be cursed due to something they did in their premortal life. Harrell explains:

Why blacks were denied the priesthood in the first place has been and continues to be a bit controversial. Some have concluded that to be of the lineage of Cain through Ham who, according to LDS scriptures, was "cursed . . . as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abr. 1:26-27). Recognizing that God would not punish children for the sins of their fathers, it became commonly held that it was denied them in consequence of **their lack of valiancy in the preexistence**. As early as 1844, LDS apostle Orson Hyde attributed the "accursed lineage of Canaan" to a premortal lack of valor. "**Those spirits in heaven** that lent an influence to the devil," he stated, "were **required** to come into the world and take bodies in the **accursed lineage of Canaan; and hence the Negro or African race**."<sup>28</sup>

21 Stephen G. Taggart, *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970), pp. 62-63.

22 Gregory A. Prince, "David O. McKay and Blacks," *Dialogue*, (Spring 2002): p. 146.

23 Sandra Tanner, "Racial Statements in LDS Scriptures," <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/racialstatements.htm>

24 *Doctrines of the Gospel-Student Manual*, Religion 430 & 431 (Salt Lake City: LDS Church, 2004), pp. 14-15.

25 Harrell, "This is My Doctrine," p. 215.

26 Apostle Richard G. Scott, "Removing Barriers to Happiness," *Ensign* (May 1998): p. 86.

27 *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, (March 15, 1842): p. 709.

28 Harrell, "This is My Doctrine," p. 389.

## The Start of the Priesthood Ban

It appears that after the death of Joseph Smith, the ban on blacks being ordained to the priesthood became rigid under Brigham Young's leadership. Charles Harrell discusses the first statement connecting priesthood denial with Ham's lineage:

The first recorded statement on the priesthood ban appears to be by Parley P. Pratt who said of a black Church member on April 25, 1847, he **“was a black man with the blood of Ham in him which lineage was cursed as regards the priesthood.”** On February 13, 1849, Brigham Young echoed a popular folklore linking blacks to descendants of Cain when he remarked in a private conversation, **“The Lord had cursed Cain’s seed with blackness and prohibited them the Priesthood.”**<sup>29</sup>

In 1852 Brigham Young made a number of racial comments when addressing the Utah Territorial Legislature:

Now I tell you what I know; when **the mark was put upon Cain**, Able's children was in all probability young; **the Lord told Cain that he should not receive the blessings of the priesthood** nor his seed, until the last of the posterity of Able had received the priesthood, **until the redemption of the earth**. If there never was a prophet, or apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before, I tell you, this people that are commonly called **negroes** are the **children of old Cain**. I know they are, **I know that they cannot bear rule in the priesthood**, for the curse of them was to remain upon them . . . until the times of the restitution shall come, and the curse be wiped off from the earth, . . .

Now then in the kingdom of God on the earth, a man who has the African blood in him **cannot hold one jot nor tittle of priesthood**; Why? because they are **the true eternal principals the Lord Almighty has ordained**, and who can help it, men cannot, . . .<sup>30</sup>

That same year the Territory of Utah passed legislation that allowed for slavery.<sup>31</sup> This applied to both Indian and African slaves. One black slave, Green Flake, was even given to the church for tithing credit.<sup>32</sup>

Preaching in 1859, at the October Conference of the LDS Church, President Brigham Young declared:

29 Harrell, *“This is My Doctrine,”* p. 388.

30 “Speech by Gov. Young in Joint Session of the Legislature, [Territory of Utah], Feb. 5th 1852 giving his views on slavery,” as reprinted in *Curse of Cain*, p. 99.

31 “Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials, passed by the First Annual, and Special Sessions, of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, . . .” 1852.

32 Tanner, *Curse of Cain*, pp. 44-46.

Cain slew his brother . . . and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the **flat nose and black skin**. . . . How long is that race [blacks] to endure the **dreadful curse** that is upon them? That curse will remain upon them, and **they never can hold the Priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam have received the promises** and enjoyed the blessings of the Priesthood and the keys thereof. Until the last ones of the residue of Adam's children are brought up to that favourable position, the children of Cain cannot receive the first ordinances of the Priesthood. They were the first that were cursed, and they will be the last from whom the curse will be removed.<sup>33</sup>

On another occasion Brigham Young declared:

Shall I tell you the **law of God** in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is **death on the spot**. This will always be so.<sup>34</sup>

Preaching in 1882, John Taylor, the third president of the LDS Church, taught:

Why is it, in fact, that we should have a devil? Why did not the Lord kill him long ago? . . . He needed the devil and great many of those who do his bidding just to keep . . . our dependence upon God, . . . When he destroyed the inhabitants of the antediluvian world, he suffered **a descendant of Cain** to come through the flood in order that **he [the devil] might be properly represented upon the earth**.<sup>35</sup>

Elder B. H. Roberts, of the Council of Seventy, explained that the reason some were born black was a direct result of their performance in their premortal life:

. . . I believe that race [blacks] is the one through which it is ordained **those spirits that were not valiant in the great rebellion in heaven** should come; who, through their indifference or lack of integrity to righteousness, rendered themselves **unworthy of the Priesthood** and its powers, and hence it is withheld from them to this day.<sup>36</sup>

Writing in 1935 Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, who later became the tenth president of the LDS Church, explained that Cain was to be the father of an “inferior race”:

Not only was Cain called upon to suffer [for killing Abel], but because of his wickedness he became the

33 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, p. 290.

34 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 10, p. 110.

35 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 23, p. 336.

36 *Contributor* 6:297, as quoted in *The Way to Perfection*, by Joseph Fielding Smith, Genealogical Society of Utah, 1935, p. 101.

father of an **inferior race**. . . . Millions of souls have come into this world **cursed with a black skin** and have been **denied the privilege of Priesthood** and the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel. **These are the descendants of Cain.**<sup>37</sup>

In one of Joseph Fielding Smith's popular books, *Doctrines of Salvation*, he wrote:

NO NEUTRALS IN HEAVEN. There were no neutrals in the **war in heaven**. All took sides either with Christ or with Satan. Every man had his agency there, and men receive **rewards** there based upon their actions there, just as they will receive rewards hereafter for deeds done in the body. **The Negro, evidently, is receiving the reward he merits.**<sup>38</sup>

At the October 1947 LDS Conference, Apostle George F. Richards proclaimed:

The Negro race have been forbidden the priesthood, and the higher temple blessings, presumably because of **their not having been valiant while in the spirit**. It does not pay to be anything but valiant.<sup>39</sup>

LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, son-in-law of President Joseph Fielding Smith, wrote:

Those who were **less valiant in pre-existence** and who thereby had certain spiritual restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as **the Negroes**. Such spirits are sent to earth through the lineage of Cain, the mark put upon him for his rebellion against God and his murder of Abel being a black skin.<sup>40</sup>

On March 18, 1961, Alvin R. Dyer, of the First Presidency, speaking at the missionary conference in Oslo, Norway, stated:

Why is it that you are white and not colored? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Who had anything to do with your being born into the Church and **not born a Chinese or a Hindu, or a Negro?** . . . I suppose, and you often may have heard missionaries say it, or have asked the question, **why is a negro a negro?** And you have heard this answer: Well, they must have been neutral in the pre-existence or they must have straddled the issue. That is the most common saying, they were neither hot nor cold so the Lord made them Negroes. This is, of course, not true. **The reason that spirits**

**are born into Negro bodies is because those spirits rejected the priesthood of God in the Pre-existence.** This is the reason why you have Negroes on the earth. . . . All of this is according to a well worked-out plan, that these millions and billions of spirits awaiting birth in **the pre-existence would** be born through a channel or race of people. Consequently, **the cursed were to be born through Ham.** . . . This is why you have colored people, why you have dark people and why you have white people.<sup>41</sup>

LDS Apostle Mark E. Petersen, speaking in 1954 at the Convention of Teachers of Religion on the College Level, Brigham Young University, gave this overview of the church's teaching on race:

The discussion of civil rights, especially over the last 20 years, has drawn some very sharp lines. It has blinded the thinking of some of our own people, I believe. . . . We who teach in the Church certainly must have our feet on the ground and not be led astray by the philosophies of men on this subject any more than on any other subject. . . . He [the Negro] is not just seeking the opportunity of sitting down in a cafe where white people eat. . . . it appears that the negro seeks absorption with the white race. He will not be satisfied until he achieves it by intermarriage. . . .

What should be our attitude as Latter-day Saints toward **negro and other dark races? Does the Lord give us any guidance?** Is there any Church policy on this matter? Is segregation in and of itself a wrong principle?

Is there any reason to think that the same principles of **rewards and punishments** did not apply to us and our deeds in the **pre-existent world** as will apply hereafter? Is there reason then why the type of birth we receive in this life is not a **reflection of our worthiness or lack of it in the pre-existent life?** We must accept the justice of God He is fair to all. His is not a respecter of persons. He will mete to us according to what we deserve. . . . We cannot escape the conclusion that because of **performance in our pre-existence** some of us are born as Chinese, some as Japanese, some as Indians, some as Negroes, some as Americans, some as Latter-day Saints. These are **rewards and punishments**, fully in harmony with His established policy in dealing with sinners and saints, rewarding all according to their deeds. . . .

**The Lord** segregated the people both as to blood and place of residence. At least in the cases of the **Lamanites and the Negroes** we have the **definite word of the Lord Himself** that He placed a dark skin upon them **as a curse**—as a punishment and as a sign to all others. He forbade intermarriage with them under

37 Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, p. 105.

38 Joseph Fielding Smith, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 65-66.

39 George F. Richards, LDS Conference Report (October 1947): p. 57.

40 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), pp. 476-477. Second edition, 1966, p. 527.

41 Alvin R. Dyer, "For What Purpose," (March 18, 1961). From a typed manuscript at the LDS Archives. As quoted in *In Their Own Words: A Collection of Mormon Quotations*, compiled by Bill McKeever, (Mormonism Research Ministry, 2009), p. 39.

threat of extension of the curse. (2 Nephi 5:21) And He certainly segregated the descendents of Cain when **He cursed the Negro as to the Priesthood**, and drew an absolute line. . . . But what does the mercy of God have for him? **This negro, who in the pre-existence lived the type of life which justified the Lord in sending him to the earth in the lineage of Cain with a black skin**, and possibly being born in darkest Africa—if that negro is willing when he hears the gospel to accept it, he may have many of the blessings of the gospel. **In spite of all he did in the pre-existent life**, the Lord is willing, if the Negro accepts the gospel with real, sincere faith, and is really converted, to give him the blessings of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. If that Negro is faithful all his days, he can and will enter the celestial kingdom. **He will go there as a servant, but he will get a celestial resurrection.**<sup>42</sup>

In 1969 the LDS First Presidency issued another statement on race:

December 15, 1969

To General Authorities, Regional Representatives of the Twelve, Stake Presidents, Mission Presidents, and Bishops.

Dear Brethren:

In view of confusion that has arisen, it was decided at a meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve to restate **the position of the Church with regard to the Negro** both in society and in the Church.

. . .

We believe that the Constitution of the United States was divinely inspired, . . .

It follows, therefore, that we believe the Negro, as well as those of other races, should have his full Constitutional privileges as a member of society, . . .

However, **matters of faith, conscience, and theology** are not within the purview of the civil law. . . .

From the beginning of this dispensation, Joseph Smith and all succeeding presidents of the Church have taught that **Negroes, while spirit children of a common Father**, and the progeny of our earthly parents Adam and Eve, **were not yet to receive the priesthood**, for reasons which we believe are **known to God** but which He has not made fully known to man.

Our living prophet, President David O. McKay, has said, “The seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro is **not** something which originated with man; but **goes back into the beginning with God.** . . .

42 Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems—As They Affect The Church,” BYU (August 27, 1954), as printed in *Curse of Cain? Racism in the Mormon Church*, pp. 104-109.

**“Revelation assures us that this plan antedates man’s mortal existence, extending back to man’s pre-existent state.”**<sup>43</sup>

From these quotes we see how the LDS teachings on premortal performance, race, and the supposed curse of Cain are intertwined. With so many of the LDS prophets and apostles teaching that blacks have been cursed with a black skin due to their misdeeds in the premortal existence, one wonders how the LDS Church can dismiss these as simply comments by “individuals” or “folklore”?

## Lifting the Ban

During the 1960’s and early 1970’s the LDS Church received extensive social pressure to change their racial stance in the form of demonstrations, and newspaper and magazine articles.<sup>44</sup>

For over a hundred years LDS leaders had taught that blacks could not be given the priesthood until all the rest of Adam’s posterity had been given the opportunity. Preaching in 1866, Brigham Young declared:

Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth **cursed** with a s[k]in of **blackness**? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the Holy Priesthood, and the **law of God**. They will go down to death. And when **all the rest of the children have received their blessings** in the Holy Priesthood, **then that curse** will be removed from the **seed of Cain**, and they will then come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to.<sup>45</sup>

Yet on June 9, 1978, the LDS Church’s *Deseret News* carried a startling announcement by the First Presidency of the LDS Church that stated a new revelation had been given:

We have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the upper room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

He has heard our prayers, and **by revelation** has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when **every** faithful, worthy **man** in the church may receive the **holy priesthood**, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of **the temple**. Accordingly, **all worthy male members** of the

43 “BYU Religion Dean on Premortal Life, Part I: Race and Nobility,” by Jupiterschild, March 19, 2008. <http://faithpromotingrumor.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/byu-religion-dean-on-premortal-life-part-i-race-and-nobility/>

44 Tanner, *Curse of Cain?* pp. 54-78.

45 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 272.



church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color.<sup>46</sup>

One should note, however, that the actual “revelation” was not printed, only an announcement of a revelation, which has now been added to the back of their *Doctrine and Covenants* as Declaration 2. This is similar to the situation in 1890 when the church issued the “Manifesto” announcing the end of polygamous marriages, printed as Declaration 1 in the D&C.<sup>47</sup>

Twenty-five years before the LDS Church gave up the practice of polygamy they were declaring that no such change could be made. In 1865 the church announced:

We have shown that in requiring **the relinquishment of polygamy**, they ask the renunciation of **the entire faith of this people**. . . .

**There is no half way house. The childish babble about another revelation is only an evidence how half informed men can talk.**<sup>48</sup>

However, as the U.S. government persisted in prosecuting LDS polygamists,<sup>49</sup> LDS President Wilford Woodruff issued the 1890 Manifesto which suspended its practice. The lifting of the priesthood ban on blacks seems to be another instance of political pressure forcing the church to announce a new revelation. Writing in the *New York Times*, June 11, 1978, Professor Mario S. DePillis observed: “For Mormonism’s anti-black policy a revelation was the only way out, and many students of Mormonism were puzzled only at the lateness of the hour.”

Both Declaration 1 and 2 at the back of the *Doctrine and Covenants* were supposedly the result of “revelation” ending a long criticized practice of the LDS Church. Yet neither was accompanied by an official explanation of the doctrinal implications. *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 132, which teaches plural marriage, and the *Pearl of Great Price*, with its statements about Cain and black skin, are still considered scripture.

On the official LDS web site is a statement titled “Priesthood Ordination before 1978.”<sup>50</sup> There the priesthood ban on blacks is defended as being similar to the Old Testament priesthood restrictions: “Among the tribes of Israel, for example, only men of the tribe of Levi were given the priesthood and allowed to officiate in certain ordinances.”<sup>51</sup> Notice, the comparison was made

to something God announced to Israel. This implies that the ban on blacks was also God-ordained, not “folklore” or a practice of unknown origin. The tribe of Levi was chosen but the rest of Israel was not declared to be under a “curse” as blacks were said to be prior to the 1978 change.

## Attending the Temple

After the First Presidency made their 1978 announcement, many people became confused over the church’s position on interracial marriage and temple attendance. It soon became apparent, however, that the church’s ban on blacks participating in the temple ordinances and the ban on mixed marriages had been lifted.

Joseph Freeman, the first black man ordained to the priesthood after the 1978 change, indicated that he wanted to be sealed in the temple to his wife who was not of African descent. Church spokesman Don LeFevre said that such a marriage would be possible and that although the church did not encourage interracial marriage, there was no longer a policy against whites marrying blacks:

That is entirely possible, said Mr. LeFevre. . . . “So there is no ban on interracial marriage. If a black partner contemplating marriage is worthy of going to the Temple, nobody’s going to stop him—if he’s marrying a white, an Oriental . . . if he’s ready to go to the Temple, obviously he may go with the blessings of the church.”<sup>52</sup>

On June 24, 1978, the *Salt Lake Tribune* announced:

Joseph Freeman, 26, the **first black man** to gain the priesthood in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Friday **went in the Salt Lake Temple** with his wife and sons for sacred ordinances . . . Thomas S. Monson, member of the church’s Quorum of Twelve Apostles, conducted the marriage and sealing ceremonies.

One hundred years earlier Elijah Abel had requested the same privilege of attending the temple, but was denied. LDS author Armand Mauss commented:

The restrictive policy on priesthood, . . . lingered on. It was periodically reconsidered after Brigham Young’s death in 1877, usually in response to a **petition from a black member** or sympathizer. The first of these reconsiderations occurred as early as 1879, when Young’s successor, John Taylor, responded to a petition from **Elijah Abel** (the sole surviving black member to have received the priesthood) **that he be admitted to the sacred temple rites** of the church. Taylor’s consultations turned up a claim by two prominent local church leaders

46 *Deseret News* (June 9, 1978), p. 1A.

47 *Doctrine and Covenants*, Official Declaration, #1 and #2.

48 *Millennial Star*, (Oct. 28, 1865).

49 Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), pp. 105-124.

50 “Priesthood Ordination before 1978,” <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/priesthood-ordination-before-1978?lang=eng>

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Salt Lake Tribune* (June 14, 1978).

that in the mid-1830s they had heard Joseph Smith declare that Negroes could not be given the priesthood and that Abel was supposed to have been stripped of it before Smith died.

Taylor himself, though a contemporary of these witnesses and a close associate of Smith, could recall **no such instruction**. . . . The young apostle Joseph F. Smith, nephew of the prophet, disagreed with their recollections on the basis of an 1841 certificate he had seen verifying Abel's ordination as a seventy, and Abel himself had similar documentation . . . . To Abel's chagrin, church policy was "resolved" not by granting his petition [to attend the temple] but by sending him on a mission.<sup>53</sup>

Abel's requests for temple ordinances were repeatedly denied. He died in 1884 and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, never having been admitted to the temple. His son and grandson were also ordained to the priesthood but we have no evidence that they were ever allowed to attend the temple.<sup>54</sup>

Another early black convert to Mormonism was Jane Manning James. Her family joined Mormonism in the 1840's and she lived for a time in the Joseph Smith home as a domestic. After migrating to Utah she was a domestic in the Brigham Young home and married another black convert, Isaac James. Isaac left the family in 1869 but Jane remained faithful to the LDS Church. Mormon historian Jessie I. Embry tells some of Jane's story:

Jane Manning James was a member of the female Relief Society and donated to the St. George, Manti, and Logan temple funds. **She repeatedly petitioned the First Presidency to be endowed and to have her children sealed to her.** During the time that Isaac was gone, Jane asked to be sealed to Walker Lewis who, like Elijah Abel, had been ordained during Joseph Smith's lifetime.

After Isaac died, Jane asked that they be given the ordination of adoption so that they would be together in the next life. She explained in correspondence to church leaders that Emma Smith had offered to have her sealed to the Smith family as a child. She reconsidered that decision and asked to be sealed to the Smiths. Permission for all of these requests **was denied**.

Instead the First Presidency "decided she might be **adopted into the family of Joseph Smith as a servant**, which was done, a special ceremony having been prepared for the purpose." The minutes of the Council of Twelve Apostles continued, "But Aunt Jane was not satisfied with this, and as a mark of dissatisfaction **she applied again after this for sealing blessings, but of course in vain.**"<sup>55</sup>

Jane Manning James died in 1908 and President Joseph F. Smith spoke at her funeral. LDS Apostle Mathias F. Cowley reported:

In after years when President Joseph F. Smith preached the funeral sermon of this same faithful woman he declared that she would in the resurrection attain the longings of her soul and **become a white and beautiful person.**<sup>56</sup>

Today there is no restriction on ethnic identity for faithful Mormons to participate in their temple ordinances.

## Could the Ban on Women in the Priesthood be Changed as Well?

Speaking at the LDS Conference in October of 1967, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, who would later become the thirteenth president of the LDS Church, related the priesthood prohibition on blacks with the same policy for women:

Increasingly the Latter-day Saints must choose between the reasoning of men and **the revelations of God**. This is a crucial choice, for we have those within the Church today who, with their worldly wisdom, are leading some of our members astray. . . .

The Lord does not always give reasons for each **commandment**. Sometimes faithful members, like Adam of old, are called upon to **obey an injunction of the Lord** even though they do not know the reason why it was given. Those who trust in God will obey him, knowing full well that time will provide the reasons and vindicate **their obedience**.

The arm of flesh may not approve nor understand why **God has not bestowed the priesthood on women or the seed of Cain**, but **God's ways** are not man's ways.<sup>57</sup>

However, thirty years later Gordon B. Hinckley seemed to suggest that the restriction on women in the priesthood could be changed at some future time. In 1997 Hinckley was interviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation regarding the 1978 revelation giving priesthood to blacks:

RB: Now up until 1978 I understand **Blacks were not allowed to be priests** in your Church?

GBH [G. B. Hinckley]: That is correct. Although we have Black members of the Church. . . .

53 Armand Mauss, *All Abraham's Children* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2003), pp. 215-216.

54 Tanner, *Curse of Cain*, pp. 38-39.

55 Embry, *Black Saints in a White Church*, pp. 40-41.

56 M. F. Cowley, ed., *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), p. 587.

57 Ezra Taft Benson, "Trust Not the Arm of Flesh," LDS Conference (October 1967).

RB: So in retrospect **was the Church wrong in that?**

GBH: **No I don't think it was wrong.** It things, [sic] various things happened in different periods. There's a reason for them.

RB: What was the reason for that?

GBH: **I don't know what the reason was. But I know that we've rectified whatever may have appeared to be wrong at the time.**

RB: Is it a problem for the Church that it still has a tag of being racist?

GBH: No I don't think so. I don't see that anywhere. . . .

RB: **At present women are not allowed to be priests in your Church.** Why is that?

GBH: That's right, because **the Lord has put it that way.** Now women have a very prominent place in this Church. They have their own organization. . . . And the women of that organization sit on Boards. . . . They counsel with us. . . . and if you ask them they'll say we're happy and we're satisfied.

RB: They all say that?

GBH: Yes. All except a oh you'll find a little handful one or two here and there. . . .

RB: You say the Lord has put it that way. What do you mean by that?

GBH: I mean that's a part of His programme. Of course it is, yes.

RB: **Is it possible that the rules could change in the future as the rules are on Blacks?**

GBH: **He could change them yes.** If He were to change them that's the only way it would happen.

RB: So you'd have to get a revelation?

GBH: **Yes, But there's no agitation for that. We don't find it. Our women are happy. They're satisfied.**<sup>58</sup>

Hinckley's interview certainly raises some interesting questions. If enough women campaigned for priesthood and enough public pressure were mounted against the LDS priesthood ban on women, would the LDS Church change its policy as it did on plural marriage and blacks?

<sup>58</sup> David Ransom, Interview with Gordon B. Hinckley, Compass, ABC Australia, (November 09, 1997).  
<http://www.abc.net.au/compass/intervs/hinckley.htm>

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## Do the LDS Prophets Speak for God?

How does one reconcile over one hundred and eighty years of racial statements by LDS prophets and apostles with their claim of prophetic leadership? By insisting that past statements by their prophets were simply "speculation or opinions" they have clouded the issue of when their prophets speak for God. In the March 2012 *Ensign*, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the LDS First Presidency, instructed that they speak "throughout all time":

Prophets are **inspired** teachers and are always special witnesses of Jesus Christ (see D&C 107:23). Prophets speak not only to the people of their time, **but they also speak to people throughout all time.** Their voices echo through the centuries as a testament of **God's will** to His children.<sup>59</sup>

In the LDS Church manual *Gospel Principles* we read:

In addition to these four books of scripture [Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price], **the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us.** Their words come to us through **conferences**, the *Liahona* or *Ensign* magazine, and instructions to local priesthood leaders.<sup>60</sup>

One would naturally assume that an official statement issued by the First Presidency would constitute church doctrine that would be for "all time." However, the current LDS position on blacks seems to be at odds with the 1949 statement of the First Presidency, where the ban on blacks was declared to be a "direct commandment from the Lord":

The attitude of the church with reference to the **Negroes** remains **as it has always stood.** It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of **direct commandment from the Lord** on which is founded the **doctrine of the Church** from the days of its organization, to the effect that **Negroes** may become members of the Church but that they **are not entitled to the priesthood** at the present time. . . .

The position of the Church regarding the Negro may be understood when **another doctrine** of the Church is kept in mind, namely, that **the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence** has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality and that while the details of this principle have not been made known, the mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintain their **first estate**; and that the worth of the privilege is so great that

<sup>59</sup> Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Why Do We Need Prophets?" *Ensign*, (March 2012): p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: LDS Church, 2009), p. 48.

spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what **the handicap** may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure; and that among the handicaps, failure of the right to enjoy in mortality the blessings of the priesthood is a handicap which spirits are willing to assume in order that they might come to earth. . . .

Well, what about the removal of the curse? We know what the Lord has said in the Book of Mormon in regard to the Lamanites—they shall become **a White and a delightful people. I know of no scripture having to do with the removal of the curse from the Negro.**<sup>61</sup>

But how is one to reconcile this 1949 statement by the LDS First Presidency with the recent church press release denouncing past leaders teachings on race as “speculation and opinion”? Are press releases now to be considered more “official” than a statement by the LDS First Presidency?

The LDS Church emphasizes that the members are to follow the “living prophets” as opposed to their dead prophets. However, they continually quote past prophets when it suits their purpose. In 2010 two General Authorities of the LDS Church<sup>62</sup> reminded Mormons of President Ezra Taft Benson’s 1980 speech, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” where he stated that “The prophet will never lead the Church astray.”<sup>63</sup>

In an Opinion piece for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Matthew L. Harris, associate professor and director of graduate studies in history at Colorado State University-Pueblo in Pueblo, Colorado, commented:

Brigham Young University religion professor Randy Bott had a bad day last week. His church rebuked him for teaching false doctrine, his colleagues scorned him, and dozens of pious Mormon bloggers called for his resignation. . . .

**But did Bott teach false doctrine?** Were his views incompatible with Mormon theology? If so, how did a man who gets paid to teach students at an LDS university about Mormon theology not understand this crucial theological point? . . .

Today’s church leaders say “we do not know why God denied blacks the priesthood,” but earlier leaders never made that claim. **In fact, they made it very clear why blacks couldn’t hold the priesthood: God cursed them with the mark of Cain because they lacked moral purity in a pre-Earth life.**

61 1949 First Presidency Statement, as quoted in *Neither White Nor Black*, edited by Lester Bush and Armand Mauss (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), Appendix. <http://signaturebookslibrary.org/?p=438>

62 Claudio R.M. Costa, of the Presidency of the Seventy, “Obedience to the Prophets,” and Kevin R. Duncan, of the Seventy, “Our Very Survival,” LDS Conference, (October 2010).

63 Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” (Feb. 26, 1980). <http://www.lds.org/liahona/1981/06/fourteen-fundamentals-in-following-the-prophet?lang=eng>

If such words make us wince, they didn’t have that effect on early church leaders. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the church was thoroughly awash in such teachings. . . .

Church officials now deny that they ever taught the divine-curse doctrine. “This **folklore** is not part of and never was taught as doctrine by the church,” LDS spokesman Mark Tuttle boldly declared in 2008 . . . The church reaffirmed this position in a recent press release, claiming that a few misguided leaders gave “some explanations” about the “origins of priesthood availability” that “do not represent church doctrine.”

And yet, the new official line cannot be reconciled with the hundreds, maybe thousands, of authoritative statements the church has made on the subject throughout its 182-year history. . . . LDS leaders would be well served to acknowledge this doctrine, apologize for it and move on. Until they have the courage to do that, more people like Bott will get their knuckles rapped, and more people will ask why the church sweeps its racial history under a rug.<sup>64</sup>

Sweeping past LDS leaders’ sermons on blacks “under a rug” is indeed the best that the LDS leadership has been able to do. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie’s speech of 1978 illustrates this very point:

I would like to say something about the new revelation relative to the priesthood going to those of all nations and races. . . . The gospel goes to various peoples and nations **on a priority basis**. . . . Not only is the gospel to go, **on a priority basis** and harmonious to a **divine timetable**, to one nation after another, but the whole history of **God’s dealings with men** on earth indicates that such has been the case in the past; it has been restricted and limited where many people are concerned. . . . With some minor exceptions, the gospel in [Christ’s] day went exclusively to Israel. The Lord had to give Peter the vision and revelation of the sheet coming down from heaven with the unclean meat on it, following which Cornelius sent the messenger to Peter to learn what he, Cornelius, and his gentile associates should do. . . . There have been these problems, and the Lord has permitted them to arise. There isn’t any question about that. We do not envision the whole reason and purpose behind all of it; **we can only suppose and reason that it is on the basis of our premortal devotion and faith**. . . . There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren which we have interpreted to mean that **the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality**. I have said the same things, and people write me letters and say, “You said such and such, and how is it now that we do such and such?” And all I can say to that is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in **a living, modern prophet**.

64 Matthew L. Harris, “Why is LDS Church denying past doctrine?” *Salt Lake Tribune* (March 11, 2012): p. O4.

**Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation.** We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world. . . .

It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June of this year, 1978. It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light out into the world on this subject.<sup>65</sup>

A close reading of McConkie's statement shows that he still believed the ban was appropriate until 1978 and that it was based on "our premortal devotion and faith." In other words, the church was right about the curse on Cain and to restrict priesthood to blacks until they got the 1978 revelation. So the new revelation only ended the ban, it didn't address the issue of the curse and black skin. In a 1998 interview for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, David Jackson, a black member of the LDS Church, explained:

"What [the 1978 revelation] doesn't say is we're no longer of the lineage of Cain, that we no longer did these things in pre-existence. **It does not say we are not cursed with black skin.**"<sup>66</sup>

BYU professor Eugene England was troubled in 1998 by the lingering racial teachings being passed on to future generations:

This is a good time to remind ourselves that most Mormons are still in denial about the ban, unwilling to talk in Church settings about it, and that some Mormons **still believe that Blacks were cursed by descent from Cain through Ham.** Even more believe that Blacks, as well as other non-white people, come color-coded into the world, their lineage and even their class a **direct indication of failures in a previous life.** . . . The majority of Mormons were clearly still racists in the 1960s . . . Sadly, some of that baggage is still with us. I check occasionally in classes at BYU and find that still, twenty years after the revelation, **a majority of bright, well-educated Mormon students say they believe that Blacks are descendants of Cain and Ham and thereby cursed and that skin color is an indication of righteousness in the pre-mortal life.** They tell me these ideas came from their parents or Seminary and Sunday School teachers, and they have never questioned them.<sup>67</sup>

65 Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike Unto God," BYU, (August 18, 1978). <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=11017>

66 Larry B. Stammer, "LDS Church Mulls Revoking Doctrine on Black 'Curse,'" *Salt Lake Tribune* (May 18, 1998).

67 Eugene England, "Becoming a World Religion: Blacks, the Poor—All of Us," *Sunstone* (June 1998): pp. 54-58.

William Lobdell, of the *Los Angeles Times*, observed:

In the not-too-distant past, the Mormon faithful were routinely taught that blacks were an inferior race, the color of their skin linked to curses from God recounted in Hebrew and Mormon scriptures. Besides being barred from the priesthood, black males couldn't serve on missions or be married in the temple—though they could become church members and be baptized.

The Mormons' historic position on race wasn't much different from that of many other U.S. denominations; it just lasted longer. It took until 1978—**14 years after the Civil Rights Act**—before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lifted the ban following what leaders said was a revelation from God to make the priesthood available to "every faithful, worthy man."

The new doctrine came without an apology or repudiation of the church's past practice. . . .<sup>68</sup>

Until the LDS Church officially clarifies its doctrine of pre-existence and assignment to race, its old teachings will continue to haunt them and be handed down through the generations to come.

In contrast to these teachings, the first century Christians placed no restrictions on those of various races. In Acts 8:36-40, Philip baptized the Ethiopian man and placed no racial restrictions on him. Later in Acts we read that "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts. 10:34-35). Also, Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

68 Williams Lobdell, "New Mormon Aim: Reach Out to Blacks," *Los Angeles Times* (Sept. 21, 2003).

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## PLAYING FAIR?

### An Evaluation of Joseph Smith's "Rocky Mountain Prophecy"

Johnny Stephenson

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I often come across this scenario on Mormon Facebook Pages and other sites as I browse the internet: Self-proclaimed Mormon “apologists” using material from FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research) to “prove” that critics of Mormonism are dead wrong about issues that the critics claim prove the LDS Church has manipulated or lied about its history. Case in point—Joseph Smith’s “prophecy” recorded in the *History of the Church*:

“I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be **driven to the Rocky Mountains**, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see **the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.**”<sup>1</sup>

#### I. LDS CHALLENGING "ANTI-MORMONS"

On a Facebook Page titled “Challenging Anti-Mormon Apologetics,”<sup>2</sup> I came across the following post:

LDS Honesty: Lying for the Lord ... also says the following:

4. The famous Rocky Mountain Prophecy was a later addition to the official church history and not uttered by Joseph Smith as a prediction that the Mormons would inhabit the Salt Lake Valley. Despite the fact it is not authentic; the church presented it as such for more than a century. **The “Rocky Mountain Prophecy” was added after the Mormons arrived in Utah. (*The Changing World of Mormonism*, p. 406)** The church had no intentions of giving this information to members, in order to make their history appear more faith promoting.

Contemporary documentation says otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

What is this “contemporary documentation” they speak of? If one pursues the FAIR link that the Facebook Page references, one comes upon the Mormon apologist response to the allegation that Smith’s famous Rocky Mountain “prophecy” was inserted into the Manuscript History of the Church at a later date. But has FAIR proved their point? Let’s start with their conclusion and work our way back. FAIR states,

To accept a “forgery” theory, we must accept that all of the people listed above who remembered Joseph speaking about the Rocky Mountains were lying or fabricating their experience. Furthermore, we must also accept that Joseph was sending explorers to the west with no real expectation of moving, and the discussion of heading west by both members and enemies was all idle talk.<sup>4</sup>

This is a classic case of diverting the issue. Jerald and Sandra Tanner actually state in *The Changing World of Mormonism*,

In our book *Falsification of Joseph Smith’s History*, page 10, we stated concerning this prophecy:

There is **some evidence that Joseph Smith considered going west** to build his kingdom, but since we now know that the Mormon Historians actually compiled Joseph Smith’s *History* **after his death** and that they drew from many sources, we cannot help being suspicious of the authorship of this prophecy.<sup>5</sup>

We see that the Tanners did indeed admit that “there is some evidence that Joseph Smith considered going west”, so why does FAIR state,

But, to claim that the account of him discussing and even prophesying a move to the west rests on nothing but “forgery” is to distort and ignore too many sources, from too broad a time period, over what is essentially a peripheral issue.

Notice how FAIR is trying to tie this specific “prophecy” to any discussion about the Rocky Mountains, and that any discussion of moving west by Smith must also be classed as spurious. Then, if they can show that Smith discussed it, this makes the Tanners deceptive. FAIR is trying to set their own criteria here, but this is not what the Tanners claim at all, as I have shown above.

The Tanner’s claim was not that Smith never discussed the Rocky Mountains, or moving the church west; it was that a prophecy was fabricated by Mormon Historians (most likely based on exaggerations by contemporary Mormons well after the fact) and placed in the official *History of the Church* as an actual specific statement (prophecy) made by Joseph Smith. The specific charge made by the Tanners was this,

Important evidence concerning Joseph Smith’s prophecy that the Mormons would come to the Rocky

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Church*, by Joseph Smith, Deseret Book, vol. 5, ch. 4, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> “Challenging Anti-Mormon Apologetics” is a Facebook Page that describes itself as “A group where the members discuss issues brought up by critics of Mormonism on Face Book.”

<sup>3</sup> FAIR article: [http://en.fairmormon.org/Criticism\\_of\\_Mormonism/Books/One\\_Nation\\_Under\\_Gods/Use\\_of\\_sources/Forged\\_Rocky\\_Mountain\\_prophecy](http://en.fairmormon.org/Criticism_of_Mormonism/Books/One_Nation_Under_Gods/Use_of_sources/Forged_Rocky_Mountain_prophecy)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Changing World of Mormonism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 405.

Mountains has recently come to light. This prophecy was reported to have been given in **1842** in Illinois. Joseph Smith himself was supposed to have said:

While the Deputy Grand-Master was engaged in giving the requisite instructions to the Master-elect, I had a conversation with a number of brethren . . . I **prophesied** that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and **would be driven to the Rocky Mountains**, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people **in the midst of the Rocky Mountains**. (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 85)<sup>6</sup>

The Tanners go on to explain how they acquired a photograph of the very manuscript page of the *History* containing the prophecy. However, the prophecy has obviously been added to the manuscript at a later date. The Tanners continue,

. . . The situation, then, boils down to the following: we have two handwritten [history] manuscripts, books D-1 and D-2. Neither of these books were even started until after Joseph Smith's death [in 1844]. In both cases the prophecy concerning the Mormons coming to the Rocky Mountains was interpolated in a smaller handwriting. From this evidence we can reach only one conclusion: the famous "Rocky Mountain Prophecy" is not authentic.<sup>7</sup>

FAIR singles out both *One Nation Under Gods*, by Richard Abanes, and Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book *The Changing World of Mormonism*, (and since they imply that Richard Abanes probably got his information from the Tanners I will focus on the argument made in *Changing World*). FAIR makes these points of criticism:

Jerald and Sandra Tanner claim that a prophecy from Joseph about the Saints' move to the Rocky Mountains was forged after the fact and inserted into the *History of the Church*. They provide the following sources for this claim:

- *History of the Church* 5:85.
- Joseph Smith's Manuscript History, Book D-1, page 1362
- *Brigham Young University Studies*, Summer 1971, p.469
- Davis Bitton, "Joseph Smith in the Mormon Folk Memory," The John Whitmer address, delivered at the Second Annual Meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association, Lamoni, Iowa, September 28, 1974, unpublished manuscript, p.16 [This article is now available in "Joseph Smith in the Mormon Folk Memory," in *Restoration Studies*, ed. Maurice L. Draper, vol. 1, (Independence, Missouri, 1980).]<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Changing World*, p. 405.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph\\_Smith\\_prophecies/Forged\\_Rocky\\_Mountain\\_prophecy/Tanners\\_use\\_of\\_sources](http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith_prophecies/Forged_Rocky_Mountain_prophecy/Tanners_use_of_sources)

FAIR concludes, "This use of sources is dishonest and misleading."

## II. UN-FAIR?

FAIR maintains that the Tanner's use of these sources are "dishonest" and "misleading." Let's take this point by point and see if that is the case. FAIR states,

None of these sources support the argument:

The *BYU Studies* article from 1971 is Dean Jessee's account of the authorship of the *History of the Church*. It says nothing about adding a "Rocky Mountain Prophecy," and the Tanners neglect to provide the perspective on authorship practices in 19th century history that Jessee provides. They thus hide the material that answers their objection. Readers can fortunately access these ideas on the wiki.<sup>9</sup>

Can we point out that FAIR doesn't explain that the *History of the Church* still retains Joseph Smith's name as author and it doesn't explain how the history was compiled from other people's diaries? And they must have missed the Tanners when they explained, ". . . we now know that the Mormon Historians actually compiled Joseph Smith's *History* after his death and that they drew from many sources . . ." Do all the Mormon "Authorities" who quote this "prophecy" from the *History* bother to explain the background behind it, or that in using it this way they tout Smith's prophetic powers as though he had actually penned those lines? But the real question that FAIR doesn't address about the quote from Jessee is why the Tanners used it. Not only does FAIR not explain this, they don't even offer a link or internet address to the book! They don't even bother to quote what the Tanners said! Here is the Tanner's explanation:

We are now happy to announce that a photograph of the portion of the original handwritten manuscript containing this 'prophecy' has been located at the Visitor Center in Nauvoo, Illinois. Wesley P. Walters of Marissa, Illinois, has sent us a photograph of this page. . . . This photograph is taken from "Joseph Smith's Manuscript History," Book D-1, page 1362.

An examination of the photograph revealed that the part concerning the Mormons becoming "a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains" **was crammed in between the lines of the text in a much smaller handwriting**. This indicated that the famous prophecy had been added to the manuscript sometime after this page had originally been written. When we published an enlarged edition of *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* we stated that "**Dean C. Jessee's study** proves that this prophecy could not have been written in "Joseph Smith's Manuscript History" until at least a year after Joseph Smith's death. **He shows that page 1362 of the Manuscript History—the page containing the prophecy—was not even written until July 4, 1845!**

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

We reasoned that if the page was not written until July 4, 1845, then it was likely that the interpolation containing the prophecy was not added until after the Mormons came to Utah. We have recently found new evidence which further undermines the authenticity of this prophecy. Fortunately, in 1845 Brigham Young had ordered the scribes to make a “duplicate handwritten copy of the *History*” (*Brigham Young University Studies*, Summer 1971, p. 469). We examined this **second manuscript**, Book D-2, p. 2, and found that the “Rocky Mountain Prophecy” **was written in very small handwriting between the lines**. In other words, it was obviously added at a later time to this manuscript.<sup>10</sup>

So the reason that the Tanners quoted Jessee from his 1971 article, was to prove that the Manuscript History and the duplicate weren’t written until 1845, a year after Smith died, and that the prophecy was added even later than that. The Tanners then quote an address by assistant LDS historian Davis Bitton where he discusses the absence of a contemporary source for the prophecy.<sup>11</sup> They also included a photo (in their on-line version of the book) of the page in question from the Manuscript History [see photo on the following page of this newsletter]. This photo absolutely supports the argument and FAIR doesn’t deal with the Manuscript History addition.

FAIR is not playing fair because they are not telling you why the Tanners used the *BYU Studies* source. And they do not discuss Bitton’s acknowledgment that “no such prophecy in the handwriting of Joseph Smith or published during the Prophet’s lifetime” exists. How many Mormons are going to go to the trouble of reading what the Tanners wrote? Especially when FAIR doesn’t quote them. FAIR then goes to the Davis Bitton source and states,

Davis Bitton’s article specifically rejects the Tanners’ claim:

Two errors have been made regarding this Rocky Mountains prophecy. The first is to reject it out of hand as a **later invention** of the Utah Mormons. There is enough discussion of **possible** westward moves during the later Nauvoo period to think that Joseph Smith, in one of his prophetic moods, **might well have said something of the sort**. The second error, even more serious, is to seize upon these fragments as the basis for concluding that Joseph knew exactly what the future held in store for the Saints down to every last detail. Like the constitution-by-a-thread prophecy, the Rocky Mountains prophecy **probably** had a basis in an actual statement. The two prophecies are alike, too, in the fact that they were extremely popular later on when they served the needs of the Saints for encouragement.<sup>12</sup>

First, the Tanners did not “reject it out of hand as a later invention,” they show credible evidence that it was indeed added later. Second, a statement that one is thinking about moving west someday, or sending out exploration parties, is far different from prophesying that one will, with specific details about what happens before and after. Thirdly, (and most important) it is the Mormons that are “seizing upon these fragments as the basis for concluding that Joseph knew exactly what the future held in store for the Saints down to every last detail,” and that is why this is not a “peripheral issue.” Here is a little more of the Tanner’s use of Davis Bitton’s article that FAIR doesn’t quote,

“The situation, then, boils down to the following: we have **two handwritten manuscripts, books D-1 and D-2. Neither of these books were even started until after Joseph Smith’s death**. In both cases the prophecy concerning the Mormons coming to the Rocky Mountains **was interpolated in a smaller handwriting**. From this evidence we can reach only one conclusion: the famous “Rocky Mountain Prophecy” is not authentic. The church historical department has Joseph Smith’s diary for 1842-43, but the first entry does not appear until December 21—some four months after the prophecy was supposed to have been given. Mormon scholars have been unable to come up with anything to support the authenticity of this prophecy.

The Tanner’s argument continues,

**Davis Bitton**, an assistant church historian, has written almost five pages concerning this matter. He frankly states that “**there is no such prophecy in the handwriting of Joseph Smith or published during the Prophet’s lifetime, but it was referred to in general terms in 1846 during the trek west. After the arrival in the Salt Lake Valley the prophecy was frequently cited and became more specific as time went on**” (“Joseph Smith in the Mormon Folk Memory,” The John Whitmer Address, delivered at the Second Annual Meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association, Lamoni, Iowa, September 28, 1974, unpublished manuscript, p. 16).

Davis Bitton goes on to state that “The manuscript history covering this period was **written in 1845**...” This is, of course, a year after Joseph Smith’s death. Mr. Bitton then admits that the prophecy is an “**insertion**” which was added into the manuscript as “an afterthought” (p. 18). Although Davis Bitton cannot find any real evidence that Joseph Smith made the famous “Rocky Mountain Prophecy,” he does feel that there was “a time when something like this might have been said by Joseph Smith with considerable plausibility. Anytime during the last four years of his life,... the Prophet had good reason to consider possibilities for relocation. It can be demonstrated that he considered the possibility of settling in Oregon (or on Vancouver Island). He was attempting to negotiate some kind of colonization venture in Texas ...” (p. 17).

<sup>10</sup> *Changing World*, pp. 405-406.

<sup>11</sup> *Changing World*, p. 406, citing Davis Bitton, “Joseph Smith in the Mormon Folk Memory,” The John Whitmer address, delivered at the Second Annual Meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association, Lamoni, Iowa, September 28, 1974, unpublished manuscript, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> FAIR article: [http://en.fairmormon.org/Criticism\\_of\\_Mormonism/Books/One\\_Nation\\_Under\\_Gods/Use\\_of\\_sources/Forged\\_Rocky\\_Mountain\\_prophecy](http://en.fairmormon.org/Criticism_of_Mormonism/Books/One_Nation_Under_Gods/Use_of_sources/Forged_Rocky_Mountain_prophecy) Hereafter referred to as, *Criticism—One Nation*.





Mr. Bitton admits that other changes were made in Joseph Smith's documents to support the idea that he knew the Mormons would come to the Rocky Mountains:

And in February 1844 the Prophet was organizing an exploring expedition to go to the West. There are some **interesting changes in the way the description of this expedition was written by Willard Richards**, secretary of Joseph Smith at the time, and the **later revisions**. The original, handwritten version reads: "Met with the Twelve in the assembly room concerning the **Oregon Expedition**." This has been modified to read "the Oregon and California Exploring Expedition." Continuing, the Richards manuscript reads, "I told them I wanted an exposition of all that country, "— which has been changed to "exploration of all that **mountain country**." There are other such changes that make one suspect that the later compilers of the history, notably George A. Smith and his assistants in the 1850s, were determined to have Joseph Smith contemplating the **precise location** where the Saints had by then settled. Oregon would not do; Oregon and California as then defined at least included the Rocky Mountains. If the Prophet could be made to say "mountain country" instead of just "country," it would appear that he clearly had in mind the future history of his followers (pp. 17-18).<sup>13</sup>

If we go by what FAIR states, we have Bitton refuting himself! They have to perpetuate an outright lie to make their point (that Bitton's article specifically rejects the Tanner's argument). Bitton's article in no way rejects the Tanner's claim that the specific prophecy, recorded in the *History of the Church* was an insertion after the fact. It was, and Bitton agrees that it was, stating that "there is no such prophecy in the handwriting of Joseph Smith or published during the Prophet's lifetime." The Tanners also reveal Bitton's speculation that the prophecy might be based on something Smith **might** have said. But the bottom line is Smith didn't say those specific words, and there is no proof that he did. Is FAIR's claim that the Tanner's use of Bitton is "dishonest"? We see that it is not, and that the Tanners are more than fair, admitting that Smith "considered going west to build his kingdom."

### III. FAIR'S EVIDENCE IS NO EVIDENCE

FAIR also attacks the Tanners and Richard Abanes for the use of the *History of the Church* source. FAIR quotes a footnote by B. H. Roberts, where he supports the authenticity of the "prophecy" with a quote by Anson Call. But is the Anson Call reference used by Roberts and FAIR credible?

As "evidence" FAIR writes,

The prophecy source is the **biography** of Anson Call, **in August 1842**. The relevant section reads as follows:

"A block schoolhouse had been prepared with shade in front, under which was a barrel of ice water. Judge Adams, the highest Masonic authority in the State of Illinois, had been sent there to organize this

ledge. He, Hyrum Smith and J. C. Bennett, being high Masons, went into the house to perform some ceremonies which the others were not entitled to witness. These, including Joseph Smith, remained under the bowery. Joseph as he was tasting the cold water, warned the brethren not to be too free with it. With the tumbler still in his hand, **he prophesied that the Saints would yet go to the Rocky Mountains**, and said he, 'This water tastes much like that of the crystal streams that are running from the snow-capped mountains. I had before seen him in a vision, and now saw, while he was talking, his countenance change to white, not the deadly white of a bloodless face, but a living, brilliant white. He seemed absorbed in gazing upon something at a great distance and said, "I am gazing upon the valleys of those mountains."

... This was followed by a vivid description of the scenery of these mountains, as I have since become acquainted with it. Pointing to Shadrach Roundy and others, he said: "There are some men here who shall do a great work in that land." Pointing to me, he said, "There is Anson, he shall go and shall assist in building up cities from one end of the country to the other, and you, rather extending the idea to all those he had spoken of, shall perform as great a work as has been done by man, so that the nations of the earth shall be astonished, and many of them will be gathered in that land and assist in building cities and temples, and Israel shall be made to rejoice."... (*Tullidge's Histories*, Vol I. History of Northern Utah, and Southern Idaho.—Biographical Supplement, p. 271)

Thus, the accusation must be not only that the Church decided to "forge" a prophecy by Joseph, but that Anson Call did as well. Can we assess how likely these claims are?<sup>14</sup>

We certainly can assess them, because FAIR is not being fair here either. The first thing they want you to believe is that the Anson Call source is from "August 1842." There are all kinds of problems with this, which B. H. Roberts mentions in that *History of the Church* footnote that FAIR quotes. Here are some of the problems that Roberts encountered,

It is thought important that the following statement **from a biography of Anson Call, by Edward Tullidge**, should be made part of the history of this prophetic incident, as doubtless the testimony of Brother Call relates to **the same incident as that described in the Prophet's text of the History, notwithstanding some confusion of dates that exists in the Call testimony**. It will be seen that **the Prophet fixes the date of his prophecy on Saturday, the 6th of August, 1842**. In Whitney's *History of Utah*, Vol. IV.—(Biographical section of the history, p. 143), the date on which Call heard the prophecy, is given as the **8th of August, 1842**. While in Tullidge's biography of Call the date is given as the **14th of July, 1843**, evidently an error. There is no entry in the Prophet's journal for the 8th of August, 1842, and the entries for the 8th of August, 1843, and the 14th of

<sup>13</sup> *Changing World*, pp. 405-406.

<sup>14</sup> FAIR, *Criticism—One Nation*.

July, 1843, relate to matters of quite a different character. Tullidge, in relating **Anson Call's recollection** of the incident also says that J. C. Bennett was present on the occasion, which must also be **an error**, as the rupture between Bennett and the Church and its authorities occurred and he had left Nauvoo previous to the 6th of August, 1842. In the Call statement as published by Tullidge, the name of Mr. Adams, the Deputy Grand Master Mason in charge of the ceremonies, is given as George, it should be James.<sup>15</sup>

Tullidge's biography of Call was written in 1889. So when did Call actually first write down the prophecy he claimed that Smith made? Certainly not when it is claimed to have happened (August 1842), since he is wrong about so many details. Notice that even in his notes, Roberts tries to make it seem as if Smith wrote the prophecy and put it in his history himself.

It seems that Anson Call kept a journal, but the prophecy is not found there. He wrote an autobiography taken from his journals that ended at the year 1839. He later wrote what he called a "Life Sketch" which included his recollection of Smith's prophecy. However, his account is obviously written well after the fact, because of the problems with the historical data that B. H. Roberts notes in his *History of the Church* footnote. Also, his journal ends when Smith escaped from Liberty Jail in 1839! The "prophecy" was obviously written later, and appears to be unfinished in the copy that Alice Burton had in her possession because it breaks off mid sentence near the end.<sup>16</sup>

FAIR's sarcastic comment that Call "forged" his "prophecy," is the most realistic conclusion, because the historical details don't line up with the facts.

Since FAIR has no evidence that there was a specific Rocky Mountain prophecy uttered by Smith that was recorded in his lifetime, they choose to befuddle the issue with a series of quotes that they claim bolster the premise that there was probably a prophecy. Most of these are remembrances of Mormon authorities long after the fact—which prove nothing at all.

One interesting quote they use is from *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*.<sup>17</sup> On November 24, 1878, Woodruff wrote on the "Inside Front Cover Fly Sheet" of one of his Journals some "true sayings" of the "Prophet Joseph" that he says he copied from Philo Dibble's "record." These "true sayings" are supposedly Dibble's recollection of Smith's last address before the Nauvoo Legion.<sup>18</sup> It is obvious from a quick reading that these are not journal entries from the period, or even written on those dates or shortly after the events because, like Call's account, they are so full of inaccuracies.

<sup>15</sup> *History of the Church*, footnote, vol. 5, pp. 85-86.

<sup>16</sup> See "Anson Call-Excerpts from his Autobiography," <http://user.xmission.com/~plporter/lds/ansoncall.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Criticism—One Nation.

<sup>18</sup> This material is only included in the Appendix to *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* as published on the *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM*, Signature Books, 2009. It was not included in the 1985 printing of the *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* published by Signature Books.

Dibble first gives the date of the 22 of June, 1844, and says that Smith "called us [The Nauvoo Legion] out in order and to my astonishment Counsell'd us to give up our arms" and then prophesied to them that they would "gather many people into the fastness of the Rocky Mountains as a centre for the Gathering of the people." He then thanked them, dismissed them and told them to "take care of your wives, children and homes." But the speech was actually given on June 18, and the Legion did not give up their arms until June 24.

Dibble then writes that "on the 23d day of June 1844" Smith, dressed in his General's uniform, gave his last speech to the Nauvoo Legion. If he had dismissed them the day before, (as Dibble attests) and said his obvious farewell ("take care of your wives, children and homes") why would he give them a "last speech" the next day? Also, Dibble's date of June 23, 1844, for the "last speech" of Smith before the Nauvoo Legion is incorrect. Dibble uses parts of Smith's speech as recorded by those who were there and later published in the *History of the Church*, and then has Smith saying,

. . . for you will yet be called upon to go forth and Call upon the freeman from Main to gather themselves to gather to the Rocky Mountains and the red man from the west, and all people from the North and from the South, and from the East to go to the west to establish themselves in there strong holds in their gathering places, and there you will gather the red Man to their center from their scattered and dispersed situation to become the strong arm of Jehovah who will be a strong Bulwark of Protection from your foes . . .<sup>19</sup>

With the confusion as to dates it is obviously Dibble's later recollections.

After quoting numerous people's recollections of Smith mentioning a move to the Rocky Mountains, FAIR concludes with,

To accept a "forgery" theory, we must accept that all of the people listed above who remembered Joseph speaking about the Rocky Mountains were lying or fabricating their experience. . . . It could be, of course, that Anson Call forged his account, and all the Church leaders and members lied about remembering Joseph speak about the matter. But why then appeal to "many of you" remembering Joseph speaking about it? Why not claim it was a private, secret teaching given to the apostles—for, they certainly also reported these. If the claim was fraudulent, why risk exposure?

Or, the story could have started after the Saints reached the valley, and simply grown in the telling with members "remembering" the story as it was retold to them. But, the contemporary evidence would seem to argue against this, and witnesses often mentioned how struck they were by Joseph's remarks. They also described him discussing this idea in a variety of setting, which argues against an accumulated "folklore."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> FAIR, *Criticism—One Nation*.

FAIR thinks it “strange to see critics argue that Joseph would not prophesy about this,” because they claim that critics say he “was always larding his ideas with prophetic pronouncement,” and I agree. He did. I will also show that the accumulated “folklore” argument fits the evidence perfectly.

Again we see FAIR combining two different issues and tying them together; implying if the prophecy itself was fraudulent that Smith’s discussing the matter must also be based on something “fraudulent.” The Tanners do not say that Smith never spoke about it, they admit that he did. The Tanner’s “evidence” for the invention of the specific prophecy is legitimate though, while FAIR’s evidence doesn’t appear to be any evidence at all.

Also, Call’s appeal to “many of you” was made because Smith did in fact make vague statements about the west. This obviously grew into a full blown “folklore” prophecy as did the story about Brigham Young transforming into Joseph Smith while he was making the case for claiming leadership of the Church.

I do agree with one point that FAIR makes: that Smith “discussed moving to the west several times, and likely prophesied about it.” Given the Mormons’ history of being driven out of every place they settled in, it sure wouldn’t be bad odds to do so and get that right. But it wasn’t this particular “prophecy” given in those words on that date; the details are completely different, and he made other “prophecies” about the west and Nauvoo that were completely false. This makes Smith a good guesser, but a bad prophet.

#### IV. THE REAL ISSUE

What is the real issue that the Tanners and Richard Abanes and others are getting at here? It is this: there were changes made in Joseph Smith’s *History* after the fact and written in as his actual words, without any contemporary documents to authenticate them. As B. H. Roberts writes in *New Witnesses for God*,

At that date, **August 6th, 1842**, the Rocky Mountains seemed like a country afar off to the people of Illinois. The Missouri River was the extreme frontiers of the United States. All beyond that was well nigh an unexplored wilderness filled with savages. The church was fairly settled at Nauvoo, the state authorities were apparently very friendly, the future of the Saints in Illinois seemed propitious. Yet in the midst of all these favorable circumstances the Prophet predicted much affliction for some of the Saints, death from persecution for others, apostasy for many, and for the great body of the church **an exodus to the Rocky Mountains**, where some of those present who were listening to the prediction, should live to assist in making settlements and building cities **in the Rocky Mountains** where they would see the Saints become a mighty people.

There can be **no question as to the reality of these two predictions**, the one of March, 1831, and the other of **August, 1842**, or of their being of a character to **test the**

**divine inspiration of him who uttered them.** That they were proclaimed some years before the events predicted in them began to be fulfilled, or even there was any thought or prospect of such events taking place, is well known; that **the latter prophecy has been fulfilled to the uttermost**, the whole history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from August, 1842, until now witnesses. The Saints suffered many afflictions in Illinois. Their homes, fields, stacks of grain, stock and other property were destroyed; their prophets and a number of others were killed outright by mob violence; many more perished from exposure and disease occasioned by being driven from their homes at an inclement season of the year. In those trying times, following the martyrdom of the Prophet and the expulsion from Nauvoo, many turned away from the faith, and it is too generally known to need comment, that the great body of the church made its way to **the Rocky Mountains**, where cities, towns and villages have been founded, the wilderness subdued, and the Saints are fast becoming a mighty people.”<sup>21</sup>

Even knowing the problems with Call’s recollection of Smith’s “prophecy,” Roberts still insists that “the latter prophecy has been fulfilled to the uttermost,” and touts it as a test of “the divine inspiration of him who uttered them.” In 1891 Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson repeats the “prophecy” to a group of students,

“I need spend no time to prove the fulfilment of this remarkable **prophecy**. All of you who are present in this hall tonight can testify to its literal fulfilment. The Latter-day Saints have indeed become a mighty people in these mountains, numbering as they do now about two hundred thousand souls, organized into thirty-two stakes of Zion, or nearly five hundred wards and branches; and this does not include the Saints in Mexico and Canada. It is also a matter of history that the Saints, for years after the prediction was uttered, continued to suffer persecution and affliction from their enemies; that many apostatized, while others, who proved faithful and true to their covenants, were put to death for conscience’ sake, and the remainder were driven by a ruthless mob from the beautiful city of Nauvoo into the western wilderness in the year 1846.”<sup>22</sup>

Apostle Erastus Snow would add to the folklore in 1916:

“Joseph Smith, **when he uttered this prophecy**, when he beheld this vision, was standing upon the banks of the Mississippi River, fifteen hundred miles from where we now are. Yet he saw **the Rocky Mountains**, and the crystal streams flowing from yonder canyons, and I doubt not that if he had led his people to this land, as he once purposed doing, he would have recognized it as a familiar scene, having beheld it in vision, by the seeric gift, before he saw it with the natural eye. But the Prophet was not destined to fulfill his own prediction; his martyrdom prevented; and the Lord raised up another mighty man to

<sup>21</sup> B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, Deseret News, 1911, vol. 1, ch. 22, pp. 302-303.

<sup>22</sup> A Lecture Delivered by Elder Andrew Jenson before the Students’ Society, in the Social Hall, Salt Lake City, Friday Evening, January 16, 1891. Brian Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, vol. 2, p. 161.

carry out the project, to become the founder of Utah, and the redeemer of the Great American Desert."<sup>23</sup>

On the Church's official site, under "Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith" they are still peddling the folklore,

"The Prophet was well aware that he and all of the Saints living in Nauvoo were in an increasingly dangerous situation. As Nauvoo grew larger, some of the people who lived in the area began to fear the growing political and economic power of the Saints, and mobs began again to harass them. The Prophet was in particular danger, for authorities from Missouri made repeated efforts to capture him, and apostates from the Church became increasingly hostile in their efforts to destroy him. On **August 6, 1842**, the Prophet declared that the time would come when Church members would be forced to leave Nauvoo:

**"I prophesied** that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be **driven to the Rocky Mountains**, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the **Rocky Mountains**."<sup>24</sup>

The footnote they give for the quote references the same interpolated manuscript that the Tanners expose as having been added after the fact:

*"History of the Church, 5:85; from "History of the Church" (manuscript), book D-1, p. 1362, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah."*<sup>25</sup>

In July of 1997, LDS Apostle M. Russell Ballard once again references the same spurious prophecy in a *New Era* article,

"The pioneer exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, began on February 4, 1846. Nearly four years earlier, in **August of 1842, the Prophet Joseph Smith shared his foreknowledge of the trek west: 'I prophesied** that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be **driven to the Rocky Mountains**, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some [would live to] build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the **Rocky Mountains**'..."<sup>26</sup>

The impression the Church today gives is not that this "prophecy" is a conglomeration of various and sundry statements by Smith, or even an amalgamation of them

crafted into a coherent "prophecy," but a valid, specific statement uttered by Smith on a particular day and inserted by Smith himself into his own history. What the evidence shows is that this is not only an interpolation, but it is an insertion of something that there is no evidence that Smith ever said in those precise words, on that particular day. The Tanners are absolutely correct in their use of sources to prove this, and their conclusion that this "prophecy" is "not authentic."

## CONCLUSION

FAIR boasts on their site:

"FAIR has been defending The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints online since 1997. Our mission is to provide well-researched answers to challenging questions within a faithful context."

However, as we have seen, their methods are shoddy and deceptive. If one were to systematically go through each of their reviews, one can come to the same conclusion for the majority of their efforts. Their vilification of the Tanners as "dishonest" is especially disturbing, for as we see by the evidence from this one instance, the Tanners are vindicated by the facts, and it is FAIR who is shown to be dishonest and misleading.



## Excerpts From Letters and Emails

**Oct. 2011:** I have been googling and watching you on U tube and taking pages and pages of notes. You should know that you among other brave souls have been instrumental in my transition out of mormonism. A convert of 2 yrs, I ALWAYS had reservations but shelved them. . . . Talk about buyer's remorse! . . . Know that you helped me keep my sanity and also my faith in GOD after the devastation and mostly disappointment at having been taken down the wrong road. Still I feel these past 2 years were not wasted and feel a new found sense of purpose in being able to share THE GOOD NEWS.

**Oct. 2011:** I was a mormon for 42 years, served a mission, married in the temple, and was active and held multiple callings, it wasn't until 6 or 7 years ago when I started questioning things in the history that got me investigating the facts.

Your books I would find in the Library's in southeast Idaho and Northern Utah and i would read and re-read them check the references to see if they had any validity and sure enough you guys were not lying. To make a long story short I left the church in 2008 and found the Lord in 2009 and am now a Christian!

**Oct. 2011:** I was raised a Mormon and left the LDS church many years ago . . . I have not taken my name off of the LDS church membership but with the help of your web site I will attempt to do so soon.

<sup>23</sup> *LDS Conference Report*, April 1916, p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, LDS Church, 2007, p. 517.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>26</sup> "Faith in Every Footstep," by M. Russell Ballard, *New Era*, July 1997.

**Oct. 2011:** My nephew (19) has just been baptized into the Mormon church. I came across your interview with John Ankerberg on You Tube. Wow! You are amazing! . . . Again, thank you for your courage, thoroughness, and kindness in your approach. :)

**Oct. 2011:** I support the cause for truth you are in. For a church that purports the truth and expects honesty from it's members, you would think you could expect honesty and the truth from it. Not so easy!! I have been a member for almost 50 yrs. It is only in the last few yrs. that I have found out much of the real history.

**Nov. 2011:** Several years ago, as an active Bishop, your website was one of the key sources of truth, which led us to research more deeply our own beliefs. . . . Thank you so much for your faithful witness.

**Nov. 2011:** I just wanted to thank dear Mrs. Sandra Tanner again for visiting with me and my husband this weekend. . . . My husband and I have had such a long journey out of Mormonism. We were both oldest children of old Mormon families. Sandra has helped us to discard the heresies of Mormonism.

**Dec. 2011:** It is interesting that you people condemn the LDS Church and call them a false cult. . . . I am going to vacate the evangelical sphere of Christianity and become LDS. . . . I have forgiven all those . . . who have caused me hurt and prayer that they too will receive a testimony of the validity of the [LDS] gospel.

**Dec. 2011:** Thank you for helping me come out of Mormonism at age 55 in 2005. I am so much happier and now I have the grace that Joseph Smith took out of the supposedly "restored" gospel.

**Dec. 2011:** We discovered you when our daughter started dating a Mormon. . . . [They] have broken up their relationship because she would not convert. She actually made it through missionary lesson 3 and stopped. [She] said that Bible verses kept coming to her mind and felt they were from God.

**Dec. 2011:** I admire you intensely and respect the work you've done. I left the church 3 weeks ago and am joyful beyond words. It took way too long to admit what I had known all along, but now that I have that courage my life is better in every way.

**Dec. 2011:** I have spent six years investigating the LDS Church comparing their material with yours and other ministries and have found that many of the facts presented by evangelicals are filled with erroneous lies and mis-quotes concerning LDS doctrines and what their apostles really meant.

**Jan. 2012:** Listened to your interview w/Doris Hanson ["Polygamy: What Love is This?" TV show] last night and really enjoyed it, especially your calm, cool and collected answers to the callers. You're awesome! I want to meet you in person my next trek to SLC as I've "righteously" avoided you my whole life as a lifelong [LDS] church member! lol

**Jan. 2012:** Sandra, someone posted on Craig's list that he wanted to talk to a believing inactive mormon as himself. I wrote and told him that i was an ex mormon and he started preaching to me. I told him to check out UTLM.ORG. He said that he did not believe anything those Tanners said. I gave up on him; but about 6 months later he wrote to me and said that he got curious about UTLM and started reading. Now he has left the mormon church for Biblical christianity. All praise be to God who works through us for his divine purposes.

**Jan. 2012:** Thank you for this website I'm a Christian . . . I have a friend who is a Mormon, after listening to some things she talked about and doing my own research to include finding some youtubes by Sandra Tanner, I was blown away. . . . this process has me looking deeper into my faith and reconnecting with Jesus Christ my Lord Savior. I am praying and reading my Bible with such thirst I pray it will never end. Thanks again for all your research I pray that my friend will find the love of Jesus Christ.

**Jan. 2012:** Awesome website information thanks. I've been meeting with Mormon Missionaries over the last 4 weeks (3 times a week) and I'm due to get baptized soon in the Mormon Church. I have had serious doubts about the teaching from the Missionaries as I have felt like something isn't right. So I've been googling 'ex mormon' websites and came across yours. The articles are really helpful thanks. I was raised in a Christian home and the [LDS] Missionaries said that the Book of Mormon and their faith does not contradict the bible. However, through reading your material, I have found that there are huge contradictions. I would never have known about all this strange teaching, if there wasn't great website information like yours available. I feel like the Mormons deceived me and were dishonest in their dealings with me by failing to disclose the contradictions of their faith with the Bible. But I am grateful that I have learned now before I encountered huge disappointment and hurt. Thanks.

**Jan. 2012:** Hi, I'm a convert to the LDS church and I know there are many things written and said about Mormons that are taken out of context, distorted, and just plain untrue. I read all this stuff over 30 years ago when I was first investigating the Church! . . . Well I read all this anti-Mormon stuff, that I found in Christian bookstores, of all places! I just knew it wasn't right. I finally found some correct information on the Church, studied, pondered and prayed for a year, went to church to see what it was like, then asked the missionaries over and I asked them more questions. I knew I couldn't be a member of any other church. It has the fulness of the gospel and will bring you closer to Jesus Christ and the Bible than any other church!

**Jan. 2012:** I had a friend who was a Mormon for many years, who visited you at your bookstore while she was searching for the truth. She was impressed with your kindness, if not at the time with the truth that you stood for. I was witnessing with another Christian friend, to her, for the last 11 or so years. She got saved recently, and is now attending a Christian church . . . Thank you for your part in being a Christian witness to her during her search for the truth.

**Jan. 2012:** [LDS man] It is always interesting to read the material that you and your minions dig up on these topics to try to discredit the LDS church and I admire your zeal and commitment to your faith. . . . As LDS, we love Christ as much as you do and we walk in His ways and have his image engraven upon our countenances. . . . On the matter of slavery and bond people, that is a matter well documented right in the Holy Bible and supported by it. . . . The LDS church is not the church of the devil so save your breath.

**Jan. 2012:** I was a mormon for 27 years, sealed in the church. . . . I am now divorced. I asked my husband what if I didn't go to church anymore, he said we would have to part ways. . . . My sister told me about you and I watch you on YouTube. I understood everything you were talking about, I tell people how I felt about living that life and they don't get it. Thank you for caring and making me feel okay and that I'm not crazy.

**Jan 2012:** Thanks so much for your years of work exposing Mormonism. You played a big part in my exit 9 years ago. All the best to you!!

**Jan. 2012:** Oh come on—no matter what I say, you will disagree with it and you know it. You twist and distort things and try to make Mormons look all wrong, etc. And it's because you aren't in the church and you don't have a testimony. . . . I've been on enough anti-Mormon and ex-Mormon videos and message boards to know how this works. Just remember, you don't have a testimony so you are purposely twisting and distorting things. It doesn't mean the church isn't true!

**Feb. 2012:** I just read your article on [Joseph Smith's] White Horse Prophecy. Your slant on the story is that it would be a bad thing for an LDS leader to save our US Constitution. I don't know what you think today (2012), but it seems pretty clear to me that most, if not all of the statements that you cite from previous LDS leaders are coming true.

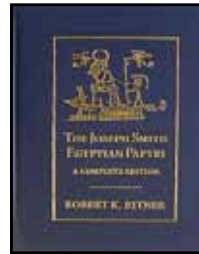
**Feb. 2012:** Praises to the Lord for [the John Ankerberg TV] shows with Brigham Young's granddaughter & former BYU professors! I've prayed for 12 years that the Lord would work on my son's heart & he'd see the conflicts between the Bible and the Mormon church. As a result of watching your shows my son has left the Mormon church after being conflicted about their teachings for over 2 years.

**Feb. 2012:** I tried to be a Mormon for about 9 months when I was much younger. It just didn't work out (for obvious reasons!) and I contacted you folks for info on getting my name out of their rolls. I was able to achieve my goal with y'all's help, thank you so much!

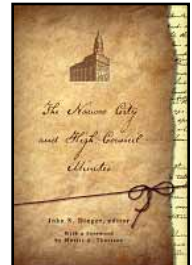
**March 2012:** I absolutely love your newsletters. They are wonderfully reaffirming to an exmo like me. There are no words to describe my gratitude to you for your efforts at exposing the truth about the whole mormon mess.



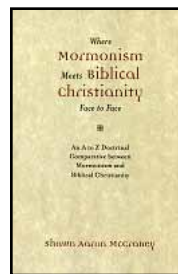
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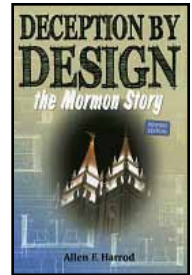
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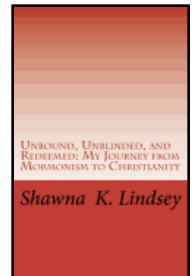
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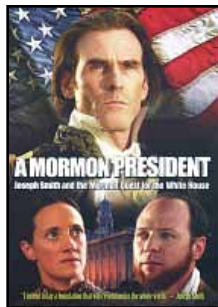
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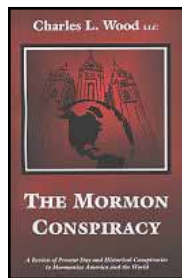
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