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## Jerald Tanner s Quest for Truth - Part 2

By Ronald V. Huggins

*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:1-2)*

In the wake of Jerald Tanner's passing last October 1st it seemed fitting to go back and reflect on the circumstances of his conversion to Christ, his meeting and marrying Sandra McGee, and the beginning of their path that would lead to a lifelong ministry focused on researching Mormonism, bringing forth early Mormon texts and sharing Christ with Mormons. The beginning of the story appeared in the last issue of the *Salt Lake City Messenger* (<http://utlm.org/newsletters/no108.htm>).

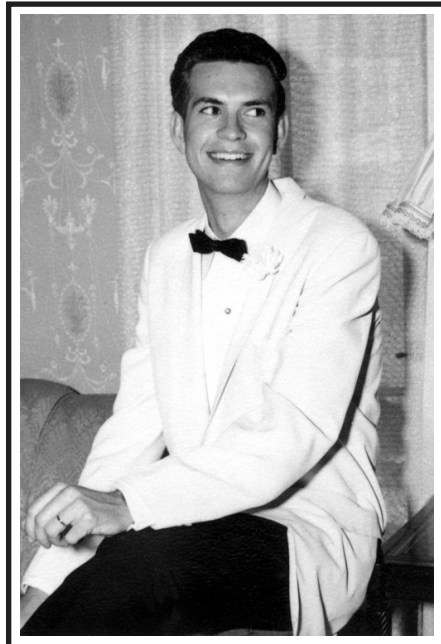
After their marriage on June 14, 1959, in Mission Hills, California, Jerald and Sandra lived there until July of 1960, when they moved to Salt Lake City. Upon their arrival, however, they dropped off their belongings at the home of Jerald's parents and stayed only a few days before heading on to Missouri for a short visit with the little Church of Christ group (see *Messenger* 108, p. 3). On July 25, 1960, Jerald and Sandra, along with their baby April and Jerald's sister Irene, traveled to Independence by train. On August 2, Sandra was baptized by Pastor Pauline Hancock. Pauline had been hesitant to baptize Sandra unless she felt sure of Sandra's testimony to the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. Prior to her baptism Sandra had expressed certain doubts, which Pauline had been able to answer to her satisfaction. At the time Jerald regarded Sandra's satisfaction with Pauline's explanations as a sort of sign

that he should continue to hold on to his crumbling faith in the Book of Mormon's authenticity.

For months prior to this, Jerald had entertained doubts about the Book of Mormon, the seriousness of which he shared with Pauline but not with Sandra. Seven months before the time of Sandra's baptism Jerald had written a letter posing seventeen questions to Pauline relating to the Book for Mormon and other problems. By that time Jerald was ready to drop the Book of Mormon, as he states explicitly in a cover letter sent along with his questions:

I am really getting more faith in Christ. At the same time though I have lost faith in the Book of Mormon. It just won't seem to meet the tests like the bible. I have prayed and so far the only answer seems to be that it is fake. The more I have thought about it the more problems I see in believing it is true.

This undated letter along with the questions included in it must have been written in late November or early December 1959. In it Jerald states that "about a month ago Sandra was born of the spirit." That took place on October 24, 1959. Jerald also urges Pauline with regard to answering his questions: "don't bother to start working on them until after Christmas." Pauline's response is dated January 20, 1960. The accusation is sometimes made that the Tanners never scrutinize their own faith, only the faith of others. It is worth noting that at the time of this letter the faith Jerald was scrutinizing was his own.



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**Special Offers**  
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Here are the questions Jerald sent to Pauline (retaining the original spelling and punctuation):

1. Could David Whitmer be an eye witness concerning the changing of the spectacles for the stone, as I didn't think he was there himself at the time. If he wasn't he could have been told this story?

2. Martin Harris talks of having the stone when he was scribe (Historical Record) this was before the first 116 pages were complete; can you explain this?

3. Many of Joseph's neighbors talk about Joseph having a stone before the Book of Mormon. Could you explain this?

4. In the book "Joseph the Prophet" by Widstoe he quotes many sources and admits the stone was found when Joseph was digging a well. He quotes many Mormon sources and agrees with Willard Chase's story about the stone. Could you explain this?

5. Could you explain section 9 verse 3 in the R.L.D.S. Doctrine and Covenants [LDS D&C 9:7-9]. Does this have anything to do with the means by which the Book of Mormon came forth?

6. There was an article in the paper the "Wayne Sentinel" I believe, it was published in the year 1824 or 1825 before the book of Mormon was even started. It told about a small group of "gold diggers" who were out looking for a pot filled with gold, they were using a stone placed in a hat to find the treasure. Can you explain why the Book of Mormon would come forth by the same means that was used to find treasures?

7. If the Book of Mormon is of divine origin, then it would seem to me that the early revelation in the Book of Commandments, given at the same time as the Book was coming forth, would also agree with the word of God. Or is it possible that Joseph could have been inspired on the book of Mormon and then have false revelations of the same time. It would seem to me that this shouldn't be overlooked. It would be about the same thing for us to overlook these early revelations, as for the Reorganized Church to overlook the Book of Abraham. Could you help me on this

8. Could you tell me why the revelation in the Book of Commandments about John living until the Lord comes is not in agreement with what the Bible says in John. The bible account says that Jesus didn't tell him that he should live till he came, The Book of Commandments says he did. This revelation looks so man made and so contradictory to the bible. Could you throw some light on this?

9. What was the gift of working with the rod in the Book of Commandments Chapter VII:3 [LDS D&C 8:5-9 (modified)]. Do you think it was a divining or mineral rod?

10. What other ancient records was Oliver Cowdery to help translate. Book of Commandments Sect. 8 verse 1 [LDS D&C 9:1-2].?

11. Some of the prophesys about the sealed book seem to be fulfilled at the time of Christs coming, such as Isaiah 29:13 which Jesus says is fulfilled at his time, compare Mark 7:6 also compare Isiah 29:14 with 1st Corinthians 1:19. could you explain this and also the other parts of the prophesy of the sealed book?

12. The Book of Mormon says Jesus was born at Jerusalem; can you explain this?

13. Gods first commandment to man was multiply and replenish the earth this was before he fell, but the Book of Mormon says that Adam and Eve could have had no children except they fell?

14. Can you explain why the language in the King James bible and the Book of Mormon is the same?

15. Can you explain how come many New Testament scriptures are quoted almost word for word?

16. In the King James Bible where it says that charity is not easily provoked [1 Cor. 13:5=Moroni 7:45]. The word easily was added by the translators but it is also inserted in the Book of Mormon, How can this be explained?

17. If High Priests don't continue after Christ; why then do priest continue in the Book of Mormon. I cannot find any reference to priest in the bible after Christ.

Most of these questions arose from problems Jerald encountered while trying to seriously accept the idea of a single divine source behind the revelations of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the first fifteen revelations of the Book of Commandments (i.e. the ones that came through the seer stone).<sup>1</sup>

The first several questions deal with problems Jerald was beginning to see relating to the translation of the Book of Mormon itself. In the *History of the Church* Joseph Smith tells of having both the gold plates and the Urim and Thummim taken away from him after Martin Harris lost the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript in the summer of 1828. Although the pages were never recovered, Smith claimed both the plates and the Urim and Thummim were returned to him soon after.<sup>2</sup> However, the only Urim and Thummim that witnesses to the translation process knew of after the loss of the 116 pages were not the miraculous spectacles he claimed to have originally found buried with the gold plates, but the seer stones Joseph had previously used in his treasure digging ventures. So, for example, Eri Mullin recalls Whitmer telling him in 1874 that "Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim when he was translating. But now it is said that he lost it when he gave the first part of the book to Martin Harris after that he used the Stone."<sup>3</sup> Before that, as Jerald notes, Martin Harris said Joseph used both. So Martin Harris reportedly claimed that "the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone."<sup>4</sup> Jerald's first question points out the fact that Whitmer himself, who did not meet Joseph until the summer *after* the 116 pages were lost, would not have actually seen the original Urim and Thummim.

By this time, as well, Jerald could see the problems that accompany God using the same method [a seer stone] to translate the Book of Mormon and deliver prophesies as was at the time

<sup>1</sup> According to Whitmer: "The revelations in the Book of Commandments up to June, 1829, were given through the 'stone,' through which the Book of Mormon was translated," *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: David Whitmer, 1887) p. 53. See also Ronald V. Huggins, "Jerald Tanner's Quest for Truth: Part 1," *Salt Lake City Messenger* No. 108 (May 2007) p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 20-23.

<sup>3</sup> Eri B. Mullin to the Editor, January 25, 1880, *Saints' Herald* (March 1, 1880) p. 76; quoted in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (5 vols.; Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1996-2003) Vol. 5, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 320. Heard by Edward Stevenson on September 4, 1870.

commonly used in treasure digging scams. This can be seen particularly well when we compare the description of the process in the article Jerald refers to in question six (which appeared in the *Wayne Sentinel* on December 27, 1825), with Joseph's translation procedure:

MR. STRONG—Please insert the following and oblige one of your readers.

Wonderful Discovery.—A few days since was discovered in this town, by the help of a *mineral stone*, (which *becomes transparent when placed in a hat* and the light excluded by the face of him who looks into it, provided he is fortune's favorite,) a monstrous potash kettle in the bowels of old mother Earth, filled with the purest bullion. . . .<sup>5</sup>

It is hard not to notice the similarity between this account and David Whitmer's own description of the way Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon:

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine.<sup>6</sup>

In question nine, Jerald also notices the fact that in one of the revelations given through the stone, Joseph appears to have God speaking positively about Oliver's use of a divining rod: "you [Oliver] have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power, save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God."<sup>7</sup> Beginning with the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine & Covenants* the references to the rod were replaced by the words "gift of Aaron" (see *D&C* 8:6-7). The problem with this picture of the founding of Mormonism is that the Bible condemns divination: "When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee," says Deuteronomy 18:9-11, "thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." Why would the same God who condemned divination in the time of Moses now bless it in the time of Joseph Smith, Jr.?

In question seven the problem identified by Jerald is especially interesting. ". . . is it possible," he asks, "that Joseph could have been inspired on the book of Mormon and then have false revelations, of the same time?" As discussed in the last issue of the *Messenger*, Jerald's discovery that Joseph was in the habit of amending his prophecies to keep them current with his developing theology, had led Jerald to follow Whitmer in

accepting only those prophecies that had been given to Joseph through the stone. The difficulty with that solution, however, was that by Whitmer's own admission Joseph had given false prophecies through the stone. Whitmer writes:

Brother Hyrum [Smith] said it had been suggested to him that some of the brethren might go to Toronto, Canada, and sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon for considerable money; and he persuaded Joseph to inquire of the Lord about it. Joseph concluded to do so. He had not yet given up the stone. Joseph looked into the hat in which he placed the stone, and received a revelation that some of the brethren should go to Toronto, Canada, and that they would sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon. Hiram page and Oliver Cowdery went to Toronto on this mission, but they failed entirely to sell the copy-right, returning without any money. Joseph was at my father's house when they returned. I was there also, and am an eye witness to these facts. Jacob Whitmer and John Whitmer were also present when Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery returned from Canada. Well, we were all in great trouble; and we asked Joseph how it was that he had received a revelation from the Lord for some brethren to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right, and the brethren had utterly failed in their undertaking. Joseph did not know how it was, so he enquired of the Lord about it, and behold the following revelation came through the stone: "*Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil.*"<sup>8</sup>

In response to Jerald's questions relating to the difficulties raised by Joseph Smith's prophecies, Pauline declares, "we only take the Bible & Bk of M—I do not try to harmonize either the Bk of Com or the DC with them." She advised Jerald to "Drop everything but the Bible and the Bk of Mormon."<sup>9</sup> This was in line with the policy of David Whitmer himself who had thought it improper to publish any of the revelations, even those that came through the stone. Whitmer writes:

Publishing the early revelations, or any of them, was contrary to the will of the Lord, as I will show you from the revelations themselves. The revelations in the Book of Commandments up to June, 1829, were given through the "stone," through which the Book of Mormon was translated. These are the only revelations that can be relied upon, and they are not law. The Lord told us not to teach them for doctrine; they were given mostly to individuals, the persons whom God chose in commencing His work for their individual instruction, and the church had no need of them.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that Pauline's letter ran six pages, the gist of her arguments was very typical of that so often heard from Mormon leaders. She essentially repeated several times over that Jerald knew what he felt when he was with her group, so who cares what men say? To the end of his life Jerald believed that the love of Christ he experienced for the first time at Pauline Hancock's church was real. He did not, however, conclude from this, as she did, that the Book of Mormon must therefore be true.

<sup>5</sup> *Wayne Sentinel*, Reproduced by Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1980-81) p. 78. A potash kettle was made of solid iron and "could range between 40 and 54 inches diameter, be up to 1 1/4 inches thick and weigh upwards of 1,000 pounds." (<http://www.visithistorickirtland.org/attractions/ashery.html>)

<sup>6</sup> Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Book of Commandments*, 7:3.

<sup>8</sup> Whitmer, *Address*, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Pauline Hancock to Jerald Tanner (20 Jan 1960) pp. 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Whitmer, *Address*, p. 53.

In his answer to Pauline's response to his questions (postmarked Feb. 27, 1960) Jerald writes: "Actually I would like to believe the Book of Mormon is true. My prejudice leans toward it instead of away from it. I pray about it all the time, but as yet I have received no answer. I hope God will give me a positive answer soon." In this Jerald falls into a very common Mormon pattern of behavior: If at first God tells you the Book of Mormon is not true, don't give it up, just keep on praying until you think he has told you that it *is* true.

In this same letter Jerald also enclosed some money and writes: "Use the money to spread the good news. I think we could have given you much more, but we are not sure of the Book of Mormon, and I don't really want to support a thing unless I am sure of it." Even though Jerald expressed grave concerns about the historicity of the Book of Mormon he did go back to a belief in it, as is seen, for example, in the statement of faith he sent to Kate Carter in 1962, affirming "the Bible and the Book of Mormon to be the word of God" (see *Messenger* 108, p. 18).<sup>11</sup>

It is the issue that Jerald raises in questions 14-16, namely the literary dependence of the Book of Mormon on the King James Bible, that becomes for him one of the straws that broke the camel's back with regard to the Book of Mormon. Eventually Jerald would be forced to conclude that if the Book of Mormon were to continue to be considered true, then somehow the King James New Testament had to have been made available to the ancient pre-Christian Nephites in some miraculous manner. This, along with the total lack of archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon, finally caused him to give it up once and for all. Sandra would hold onto the Book of Mormon longer than Jerald, but would ultimately become convinced that serious problems attended it by reading M. T. Lamb's *The Golden Bible* (1887).<sup>12</sup> The Tanners would publicly give up the Book of Mormon in 1962, making the case for doing so in a tract called "Facts Concerning the Book of Mormon." This tract became the basis for a chapter in Jerald's *Mormonism: A Study of Mormon History and Doctrine*, a book that in turn would become the basis of the various editions of *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*<sup>13</sup>

Giving up the Book of Mormon was much more difficult for the Tanners than leaving the LDS Church had been. "Even when I had decided in my mind that I did not believe the 'Book of Mormon,' any longer," Sandra told the *New York Times* in 1965, "it was months before I could say it out loud."<sup>14</sup>

When Pauline died of cancer on October 19, 1962, she still clung to her faith in the Book of Mormon. When Jerald and Sandra gave up the Book of Mormon Pauline Hancock's church grieved but did not reject them as the Utah Mormons had done when they first began questioning. On the contrary, the bond of affection was preserved between them.

Pauline's group would not give up the Book of Mormon until November 24, 1973, after Wes Walters discovered an old legal document proving that the stories about Joseph Smith using his seer stone as a tool in his money-digging were true.<sup>15</sup> Once it was established that the same technique was used by Joseph to translate the Book of Mormon as he had previously used for divination, they felt they could no longer hold to its divine origin.<sup>16</sup>

### Jerald's Formal Resignation

In August of 1960 Jerald was formally excommunicated from the LDS Church. Two years before, Jerald had asked that his name be removed from the membership roles and had been assured by a member of the Stake Presidency that it would be done. He now discovered, however, that the man had not kept his word, that in fact nothing had been done. Jerald wrote to the President of the LDS Church, who then referred the matter to Bishop Alma E. Kehl of the Cannon Seventh Ward in Salt Lake City. He was summoned to appear with witnesses for a Bishop's Court on August 14, 1960. When he arrived, however, he was told his witnesses (Sandra, his mother Helen and another woman) could not be present during the hearing. The rest of the farcical proceedings is perhaps best told in Jerald's own words:

I walked into the room alone, and they shut the door. They asked me if I would mind if they made a tape recording of the proceedings. I permitted them to make the recording but asked if I could also make a recording. The answer was no. They asked me if I wanted to plead guilty to the "alleged wrong doing" of requesting my name to be removed from the Church records and teaching doctrines not in harmony with the Church. I replied that I did not believe my actions were "wrong" in these regards, and therefore could not plead guilty, but that I wanted my name removed without the use of the expression "wrong doing." This caused a great deal of confusion among the members of the "Bishop's Court," and they did not know how to proceed. After conversing among themselves they decided to proceed without the admission of "wrong doing" on my part.<sup>17</sup>

On August 28, 1960, Jerald received a letter informing him that he had been excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, remarkably enough without mentioning that he had been found guilty of anything. Rather it said only

<sup>11</sup> Kate Carter, *Denominations that Base their Beliefs on the Teachings of Joseph Smith* (n. p.: Kate Carter, 1962) p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible, or, The Book of Mormon: Is It From God?* (New York: Ward & Drummond, 1887). Utah Lighthouse Ministry currently produces a photomechanical reprint of Lamb's book.

<sup>13</sup> When Sandra's Aunt Lucille saw *Mormonism: A Study of Mormon History and Doctrine*, which ran well over two hundred pages and was produced on Jerald and Sandra's mimeograph machine, she quipped: "Well I guess this proves that an uneducated young man *can* produce a very big book!"

<sup>14</sup> *New York Times* (Dec. 27, 1965), quoted in the *Salt Lake City Messenger* No. 6 (Jan. 1966) p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> See Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1980-1981) Chapter 4, pp. 67-91.

<sup>16</sup> The announcement was made in the *Independence Examiner* (Nov. 24, 1973), under the title "Attention Book of Mormon Believers." Steven L. Shields is mistaken when he corrects his original date for this (which was correct) to 1971 in *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* (4th ed.; Los Angeles, Cal. 1990) p. 296. On November 25, Gene and Olive Wilcox sent a copy of the announcement to Jerald and Sandra with the note: "Dear Jerald and Sandra—thought you folks would be happy and pleased with this. Would love to see you. Gene and Olive."

<sup>17</sup> Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (5th ed.; Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987) p. 574.

“In accordance with your request your name has been removed from the records and you are no longer considered a member of the said Church.”<sup>18</sup>

## Letter from BYU Historian

On October 7, 1960, BYU historian William E. Berrett wrote a lengthy and very courteous seven-page letter responding to the materials Jerald and Sandra Tanner had been sending out. He did so at the request of both Apostle LeGrand Richards and Sandra’s mother, Georgia. The latter had written to Berrett on August 30 in hopes of recruiting his help in coaxing Sandra back into the LDS Church. She wrote:

Sandra graduated from Seminary and was one of the most faithful and spiritual girls in the church, throughout highschool. All her activities centered in the church. It was really Seminary that got her seriously interested in church history. She found changes and teachings that bothered her, but she simply figured it would all add up when she had studied more. However the opposite seemed to happen. The more she studied the more confusing it all became.<sup>19</sup>

This is an interesting description of Sandra’s past. True, Sandra’s life had been centered in the LDS Church, but it was Georgia herself and her sister Lucille who had first made Sandra aware of the problems. In her letter, Georgia goes on to recount Jerald and Sandra’s bad experience in the genealogical library with LeGrand Richards, a story recounted in the last *Messenger*, noting that when Sandra and her grandmother went back the next day they were told the microfilm was out for repair, quipping edgily that “One could hardly help wondering what is being repaired!” She then goes into the story of Joseph Fielding Smith’s letter to Sandra’s bishop, a copy of which she sent along, asking Berrett whether he thought there was “anything in the letter that you would call faith promoting for a young girl to receive? Does he [Smith] show the love of Christ she would expect from an Apostle of Jesus Christ?” She concludes: “You cannot find within this church more humble, sincere, or righteous souls than these two (Sandra and Jerald)[.] They radiate the spirit of Christ.”

We do not know how Berrett processed all of this but in his response to Jerald and Sandra he avoided the blame game almost entirely. His writing was refreshingly free of the kind of impatient, self-righteous rhetoric Jerald and Sandra had recently been encountering. Instead Berrett actually put forth something resembling historical arguments against the evidence Jerald and Sandra had presented. These focus almost entirely on defending the official story of the first vision with its clear identification of the two personages that appeared to Joseph as the Father and the Son.

## First Vision Problems

Berrett’s basic thesis was that the official account of the first vision, “which has been consistently used in the Church since 1838 is the account as written by the Prophet Joseph Smith,” and that “when the account appeared in 1838 and 1840 it did not come as a surprise to the membership of the Church; it created no stir and no denials, nor did the enemies of the Church at that time allude to it as a new approach.”<sup>20</sup> As support for this Berrett presents some late recollections as well as some early accounts that were not, in his view, inconsistent with the official story of the first vision.

The core of Berrett’s time, however, was spent responding to the list of *Journal of Discourses* passages that Jerald and Sandra had compiled in which the primary, and indeed in some instances the only figure mentioned, is not the Father *or* the Son but an angel. Berrett begins by asserting:

You must be perfectly aware that statements as contained in the *Journal of Discourses* are not new to any student of Church History. I have had a copy of the very same statements in my files for years and the *Journal of Discourses* have been available to scholars from the time they were first published.<sup>21</sup>

Berrett’s statement that the 26-volume set of the *Journal of Discourses* was available to scholars is somewhat misleading, as becomes clear from the statement historian LaMar Petersen once drew up for the Tanners:

In 1954 upon learning that the Deseret Book Company had a microfilm of the 26-volume *Journal of Discourses* I asked for the privilege of reading from some of the volumes on their viewer. After checking “across the street” [i.e., with the LDS Church Administration Offices] the management announced that the privilege of reading from the *Journals* could not be granted.<sup>22</sup>

There is not the space here to reproduce all the passages Jerald and Sandra compiled and Berrett’s responses.<sup>23</sup> We will, however, present three of them to underscore the key point at issue, namely that in several of them it seems that the messenger of the first vision was an angel not the Father and/or the Son.

**(1) Brigham Young:** “The Lord did not come with the armies of heaven... But He did send His angel to this same obscure person, Joseph Smith jun., who afterwards became a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and informed him that he should not join any of the religious sects of the day...” (*Journal of Discourses* Vol. 2, p. 171)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 575, where a copy of the letter appears.

<sup>19</sup> Georgia McGee to William [E.] Berrett (August 3, 1960).

<sup>20</sup> William E. Berrett to [J]erald and Sandra Tanner (October 7, 1960) pp. 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> The list of passages Berrett responds to corresponds more or less with the tract Jerald and Sandra published around this time entitled “The Father and the Son?” It is the same list that Jerald and Sandra include in a letter to LeGrand Richards dated October 9, 1960. As he is working through the list of passages Berrett includes discussion of one passage that is not included in either of the sources I have just mentioned, raising the question whether Jerald and Sandra had sent him a list that included it as well.

<sup>22</sup> The entire statement is reproduced in Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1967) p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> Many of them, as well as a good deal of other material on the subject can be found in Sandra’s online article “Evolution of the First Vision and Teaching on God in Early Mormonism,” at <http://utlm.org/onlineresources/firstvision.htm>.

Despite the presence of a reference to the first vision command not to join any of the religious sects, Berrett simply asserts against this evidence that Young “makes no direct mention of the first vision.”

**(2) Wilford Woodruff:** “That same organization and Gospel that Christ died for, and the Apostles spilled their blood to vindicate, is again established in this generation. How did it come? By the ministering of an holy angel from God...The angel taught Joseph Smith those principles which are necessary for the salvation of the world...He told him the Gospel was not among men, and that there was not a true organization of His kingdom in the world...This man to whom the angel appeared obeyed the Gospel...” (*Journal of Discourses* Vol. 2, pp. 196-197)

Here again we have the first vision claim about there not being a true church upon the earth. Berrett asserts that Woodruff was “not talking about the first vision,” and that “Clearly his references are to Moroni.” However, neither of these assertions are supported by the content of the passage itself.

**(3) George A. Smith:** “When Joseph Smith was about fourteen or fifteen years old...he went humbly before the Lord and inquired of Him, and the Lord answered his prayer, and revealed to Joseph, by the ministration of angels, the true condition of the religious world. When the holy angel appeared, Joseph inquired which of all these denominations was right and which he should join, and was told they were all wrong...” (*Journal of Discourses* Vol. 12, pp. 333-334)

Berrett says that “one would do [Smith] an injustice to indicate that he was referring specifically to the first vision,” and that “most of his remarks have to do with a visitation of Moroni.” In this case Berrett speaks right into the teeth of the evidence. Earlier in the passage George A. Smith had mentioned Joseph’s inspiration to ask for wisdom after reading James 1:5. Joseph’s age in this passage (14 or 15) also places the event at the proper time for the first vision (he was born in December of 1805), and it contains the first vision question about which sect to join and the command to join none.

As I read Berrett’s responses I have to say that they strike me as decidedly listless. I often think how discouraging and uninteresting historical study must be when the results of your research always have to come out “right,” when, as Küng, cited in our earlier article, had said, “If continuity is lacking it can be procured by omissions and harmonizations.” Berrett comprehended the real problem of having the personages described in these passages as angels. “What do we mean by an angel?” he asks, and then replies: “It is a name applied to a heavenly visitor and could be equally applied to the Father and the Son if they were to appear, or to messengers sent from the Father and the Son to do their bidding.”<sup>24</sup> This was an argument that really does very little toward resolving the problem,

especially given the fact that what was really needed was clear early references identifying the two personages as the Father and the Son, references Berrett was not apparently able to produce. In concluding his letter, Berrett kindly appealed to Jerald and Sandra “not to leave the Church of your illustrious ancestors but to seek for the spirit which they possessed.”

## A Visit with Berrett

In his letter Berrett had invited Jerald and Sandra in for a face to face discussion of the issues they had been investigating. When they met with him on October 26, 1960, they found him cordial and laid back, friendly, totally relaxed, and utterly unruffled discussing the problems they were having with the early LDS Church. When they raised the issue of the sermons in which Brigham Young taught that Adam was God, Berrett placidly asked to see them. After looking at their list of passages he casually pushed it aside and said beaming: “I have a list twice that long.” And then, as if to dismiss the whole subject once for all and forever from the realm of polite conversation, he observed cheerfully: “Just Brigham’s opinion, not official doctrine you understand. Brigham said lots of confusing things. Just focus on what the current prophet says, that is the safest course.”

When it had become clear that that was all the farther they were going to get with Berrett on that point, Jerald and Sandra moved on to the issue of the changes in the early revelations. Berrett nodded sympathetically, “Yes,” he said, “there had been some small confusion there as well, but that didn’t have anything to do with the Church’s being dishonest. Certainly not! No it had to do rather with the fact that God delivers his truth as it were ‘line upon line and precept upon precept.’ In fact I’ve no doubt you will be delighted to know,” Berrett announced proudly, “that the Church is even now in the process of producing a new edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* with footnotes to explain precisely when each part of each prophesy was revealed!”

Berrett’s basic approach as he sat contentedly in his office chair before Jerald and Sandra was to project an air of confidence that was contagious. Jerald and Sandra naturally preferred this to downright incivility, but they still wanted things backed up as well with a little old-fashioned solid evidence. Berrett’s answers, though pleasantly delivered, lacked any real substance. As for his promised new edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* with changes noted, after forty-six years it has never materialized.

## Apostle Richards Bows Out - The Tanners Move

On November 25, 1960, LeGrand Richards sent a letter to Sandra’s mother telling her that henceforth he was bowing out of further interaction. “If I felt that your daughter and her husband really wanted to know the truth,” Richards wrote, “I would put myself out to do most anything to help them but I am convinced... that they do not want to know that Joseph Smith was a prophet.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> William A. Berrett to [J]erald and Sandra Tanner (October 7, 1960) p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> LeGrand Richards to Georgia McGee (November 28, 1960).

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Five days later (December 1) Jerald and Sandra collected their baby daughter April, their mimeograph machine, and their black cockapoo, Tippy, and moved out of the home of Jerald's parents and to their own place in a duplex at 319 North 5th (now 6th) West. The experience with Jerald's parents had been good. By that time his mother, Helen, was having her own doubts about Mormonism and would listen to the radio program of a local Evangelical Free Pastor named Wilber Nelson on a little radio she carried with her during morning walks. And far from resenting having to put up with the dog, she loved it and took every opportunity to spoil it by slipping it treats. Sandra used to tease Jerald by saying that if she ever left him she would go home to his mother.



Sandra, April and Jerald  
Spring 1961

Smith on the First Vision: Taken From The *Deseret News*," which they sent out the third week of February 1961.

### Charles Finney's Vision

Earlier that same month Sandra's grandmother, Sylvia Rogerson, stumbled upon something that would provide more insight into Joseph Smith's first vision story. Sitting at home on February 8 she picked up that month's issue of the Billy Graham Association's *Decision Magazine* and began looking through it. Sylvia was not the only member of the family to subscribe to Billy Graham's magazine at the time. Graham's influence was felt not only through radio and television programs but also by the fact that the daughter of Sandra's Aunt Lucille had come to Christ in 1958 at a Billy Graham San Francisco Crusade. On this occasion Sylvia was surprised to find in Graham's magazine a reprint of the autobiographical account of the conversion of Charles G. Finney, the greatest evangelist of the early nineteenth century's Second Great Awakening.<sup>27</sup> Finney had been dramatically converted in the central New York town of Adams on a Wednesday morning in October 1821. As Sylvia read she marked several places that reminded her of Joseph's first vision story, and then wrote at the top: "This is so very similar to Joseph Smith's Story[.] Read it and Keep." Above the famous Waldo and Jewett portrait of the youthful Finney she wrote, "He even looks like Joseph."

There can be little doubt that Joseph would have known about Finney and he may well have heard the story of Finney's conversion told as well. Interestingly the version of the first vision story Joseph told Robert Matthews (Joshua the Jewish Minister) on November 9, 1835, would later be found to contain additional striking agreements with Finney's story as well. But Sylvia couldn't have known this at the time, since Smith's 1835 diary was still being suppressed. It wouldn't become available to the general public until Jerald and Sandra published H. Michael Marquardt's transcription of it eighteen years later.<sup>28</sup>

### Deseret News Find

In the meantime research on the first vision continued. One day when Sandra's grandmother was at the library reading Joseph Smith's history in the Saturday, May 29, 1852, *Deseret News*, she discovered yet another instance in which the earlier telling of the story had been changed in the then current Joseph Smith *History of the Church*:<sup>26</sup>

<i>Deseret News</i> Saturday, May 29, 1852	<i>History of the Church</i> Vol. 2, page 312
I gave him [Erastus Holmes] a brief relation of my experience while in my juvenile years, say from six years old up to the time I received the <i>first visitation of angels</i> , which was when I was about fourteen years old...."	I gave him [Erastus Holmes] a brief relation of my experience while in my juvenile years, say from six years old up to the time I received the <i>first vision</i> , which was when I was about fourteen years old...."

We now know for certain that the language of the *Deseret News* account agrees with the entry in Joseph Smith's diary for November 14, 1835. But it wasn't commonly known then. Jerald and Sandra produced a sheet on this discovery entitled "Joseph

## New Titles

*His Favorite Wife: Trapped in Polygamy* .....\$18.00  
Susan Ray Schmidt - Cassidy Lane Publishing

*I Was a Born-Again Mormon—Moving Toward Christian Authenticity*.....\$9.00  
Shawn McCraney - Alatheia Press

*Why They Left: The True Story of Sandra Tanner*.....\$10.00  
Audio CD - Truth in Depth Productions

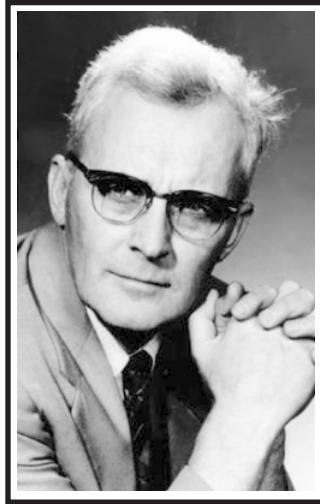
<sup>26</sup> After this discovery Jerald and Sandra published a tract entitled, "Joseph Smith Speaks on the First Vision." This tract would have been produced between December 1, 1960, when they moved into their new place (see the address on the sheet), and Thursday, February 16, 1961, when Hugh Nibley got his copy of it in the mail (as reported by Nibley in his February 18, 1961, in the speech described below).

<sup>27</sup> Charles G. Finney "The Day I Met Christ," *Decision Magazine* (Feb., 1961) pp. 3 and 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Joseph Smith's 1835-36 Diary* (Transcription by H. Michael Marquardt; Salt Lake City, Utah: Modern Microfilm Company, 1979).

## A Winter Saturday at BYU

On Saturday, February 18, 1961, a series of events occurred that would move Jerald and Sandra's work forward on several fronts. It is here that the man who in many ways represents Jerald's Mormon nemesis enters our story, Hugh Winder Nibley. At the time Nibley was already in his fifties, still quite handsome, tall, thin, blue-eyed, prematurely silver haired, he looked every bit the scholar. Nibley was Mormonism's big gun and bright-eyed boy come home after WWII to roost at BYU. Unlike Jerald, Nibley was massively educated and willing to use, or whenever necessary perhaps even misuse, his education to prove Mormonism true. He was the sort of man who could misquote his source and then scornfully ridicule its author when confronted about it. LaMar Petersen, who as we shall see would suffer this kind of abuse from Nibley, would later write to Nibley damning his work as "shallow and facetious." "You have belittled the scholars," Petersen writes in the letter, "and extolled fraudulence."<sup>29</sup>



Hugh Nibley

Nibley's daughter, Martha Beck, in her iconoclastic book *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* (2005), tells the story of an encounter she had with a scholarly looking person in a supermarket who claimed he used to be "one of the flunkies," who checked her father's footnotes, only to discover that many of them had serious problems:

Sometimes what he [Nibley] said was exactly the opposite of what the author meant. Sometimes a quotation he'd footnote just wasn't there. My team leader told me your dad's gift was that he could see anything on any page that needed to be there.<sup>30</sup>

Like a skillful tailor at his needle Nibley had the gift of altering evidence to fit the body shape of any conclusion he felt was necessary.

One would have thought that all reason and justice would have decreed that Jerald and Sandra would be no match for a man that could obfuscate and misrepresent his sources in several different languages, ancient and modern, while they had to try to limp along as best they could with only one language. Still, they had something else on their side that Nibley didn't have: a commitment to the simple unvarnished truth, a weapon powerful

enough to counterbalance the whole truckload of LDS apologists who were to come after.

Returning to our story, it had been advertised that on that February day Nibley would present a lecture on the first vision story. In a bold stroke of trying to accuse others of what the LDS leadership itself had been doing, Nibley was calling his address "The Suppression of the First Vision."<sup>31</sup> The weather that day was bad, a blizzard, but Jerald and Sandra really wanted to go and hear what Nibley had to say. So they piled into their black '51 DeSoto and drove to Provo. When they arrived they were surprised to find out the event cost eight dollars per person, which was more than they had on them. Sandra urged Jerald to go ahead and go while she read in the BYU library. Jerald didn't want her to have to do that so it was decided that since they were there, they might as well go over to the library and find out what they had in the collection.

As it turned out, they discovered a veritable gold mine of early sources on microfilm. There was a young man on duty that day and when they told him they wanted to make copies he came over and after a bit of fiddling admitted he didn't know how to run the microfilm copying machine. After Jerald showed him how, the young man, realizing Jerald understood how to work the thing, said, "Well, go ahead and make whatever copies you want and then come and pay for them when you're done." Like kids in a candy shop Sandra and Jerald set to work. It is not clear exactly how much money they had with them that day, except that it was more than eight and less than sixteen dollars. Sandra described what they came away with a few days later in a letter to her mother:

We got the first 41 pages of the book of Comm. photographed (The Historians Copie!—signed by W. Woodruff) Hows That! Also, some of the Blood Anot. sermons photo. from the Deseret News, + a photo from the Mil Star showing that part about angels that Grandma found in the D. News, and a letter from Lund to J. R. Clark about the sec. on marriage that is removed. The B.Y.U. [Library] has all kinds of interesting things on microfilm, Deseret News, Mil. Star, E[lders] Journal, Eve. + Morn. Star,<sup>32</sup> the diary of Wandle Mace that Berrett referred to, all kinds of anti-mormon books, the Book of Commandments—also all reprints, the different ed. Of the Doc. + Cov. starting with 1835—about 1865. And, they will photo any of it (15¢ a sheet). We would have got you a copy, but, that was all the money we had with us.<sup>33</sup>

Securing the first forty-one pages of the *Book of Commandments* that day represented the initial step in what was to be their first photomechanical reprint of an early Mormon document.

Up until 1961 the Tanners had been freely distributing their various pamphlets but this significantly limited the distribution. Eugene Wilson, owner of Wilson's Book in Salt Lake, convinced

<sup>29</sup> LaMar Petersen to Hugh Nibley (February 17, 1968).

<sup>30</sup> Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* (New York: Crown, 2005) p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> This was the title Sandra uses to refer to the lecture in a letter to her mother (February 17-21, 1961), which is consistent with the contents of the typescript of the speech (see footnote 37).

<sup>32</sup> The *Deseret News*, *Millennial Star*, *Elders' Journal* and *Evening and Morning Star* are all early Mormon newspapers. The first mentioned is, of course, still published.

<sup>33</sup> Sandra Tanner to Georgia McGee (February 17-21, 1961).



them that if they would at least put on a minimal charge, like 25 cents, he could sell the pamphlets in his store and thus enlarge the Tanner's reading audience.

### “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story”

As to Nibley's February lecture, it became the basis of a four-part series of articles in the 1961 July through November issues of the LDS Church-owned *Improvement Era* magazine, entitled “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story.” In the first installment Nibley writes:

The writer's great-grandfather, a Jew, one day after he had given Joseph Smith a lesson in German and Hebrew asked him about certain particulars of the first vision. In reply he was told some remarkable things, which he wrote down in his journal that very day. But in the ensuing forty years of his life during which he had many children and grandchildren and preached many sermons, Brother Neibaur seems never once to have referred to the wonderful things the Prophet told him—it was quite by accident that the writer discovered them in his journal. Why was the talkative old man so close-lipped on the one thing that could have made him famous? Because it was a sacred and privileged communication; it was never published before the world and never should be.<sup>34</sup>

The reader coming to this passage with no background might be puzzled about what point Nibley is making. In fact, Nibley's conclusion about why Neibaur apparently never told the story again was pure surmise. Also one would wonder why that account should be kept private when Joseph Smith told the same story publicly prior to it. Both assertions would only have meaning if there was something in the story Joseph told Neibaur that was strikingly different from the one he had made a matter of public record some years earlier, or at least that it contained additional features that Joseph didn't want revealed. Of course we now know that that was not the case, that this account told in Neibaur's presence on May 24, 1844, was not particularly remarkable. Here it is:

Br[other] Joseph tolt us the first call he had a Revival Meeting his Mother & Br[other] & Sist[er] got Religion, he wanted to get Religion too wanted to feel & shout like the Rest but could feel nothing, opened his Bible the first Passage that struck him was if any man lack Wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberality & upraidat not [James 1:5] went into the Wood to pray knelt himself down his tongue was closet cleavet to his roof—could not utter a word, felt easier after a while—saw a fire towards heaven came near & nearer saw a personage in the fire light complexion blue eyes a piece of white cloth drawn over his shoulders his right arm bear after a wile a other person came to the side of the first Mr Smith then asked must I join the Methodist Church—No—they are not my People, [they] I have gone astray there is none that doeth good no not one, but this is my Beloved son harken ye him, the fire drew nigher, Rested upon the tree enveloped him.<sup>35</sup>

In Nibley's statement, as we said, the impression is given that Joseph confided the matter to Neibaur privately. The text itself gives no such impression. Indeed the lead-in line runs: “called at Br[other] J[oseph]. S[mith] met Mr [Edward] Bonnie—Br[other] Joseph tolt us the first call...” What Nibley really appears to be doing is making up a case for the continuing suppression of the account using a kind of too-sacred-for-the-public-to-see argument. But why should he make such an argument out of the blue in this context? Who was he trying to discourage from looking at the Neibaur account, if indeed that is what he was doing?

It could be that it was because Jerald and Sandra's circle had been seeking access to it for some time. They had initially learned of it from Nibley's book *The World and the Prophets* (1954) where he says:

The writer's great-grandfather was a Jew, and a very hardheaded and practical man. He tells in his journal, writing on the very day that the event took place, of how he cross-examined Joseph Smith on every minute detail of the First Vision and of how the Prophet satisfied him promptly and completely. From that day he never doubted the calling of the Prophet.<sup>36</sup>

One of the advantages of quoting from a document you have access to but nobody else does is that so long as you are confident that it will not become available any time soon, you are free to misquote it to your own advantage. Today it is possible for us to compare what Neibaur said with what Nibley said he said. And when we do we find that Nibley clearly, as it were, goes beyond what was written. In the first place there is the very tantalizing double entendre in the statement about Neibaur's “writing on the very day that the event took place.” But which event is Nibley referring to, the first vision or the telling of the story of the first vision by Joseph Smith? This was clarified in the “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story” account where Nibley says that Neibaur “asked him about certain particulars of the first vision. In reply he was told some remarkable things, which he wrote down in his journal that very day.”<sup>37</sup> In other words Neibaur recorded the details of the 1844 telling of the first vision story as related to him by Joseph Smith.

In addition Nibley tries to make it sound as if a tough-minded, skeptical Neibaur had interrogated Joseph and that the prophet's satisfactory answers became the basis of Neibaur's confidence in his prophetic powers. None of this is evident in the journal entry to which Nibley appeals. There is no reference to Joseph's telling the story in response to any sort of interrogation by Neibaur, nor to its effect on Neibaur's faith in Joseph. At that time, Neibaur had already been a faithful believer in Mormonism for some years. In short Nibley was simply adding yeast to the dough of the story in order to make it rise more readily to his apologetic purpose. Even further removed from what Neibaur actually records were Nibley's statements in the lecture Jerald

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Nibley, “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story,” *Improvement Era* (July 1961) p. 522.

<sup>35</sup> Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (5 vols., Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1996) Vol. 1, pp. 189-90.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh Nibley, *World of the Prophets* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1954) p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Hugh Nibley, “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story,” *Improvement Era* (July 1961) p. 522.

and Sandra missed that snowy day in February 1961. There Nibley said:

When my great grandfather, [Alexander Neibaur] asked the prophet some particulars of the First Vision, he was told things that probably no other person was told. But they are not for public consumption. They are locked up in a safe in Salt Lake, and that's where they should be. He did not mean them to be divulged to the world.<sup>38</sup>

Nibley asserts that the account Joseph told him included “things that probably no other person was told,” which were not meant “to be divulged to the world.” But again as we read the account itself we see that it is a fairly straightforward recitation of the familiar official version that Smith had published four years earlier. Nibley elaborates on his source in order to argue for its continued suppression.

Since Jerald and Sandra did not attend this meeting they did not hear the above statement. The version of the statement which we discussed earlier would appear in the first installment of the “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story” in the July 1961 *Improvement Era*.<sup>39</sup> As we said, they seemed to have learned of it from Nibley's *The World and the Prophets* (1946). The history of their knowledge of the passage is sketchy up to that point. We do know that Sandra's grandmother went to the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City on Tuesday, November 15, 1960, and that she was refused access to it by A. William Lund, Assistant Church Historian, although apparently she was told that the Neibaur account made reference to the “this is my beloved son, hear him” statement.<sup>40</sup> We also know that the search was on in the Tanner circle around this time for copies of Nibley's book containing the reference. Sandra's Aunt Lucille bought one on Sunday, December 11, 1960, from someone at her local LDS ward. On January 4, 1961, Sandra wrote the following letter to Nibley:

I am quite interested in your [great] grandfather's diary that you quote in your book, *The World And The Prophets*, and I wonder if it would be possible to obtain a copy of it? If this is not possible, do you have a copy of his diary that I could read?

I would like to buy 5 copies of your book, *The World And The Prophets*. I have been to the book stores in Salt Lake, and they don't have any copies of your book. I wonder if you know of any place where I can obtain this book?

Nibley responded on March 8, informing Sandra that “Marvin Wallin of Bookcraft,” had just obtained “a couple of cases of *The World and the Prophets*,” and suggested that she might be able to get the desired copies from him. Then in response to the question concerning Alexander Neibaur's journal Nibley wrote:

The day my great-grandfather heard that remarkable account of the First Vision from Joseph Smith he wrote it down in his journal; and for 40 years after he never mentioned it to a soul. Therefore, when I came across the story unexpectedly I handed

the book over to Joseph Fielding Smith and it is now where it belongs—in a safe.

As soon as they found out that Neibaur's journal had been given over to Joseph Fielding Smith, they sent ten dollars requesting a microfilm copy be made from it. On March 13, 1961, Smith refused and returning the ten dollars commented that “Private journals are filed in this office with the understanding that they will be available to members of the family, but not to the general public.”

In the meantime, Sandra apparently wrote to Nibley again. On March 21, Nibley again writes to Sandra, saying:

I believe I said in my letter to you that the Neibaur Journal now reposes in a safe in the Church Historian's Office, where it belongs.

The “reason that Alexander Neibaur told no one of his experience for forty years,” Nibley wrote, “is that it was strictly confidential and should remain so. I think we should respect his confidence.” As we have already noted there is nothing in the then-suppressed journal entry itself to support Nibley's claim about the supposed confidentiality of Joseph's telling of the story which was also the supposed reason behind Neibaur's never mentioning it again (if in fact he really did never mention it again).

Nibley's most interesting statement in the letter of March 21 came when he says that “the last time I asked permission to see the Journal, I was refused.” This is a remarkable story and Nibley only tells part of it. He doesn't say how he eventually gained access to it after being refused. We learn that from the autobiography the late LDS Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington:

Hugh Nibley... came to the library to see the diary of his [great] grandfather Alexander Neibaur—a diary that he had previously given it to the Church Historian's Office. Lund refused to let him see it because it was restricted material. Despite Nibley protestations that he'd only just given the diary to Lund, he was refused. Later I saw Nibley at the table copying from the diary. He explained that he had gone to the president of the church, who instructed Lund to let him use it.<sup>41</sup>

Here is the full text of Nibley's letter:

Dear Mrs. Tanner,

I believe I said in my letter to you that the Neibaur Journal now reposes in a safe in the Church Historians Office, where it belongs.

The reason that Alexander Neibaur told no one of his experience for forty years is that it was strictly confidential and should remain so. I think I should respect his confidence. Actually, the last time I asked permission to see the Journal, I was refused. Any attempt to reproduce it at this time is out of the question.

Yours very sincerely,

Hugh Nibley<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> A rough-draft typescript of the presentation exists and was reproduced some years ago by F.A.R.M.S. in its Occasional Papers Series. The typescript was probably derived from a recording of the lecture and was prepared by someone other than Nibley. This is indicated by the fact that the person who produced it was not able, for example, to make out the name of Nibley's great-grandfather.

<sup>39</sup> Nibley's February talk spans subjects dealt with in the entire four-part series of *Improvement Era* articles.

<sup>40</sup> Handwritten note by Lucille Hyler in her copy of Nibley's *The World and the Prophets* (inside front cover).

<sup>41</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> A photocopy of this letter appears in Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (5th ed.; Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987) p. 12.

One wonders whether in framing things this way to Sandra, Nibley was trying to head off something that Joseph Fielding Smith had missed when giving his excuse for not making the Neibaur journal available to Jerald and Sandra. If it was true that the LDS Church was only concerned about the rights and feelings of the families whose ancestors' writings were preserved in the Church Historian's Office, then between them Jerald and Sandra should be able, with a little genealogical research, to pull together enough family ties to legitimately ask to see a veritable mountain of restricted archival material. Beyond question Sandra already had as much right to Brigham Young's writings as LeGrand Richards had to Joseph Lee Robinson's or Hugh Nibley had to Alexander Neibaur's. In view of this, it is interesting that a somewhat different account of the story of Nibley's being denied access to the Alexander Neibaur story is given in an undated letter sent to Jerald by someone named Bruce, who begins by saying that he had "just talked to Dr. Nibley [sic] on the phone to make sure I got the facts straight." According to Bruce, Nibley had gone to the archives one day when "one of the assistants or 'underlings' [was] working," who "wouldn't let Dr. Nibley [sic] see the journal because he was obeying rules not to let out books or such without permission from someone of authority." He goes on to say that "Dr. Nibley [sic] told me since that time he has gone back several times when someone who was in authority was there and was not denied access to the journal in these cases. He had had access to the journal since he placed [it] in the Office + is familiar with its contents." We note that Arrington and Bruce seem to have different stories from Nibley. It would seem strange to speak of Lund as an "underling."

That the family-connections, genealogical approach to gaining access to information never seemed to have occurred to Jerald and Sandra at this early stage seems remarkable. Still when the occasion finally did arise for Sandra to ask to see something from Brigham Young, the response was predictably inconsistent with the LDS Church's alleged respect for the hallowed dignity of family ties. Here is what happened.

In 1977 a booklet was clandestinely produced by an anonymous "Latter-day Saint Historian," most likely D. Michael Quinn—that was before Quinn himself was excommunicated—entitled *Jerald and Sandra Tanner's Distorted View of Mormonism: A Response to Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* In their response to this booklet Jerald and Sandra called this anonymous author "Dr. Clandestine." One of the difficulties in responding to Dr. Clandestine was that he had access to restricted material from the LDS archives the Tanners did not have. Among these were the handwritten drafts of the "Manuscript History of Brigham Young." This gave Sandra a doubly legitimate reason for asking for access to these materials. If the archives were going to grant their anonymous historian access to materials for the purpose of assigning blame to the Tanners for not knowing what they could not have known, then surely fairness would require that the Tanners should in their turn be able to see the documents in question and correct any errors that had arisen as a result of

their not having seen them before. The LDS Church was about to be put on trial with regard to its basic integrity and fairness in relation to its regular appeal to family ties as a stock excuse for suppressing documents.

On January 13, 1978, Sandra goes down to the LDS Historical Department and puts in a request to see her great-great-grandfather's diary. The woman at the desk says she will need approval from higher up. Sandra asks to be directed to the appropriate person. She is escorted to the office of Earl Olson.

Crouching behind his desk, Olson glowers at Sandra under the artificial lights, affecting the bearing of an irritated grade school principal getting ready to dress down some naughty child. Sandra is not intimidated. She is frustrated, however, as she tries to make him appreciate the force of her arguments from the rights of ancestry and the demands of fairness. Far from her arguments hitting home, they serve, as it were, only as a red flag before the rising fury of a mad bull. Olson snaps back: "Mrs. Tanner, I don't have to be fair with you about anything."

Sandra is taken aback but not deterred. She presses again her rights as Brigham Young's great-great-granddaughter. Finally Olson is able to control his temper no longer and he begins angrily shouting: "Mrs. Tanner, I wouldn't even show you today's *Deseret News*." Sandra recognizes that whatever else might be said at that point, the best course would be to regard the interview as concluded, and take her leave. As she did so she was surprised to see people all along the hall poking their heads out to see what Olson's fit of temper was all about.

Jerald and Sandra would sometimes ask other people to write to the Church Historical Department in the hopes of obtaining information it wouldn't give to them. At times this approach proved effective. In the Tanners' files is a letter from Joseph Fielding Smith to a certain Sister Christine Sweet dating to August 29, 1961, responding to a question about the first vision account in the Alexander Neibaur journal. Smith reveals that the passage contains the words: "this is my Beloved Son harken ye him" and then goes on to say that "Should there be any question in your mind as to the identity of the two personages who visited the Prophet, I hope you will take the opportunity of visiting my office so that the matter can be further explained."

Had Nibley's will prevailed we should still perhaps be waiting to see Alexander Neibaur's diary. Happily that would not be the case. Still it was a number of years before the first vision passage would be made public. In a letter to the editor that appeared in the Winter 1966 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, LaMar Petersen remarks in reference to the Neibaur Journal that "such journals are not open for public inspection. Several researchers have been denied access to this particular journal, including the donor."<sup>43</sup> Petersen was responding to an article that quotes a portion of Neibaur's first vision passage but does so in dependence upon a 1965 BYU Master's thesis by Paul R. Cheesman. For some reason Cheesman had been granted extraordinary access to documents relating to the first vision, and it was there that a transcription of the long suppressed first vision story in Joseph Smith's own handwriting first appeared.

<sup>43</sup> LaMar Petersen to the Editor, *Dialogue* 1.4 (Winter 1966) p. 9.

Although I am not certain when precisely Neibaur's first vision account first became available, I did find the entire passage reproduced in an appendix to Milton V. Backman's *The First Vision in its Historical Context* (1971).<sup>44</sup>

This was as far as the quest for the first vision would carry Jerald and Sandra in 1961. It would not be until November of that year that Nibley, in his final installment of "Censoring the Joseph Smith Story," attacks the sheet he had received from Jerald and Sandra on Thursday, February 16, 1961.<sup>45</sup>

This final installment also holds the distinction of containing, out of the great flood of misquotation that flowed like a mighty river from Nibley's pen, my favorite one, and that not because of its surpassing significance over the host of other misquotations awaiting the reader of Nibley, but simply because it is so mind-boggling it makes me laugh. It occurs when, in trying to make light of the discovery that the personage that spoke to Joseph in the first vision is called an angel in early sources, Nibley quotes H. Cremer's article on *Angels* in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* as saying: "the distinction between the angel and Yahweh does not hinder from making the angel speak as Yahweh or from speaking of the angel as Yahweh," which Nibley interprets as saying that "Jehovah himself in his capacity of a messenger to men is an angel." Cremer did not, however, say that. Nor did he say the version of the saying that appeared in the reprint of Nibley's 1961 *Improvement Era* articles in the 1991 compilation *Tinkling Bells and Sounding Brass*. The difference between the three versions comes down to whether and where you put the word *of*:

Cremer (1908): "the distinction between the angel and Yahweh does not hinder from making the angel speak as Yahweh or from speaking of the angel as of Yahweh,"<sup>46</sup>

Nibley (1961): "the distinction between the angel and Yahweh does not hinder from making the angel speak as Yahweh or from speaking of the angel as Yahweh"<sup>47</sup>

Nibley (1991): "the distinction between the angel and Yahweh does not hinder from making the angel speak as of Yahweh or from speaking of the angel as Yahweh"<sup>48</sup>

It was also in the first installment of this series that Nibley grossly misrepresented something LaMar Petersen said in his *Problems in Mormon Text* (1957), in order to prove that "Some critics...seem to think that if they can show that a friend or enemy of Joseph Smith reports him as saying that he was visited by Nephi [rather than Moroni], they have caught the Prophet in a fraud."<sup>49</sup> Nibley gave a lengthy footnote in alleged support of this claim.<sup>50</sup>

Nibley makes it sound as if Petersen had only given examples remote from Joseph Smith, overlooking the fact that Petersen's primary example was from the publication overseen by Joseph Smith himself. Joseph Smith had originally called the angel Nephi in this account, not Moroni. Petersen wrote to Nibley confronting his misrepresentation of his work:

You infer that the identification of Nephi as the angel who visited Joseph Smith in his room is the work of critics. You fail to state that the identification was made by Joseph himself and that if it was an error he never corrected it...I think you mislead the reader in your footnote 15. You fail to note that the source of the Nephi story was the Times and Seasons which was definitely not in England "far away from Joseph Smith."<sup>51</sup>

Nibley wrote back but did not address the issue of his misrepresenting Petersen. Rather he tried to make it sound as if Petersen had a problem of not liking his words twisted by Nibley: "its lucky you wrote me when you did," Nibley writes, "It is still not too late; the Lord has extended the day of our probation: you would be insane to waste this priceless reprieve, + you could still be one of the few really happy men on the earth, but you'll have to stop being a damn fool."<sup>52</sup>

When a scholar behaves like this when corrected it tends to perpetuate his error. Nibley was informed of the fact that he had misrepresented Petersen on July 14, 1961. He wrote his dismissive response on July 17. A correction might have been made but never was. And so now we find the same error enshrined for posterity in the eleventh volume of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, published in 1991.<sup>53</sup> In 1962 the Tanners would prepare their own response to Nibley's entire series of articles. They called it, "Who Censored the Joseph Smith Story?" Although there is no evidence in the text of that tract that they were aware of the exchange between LaMar Petersen and Nibley, they were still able to discern easily enough by comparing what Nibley made of Petersen's statement to what Petersen actually said that Nibley had indeed "missed the whole point."<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to Nibley and the many others like him, Jerald and Sandra actually felt that it was their duty, as believers in the God of Truth, when confronted by evidence to the contrary of what they wanted to think, to change their position. Herein lies a key to their effectiveness when countering the works of LDS apologists (and Christian detractors) who did not and do not hold themselves to the same high standard.

<sup>44</sup> Appendix H of Milton V. Backman's *The First Vision: Its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1971) p. 177.

<sup>45</sup> Hugh Nibley, "Censoring the Joseph Smith Story: Conclusion," *Improvement Era* (Nov. 1961) pp. 813, 865-68.

<sup>46</sup> H. Cremer, "Angel," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (12 vols.; ed. By Samuel Macauley Sherman; New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908) Vol. 1, p. 175. Underlining mine.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Nibley, "Censoring the Joseph Smith Story: Conclusion," *Improvement Era* (Nov. 1961) pp. 867-68. Underlining mine.

<sup>48</sup> Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 11; Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company / Provo, Utah, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991) p. 93.

<sup>49</sup> Hugh Nibley, "Censoring the Joseph Smith Story: Part 1," *Improvement Era* (July 1961) pp. 492 and 522.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526, nt. 15. It should be noted as well that footnote 4 is on page 4 of Petersen's book, and not, as Nibley has it, on page 3.

<sup>51</sup> Letter of LaMar Petersen to Hugh Nibley (July 14, 1961).

<sup>52</sup> Letter of Hugh Nibley to LaMar Petersen (July 17, 1961).

<sup>53</sup> Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 11; Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company / Provo, Utah, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991) pp. 61 and 97.

<sup>54</sup> Jerald Tanner, "Who Censored the Joseph Smith Story?" (Salt Lake City, Utah: Jerald Tanner, [1962]) p. 2.

We see this, for example, where sometime, most likely during 1960, Sandra published a second “Dear Friend” letter correcting a mistake she had made in the first:

Some time ago I wrote a letter stating my reasons for withdrawing from the [LDS] church. In it I stated that there was no mormon or anti-mormon literature published before 1870 which identified the personages in the first vision as God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. I would like to apologize, for I have found that an anti-mormon writer named John Hyde, in his book “Mormonism”, published in 1857, states that Joseph saw God and Christ in 1820.<sup>55</sup>

Jerald and Sandra would be helped by a number of faithful friends in pursuing the issue of the first vision. They would be the first to actually publish the long-suppressed 1832 account mentioned to LaMar Petersen by LDS Apostle Levi Edgar Young and sought as well by Fawn Brodie for her biography of Joseph Smith. This occurred in 1966, and consisted of reproducing the typescript version from Paul R. Cheesman’s BYU Master’s Thesis. When that Thesis mysteriously (though perhaps predictably) disappeared from the BYU library, Mrs. Cheesman spread it around that the Tanners had stolen it. In response, Sandra wrote to Mrs. Cheesman informing her that they were not responsible for the theft of the Thesis and that her statements amounted to slander.

As I write, the Tanners’ copy of the Cheesman Thesis lays on the table before me at the page where the Thesis Committee’s signatures would have appeared in the library copy. In the Tanners’ copy the lines are blank indicating that this isn’t the copy that had been entered into the library. In actual fact the thesis was sent to Jerald and Sandra by a third party, who at first did not include the crucial appendix. When the appendix arrived, and Sandra recognized it as the long suppressed 1832 first vision account, she was so excited she phoned Jerald from the post office.

The Tanners would also, with the help of another good friend, H. Michael Marquardt, be the first to publish a typescript of Joseph Smith’s entire 1832-1834 diary and his 1835-1836 diary in 1979, and then his 1838-1839 diary in 1982. Each of these diaries contained at least one telling of the first vision story.

## How to Make Enemies and Influence People

One of the excuses the LDS Church used in those days for suppressing documents was their fragile state of preservation. While Jerald knew that some documents were too fragile to survive frequent handling, he also knew that many archives and research facilities (not least of all the LDS Church Historian’s Office) also compensated for this by microfilming them. Jerald had also come to learn by this time that for the time being at least the LDS Church Historian’s Office was intransigent in its habit of dealing with problems in LDS history by hiding crucial documents away in a vault. So he concocted a scheme to illustrate

the situation in a dramatic way. He sent letters to about twenty LDS officials and included ten dollars in each requesting copies of specific documents that were on microfilm. He distributed the money in that way because he hoped that when they inevitably returned it, as they had done on previous occasions, they would also perhaps include some sort of letters resorting to the usual fatuous list of excuses for refusing his request. At the time Sandra thought it a somewhat hair-brained idea. For one thing they could scarcely afford so large an outlay of cash in those days, but even more to the point, she was convinced it would just make everybody down at headquarters more angry at them than they already were, which of course it did.

We may feel real sympathy for laborers in the Church Historian’s Department in those days, recognizing how frustrating it must have been for them to always have to try to come up with legitimate-sounding excuses for refusing people access to documents that in all justice they had every right to see. The letters went out on April 7, 1961. From Jerald’s point of view, the response was gratifying. Most but not all of those he sent money to, sent back the money along with some excuse for not fulfilling the request.<sup>56</sup>

This was probably a futile idea, but Jerald was only twenty-two. Still in doing this he was crossing the wills of those two to three times his age who were often humorless characters with little patience for the sanguine, spontaneous folly of youth, especially when in search of revealing things that it was their bread and butter to hide.

## Back to the Book of Commandments

When Jerald and Sandra went to Provo on that stormy February day in 1961 and came back with copies of the first forty-one pages of the original edition of the *Book of Commandments*, it was only a small step for them to decide to actually undertake a photomechanical reproduction of the entire work. In the earlier reprints, the type was reset instead of actual photocopies of the originals. The reader will recall how they at first imagined that BYU was very free in letting documents be copied. They subsequently learned, however, that that had only occurred by mistake. Through the grapevine the story reached them that when it was discovered what had been copied that day and who had copied it, there followed some sort of a shake up. Jerald explained what happened in an early tract, “they [the LDS Church Historian’s Office] became very upset and informed the B.Y.U. Library that they were not to allow us to have access to these microfilms of rare documents. Two women [probably Georgia and Lucille] who went to the B.Y.U. Library after this had happened were informed that the Church Historian’s Office had instructed the library to make a list of the microfilms they had, so that they would know just what we had access to.”<sup>57</sup>

One of the things that must be clearly understood before we begin to describe Jerald and Sandra’s ongoing efforts to obtain

<sup>55</sup> The copy of this second “Dear Friend” letter in Sandra’s collection has a speculative date penciled in by her at some point as July or August, 1960, that date is probably too early, since this letter makes reference to the tract “The Father and the Son?” At some later date she wrote “61?” Very probably it could not have been written much after August of 1961 when Hugh Nibley quotes the John Hyde passage in the second installment of his “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story” (*Improvement Era* [Aug. 1961] pp. 578-79).

<sup>56</sup> The story is given along with examples of the responses for example, in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.; Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987) pp. 1-11, and, especially, *The Case Against Mormonism* Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1967) pp. 67-77.

<sup>57</sup> Jerald Tanner “Suppression of the Records,” (Salt Lake City, Utah: Jerald Tanner, 1961-1962) not paginated, last page in tract.

copies of the remaining pages of the *Book of Commandments* from Mormon sources is that the *Book of Commandments* was not a manuscript but a book that had long since entered public domain. When this is kept clearly in mind the various excuses given for refusing the Tanners' repeated requests for copies are seen for what they really are.

Jerald wrote to Chad Flake in Special Collections at BYU in early April 1961. Flake declined to help on April 11 on the grounds that "We are supplied this copy by the Church Historian's office...but not for photoduplication or other forms of publication. Due to the fact that there is manuscript material in this copy, you would need to secure the permission of the Church Historian's library to have it reproduced." And then, probably as a sideways allusion to the manner in which Jerald and Sandra had obtained the first forty-one pages of the *Book of Commandments*, Flake goes on to remark: "Unfortunately, none of our professional staff, either in the Special Collections or Microfilm area, are on duty on Saturday; and our student assistants are instructed not to make any photocopies. This policy is for their protection, so that they will not be held responsible for copyright violations." Flake must have felt that the fiction he put forth in this first letter was a good one, because we find him using it more categorically in a letter he wrote on April 14 to Manfred Goettig, a convert to Mormonism from Germany who worked in the same machine shop as Jerald: "It is impossible for us to send you a copy of the Book of Commandments due to the fact that the manuscript is not owned by us...Under law, the reproduction rights of manuscripts are retained by the institution which owns the manuscript." Notice how in a matter of three days the *Book of Commandments* of Flake's imaginative description moved from containing manuscript material, to actually *being* a manuscript. Pauline Hancock also wrote asking for copies and was refused by Flake in a letter written on April 12. Interestingly Flake seems to have some knowledge of Pauline and affection for her, because his letter is more courteous and possibly more honest, for all Flake says by way of an excuse is that the Church Historian's Office "allowed us to receive a copy of the film... with the stipulation that any reproduction would have to come through their office."

When the first salvo of requests failed, Jerald decided to try to recruit the help of the sympathetic William E. Berrett. In his first response, dated April 24, Berrett repeated Flake's excuse. The Tanners then asked Berrett to contact the Church Historian's Office on their behalf. He did so but failed, writing on May 5: "I did not disclose to [the Church Historian's Office] who I wanted the copy for," writes Berrett, "but in their reply they indicated that they had refused a copy to you and that I would have to divulge the name of the individual who wanted a copy."

"Apparently," Berrett went on sympathetically, "the feeling is that you have only one desire in using a copy and that is to attack the Church. I regret that you should have given any cause for them to feel that that is the case."

On June 1, Sandra wrote directly to Joseph Fielding Smith seeking to obtain a microfilm copy of the *Book of Commandments*. In her letter she was careful to call Flake's bluff by saying: "We don't want the manuscript portion, just the printed part." Her letter was returned with a note written on it that was entirely nonsensical in relation to the particular request: "Private records are sacred to the individual." (The *Book of Commandments*, of course, was not a private record.) Still, not allowing herself to be dissuaded, Sandra continued to pursue the document. A. William Lund refused her request in a letter dated June 5 and finally David O. McKay also refused to provide any help.<sup>58</sup>

The Tanners had similar difficulty trying to obtain a copy from then RLDS Historian Charles Davies. They wrote to Davies twice, on April 8 and then again on April 22, and were refused both times.<sup>59</sup>

Finally Jerald and Sandra did what they probably should have done in the first place, they journeyed beyond the bounds of the capricious realm of Mormonism and put in a request with Yale University Library, who being more inclined to adhere to normal archival protocol, saw no difficulty in promptly giving them what they asked for.

One of the most bizarre episodes in the ongoing saga of the Tanner's efforts to reprint an early Mormon text, an episode reminiscent of the cheesy cloak and dagger tactics of the old Charlie Chan movies that many in that era had grown up watching, was the attempt by *somebody* to instigate the destruction of the photocopies of the *Book of Commandments* copies Jerald and Sandra had obtained that Saturday at BYU.

These copies had originally been printed in the negative, i.e., the print was white and the background black. In order to have this reversed prior to being able to take them to a printer, Jerald and Sandra took them down to John A. Spencer Jr.'s Universal Microfilm Company, then at 141 Pierpont Avenue. At the time Universal was the only microfilm company in the valley and thus had the LDS Church as one of its clients.

As the story was told to Jerald and Sandra, one day someone from the LDS Church came in and asked Spencer whether someone had recently brought in copies of some pages from the *Book of Commandments*. Spencer answered that he didn't really pay much attention to what people brought to him, only what they wanted him to do, but that he thought someone might have brought in some *Book of Commandments* pages. The person then said something to the effect of, "well, don't you use some sort of chemicals around the shop that might, say, spill 'accidentally' and destroy some copies someone might have brought in for you to work on. I mean, you couldn't be blamed if some chemical 'accidentally' spilled." Spencer, realizing that he was being asked to destroy the *Book of Commandments* pages Sandra and Jerald had brought to him, tried to laugh it off, saying something to the effect of, "Look, I'm just a business man. I could hardly afford having it get around that I have those kind of accidents." But Spencer had realized what he was being asked to do, and when

<sup>58</sup> Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism* Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1967) pp. 135-37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

he had finished the work and was dropping it off he told Jerald and Sandra what happened.<sup>60</sup>

Once the preparations for their reprint edition of the *Book of Commandments* was complete they took it to Woodruff Printing Company to have it printed using the photo-offset printing method. And so the first photo reprint edition of the *Book of Commandments* ever produced, and the first of many Tanner firsts, was in print. It was a small volume, 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches, with a picture of the original opened to the title page, showing the signature of Wilford Woodruff on the inside of the cover. The title reads above the picture of the title page:

A  
BOOK OF COMMANDMENTS  
PRINTED 1833  
A PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRODUCTION  
LITHOGRAPHED 1961

At the bottom, underneath the picture, this explanation is given: “The first forty-one pages are reproduced from the Wilford Woodruff copy at the Brigham Young University. Pages forty-two through One [sic] hundred sixty are reproduced from the Yale University copy.” No preface or introduction were actually bound into the volume. It did, however, include a four-page insert, the first page giving a brief account of the Tanner’s attempts to gain access to the original,<sup>61</sup> the second reproducing Chad Flake’s April 11th letter, the third showing the revelation later appearing as *D&C 5* (= *Book of Commandments 4*) showing how it had been changed from its original printing, and the fourth doing the same with *D&C 27* (= *Book of Commandments 28*).

It will come as a surprise to nobody that Jerald and Sandra would continue to have obstructions thrown in their way even after they had printed the document. When they approached the two Salt Lake City newspapers about advertising, the once independent *Salt Lake Tribune*, and the LDS Church-owned *Deseret News*, both refused to place an ad. One of the employees of the Newspaper Agency told the Tanners that the reason behind the refusal was that the insert was “too controversial.” When a woman later called the Newspaper Agency to inquire into whether this was true, she was told that the Tanners had lied to her, that indeed the Agency did not discriminate in that fashion, nor had they refused to run the Tanner’s *Book of Commandments* ad. Making the best of every opportunity, the woman responded, “Very well then, if that’s really the case, I would like to personally take out an advertisement for the Tanner’s edition of the *Book of Commandments*.” The suggestion forced the man to give up pretending and show his true colors. He would not accept an ad from her either.<sup>62</sup>

An interesting example of adding insult to injury came when Chad Flake in *Brigham Young University Studies* attacked the quality of Jerald and Sandra’s reprint of the *Book*

of *Commandments*, complaining that “it has pages which are completely unreadable.”<sup>63</sup> The fact is, however, a poor reprint is better than none at all. This is shown in the continuing usefulness of Joseph Smith’s so-called Grammar & Alphabet of the Egyptian Language, a document that provided the key to the creation of the LDS Book of Abraham. Thumbing through the pages of that work, one can literally follow the process by which Joseph Smith developed portions of the Book of Abraham text from erroneous “inspired” translations of Egyptian characters copied in the margins. In 1965 James D. Wardle provided a poor microfilm copy of the document to the Tanners. They in turn subjected it to the technologies available to them at the time to improve the images. Still the reprint as a whole is of a very poor quality. Nevertheless from 1966 down to the present it has been the only commonly available reprint of the work, and for all its limitations it is far better than having the document completely unavailable.

Perusing Jerald and Sandra’s *Book of Commandments* reprint, one immediately notices that the first forty-one pages, the pages they obtained from BYU, are of a poorer quality than those obtained from Yale University. All the unreadable spots come from the BYU pages. Why then didn’t Jerald simply replace those original forty-one pages with better ones from Yale? At any given time in those days Jerald and Sandra seemed to have had twenty, fifty, a hundred or more dollars sent off in the mail somewhere with requests for copies. Surely the reason was not an unwillingness to spend the money. And indeed that was not the reason. Jerald felt that it was important that, in so far as possible, the reprint had to come from the LDS Church’s own copy of the *Book of Commandments*. He knew that LDS people were often very quick to dismiss anything that was critical of the Church on whatever pretext they could snatch out of the air at a moments notice. When Sandra’s grandfather William Henry McGee—whom she refers to as the Joseph Fielding Smith of her family—was bemoaning Sandra’s apostasy, Georgia responded by saying, “Well, the problems she encountered in the *Book of Commandments* are really there. What is she supposed to do about them?” His response was dismissive. That assertion, he said, was “all lies.” Georgia gave him a copy of the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) edition of the *Book of Commandments* and challenged him to make the comparison himself. When she asked about it some time later his response was: “That dirty Church of Christ group, they changed the revelations!”

Even after the Tanners produced their photographic reprint there were those who occasionally cast doubt on its authenticity. One Mormon woman, when finding out that part of it came from the Yale library, dismissed it saying: “Yale! don’t you know that there was a communist plot there in the 1930s bent on undermining the LDS Church? Nope you can’t trust anything from Yale. No doubt the document has been doctored.”

<sup>60</sup> Fragments of this story are told in various places in the Tanner’s works, usually without mentioning names. See, e.g., *The Case Against Mormonism*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1967) pp. 51-52.

<sup>61</sup> Including an early account of the shakeup that followed their making photocopies during their February visit to BYU: “When the L.D.S. Church Historian’s Office found out that we had obtained these photographs, they immediately sent word to the Brigham Young University to keep us from obtaining any more photo-copies of these rare documents.”

<sup>62</sup> This amusing anecdote is related in Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1967) pp. 51-52.

<sup>63</sup> Chad Flake, “Mormon Bibliography 1963,” *BYU Studies*, Vol. 5, Nos. 3 and 4 (Spring/Summer 1964) p. 242. (Infobase CD-ROM edition).

These were not in any sense legitimate criticisms. Still Jerald made it a policy to give such spiritually and intellectually irresponsible people as few excuses as possible. Down through the years people have criticized the Tanners for not cleaning up texts before making reprints of them, for not taking the trouble in other words to tidy up the margins and gutters and to obliterate as far as possible the writing on the pages. But this was intentional as a way of making it as clear as possible that they were merely reproducing the text as it was, without modifying it in any way.

In contrast to the situation with the Grammar & A[ll]phabet of the Egyptian Language, which has never been replaced by a more adequate edition (although there has been rumors of a much anticipated forthcoming edition by Brent Metcalfe, David P. Wright, Edward H. Ashment, and Robert K. Ritner), a better reprint of the *Book of Commandments* appeared in early 1962 printed by the Deseret Printing Company for Mormon antiquarian Wilford C. Wood under the title, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. II from a copy Wood owned. *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. I, a photo reprint of the 1830 Book of Mormon, appeared a few years earlier. Flake smoothes the edges of the story by saying in his previously mentioned *BYU Studies* article that the Wood edition was “published at approximately the same time” as the Tanners’ edition. That is true in substance although the Tanner edition came out in early September 1961<sup>64</sup> and the Wood edition did not appear until February of 1962.

For those satisfied with appearances, the fact that the LDS Church-owned Deseret Printing Company agreed to print Wilford C. Wood’s photomechanical reprint will serve as sufficient proof that the LDS Church was not really committed to suppressing the *Book of Commandments* but were simply put off by the manner in which Jerald and Sandra pursued the project. The question provides an interesting opportunity to reflect. To begin with we should know a little about the man who produced *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. II.

Wilford C. Wood was a man who loved the LDS Church and served it all his life. He was a great enthusiast for finding and obtaining artifacts of early Mormonism. Some of the highlights of his collection included the original cast death masks of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the magical Jupiter’s Talisman that Joseph Smith had on him when he was killed, and Joseph Smith’s sandy-colored seer stone. In his capacity as LDS history hunter Wood did invaluable service to the LDS Church by buying up historic sites on behalf of the LDS Church. In this regard, LaMar C. Berrett writes:

For forty years Wilford actively researched ownership and purchased properties that had played an important part in Latter-day Saint history. He usually purchased the property in his own name, then sold the property to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at a great savings to church members.

Wilford purchased eight out of ten plots of ground that comprised the original temple block in Nauvoo, Illinois. He also purchased the Liberty Jail at Liberty, Missouri; Aaronic Priesthood property at Harmony, Pennsylvania; Adam-ondi-Ahman in Missouri; the Masonic Lodge at Nauvoo, Illinois; the John Johnson home at Hiram, Ohio, and a store in Kirtland, Ohio.<sup>65</sup>

In “thanks for his work in acquiring so many Mormon treasures,”<sup>66</sup> the LDS Church presented Wood with a statue of the kneeling Joseph Smith receiving the golden plates by Torleif Knaphus, the famous LDS sculptor who also did the Angel Moroni Monument at the Hill Cumorah and the Handcart Monument on Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

So when Wood wanted to print his own editions of the 1830 Book of Mormon, the 1833 *Book of Commandments*, and 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*, nobody in the LDS Church, so far as we know, discouraged him. Not only so, lest anyone doubt the authenticity of the texts he was reprinting, he included sworn statements by the representatives of the Deseret News Publishing Company, including at the time, Thomas S. Monson, now a member of the First Presidency of the LDS Church.

The Wilford Wood reprints were initially made available by the LDS Church-owned Deseret Book Stores and by the then independent Bookcraft stores. Advertisements for the book were placed in the same newspapers that had refused to run ads for Jerald and Sandra’s reprints of the same book. Jerald and Sandra speculated that the “leaders of the Mormon Church evidently felt that by using reverse psychology they could make the Mormon people believe that they were glad that the Book of Commandments had been reprinted.”<sup>67</sup> However, Jerald and Sandra received information on October 9, 1964, that the Wood reprints were no longer available from Deseret Book. The next day Sandra went in to enquire for herself about the matter and was told that “President David O. McKay won’t let us sell that anymore. . . . We’ve had several people leave the Church because of those books.” On October 11 Jerald and Sandra wrote to Wood himself about it. Wood wrote back saying he had plenty of the books available and asked whether they would permit him “to use your letter to show it to President McKay or those responsible for stopping the sale of the book at Deseret Book Company.”<sup>68</sup>

In a letter written on March 22, 1967, Wood blames Joseph Fielding Smith for stopping the sales of his reprints:

Without mentioning any names or talking about the General Authorities personally, this is what happened. The man who is supposed to answer all of the questions about the Church in the Improvement Era [Joseph Fielding Smith] is the man who stopped Deseret Book from selling the book. President McKay has told me more than once that he would see to it that the Deseret Book sold Volumes one and two of Joseph Smith Begins His Work. So far he has been unable to do so. I love President McKay with all of my heart.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Chad Flake, “Mormon Bibliography 1963,” *BYU Studies*, Vol. 5, Nos. 3 and 4 (Spring/Summer 1964) p. 242. (Infobase CD-ROM edition).

<sup>65</sup> LaMar C. Barrett, *The Wilford C. Wood Collection*, Volume 1 (n.p.: Wilford C. Wood Foundation, 1972) p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Monte Whaley, “Reach Out and Touch History,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (16 Sept 1996) p. D-4.

<sup>67</sup> Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1967) p. 52.

<sup>68</sup> Wilford C. Wood to Jerald Tanner (October 27, 1964). See *The Case Against Mormonism*, Vol. 1, pp. 54 and 56.

<sup>69</sup> Wilford C. Wood to Edmond C. Gruss (March 22, 1967). See *The Case Against Mormonism*, Vol. 1, pp. 54 and 56.



It would be approximately sixteen years before the Wood reprints would again become available in Deseret Book. During that entire period the Tanners continued to sell them. When the RLDS Herald House Publishers produced their reprint editions of the original Book of Mormon (1970), *Doctrine and Covenants* (1971) and *Book of Commandments* (1972), the Tanners decided to continue carrying the Wood reprints, not only because the newer reprints produced by the rival RLDS Church would raise the same kind of suspicion as the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) edition raised with Sandra's grandfather McGee, but also because the pedigree of the Wood reprints (originally published by the Deseret News Publishing Company) remained impeccable despite the fact that the LDS Church had blacklisted them. So, even though Wood stood in quite a different relation to the LDS Church than Sandra and Jerald did, his reprints were only accepted for a relatively short time. At the end of the day it wasn't a matter of personalities that caused the LDS Church to fight against Jerald and Sandra's efforts to make a reprint of the original *Book of Commandments*, it was where it stood in relation to the truth, and to the God whose word is truth.

(to be continued...)



## Excerpts from Emails and Letters

**April 2007.** I was baptised 4 weeks ago into the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and I have found your web site very interesting and helpful. I have had doubts of it being the truth since I started studying 7 months ago but like all other Mormons I know learnt to trust the "burning bussom feeling" and often continued against my better judgement.

Your website has helped fill the unanswered questions I was always left with but could get no proof of and I would like to thank you for that. It was David McCament's Testimony and scriptures from the bible that confirmed my doubts. I probably would have continued along if they had not told me last week I could become a goddess.....there is only one God and it's not me, though I have struggled with exactly who that was recently while studying with them.

**April 2007.** I was raised Mormon, but became a Christian on 04/02/2007 along with my wife (she was not Mormon). The decision was not an easy one, however it became clear that the Mormon Church was not what it claimed to be.

My initial reason to doubt came when I saw a 20/20 segment on Mark Hofmann. I could not understand why the church would spend so much money to hide the documents he was "unearthing." If the church is what it claims to be, there should be no reason to do that. I found it even more troubling to find they were hiding "forged" documents at the cost of its members.

**April 2007.** I've studied anti-mormon literature etc. for 15 years. My commitment to the LDS Church is unwavering and it only strengthened my beliefs that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, and Jesus Christ restored His Church on earth once again because He loves mankind.

**May 2007.** I began receiving your publication a number of years ago. I knew in my heart I had to one day meet this man, Jerald Tanner. It was in 1995 that I drove to Salt Lake City and had the opportunity of talking to him for fifteen minutes. I doubt if I will ever meet another with such zeal for the Gospel as this humble man.

**May 2007.** THAT OLD "LIER FROM THE THE BEGINNING" HAS YOU FIRMLY ON HIS FISHING HOOK. IN CASE YOU DON'T KNOW WHOM I'M TALKING ABOUT, IT'S SATAN" WHOM IS YOUR GOD, FOR YOU ARE ABOUT TO GO TO HELL AND SUFFER FOR ETERNITY, BECAUSE YOU "BOUGHT HIS SUBTLE LIES!

**May 2007.** I am sorry to hear about Mr. Tanner. ... I have read and enjoyed your works for some time now. I am an active member of the LDS faith and I do appreciate what the two of you have done. Your work has caused me to study and find answers to some very interesting points.

**May 2007.** I'm sure the man [Jerald] is having one hell of a change of heart right now on the other side of the veil.

I met you guys in Brigham City, and Salt Lake City. Back in 1985 and you are still the same people.

Bitter til the very end!!!! Your time is coming too, soon Sandra!

**May 2007.** Just a short note of appreciation in memory of Jerald for his excellent scholarship in this cause. I was in the LDS church briefly in my twenties (I am fifty-one now) but left when I did more research than the LDS church liked. I have read your newsletter from time to time and am always impressed with your thoroughness and integrity. You have done wonderful work—as educators, historians, and scholars. Best wishes, Jerald will be missed.

**May 2007.** Now he [Jerald] knows.... It's a sad time when anyone passes away for those left behind and I'm sorry for your loss. I do have to say however that for anyone to spend a lifetime dedicated to doing what you do amazes me. What a waste of a life. For heavens sake let it go.

**May 2007.** Thank you for your comprehensive and well documented work. Having been baptized into the Mormon church in England, I have always had doubts about the validity of some of the fundamental doctrines of the church. I have no doubt that there are good, caring people in this organization, but they are sadly misled, it is true that recovery from Mormonism is a difficult process as we find ourselves alienated from family and friends. I have the added dilemma of a devout mother in the church, as well my girlfriend who has serious doubts but blindly accepts the teachings through duress.

**May 2007.** I don't berate your church, but yet you berate mine. And I am the one that is not a christian. Possibly your time would be better spent getting to know Christ, not teaching falsehoods about his church.

**May 2007.** I really enjoyed the article on Jerald Tanner in the last Messenger. Jerald and Sandra were so helpful in my leaving the Mormon church along with my family.

**June 2007.** You probably won't remember me but when I was Mormon, ... I had arranged a layover in Salt Lake just for the purpose of seeing who these Tanners were and why they hated Mormons so much. Inside, however, I did have questions. I met with you and your husband in your little bookstore and was humbled. You and your husband were very kind. ... I purchased "The Changing World of Mormonism" and started reading it. I cannot tell you the absolute shock it caused.... It took a few months, but God moved us out of the influence of Mormonism ... Your kindness and your ministry changed my life, which then changed my wife's. We now have 4 boys who are all believers [in Christ]. ... THANK YOU

**June 2007.** Thank you for your service. I've been deceived by this cult for a year and half and only Sunday realized what was really the truth. I appreciate your honesty and hard work in bringing forth the truth about the Mormons.

**June 2007.** Hi, I just wanted to thank the Lighthouse Ministry for the tireless effort everyone there has put into gathering priceless information, sources, and etc. It has made my wife and my transition away from Mormonism much more rational and complete.

**June 2007.** I am no longer a Mormon, having had my name taken off the membership rolls of the church, but my husband is a practicing Mormon, of at least 40 years. My sealing to him is in suspension. ... I am emotionally torn. I love him ... and want to stay with him, but the fact that I don't want to come back to the church is causing stress on our marriage.

**June 2007.** Your "[Mormonism-]Shadow or Reality" was so helpful to me while the Lord was dragging me out of Mormonism.

**July 2007.** Hello, I never thought I would be writing to your ministry, but I had an experience recently, and I thought I should share it. I was baptized into the Mormon church ... But the deeper I got into the church and its beliefs, I started having trouble. I did some serious research after I joined. Finally, I had to write to our local bishop to express my concern about some of their beliefs. I later sent him a letter, resigning from the church.

**July 2007.** Do you truly believe what you are selling? Selling is the appropriate word. ... You use scare tactics to entice people. Pulling out of context from multiple sources to substantiate a single thought. ... You claim honesty but your whole site is a farce just to line your own pocketbook.

**July 2007.** Hello wonderful folks at Utlm! You all played a pivotal role in my departure from Mormonism—I can never thank you enough!

**July 2007.** Sandra I will always be so grateful for your help in getting us out of Mormonism and all you do for so many. You affect so many people even more than you realize as for each family that gets out or stays out the ripple effect keeps going forever.

**July 2007.** Of course it would be difficult for you to even try to "disparage" the LDS faith, All 12 million of us are a bad bet for the devil to try and conquer.

**July 2007.** Mrs. Tanner you are full of hate! Hate for and towards The Church of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints... I know of no one else who attacks the church with such a hatred,... Mrs. Tanner make no mistake of this. You will bow your head in dreaded misery one day, with tears of sorrow even greater then the ones you shed the day your husband died. Mark My Words Well, Sear them into your memory! THAT DAY IS COMING ...

**July 24, 2007.** [Pioneer Day in Utah] ah grow up

**Aug. 2007.** There is a stage and we are assigned characters in the unfolding drama but it is only a role we play. ... I have read the script pretty well for 40 years. Twice in the Bishop's role and many times with titles like president, counsellor etc. [in England] ... Then one day I was sent a DVD about the BoM. I watched it hoping, as a graduate geologist and teacher of chemistry to find quick rebuttals for any criticisms. A strange thing happened. I stepped off the stage to take a closer look. I am still off that stage (2 months) and trying to come to terms with another script; this one looks like it's written by Jesus and I am growing fond of my new character. As a result of your industry and perseverance my entire family and my wife's parents (he a one-time temple sealer and both returned missionaries) are out of the LDS church. So this is a letter of thanks.

**Aug. 2007.** Do you not have anything else in your life to worry about other then setting up webpages and printed material that talk negatively about other people or religions? Do you call yourself a Christian??

... What you are doing does not help you or others living in this world it only makes you look as if you have a hatchet to bury. ... You might think you are on a crusade but when your life is over I think you will find your crusade was for the wrong side.

**Aug. 2007.** I came to your bookstore only one time, more than twenty years ago.

However, I was deeply influenced by things you said to me that day, and by the things that I was able to read and learn both before and after my visit with you. Because of the courage that you and Jerald had to ask questions LDS doctrine and history many years ago, you have helped me and countless other former LDS members—many whom you may never know you helped—escape from the fallacy of the teachings of Joseph Smith.

**Aug. 2007.** Your time will come. We can also intentionally deceive others by a gesture or a look, by silence, or by telling only part of the truth. ... The Lord is not pleased with such dishonesty, and we will have to account for our lies.

**Aug. 2007.** Thank you for your ministry. ... ULM was one of the major catalysts in my leaving the Mormon church. I am a recent Christian after 40+ years as a Mormon. I served a mission in England and graduated from BYU.

**Aug. 2007.** Sister Tanner, now your husband knows the truth! I have read your works, and it only strengthened my testimony.... The Gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth. I know it, in spite of many contradictions, and wrong doings on the part of the early leaders of the church.

**Aug. 2007.** It made me very sad to see that it is your position to bad mouth and belittle other religions on your website. Why would you do that? do you think that all Mormons are unaware of the anti-Mormon position and that you are doing a great service to the Lord by publishing those horrible books and anti-Mormon literature? I am lds and a return missionary.

**Aug. 2007.** I just bought your excellent book, "Mormonism-Shadow or Reality." I was baptized at age 18, in 1964, and excommunicated in 1981 for moral charges, which were true. I had no bitterness, and I still believed in the church til the past several months. I'm a retired Police Officer, and I started looking at facts and evidence instead of "feelings and faith"... Keep up the good work,...

**Aug. 2007.** Appears your Apostasy is bothering you. Sandra should listen to the warnings of the Prophets. "Never, ever,ever, never, ever, let anyone or anything take you away from the Gospel." A word to the wise. When we believe we know so much more than everyone else. we begin to find just how little we really do know.

**Sept. 2007.** You may not remember me but in the summer of 2004 ...I came to visit you at your book store. I had been raised a Mormon my whole life and my boyfriend started giving me information that I had never seen before...anyways I just wanted to let you know that I am no longer practicing Mormonism and am now a Saved Christian and have also been baptized....I just wanted to thank you so much for letting me meet you and for answering some questions and pointing me in the right direction.

**Sept. 2007.** WHAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO ATTACK THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS? you have no right, I see Jared Tanner has passed away i guess he is getting his just deserts.

**Sept. 2007.** Thank you for all the time and work you have put into bringing forth the truth. I was a convert to the LDS church in 1996 and now I'm free! I'm still not sure how I was so stupid and didn't see beyond the lies. When I went to the temple 4 years ago I knew that something wasn't right. Luckily my husband started his research and found the truth.



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## MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE 150 YEARS LATER

"Halt! Do your duty!"<sup>1</sup> With that command scores of zealous LDS priesthood leaders and followers, along with a few Indians, from the Cedar City, Utah, area fired on at least 140 unarmed, non-Mormon men, women and children. The killings were over in a matter of minutes, sparing only 17 or 18 children under the age of eight.<sup>2</sup> Earlier that morning several Mormons, led by John D. Lee, diabolically entered the emigrant wagon train under a white flag and convinced them to surrender their arms in exchange for an LDS escort of safe passage through Indian territory.

The gentle wagon train, composed mainly of Methodists and Presbyterians from Arkansas on their way to California, seemed doomed from the start. The news of the murder of beloved LDS Apostle Parley P. Pratt in Arkansas (by a jealous husband whose wife had left him to become Pratt's 12th wife) seemed to be the final straw for the Mormons.<sup>3</sup> This event, coupled with the tensions over federal troops then approaching the Utah Territory, President Brigham Young's declaration of martial law, lingering bitterness about mistreatment of LDS in Missouri and Illinois, recent sermons by President Young about "blood atonement"<sup>4</sup> and inflammatory sermons during the Mormon reformation period led to the slaughter known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre on September 11, 1857. As Will Bagley observed: "Mountain Meadows was a crime of true believers."<sup>5</sup>

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the massacre and has been commemorated by various events. On September 11th a memorial service was conducted at the site of the massacre, now owned by the LDS Church. They provided a pavilion, pulpit, microphone, chairs, security guards, port-a-potties and a luncheon.

Besides various speakers from the families involved, LDS Apostle Henry Eyring offered his sincere "regret" to the descendents of those killed. The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported on the event:

A Mormon apostle, speaking Tuesday at the 150th anniversary memorial service for victims of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, apologized for the church's role, expressing "profound regret for the massacre." ...

"What was done here long ago by members of our church represents a terrible and inexcusable departure from Christian teaching and conduct," said Eyring, who choked up while reading a statement delivered on behalf of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.... The words, "we're sorry," were not part of the statement, but Richard Turley Jr., the LDS Church's managing director of family and church history and co-author of the forthcoming book, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, insisted after the ceremony that the statement was meant to be an apology.

"[The church] is deeply, deeply sorry," he said. "What happened here was horrific." ...

<sup>1</sup> Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, University of Oklahoma Press, 2002, p.146.

<sup>2</sup> Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1970, pp. 101-108.

<sup>3</sup> Bagley, pp. 9, 68.

<sup>4</sup> Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987, pp. 398–404-B.

<sup>5</sup> Bagley, p. 378.

The service, attended by about 400 people, began as an antique wagon, driven by Arkansas descendants and pulled by two Belgian work horses, wound its way down to the memorial grave site. Behind the wagon were descendants carrying flags bearing the names of the 29 families who were massacred in this valley that was a popular stop along the Old Spanish Trail.

Hanging from the fence surrounding the memorial about an hour's drive southwest of Cedar City were 120 crosses representing those who died in the massacre, plus another 17 adorned with red ribbons to represent the children who survived....

The bloodbath in this meadow has stood out as perhaps Utah's, and the LDS Church's, darkest and most disputed chapter. Descendants, in varying degrees, have cried out for apologies, recognition and protection of their ancestors' stories. So while the people in the audience heard Eyring's words and viewed them as progress, few seemed to hear an outright apology.

Historian Will Bagley... felt the church—as an institution—fell short in owning up to its culpability. (“LDS apostle voices ‘regret’ for massacre,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Sept. 12, 2007, p. A12)

The LDS Church made a point of the fact that they did *not* issue an apology. Paul Foy of the Associated Press reported:

Church leaders were adamant that the statement should not be construed as an apology. “We don’t use the word ‘apology.’ We used ‘profound regret,’” church spokesman Mark Tuttle told The Associated Press. (*Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 11, 2007)

The families of the victims are also petitioning for the burial site to be designated as a national historic landmark.<sup>6</sup>

The massacre was discussed this spring in the new four-hour PBS program “The Mormons.”<sup>7</sup> This year also saw the release of the full-length motion picture “September Dawn,” a fictionalized account of the murders.<sup>8</sup> While the movie was not all that we had hoped for we were glad to see Brigham Young’s “blood atonement” sermons and the massacre brought to the public’s attention. Even the LDS Church seems to have realized it couldn’t avoid talking about the massacre this year.

In an unprecedented move, the church posted on its official web site as early as June an article on the massacre scheduled to appear in the September *Ensign*. In it LDS historian Richard Turley acknowledges that many of the Mormon charges against the emigrants were false. He writes:

Some traditional Utah histories of what occurred at Mountain Meadows have accepted the claim that poisoning also contributed to conflict—that the Arkansas emigrants deliberately poisoned a spring and an ox carcass near the central Utah town of Fillmore, causing illness and death among local Indians. According to this story, the Indians became enraged and followed the emigrants to the Mountain Meadows, where they either committed the atrocities on their own or forced fearful Latter-day Saint settlers to join them in the attack. **Historical research shows that these stories are not accurate.**<sup>9</sup>

While the article repeats the charge that someone in the wagon train had boasted he helped kill LDS founding prophet Joseph Smith and that other members of the wagon train were threatening to join the federal troops in fighting the Mormons, it must be remembered that these accounts were given by LDS men involved in the massacre. One is left to wonder if these charges were simply invented to give an excuse for the attack. Juanita Brooks observed:

Whatever the details, the fact remains that the entire company was betrayed and murdered, an ugly fact that will not be downed. Certainly, when the facts are marshaled, there is not justification enough for the death of a single individual.<sup>10</sup>

Mormons will often try to shift the blame to the Paiute Indians of Southern Utah, that the attack was their idea and they coerced the Mormons to participate. However, Turley explains that it was the other way around:

The generally peaceful Paiutes were reluctant when first told of the plan. Although the Paiutes occasionally picked off emigrants’ stock for food, they did not have a tradition of large-scale attacks. But Cedar City’s leaders promised them plunder and convinced them that the emigrants were aligned with “enemy” troops who would kill Indians along with Mormon settlers.<sup>11</sup>

While there is insufficient evidence to prove Brigham Young directly ordered the massacre, he certainly set the stage for the event and aided in its cover-up.<sup>12</sup> That Young was not upset with those who perpetrated the massacre is demonstrated by the following points. First, Brigham Young granted John D. Lee, the only man to later be tried and executed for the massacre, three additional plural wives after the event.<sup>13</sup> The second example is Brigham Young’s treatment of the 1859 rock memorial topped with a large wooden cross erected by U.S. Army Major J. L. Carleton. While visiting the site in 1861, Brigham Young orchestrated the destruction of the monument. Bagley comments:

The monument was beginning to tumble down, but the wooden cross and its inscription, “Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord,” still stood above the rock cairn.

Brigham Young read the verse aloud, altering the text to fit his mood: “Vengeance is mine saith the Lord; I have repaid.” Dudley Leavitt recalled how Young directed the destruction of the monument so that all present could deny that he had ordered it. “He didn’t say another word. He didn’t give an order. He just lifted his right arm to the square, and in five minutes there wasn’t one stone left upon another. He didn’t have to tell us what he wanted done. We understood.”<sup>14</sup>

We offer the following article by Will Bagley to help the reader better understand the historical context in which these events occurred. (Also see *Salt Lake City Messenger* No. 98)

<sup>6</sup> “Groups want church to back historic landmark,” *Deseret Morning News*, Sept. 12, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> PBS, “The Mormons,” <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/>

<sup>8</sup> For more on the movie see <http://www.startribune.com/614/story/1380924.html> and <http://www.mrm.org/topics/reviews/september-dawn>

<sup>9</sup> Richard E. Turley, Jr., “The Mountain Meadows Massacre,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2007. (emphasis added)

<sup>10</sup> Brooks, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Turley, “The Mountain Meadows Massacre,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Bagley, pp. 242-247.

<sup>13</sup> Juanita Brooks, *John Doyle Lee: Zealot, Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat*, p. 230 and Appendix.

<sup>14</sup> Bagley, p. 247; also given as “Vengeance is mine and I have taken a little” by Wilford Woodruff. See Brooks, p. 182.

# Will You Love that Man or Woman Well Enough to Shed Their Blood?

## Brigham Young's Culture of Violence and the Murders at Mountain Meadows

By Will Bagley

A paper presented at International Conference of the Center for Studies on New Religions in Salt Lake City and Provo (Utah), June 20-23, 2002, Salt Lake City & Provo. Preliminary version. Used with permission.

In 1845, the Mormon apostles issued a proclamation “*to the Rulers and People of all Nations*,” declaring, “the kingdom of God has come: ... even that kingdom which shall fill the whole earth, and shall stand for ever.” As drafted by apostle Parley P. Pratt, the proclamation was an ultimatum to world leaders to join the Mormon millennial plan “to reduce all nations and creeds to one political and religious standard, and thus put an end to Babel forms and names, and to strife and war.” The Earth’s rulers must “take a lively interest with the Saints of the Most High, and the covenant people of the Lord” or “you will become their inveterate enemy.”

This unambiguous statement of objectives by a revolutionary new religious movement inspired Mormonism’s fifty-year conflict with the American Republic. With this charter, Brigham Young sought to complete the work of Joseph Smith at any cost and by any means necessary. During his first decade in the West he built a religious theocracy that employed the techniques of a modern totalitarian state to establish the Kingdom of God in the Great Basin. In the process, he created what historian D. Michael Quinn has called a culture of violence. The decision to do whatever was necessary to build the Kingdom “encouraged Mormons to consider it their religious right to kill antagonistic outsiders, common criminals, LDS apostates, and even faithful Mormons who committed sins ‘worthy of death.’”

Mormon apologists have long argued that the “occasional isolated acts of violence that occurred” in Mormon Country “were typical of that period in the history of the American West.” This is not true. What made Utah’s violence unique even in the West was that it occurred in a settled, well-organized community whose leaders publicly sanctioned doctrines of vengeance and ritual murder. Its grim consequences made it terrible. The Mountain Meadows Massacre, the betrayal and execution of some forty men and eighty women and children at a remote oasis in Southern Utah on September 11, 1857, is the most infamous consequence of Brigham Young’s doctrines of blood and vengeance.

What was different about Mormon religious violence is that it was preached from the pulpit and for decades Utah’s extremely powerful religious-political leaders sanctioned murder and protected murderers through a cynical manipulation of justice.

Financial interests endorsed vigilante violence in California and Montana and a displaced slaveocracy encouraged systematic terror in the South, but in no place but theocratic Utah did political and religious leaders advocate “holy murder.”

The nature of this culture of violence, which is not atypical of new religious movements, baffles today’s Latter-day Saints and bedevils their faithful historians. They lack the historical imagination to appreciate the differences between the radical, millennial nature of early Mormonism and today’s conservative religion, which for the last decade has striven mightily to become no more controversial than Methodism. But, as Wallace Stegner observed, “to pretend that there were no holy murders in Utah and along the trails to California, that there was no saving of the souls of sinners by the shedding of their blood during the ‘blood atonement’ revival of 1856, that there were no mysterious disappearances of apostates and offensive Gentiles,” is simply “bad history.”<sup>1</sup>

The atrocity at Mountain Meadows did not happen because its victims stumbled into a typically violent Western confrontation or poisoned a spring or called the Mormons names. I struggled for five years to come up with a coherent explanation of this event, and much to my surprise, I found compelling evidence that this mass murder was a calculated act of misdirected retribution, which Brigham Young sanctioned as a righteous act of vengeance. In May 1861, the Mormon prophet himself explained to John D. Lee why it had to be done: “Pres. Young said that the company that was used up at the Mountain Meadows were the Fathers, Mothers, Brothers, Sisters & connections of those that Murdered the Prophets. They Merited their fate, & the only thing that ever troubled him was the lives of the Women & children, but that under the circumstances [this] could not be avoided.”<sup>2</sup>

Two early Mormon practices—the Oath of Vengeance and Blood Atonement—help us understand what happened on that grim Friday afternoon 145 years ago—and why.

Following Joseph Smith’s murder, Brigham Young incorporated this oath into the Mormon temple ceremony:

You and each of you do covenant and promise that you will pray, and never cease to pray, Almighty God to avenge the blood of the prophets upon this nation, and that you will teach the same

<sup>1</sup> Stegner, *Mormon Country*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Cleland and Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle*, p. 314. Spelling corrected.

to your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations.<sup>3</sup>

Juanita Brooks concluded (perhaps incorrectly) that every Mormon participant at Mountain Meadows had taken this oath as part of their sacred endowment. But as participant John D. Lee later wrote about the victims of the massacre, "This lot of people had men amongst them that were supposed to have helped kill the Prophets in the Carthage jail, the killing of all of them would be keeping our oaths and avenging the blood of the Prophets."

Could the murder of Parley Pratt, a Mormon prophet, on the border of Arkansas in May 1857 have contributed to the decision to destroy the Fancher party, however innocent they may have been of the crime? Two months before the murders, the Alta California thought it entirely possible:

Whether the hot blood which must now be seething and boiling in the veins of Brigham Young and his satellites, at Salt Lake, is to be cooled by the murder of Gentiles who pass through their territory, whether the "destroying angels" of Mormomdom [sic], are to be brought into requisition to make reprisals upon travelers, or whether, as has been done before, "Saints" disguised as Indians are to constitute themselves the supposed ministers of God's vengeance in this case, we are not informed, but have no doubt that ... such intentions as these, are prevalent among those saintly villains, adulterers and seducers of Salt Lake.<sup>4</sup>

During a two-year famine that ravaged Utah in the mid-1850s, Mormon leaders subjected the people of Utah to an orgy of religious fanaticism known as the "Reformation." John M. Higbee, who gave the orders to kill the Arkansans at Mountain Meadows, recalled in 1896 that Cedar City was in the grip of "a craze of fanaticism, stronger than we would be willing now to admit." Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Reformation was the Mormon leadership's obsession with blood and their public calls for murder. Their rhetoric dripped with sanguine imagery, and their Old Testament theology incorporated this dark fascination in a perplexing doctrine known as "Blood Atonement." Joseph Smith taught that certain grievous sins put a sinner "beyond the reach of the atoning blood of Christ." Their "only hope is to have their own blood shed to atone." Strictly interpreted, the doctrine may have applied only to believing Mormons, but the words of its prophets suggest the LDS church shed the blood of apostates "as an atonement for their sins."<sup>5</sup> As the doctrine evolved under Brigham Young, it would have a powerful—and confusing—influence. Of all the beliefs that laid the foundation of Utah's culture of violence, none would have more devastating consequences.

If a Saint committed an unpardonable sin, Young asked early in 1857, "Will you love that man or woman well enough to shed their blood?" He knew hundreds of people who could have been saved "if their lives had been taken and their blood spilled on the ground as a smoking incense to the Almighty, but who are now angels to the devil." If a man wanted salvation and it was "necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he might be saved, spill it ... That is the way to love mankind." It was strong doctrine to cut "people off from the earth," he conceded, "but it is to save them, not to destroy them." Sinners should welcome blood atonement and "beg of their brethren to shed their blood."<sup>6</sup>

Young's private statements exceeded even the violent language of his public sermons. "I want their cursed heads cut off that they may atone for their sins," he told the Council of Fifty in March 1849.<sup>7</sup> His interpretation of blood atonement evoked the Saints' vision of themselves as an Old Testament people, an identification so strong that the plans for the Salt Lake temple included an altar "to Offer Sacrifices."<sup>8</sup> The gory details of blood atonement shock modern observers, but the common experience of butchering animals made them less repellent to a farming people.

The Saints had a "right to kill a sinner to save him, when he commits those crimes that can only be atoned for by shedding his blood," Jedediah Grant insisted. At the beginning of the Reformation, Grant advised sinners to ask Brigham Young "to appoint a committee to attend to their case; and then let a place be selected, and let that committee shed their blood. We have those amongst us that are full of all manner of abominations, those who need to have their blood shed, for water will not do, their sins are of too deep a dye."<sup>9</sup>

Modern Mormon authorities insist blood atonement was a "rhetorical device" and "has never been practiced by the Church at any time," but historian Juanita Brooks concluded that in Utah Territory, blood atonement was "a literal and terrible reality. Brigham Young advocated and preached it without compromise."<sup>10</sup> The appearance in 1859 of the decapitated remains of two Mormon women who had consorted with soldiers at Camp Floyd—documented in army sources and in the Church Historical Department journal—puts the lie to claims that it is impossible to prove blood atonement ever happened.

Last summer [2001] historian Michael Quinn put the implications of such irresponsible rhetoric into perspective. Suppose the archbishop of Dublin incited his congregation with a rehearsal of Protestant crimes against Irish Catholics. Suppose further that he said the solution to the problem was to slit Protestant throats, and that the bishop then published

<sup>3</sup> David John Buerger, "The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony," *Dialogue* 20:4 (Winter 1987) pp. 52-53.

<sup>4</sup> "The Killing of Pratt—Letter from Mr. McLean," *Alta California*, July 9, 1857. Punctuation edited for readability.

<sup>5</sup> McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 87-88. McConkie insisted "there is not one historical instance of so-called blood atonement" in modern times.

<sup>6</sup> Brigham Young, September 21, 1856 and February 8, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 4, pp. 53, 219-20.

<sup>7</sup> Brooks, ed., *A Mormon Chronicle*, Vol. 1, pp. 98-99 contains the Council of Fifty's discussion about whether to behead Ira West in public or in secret.

<sup>8</sup> Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, December 18, 1857, Vol. 5, p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Grant sermons of March 12, 1854 and September 21, 1856, in Sessions, *Mormon Thunder*, pp. 127, 211.

<sup>10</sup> Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Vol. 1, p. 131; and Brooks, ed., *Mormon Chronicle*, Vol. 1, p. 129 n143. In the 1950s official LDS commentary on such doctrines was more forthright. An apostle noted that those who understood blood atonement "could and did use their influence to get a form of capital punishment written into the laws of various states of the union so that the blood of murderers could be shed." See McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 86-88. Beheading was an execution option in Utah until 1888.

his sermon in the Irish Catholic press. If Protestants suddenly began showing up with their throats slit, Quinn asked, would even Mormon historians pretend the archbishop had nothing to do with the crime?<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the doctrine’s precise practice, the blood atonement sermons of Brigham Young and Jedediah Grant helped inspire their followers to acts of irrational violence. By encouraging such criminal acts and then covering them up, Mormon leaders betrayed the Mormon people.

The most difficult question confronting anyone trying to understand Mountain Meadows is how decent men acting on their best and firmest beliefs can commit a great evil. To dismiss this crime as just another Western massacre and ignore its religious motivation does nothing to address this problem. Trapped in an authoritarian theocratic state that punished disobedience with death and inspired by a radical millennialistic faith, the true believers who executed this awful crime did so believing they were doing God’s will. The same motives that led devout, god-fearing Mormons to treacherously murder 120 unarmed men, women, and children in 1857 inspired nineteen devout Muslims to fly airplanes into buildings full of innocent people exactly 144 years later.

Late in life, Juanita Brooks described her first visit to Mountain Meadows and its broad sage-covered plain. “Men did not gather here by chance or mere hearsay,” she thought as she contemplated the desolate site. “If they were here, they had come because they were ordered to come. And whatever went on was done because it had been ordered, not because individuals had acted upon impulse.”<sup>12</sup>

As a last word, here are comments of a noted authority, John Doyle Lee, the only man who, as he said, “stood up and faced the music” for his crimes at Mountain Meadows:

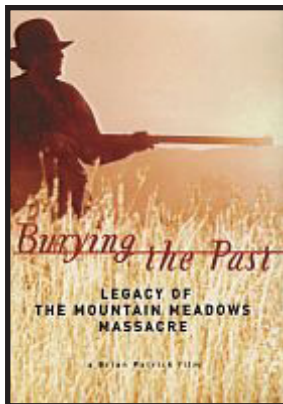
you know the policy of Brigham is to get into possession & control everything where there is a dollar to be made . . . if he considered [himself] no accessory to the deed why would he bring men whose hands have been died in human Blood to swear away my life & make an offering of me to save his guilty Petts . . . he thinks it a friendly act, to sacrifice me, to make me atone for the sins of his Pets as well as my own by shedding my blood you know that is one of his peculiar ways of showing his Kindness to some men by killing them to save them but that Kind of Friendship is getting too thin, it is too much like the love that a Hungry wolf has for an innocent lamb.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “Violence on the Mormon Frontier: Fact or Fiction?” 2001 Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium with Polly Aird, Willam Bagley, Edward Lyman, Michael Quinn, William Shepard.

<sup>12</sup> Brooks, *Quicksand and Cactus: A Memoir of the Southern Mormon Frontier*, pp. 250, 255.

<sup>13</sup> John D. Lee to Emma B. Lee, December 9, 1876, John D. Lee Collection, Huntington Library.

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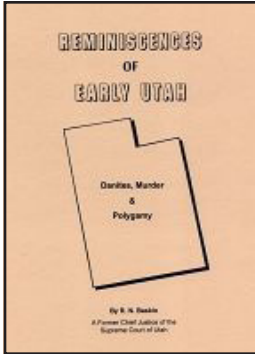
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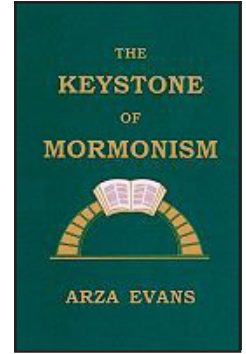
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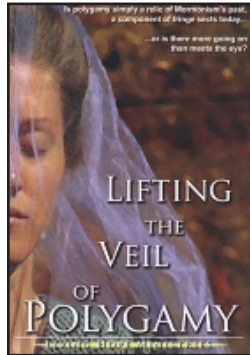


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