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The Oldest Biblical Text?

Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham Examined

By Sandra Tanner

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In 1835 Joseph Smith, Jr., announced what he thought was the most important discovery in the history of biblical studies. It all began on July 3 when Michael Chandler brought his traveling exhibit of Egyptian mummies and papyri to the small Mormon community of Kirtland, Ohio. After examining the artifacts, Joseph Smith announced to his followers that the papyri contained the long-lost writings of Old Testament prophets Abraham and Joseph.¹ Josiah Quincy, who visited with Smith in 1844, described his experience of being shown the papyri by Smith:

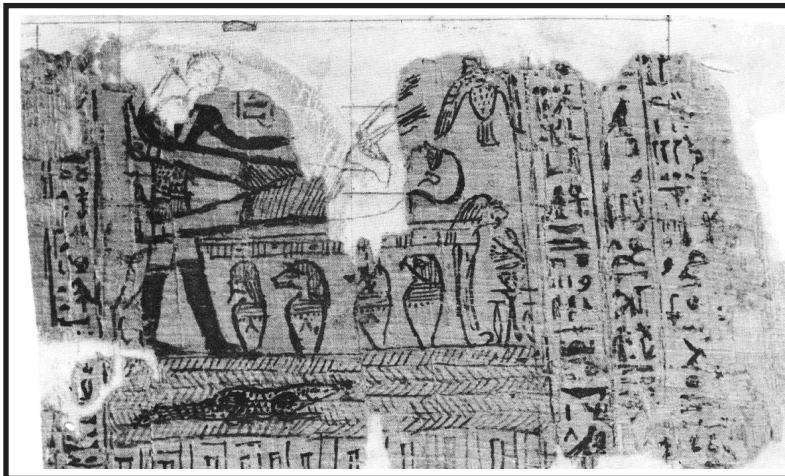
Some parchments inscribed with hieroglyphics were then offered us. They were preserved under glass and handled with great respect. "That is the handwriting of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful," said the prophet. "This is the autograph of Moses, and these lines were written by his brother Aaron. Here we have the earliest account of the Creation, from which Moses composed the first Book of Genesis."²

By the time of Smith's death, he had translated only a portion of the papyri that was attributed to Abraham. While this new record followed the creation story, it varied in significant ways from that of Genesis. Smith's claim, if valid,

would make these papyri the oldest biblical manuscripts in existence. Writing in 1938, Dr. Sidney B. Sperry, of Brigham Young University, boasted of the importance of the find:

The Book of Abraham will some day be reckoned as one of the most remarkable documents in existence . . . the author or editors of the book we call Genesis lived after the

events recorded therein took place. Our text of Genesis can therefore not be dated earlier than the latest event mentioned by it. It is evident that the writings of Abraham . . . must of necessity be older than the original text of Genesis. I say this in passing because some of our brethren have exhibited surprise when told that the text of the Book of Abraham is older than that of Genesis.³



Original papyrus used for Book of Abraham Facsimile No. 1

Although the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1945 would eventually push the date of the oldest Bible manuscripts back to the second century BC, they still would not be as old as Smith's claim for the writings of Abraham. Thus, if Smith's assertion were accurate, the papyri in his possession would be priceless. The importance placed on the papyri can be seen by the fact that in 1835 the Mormons negotiated with Chandler to buy his collection for \$2,400, a significant amount in their cash-strapped community. [Approx. \$60,000 today — www.measuringworth.com]

1 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Deseret Book, Vol. 2, 1976, p. 236.

2 "Figures of the Past," as quoted in *Among the Mormons*, edited by William Mulder and Russell Mortensen, New York, 1958, pp. 136-137.

3 Sidney B. Sperry, *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone*, LDS Church Course of Study, Adult Department, M.I.A., 1938, p. 83.

Many people are aware that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS/Mormon Church) has additional writings it considers scripture besides the Bible. The most well-known of these is the Book of Mormon, whose main story line deals with an ancient group of Israelites who migrated to the Americas in 600 BC. However, few people are familiar with their other two sacred texts, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, containing revelations given to their prophets, and the *Pearl of Great Price*, composed of the Book of Moses (a revelation), the Book of Abraham (purported translation of papyrus), an extract from Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible, and extracts from his church history. While each of Smith's additional scriptures are open to criticism, we will focus on the problems associated with his Book of Abraham.

The Papyri

After Joseph Smith's death, when the Mormons were forced out of Illinois in the 1840s, most of the church papers were brought west with Brigham Young. However, the Smith family retained possession of the Egyptian material, which later changed hands, and over the course of years the papyri dropped from public view.

Like the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith professed to translate the Book of Abraham from authentic ancient records. During this time the study of Egyptian hieroglyphs was in its infancy, which no doubt left Joseph Smith feeling free to offer his interpretation of the papyri without challenge. While Frenchman Jean-François Champollion had been involved in deciphering the Rosetta Stone in the 1820s, which proved to be the key to translating Egyptian hieroglyphs, his research was little known in the United States during Smith's lifetime.

Joseph Smith first developed his Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar using various hieroglyphs from the papyri and then composed an English explanation. In July of 1835 he recorded in his history:

The remainder of this month, I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients.⁴

He worked on his translation for the next several years, finally publishing it in the March 1, 1842, issue of the Mormon newspaper, *Times and Seasons*. The Book

of Abraham was next printed in England in 1851 as part of a booklet, *The Pearl of Great Price*, which was later canonized in 1880. Included in the Book of Abraham were three illustrations taken from the papyri, labeled Facsimile Nos. 1, 2 and 3. On the next two pages are the three scenes with a brief explanation of each.



Facsimile No. 1 — Smith described this as “Abraham fastened upon an altar” and “The idolatrous priest of Elkenah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice.”⁵ However, Egyptologists would later identify this as a standard scene from the Book of the Dead,⁶ showing the god Anubis overseeing the embalming of Osiris. Underneath the couch are four canopic jars used to store the person's organs, representing the sons of Horus.⁷

BACK IN PRINT

The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers

Includes Joseph Smith's Egyptian
Alphabet and Grammar

Compiled by H. Michael Marquardt

Photos of the Alphabet and Grammar with typescript.

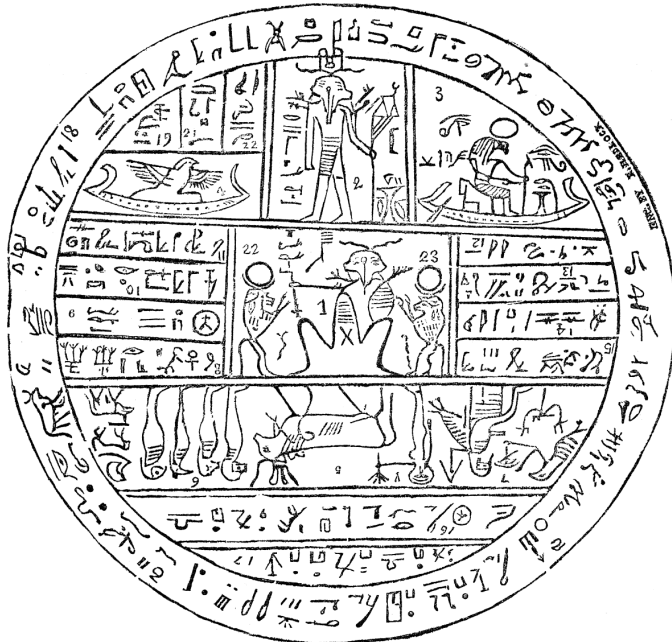
Price: \$18.00

⁴ Smith, *History of the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 238.

⁵ *Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham, Explanation of Facsimile No. 1, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.

⁶ Richard A. Parker, “The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Preliminary Report,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1968, p. 86.

⁷ <http://www.akhet.co.uk/4sons.htm>



Facsimile No. 2 — In Smith’s purported translation of the text, he explained that the central figure represented “Kolob,” the first creation nearest to the “residence of God.” Other figures related to priesthood, various planets and stars, the measurement of time and “God sitting upon his throne.”⁸ However, this object is known as a hypocephalus, a magical disc placed under the head of a mummy to aid the person in his journey after death.⁹ The figures represent well-known Egyptian deities. The Mormon copy is similar to a number of other such objects in various Egyptian collections around the world.¹⁰ Smith identified Figure 7 (lower right area) as “God sitting upon his throne” while Egyptologists identify the figure as Min, the Egyptian god of male sexual potency, shown with an erection.¹¹

LDS CLAIMS EXAMINED

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Facsimile No. 3 — Joseph Smith explained that this was a picture of “Abraham sitting upon Pharaoh’s throne,” with Pharaoh standing behind him. Abraham is said to be “reasoning upon the principles of Astronomy.”¹² However, Egyptologists identify this as the Judgment Scene from the Book of the Dead, showing Isis standing behind the seated figure of Osiris. Standing in front of the seated figure, according to Smith, is a “Prince of Pharaoh.” Smith identified the next figure as “Shulem, one of the king’s principal waiters” and the black figure as “Olimlah, a slave belonging to the prince.” However, the three figures in front of Osiris have been identified as Maat (the goddess of truth), the deceased person (for whom the papyrus was made), and the black figure is the half-man, half-jackel deity Anubis.¹³

Smith’s Translation Under Scrutiny

By 1860 Egyptology had advanced to the point where it could be used to test Joseph Smith’s ability as a translator. Even though the papyri were no longer known to be in existence, the printed facsimiles from the Book of Abraham could still be scrutinized. They were submitted to the French Egyptologist M. Theodule Deveria, who not only accused Joseph Smith of making a false translation but also of altering the scenes shown in the facsimiles.¹⁴

By the turn of the century the study of Egyptology had progressed considerably, as seen in the 1895 classic, *The*

8 *Pearl of Great Price*, Explanation of Facsimile No. 2.
 9 Rt. Rev. F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith Jr., As a Translator*, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1912, p. 26. Photo reprint by Utah Lighthouse Ministry under the title, *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham*.
 10 R. C. Webb, *Joseph Smith as a Translator*, Deseret News Press, 1936, pp. 130, 165, 173, 175, 177, 179.
 11 “Min is Not God,” *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Nov. 2008, No. 111; <http://www.toureygypt.net/featurestories/min.htm>
 12 *Pearl of Great Price*, Explanation of Facsimile No. 3.
 13 Spalding, *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham*, p. 23; http://www.egyptologyonline.com/gods_and_goddesses.htm
 14 Deveria’s work was originally published in French in 1860 and then reprinted in English in *A Journey to Great Salt Lake City*, by Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, London: W. Jeffs, 1861. Then in 1873, T. B. H. Stenhouse included Deveria’s work in his book, *Rocky Mountain Saints*. Included were side-by-side comparisons of Smith’s interpretation with Deveria’s explanation of the facsimiles.

Egyptian Book of the Dead, by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge. The growing body of knowledge on Egyptology led Rev. F. S. Spalding, Episcopal Bishop of Utah, to contact eight leading scholars of his day and request their evaluation of Joseph Smith's illustrations in the Book of Abraham. These statements were published in 1912 under the title, *Joseph Smith Jr., As a Translator*.

One of the scholars who examined Smith's work was James H. Breasted, Ph.D., Haskell Oriental Museum, University of Chicago, who wrote:

These three facsimiles of Egyptian documents in the "Pearl of Great Price" depict the most common objects in the mortuary religion of Egypt. Joseph Smith's interpretations of them as part of a unique revelation through Abraham, therefore, very clearly demonstrate that he was totally unacquainted with the significance of these documents and absolutely ignorant of the simplest facts of Egyptian writing and civilization.¹⁵

The other Egyptologists whom Spalding contacted rendered similar verdicts of Smith's erroneous interpretations.

That same year the *New York Times* ran a large article with the startling headline, "MUSEUM WALLS PROCLAIM FRAUD OF MORMON PROPHET." The article quoted the various Egyptologists contacted by Bishop Spalding and gave an overview of the problems with Joseph Smith's interpretation. The article explained:

Much of Bishop Spalding's work was done in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in this city. The ten rooms of the Egyptian collection yielded proof in such abundance that any layman, even in Egyptology, can take the drawings as published in the sacred Mormon record and reproduced on this page of THE TIMES, and find dozens of duplicates of certain figures in them on the walls of the Museum and in its cases of Egyptian objects.¹⁶

The following year saw another challenge to the facsimiles. Noted scholar Samuel A. B. Mercer published his article "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian" in 1913. Dr. Mercer observed:

No one can fail to see that the eight scholars [quoted in Bishop Spalding's booklet] are unanimous in their conclusions. Joseph Smith has been shown by an eminently competent jury of scholars to have failed completely in his

attempt or pretense to interpret and translate Egyptian figures and hieroglyphics.¹⁷

Marvin Cowan, a Baptist missionary working among the Mormons, had been told by various Mormons that the pamphlet by F. S. Spalding was outdated so in 1966 he decided to ask various scholars for their assessment. He sent copies of the Book of Abraham facsimiles to Richard A. Parker, of the Department of Egyptology at Brown University, and requested his opinion of the photos. Parker responded:

The pictures you sent me [from the Book of Abraham] are based upon Egyptian originals but are poor or distorted copies. . . . The explanations are completely wrong insofar as any interpretation of the Egyptian original is concerned. . . . Number 1 is an altered copy of a well known scene of the dead god Osiris on his bier with a jackal-god Anubis acting as his embalmer.¹⁸

One has only to look at any credible source on Egyptian deities to see that the figures in the Book of Abraham facsimiles are standard images from the Book of the Dead.¹⁹ To suggest that Abraham would use pictures of pagan gods to illustrate the true God is in direct opposition to the teachings in the Old Testament. Genesis 17:1 records that God revealed Himself to Abraham saying "I am the Almighty God." Later God instructed Moses, "I am the LORD: and I appeared unto Abraham, . . . but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (Exodus 6:2-3 KJV). In the Ten Commandments, God specifically stated that He had delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt and that they were to reject all pagan deities, specifically stating that no one was to make any image or likeness of God (Exodus 20:2-4). Joseph Smith's identification of these pagan deities with the God of Abraham makes no more sense than to claim that a statue of the Buddha actually represents Jesus Christ in prayer or claiming the Hindu goddess Parvati is actually the Virgin Mary.

Today the Book of Abraham contains the same claim of being an authentic translation of the papyri as it was originally published in the *Times and Seasons*:

**"Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud
of Mormon Prophet"**

FREE!

New York Times, December 29, 1912

Copy included with every purchase

Offer expires January 31, 2010

¹⁵ Spalding, *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁶ "MUSEUM WALLS PROCLAIM FRAUD OF MORMON PROPHET," *New York Times*, Magazine Section Part Five, December 29, 1912; <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/nytimes1912papyrus.htm>

¹⁷ Samuel A. B. Mercer, "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian," *The Utah Survey*, September, 1913, p. 11. Also printed in *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham*, Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

¹⁸ Letter by Richard A. Parker, Dept. of Egyptology, Brown University, March 22, 1966.

¹⁹ http://www.egyptologyonline.com/book_of_the_dead.htm

The Book of Abraham, Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith. A translation of some ancient records, that have fallen into our hands from the catacombs of Egypt.— The writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.²⁰

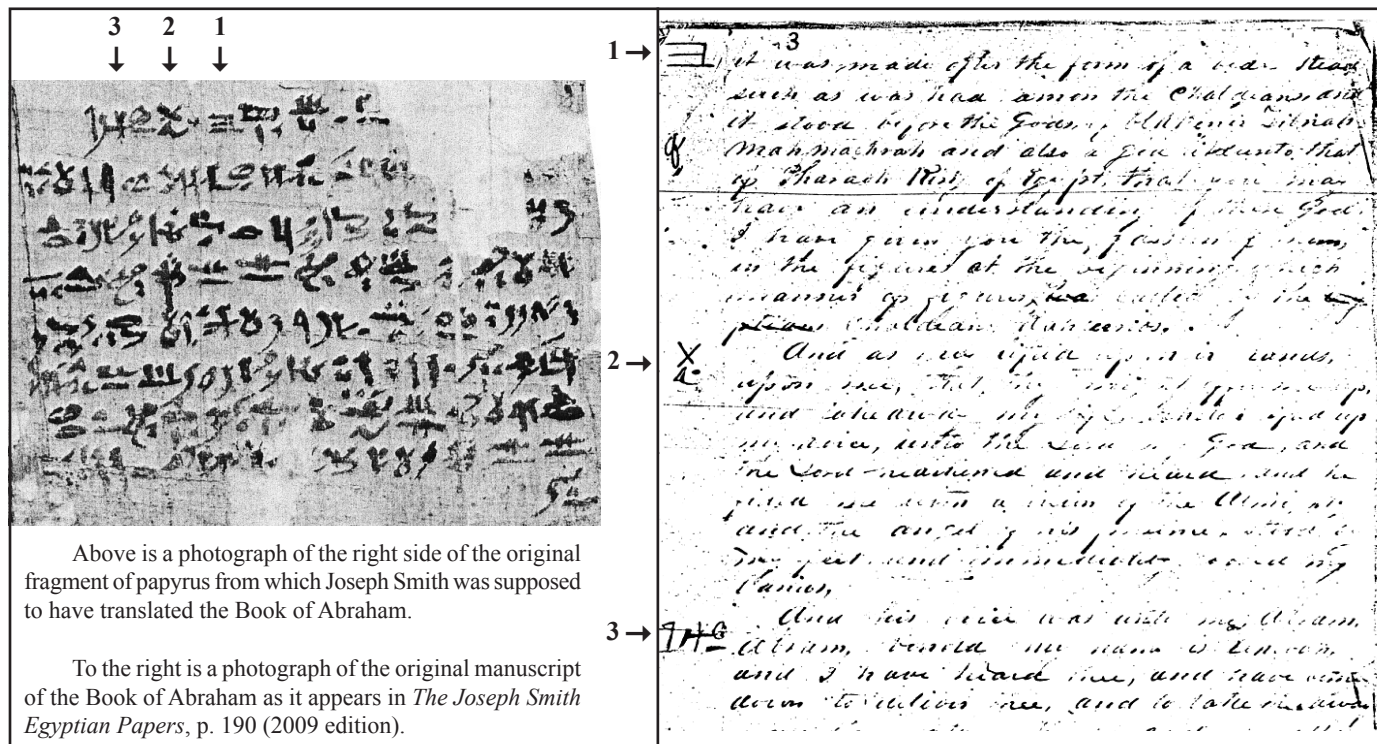
While the facsimiles have come under attack, there was no way for the scholars to test Smith’s purported translation of the papyri, as it was assumed they had been destroyed. However, Smith’s translation would be put to the test in 1967 when a number of pieces of the long-lost papyri were presented to the LDS Church by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.²¹

After Joseph Smith was killed in 1844 the mummies and papyri were retained by his widow, Emma Smith. Some of these were later sold to the Chicago museum, which burned to the ground in the great Chicago fire of 1871. Thus it was assumed that the papyrus designated as the Book of Abraham had been destroyed. Actually, some of Smith’s papyri had been preserved and were eventually purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in 1947.²² Since the papyri only dated to the time of Christ, and the museum had a number of examples from that period, the museum

felt they could divest themselves of the pieces. Working through Prof. Aziz Atiya, of the University of Utah, they arranged the return of the papyri to the LDS Church.²³ This was not exactly a gift, but had been made possible by an anonymous gift to the museum.²⁴

Once photos of the papyri were printed in the 1968 *Improvement Era*,²⁵ the official LDS magazine, scholars began the search to determine which piece Smith had utilized in his translation. The piece was identified by comparing Joseph Smith’s translation papers and his Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar with the papyri. It was soon determined that Smith had used characters from the piece of papyri identified as “XI. Small ‘Sensen’ text (unillustrated),”²⁶ also referred to as the Book of Breathings (a condensed version of the Book of the Dead). Below is an illustration of the way the hieroglyphs line up on the papyri and the way they are aligned in Smith’s manuscript next to the alleged English translation.

All of the first two rows of characters on the papyrus fragment can be found in the manuscript of the Book of Abraham.²⁷ Other manuscript pages show that he used



20 *Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.
 21 Jack E. Jarrard, “Rare Papyri Presented to the Church,” *Deseret News*, Nov. 27, 1967, p. 1.
 22 “The Facsimile Found: The Recovery of Joseph Smith’s Papyrus Manuscripts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1967, p. 56.
 23 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
 24 “An Interview With Dr. Fischer,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1967, p. 64.
 25 “New Light on Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papyri,” *Improvement Era*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, February 1968, pp. 40-41.
 26 *Ibid.*, p. 41. See *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987, p. 311.
 27 Grant S. Heward and Jerald Tanner, “The Source of the Book of Abraham Identified,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1968, pp. 92-97. Photos of the manuscript are in *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*, compiled by H. Michael Marquardt, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2009.

almost four lines of the papyrus to make fifty-one verses in the Book of Abraham. These fifty-one verses are composed of more than two thousand English words!²⁸ A person does not have to be an Egyptologist to know that it would be impossible to translate over two thousand words from a few Egyptian characters.

This piece, Joseph Smith's XI Small "Sensen" text, has been translated by several Egyptologists with virtual agreement. Contrary to Smith's version, the English translation takes up just slightly more space than the actual hieroglyphs. Professor Parker's translation was published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*:

1. [.....]this great pool of Khonsu
2. [Osiris Hor, justified], born of Taykhebyt, a man likewise.
3. After (his) two arms are (fast)ened to his breast, one wraps the Book of Breathings, which is
4. with writing both inside and outside of it, with royal linen, it being placed (at) his left arm
5. near his heart, this having been done at his
6. wrapping and outside it. If this book be recited for him, then
7. He will breath like the soul(s of the gods) for ever and
8. ever.²⁹

Mormon scholars, realizing the problems of defending a literal translation for the Book of Abraham, have now proposed that either (1) Smith didn't use the "Sensen" text and the piece Smith did use no longer exists or (2) it doesn't have to be a literal translation of the papyrus, but could be a revelation triggered by looking at the artifacts. Some also propose that Smith used the drawings from the papyri only to illustrate his revelation, not that they originally were drawn to illustrate a composition by Abraham.³⁰ However, the heading of the Book of Abraham still carries the official statement that it is a translation of the papyrus. If the Book of Abraham is a product of revelation, not an actual translation, and the facsimiles were not drawn to illustrate Abraham's text, one wonders why the Mormons needed to invest so much money to acquire these pagan documents in the first place? In Joseph Smith's day, the papyri were certainly presented to the public as actually being Abraham's record.

Doctrinal Innovations

The Book of Abraham consists of five chapters and three illustrations. The text begins with Abraham in "the land of the Chaldeans" bemoaning the fact that his forefathers "were wholly turned to the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt."³¹ The four gods that are listed are the same as Smith's identification of the gods in Facsimile No. 1. Smith seems to have assumed that the Chaldeans (in the region of Iraq) shared the same religion with the Egyptians, with their priests answerable to Pharaoh. Chapter 1:2-3 relates Abraham's ordination to the priesthood, wherein he is made a High Priest (thus reinforcing the LDS concept that the priesthood is necessary to act in God's behalf). The chapter goes on to describe the founding of Egypt by Egyptus, a daughter of Ham. Verse 27 tells us that Pharaoh was "of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood." This passage was long used as the scriptural justification for the LDS Church not to give the priesthood to blacks. Since 1978, when the church finally gave blacks the priesthood, this verse has been ignored. In the current LDS college manual, *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual*, the verse is not discussed. There is instead a quote from the First Presidency about the granting of priesthood to all worthy men "without regard for race or color."³²

Chapter 2 redefines the Abrahamic covenant as being the priesthood and endless posterity.³³ This has been interpreted as meaning celestial (temple) marriage. The Book of Abraham was published at a time when Joseph Smith was trying to secretly introduce the doctrine of plural marriage to a few of the church leaders and this text would have served as a reinforcement of his new teaching on the need for plural wives in order to increase one's posterity, to fulfill the law of Abraham.³⁴ The chapter ends with God instructing Abraham to lie about Sarai being his wife and to say she is his sister. This contradicts Genesis 12:12-13 where it is Abraham, not God, who comes up with the idea of lying. One assumes that Smith redirected this story to justify himself to the church leaders for his lying to his wife and the public about his secret polygamy. If God could tell Abraham to lie, why not Smith?

28 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pp. 312-313.

29 "The Book of Breathings (Fragment 1, the 'Sensen' Text, With Restorations from Louvre Papyrus 3284)," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 3, no. 2, Summer 1968, p. 98.

30 See articles on Book of Abraham in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992, Vol. 1, pp. 132-38.

31 Book of Abraham 1:1-6.

32 *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual*, Religion 327, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000, p. 32.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

34 *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:30-32.

Chapter 3:21-27 introduces the concept of pre-mortal existence, that men and women had a prior life (“coexisted”)³⁵ with God before being born on earth. Those who were “noble” in their pre-earth life (man’s first estate) were to be the “rulers” on earth (man’s second estate). This led to an interpretation that everyone’s birth on earth is a direct result of his/her worthiness in a prior life in heaven, thus the belief that those less valiant were born black while the righteous were born white.³⁶ The Bible, however, clearly teaches that only the Godhead has eternal existence. We are God’s creation and did not have a spiritual existence prior to our birth on earth. When Jesus declared, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58 KJV), He is claiming to be truly God and that Abraham had a beginning. In Zechariah 12:1 we read that God “formeth the spirit of man within him” (KJV).

Chapters 4 and 5 of the Book of Abraham seem to be a rewrite of the Genesis creation story with the addition of multiple gods involved in the process. For instance, verse 3 reads “And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light.” Curiously, this contradicts his earlier revelation of Moses’ account: “And I, God, said: Let there be light; and there was light.”³⁷ If Moses was as inspired as Abraham, why didn’t he understand that the creation was accomplished by a council of gods? During the early years of Mormonism, Joseph Smith preached the standard doctrine of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. However, by the 1840s he had begun to teach a plurality of gods, completely ignoring the biblical doctrine of one eternal, unchanging God and even contradicting his earlier writings.³⁸

Test the Spirits

The Bible calls us to “test the spirits” and examine the teachings of those claiming to be prophets.³⁹ When we apply these tests to Joseph Smith and his book of scripture, we are left with (1) a book that is not an authentic translation of a document written by Abraham and (2) a text that teaches heretical doctrine. Therefore, the only course for the Christian is to reject both Joseph Smith and his scripture.

For more information on the Book of Abraham, see *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* chapter 22.



35 “Premortal Life,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 3, p. 1123.

36 *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, delivered before the High Priests’ Quorum, in Nauvoo, April 27, 1845*, printed by John Taylor, p. 30.

37 Book of Moses 2:3, *Pearl of Great Price*.

38 Isa. 43:10-11; 44:6; 45:5. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, Deseret Book, 1977, pp. 345-47, 369-73. For his earlier teaching on God, see Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 31:21; Alma 11:27-29; 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*, Lectures on Faith, Section V; 1981 *Doctrine and Covenants* 20:28.

39 Deut. 13:1-3; 18:22; 1 John 4:1; 2 Peter 1:15-16; Acts 17:10-12.

JOSEPH SMITH’S TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

The significance of the Book of Abraham was recently discussed by BYU professor John Gee, at the 2009 F.A.I.R. Conference. In comparing its importance with other LDS scriptures he mentioned that “The Book of Abraham is not central to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ” and ranked it below their other books of scripture. In listing the main areas of Mormonism that should be defended was the Book of Mormon. “The Book of Mormon is true, and by that I mean that it was a record of God’s interactions with an actual ancient people,” he said. Both the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham purport to be the actual records of “ancient people.” How does one determine which scriptures are crucial to Smith’s truth claims and which are not?

Gee noted that the Book of Abraham is seldom referenced in LDS Conference talks, Abraham 3:22-28 being the usual quote mentioned. These verses teach the doctrine of man’s pre-mortal existence as an “intelligence.” Gee feels those verses are “pretty much the only distinctive part of the book,” thereby dismissing the issue of its historicity as “simply not important to Latter-day Saints.” Lack of interest on the part of the LDS membership does not mean the questions regarding the translation are irrelevant.

Gee also argues that the papyrus used by Joseph Smith for the Book of Abraham was not the one critics have designated (“XI. Small ‘Sensen’ text (unillustrated)”) but was actually part of another longer scroll. However, this would ignore the evidence that points to the “Sensen” text as the one Smith claimed to translate:

1. Abraham 1:14 states “That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning,” thus tying Facsimile 1 to the Abraham text.
2. The text following the drawing used for Fac. 1 identifies the person for whom the papyrus was prepared as “Hor.” Fac. 3, which would have been at the end of the scroll, also contains the name “Hor,” thus establishing it as part of the same papyri containing the original of Fac. 1.
3. The characters on the ‘Sensen’ text were utilized in Smith’s manuscript for the Book of Abraham and the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar.

From this it is clear that Smith intended this papyrus to be equated with the Abraham text.

In his closing remarks Gee stated: “How the Book of Abraham was translated is unimportant. The Church does not stand or fall on the Book of Abraham.” On the other hand, critics point out that this is one area where Smith’s translations can be put to the test and he fails.



CHIASMUS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON?

Excerpt from the revised 2009 Edition of Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner

In trying to establish the historicity of the Book of Mormon, some LDS writers maintain that the presence of chiasmus, a poetic style used in the Bible, points to its Hebrew origins.

Mormon apologist Noel B. Reynolds explains that "chiasmus is a peculiar and long-forgotten literary form present in the very earliest Hebrew writing as well as in other ancient Near Eastern works. In the Hebrew tradition it developed into a rhetorical device in which two sets of parallel elements are presented. The first set is presented 1, 2, 3, etc., but order of presentation is inverted in the second set, 3, 2, 1" (*Brigham Young University Studies*, Winter 1980, p. 138).

Here is an example from Genesis 9:6 showing how the elements in the first half are mirrored in reverse order in the second half:

- A. Whoever *sheds*
- B. the *blood*
- C. of *man*
- C. by *man* shall
- B. his *blood*
- A. be *shed*

Here is an example from the New Testament, Matthew 19:30:

- A. But many that are *first*
- B. shall be *last*,
- B. and the *last*
- A. shall be *first*.

An example of this from the Book of Mormon would be 2 Nephi 29:13:

- A. The *Jews*
- B. shall have the *words*
- C. of the *Nephites*
- C. and the *Nephites*
- B. shall have the *words*
- A. of the *Jews*;
- A. and the *Nephites* and the *Jews*
- B. shall have the *words*
- C. of the *lost tribes of Israel*;
- C. and the *lost tribes of Israel*
- B. shall have the *words* of the
- A. *Nephites* and of the *Jews*.

LDS scholars also point out that this style was not identified as *chiasmus* until after the time of Joseph Smith. Thus, they reason, his use of it in the Book of Mormon demonstrates that it is a translation of an ancient text. However, a brief investigation shows there are other explanations.

First, this poetic style has always been in the Bible. In Joseph Smith's day this was usually referred to as *parallelism*.

In the October 1989 *Ensign* article, "Hebrew Literary Patterns in the Book of Mormon," there is mention of a book on Hebrew poetry, dated 1787, which discusses the poetic style of parallelisms. The term *chiasmus* is never used, but this book clearly shows that Hebrew poetic styles were recognized and studied even before Joseph Smith's time.

LDS scholar Blake Ostler, in reviewing the book, *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, commented:

Book of Mormon Authorship has made a prima facie case for the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon. It fails, however, to respond to scholarly criticism in some crucial areas. For example, since Welch first published his study on chiasmus in 1969, it has been discovered that chiasmus also appears in the *Doctrine and Covenants* (see, for example, 88:34-38; 93:18-38; 132:19-26, 29-36), the *Pearl of Great Price* (Book of Abraham 3:16-19; 22-28), and other isolated nineteenth-century works. Thus, Welch's major premise that chiasmus is exclusively an ancient literary device is false. Indeed, the presence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon may be evidence of Joseph Smith's own literary style and genius. Perhaps Welch could have strengthened his premise by demonstrating that the parallel members in the Book of Mormon consist of Semitic word pairs, the basis of ancient Hebrew poetry. Without such a demonstration, both Welch's and Reynold's arguments from chiasmus are weak (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter, 1983, p. 143).

Second, as Ostler pointed out, the *Doctrine and Covenants* has examples of the same pattern. Since Joseph Smith dictated the revelations in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and it is not claimed that they were translations of ancient writings, obviously this pattern was part of Smith's style. The *Pearl of Great Price* and Joseph Smith's diary exhibit similar patterns.

A thesis at BYU by Richard C. Shipp, "Conceptual Patterns of Repetition in the Doctrine and Covenants and Their Implications" (Masters Thesis), arrives at a similar conclusion. Although Mr. Shipp was not trying to disprove chiasmus claims in the Book of Mormon, his study shows that Joseph Smith had picked up both the rhythm of chiasmus and parallelism. In his 1832 first vision account, Joseph claimed that he had studied the Bible since he was twelve, so it is quite conceivable that he picked up this style from his studies.

In 1993, H. Clay Gorton's book, *Language of the Lord: New Discoveries of Chiasma in the Doctrine & Covenants*, was published. Gorton made the surprising assertion that he "identified 225 chiasma in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which reveals a density comparable to that in the Book of Mormon" (page 24). One of his examples of chiasmus is found in a revelation "the Lord" gave to Joseph Smith on April 23, 1834. While Gorton actually quotes only one verse from this revelation, we have added the next verse to put the example in perspective:

And they shall be organized in their own names, and in their own name; and they shall do their business in their own name, and in their own names;

And you shall do your business in your own name, and in your own names (*Doctrine and Covenants* 104:49-50).

While Gorton is convinced that at least the first verse is chiastically significant, most people would view this as an example of repetitiveness. He is convinced that the appearance of chiasms in the *Doctrine and Covenants* proves that the revelations are divinely revealed:

Finding the chiastic form as such an intergral part of the *Doctrine and Covenants* has profound implications with respect to both the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the chiasmus itself. . . .

Since Joseph Smith could not have written the chiastic structure as an objective literary form, it would follow that the chiastic form itself in the *Doctrine and Covenants* was of inspired origin. . . . Recognizing the divine source of the chiastic form in the *Doctrine and Covenants* establishes the divinity of the subject matter of which the chiasma are a part (Gorton, *Language of the Lord*, pp. 25-26).

Critics, on the other hand, see the presence of chiasmus in the *Doctrine and Covenants* as another proof that it was part of Joseph Smith's style. The logical conclusion is that Joseph Smith himself was the author of both the Book of Mormon and the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

Third, chiasmus appears in English as well as other languages. This weakens the LDS argument that its presence signals a Semitic or divine origin.

Interestingly, even the followers of James J. Strang, rival to Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon for leadership of the LDS movement after Joseph Smith's death, argue for chiastic structure in Strang's book of scripture. Here are examples from the Strangite web site:

Here is a beginner's example of chiasmus from the *Book of the Law of the Lord*, chapter 39, section 1, which shows good rhythm. Notice that line A parallels line A', and line B parallels line B':

A YE SHALL not CLOTHE YOURSELVES
 B AFTER THE MANNER of the follies of other men;
 B' but AFTER THE MANNER that is seemly and convenient,
 A' SHALL YE CLOTHE YOURSELVES.

Here is a more complex example from the FIRST CHAPTER of the 1851 *Book of the Law of the Lord*, with God skillfully placed in the center of the structure:

A Thou shalt not TAKE the NAME of the Lord thy God in VAIN:
 B thou shalt not USURP dominion
 C as a RULER; for the NAME of the Lord thy God
 D is great and glorious ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES:
 E he is ABOVE ALL,
 F and is the ONLY TRUE God;
 F' the ONLY JUST and upright King
 E' OVER ALL:
 D' he ALONE hath the RIGHT
 C' to RULE; and in his NAME, only he to whom he granteth it:
 B' whosoever is not chosen of him, the same is a USURPER, and unholy:
 A' the Lord will not hold him guiltless, for he TAKETH his NAME in VAIN.

(<http://www.strangite.org/Chiasmus.htm>)

Chiastic structures in Joseph Smith's writings do not prove them to be ancient or authentic any more than those in James Strang's book prove his writings to be ancient or inspired. Chiasmus even appears in children's nursery rhymes. Mormon writer H. Clay Gorton noted that "Fukuchi has identified the chiastic structure as an integral part of old English riddles," and also claimed that he has discovered chiasmus in the works of Shakespeare (*Language of the Lord: New Discoveries of Chiasma in the Doctrine & Covenants*, by H. Clay Gorton, 1993, pages 21-22). Below is an example of chiasmus in a nursery rhyme:

A. Old king Cole
 B. was a merry old soul
 B. a merry old soul
 A. was he.

Confucius is another person who employed chiasmic verse:

Don't worry that other people don't know you;
worry that you don't know other people
(Analects—1.16.).

Even the actress Mae West is known for her chiasmic line:

It's not the men in my life,
it's the life in my men.

Another example of chiasmus comes from Leonardo da Vinci:

Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt,
and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.

Obviously Confucius, Mae West and Leonardo da Vinci were not trained in chiasmus but had picked up the form as a rhetorical device. (Examples were taken from <http://www.drmary.com/chiasmus/types.shtml>) In fact, one of the best known couplets in Mormonism could be said to be chiasmic:

- A. As man is
- B. God once was,
- B. as God is
- A. man may become.

As one person pointed out on the *Recovery From Mormonism Board*, "The chiasmus 'evidence' is like trying to prove from a piece of music that its composer must have studied music theory. And yet there are tons of music, fulfilling the basics of music theory, produced by people who couldn't even read and had no formal training whatsoever."

Mormon scholars go to great lengths in their attempts to identify chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and reason that what they have found provides proof that the book must be "a product of the ancient world." Even if chiasmus occurs in the Book of Mormon, it would not prove anything more than that Joseph Smith borrowed the chiasmic style from passages found in the Bible. Some of the chiasms that H. Clay Gorton and Richard C. Shipp have identified in Joseph Smith's *Doctrine and Covenants* seem to have been inspired by biblical texts. For example, on page 74 of his book, Gorton refers to *Doctrine and Covenants* 29:30:

- 2] that the first
- 1] shall be last
- 1] and that the last
- 2] shall be first

The source of this is clearly the words of Jesus found in Matthew 19:30:

But many that are first shall be last;
and the last shall be first.

Both Gorton and Shipp refer to *Doctrine and Covenants* 101:42:

- 2] He that exalteth himself
- 1] shall be abased,
- 1] and he that abaseth himself
- 2] shall be exalted.

This chiasm was borrowed from the King James Version of the Bible, Matthew 23:12:

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased;
and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Joseph Smith is credited with many words he actually borrowed from others. Gorton, for example, refers to the *Doctrine and Covenants* 74:1 on page 65 of his book:

- 2] For the unbelieving husband
- 1] is sanctified by the wife
- 1] and the unbelieving wife
- 2] is sanctified by the husband

Those who are familiar with the Bible will recognize that this comes from the writings of Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:14:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife,
and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband:
else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

The reader will notice that Gorton has not used the last ten words which we have shown in italics. Joseph Smith plagiarized the entire passage from 1 Corinthians 7:14, including the last phrase.

As explained above, the Book of Mormon is filled with material taken from the King James Bible. It should be obvious, then, that a great deal of material attributed to Joseph Smith was actually lifted from the Bible. In his article, "Hebrew Literary Patterns in the Book of Mormon," Mormon Hebrew scholar Donald W. Parry cited an example of synonymous parallelism in the Book of Mormon:

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Abinadi, for example, underscores what the Resurrection does for us by pairing two phrases that echo each other (Mosiah 16:10):

Even this mortal shall put on immortality,
and this corruption shall put on incorruption.
(*The Ensign*, October 1989, page 59)

While this may seem impressive at first, when we carefully examine the passage, we see that it has been taken from the writings of Apostle Paul:

For this corruptible must put on incorruption,
and this mortal must put on immortality.
(1 Corinthians 15:53)

It is obvious that although the wording has been twisted around by Joseph Smith, most of the words are identical.

On the next page, Parry gives an example of “contrasting ideas” which he found in 2 Nephi 9:39:

Remember, to be carnally-minded is death,
and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.

This should be compared with Paul’s statement in Romans 8:6:

For to be carnally minded is death;
but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

As in the previous example, Joseph Smith has slightly reworded Apostle Paul’s statement. The extensive plagiarism from the King James Version of the Bible in the Book of Mormon would need to be factored into any study of chiasmus. We believe that much of the claimed chiastic structure in the Book of Mormon is merely evidence of Joseph Smith’s repetitive style of writing and plagiarism.

Our examination of the Book of Mormon shows that Joseph Smith frequently repeated phrases, thoughts and even stories throughout his work. Toward the end of the 19th century, Mormon critic M. T. Lamb noticed that “the prevailing style of the Book of Mormon is so verbose, so full of inelegant and uncalled-for repetitions, that any ordinary writer can greatly excel it—often reducing its wordy sentences to one-half, and one-third, and even one-fourth their present compass without any sacrifice of thought or force or beauty . . .” (M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible; or The Book of Mormon, Is It From God?* 1887, p. 27).

Considering the effort needed to make the original gold plates of the Book of Mormon and then to engrave them, one would expect a scribe to be as concise as possible, not wordy. Nephi’s brother, Jacob complained:

I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates (Book of Mormon, Jacob 4:1).

However, lengthy sentences abound in the Book of Mormon. Here is just one example:

And now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record—for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity—And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away; And the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land (3 Nephi 8:1-3).

One could more easily imagine such long, rambling descriptions coming from someone spontaneously dictating to a scribe (as Joseph evidently did) than from someone painstakingly engraving each word of a long historical record. Since Smith was supposedly translating Mormon’s abridgement of the extensive history of his people, such wordy sentences become even more problematic.

B. H. Roberts, president of the LDS First Quorum of the Seventy and assistant church historian, made these revealing comments concerning repetition in the Book of Mormon:

Having seen how strong parallelism obtains between Jaredite and Nephite peoples in the matter of their migration, and their movements after arriving in the promised land, it remains in somewhat the same manner to show that a like sameness of repetition or parallelism obtains among the Nephites at different periods showing the **same limitations**, and leading to the **same conclusions** respecting the authorship of the Book of Mormon (*Studies of the Book of Mormon*, by B. H. Roberts, Signature Books, 1985, p. 264).

. . . I shall hold that what is here presented [concerning various accounts of Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon] illustrates sufficiently the matter taken in hand by referring to them, namely that they are all of one breed and brand; so nearly alike that **one mind is the author of them**, and that a young and undeveloped, but piously inclined mind. The evidence **I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history . . .** (*Ibid.*, p. 271).

Since Joseph Smith was so repetitive in his style, using the same thoughts and phrases over and over again, Mormon

scholars who search long enough are certain to find these recurring elements in an order which they consider to be chiasmic in nature. In 1981, Mormon scholar John W. Welch published a 353-page book entitled, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*. In this book, there is a section on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. John S. Kselman, Associate Professor of Semitic Languages at the Catholic University of America, made these observations about Welch's work in a review published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.

In the introduction . . . John Welch . . . describes chiasmus as “the appearance of a two-part structure or system in which the second half is a mirror image of the first, i.e., where the first term recurs last, and the last first” (p. 10). An example of this simplest form of chiasmus is found in Isaiah 22:22:

I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder;
when he opens, no one shall shut,
when he shuts, no one shall open.

The balance and inversion that mark the last two lines above are chiasmic and can be represented schematically as AB/BA. . . .

Another paper of particular interest to me . . . is the editors' contribution on “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon” . . . The instances of chiasmic arrangements of material, particularly in the early parts of the Book of Mormon, are set out with clarity and with an admirably non-apologetic tone. As a non-Mormon, I would draw different inferences from the evidence, a possibility that Welch allows for, both at the beginning and at the end of this article. In evaluating this contribution, it seems to me that the point Welch makes (i.e., that the presence of chiasmic structures in parts of the Book of Mormon indicates their status as ancient scripture) **is weak, or at least is explainable in other ways**. After all, if one wants to repeat a list of items not haphazardly, but in some sort of order, there are only two ways to do it: by mirroring the first instance (ABCD = ABCD), or by reversing it (ABCD = DCBA) (“Ancient Chiasmus Studied,” by John S. Kselman, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Winter 1984, p. 147).

Chiasmic structures are often used as a way to emphasize a point. For instance, Frederick Douglass' statement “If black men have no rights in the eyes of the white men, of course the whites can have none in the eyes of the blacks” could be seen as a chiasmus (Frederick Douglass, “An Appeal to Congress for Impartial Suffrage,” January 1867). It is often used in speeches, the most famous probably being John F. Kennedy's statement, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country” (January 20, 1961, Presidential Inaugural speech).

Ross Anderson has provided the following summary of the chiasmus issue:

No one disputes that chiasm appears in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 41:13-14). But does this reflect a Hebrew basis of the text? After all, chiasm is not unique to the Hebrew language. Any time a reciprocal relationship or action is described, or a series of items is repeated in reverse order, chiasm will result. The common phrase, “A place for everything, and everything in its place,” is a chiasm. Thus chiasm can arise by coincidence.

Moreover, Joseph Smith's familiarity with biblical language could account for chiasm occurring in his writings, whether intentionally or not. This explains why chiasm crops up in Smith's writings outside the Book of Mormon. Let me give just one example, from *Doctrine and Covenants* 3:2.

A¹: For God doth not walk in crooked paths,
B¹: neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left,
B²: neither doth he vary from that which he hath said,
A²: therefore his paths are straight . . .

A cursory reading of the *Doctrine and Covenants* reveals other passages that have elements of chiasm, such as Section 6:33-34 and Section 43:2-6. Since these passages are neither ancient nor Hebrew in origin, they diminish the relevance of chiasm in the Book of Mormon (Ross Anderson, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, Zondervan, 2009, pp. 73-7).

For further discussion of chiasmus and the Book of Mormon, see “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Fall 1993, and an online discussion at *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Dialogue Paperless, E-Paper # 2, April 30, 2006, <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/excerpts/e2.pdf>.

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THE ROLE OF PROPHET, SEER AND REVELATOR IN MORMONISM

By Sandra Tanner

Talk given May 30, 2009, at the *Compassionate Boldness Conference* in Salt Lake City, Utah.

At the April, 2009 annual conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Thomas Monson was formally set apart as the “Prophet, Seer and Revelator” of the church.¹

But what does this title mean and how does it function in Mormonism? Do the LDS leaders claim their revelatory process is distinct from the spiritual guidance received by a minister in answer to his prayers?

Joseph Smith founded his church on April 6, 1830. However, at that time it was called the Church of Christ, not receiving its current name until 1838. On that spring day in 1830, Smith announced that through revelation he had been designated as God’s prophet, seer, translator, revelator, and apostle.² Today Mormon literature usually shortens those titles to simply “prophet, seer and revelator.” Verse five of that early revelation instructed Smith’s followers to accept his words as if from God’s “own mouth.”

Today I want to focus on each of the three designations given to the president of the LDS Church.

1. PROPHET

First, let us look at the claim of Prophet. Throughout the Old Testament we see prophets called by God to declare His will, to call Israel to repentance, and to warn of God’s judgment. They were usually not very popular and were often opposed by the leaders and people. These men were forerunners to the final prophet, the Messiah as mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses declared:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear (NKJ).

Peter makes mention of the Deuteronomy passage in Acts 3:19-26, identifying the prophet who would be like Moses as Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews explained that the Old Testament role of prophet was fulfilled in Christ:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,...³

While there are men in the New Testament who are referred to as prophets, they were not prophets in the same sense as those of the Old Testament. Also, they were not the top leaders in the Christian church, but part of local

congregations, as seen in Acts, chapter 13. Mormons will often appeal to Ephesians 4:11 in support of their office of a prophet at the head of the church. But this passage says nothing about priesthood offices but is referring to various ministries within the church.

Speaks for God

When Mormons are asked to enumerate the doctrines that set their church apart from all others they usually mention that they have a living prophet. They believe that this gives their church a solid foundation that is lacking in others. Mormons do not hold their scriptures as the final authority on doctrine but instead they look to the teachings of the current president.

As a young person attending LDS meetings I often sang the song “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet to guide us in these latter days.”⁴ In fact, the Ward Teachers’ message for June 1945 instructed members that “when the prophet speaks the thinking has been done.”⁵ This attitude is currently promoted in the LDS book *True to the Faith*. In it members are taught that “you can always trust the living prophets.... Your greatest safety lies in strictly following the word of the Lord given through His prophets, particularly the current President of the Church.”⁶

When someone points out that this sounds like blind obedience, Mormons will often respond that the members are to pray for themselves to know the truth. They fail to see the circular reasoning behind these two concepts:

1. The prophet will never lead you astray.
2. You are to pray to know that he is speaking for God.

Of course, if you don’t get a confirmation that he speaks for God then you are the one with the problem, not the prophet, because the prophet will never lead you astray.

When I tell Mormons I prayed about Joseph Smith and God showed me that he was not a prophet, they say I must not have prayed sincerely. The only answer that is acceptable to them is that the president of the church is God’s prophet. Thus the answer is predetermined.

Speaking in 1994, Apostle L. Tom Perry explained:

What a comfort it is to know that the Lord keeps a channel of communication open to His children through the **prophet....** The Lord surely understood the need to **keep His doctrines pure** and to trust its interpretation to only

¹ *Ensign*, May 2009, p. 27.

² *Doctrine & Covenants*, 1981, Section 21:1; 124:125.

³ New King James Version - Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 10:43.

⁴ *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1985, number 19.

⁵ *The Improvement Era*, June 1945, page 354.

⁶ “Prophets,” *True to the Faith*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004, pp. 129–30.

one source. . . . In this way, conflict and confusion and differing opinions are eliminated.

Mr. Perry went on to quote from the second president of the LDS Church:

President Brigham Young has assured us we can have **complete confidence** in the prophets. He said: "The Lord Almighty leads this Church, and **he will never suffer you to be led astray** . . ." (in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:289).⁷

Those who study the history of Mormon doctrinal development are left to wonder about such a statement. Given the fact that President Brigham Young taught doctrines contrary to what is taught today, it is amazing to see Mr. Perry appeal to Brigham Young in affirming that the prophet will never lead you astray.

We will now look at three problem areas associated with LDS prophetic utterances.

Adam-God

The first one relates to Brigham Young's famous teaching that Adam is our Father and God, a view not endorsed today.

In 1873 Young claimed that God had revealed that doctrine to him:

How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular **doctrine** which I revealed to them, and **which God revealed to me**—namely that **Adam is our Father and God**.⁸

Further on in his sermon he identified Adam as the father of our spirits, which contradicts current LDS teaching. Brigham Young repeatedly taught that there was a hierarchy of gods and that the god over our earth is Adam. Brigham Young certainly believed that his sermons were true. Speaking in 1870 Young proclaimed:

I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture.⁹

However, in 1976 President Spencer W. Kimball stated:

We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the **General Authorities of past generations**. Such for instance is the **Adam-god theory**.

We **denounce that theory** and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of **false doctrine**.¹⁰

But this seems to contradict a statement by President Joseph Fielding Smith:

Neither the President of the Church, nor the First

Presidency, nor the united voice of the First Presidency and the Twelve will ever lead the Saints **astray** or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord.¹¹

If one prophet claims a doctrinal revelation and then a later prophet denounces the teaching, which one is right? What are we to make of the Mormon claim that having a prophet somehow guards the church against false teaching? In a January 2002 interview, *The New Yorker* reported Gordon B. Hinckley as saying:

Brigham Young said if you went to Heaven and saw God it would be Adam and Eve. I don't know what he meant by that. . . . I'm not going to worry about what he said about those things.¹²

In 1986 Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley gave instruction on how to deal with contradictory statements by their prophets:

We have critics who appear to cull out of a vast panorama of information those items which demean and belittle some men and women of the past who worked so hard in laying the foundation of this great cause. . . .

We recognize that our forebears were human. They doubtless made mistakes.¹³

But if Brigham Young's Adam-God doctrine is false, why is that not proof that he is a false prophet? Can twenty-five years of sermons on Adam-God be dismissed as simply a "mistake" or just Young's personal opinion?

God Was Once A Man?

Another concern with the claim of prophetic teaching is Joseph Smith's doctrine of God.

The cornerstone of Christian doctrine is that there is only one eternal God. The importance of this truth is seen in Deuteronomy 13 which specifies that a prophet can not lead you after a false god. Also, God instructed Isaiah: "I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." Further on Isaiah recorded: "Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."¹⁴

All Christian doctrine flows from this concept. Yet Joseph Smith taught that "it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, . . ."¹⁵

Apostle James E. Talmage discussed Joseph Smith's teaching in his book, *Articles of Faith*:

We believe in a God who is Himself progressive, . . . In spite of the opposition of the sects, in the face of direct

¹¹ *Ensign*, July 1972, p. 88.

¹² "Lives of the Saints," *The New Yorker*, Jan. 21, 2002.

http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/01/21/020121fa_FACT1

¹³ "The Continuous Pursuit of Truth," *Ensign*, April 1986, p. 5.

¹⁴ Isaiah 43:10; 44:6, 8; 46:5, 9.

¹⁵ *History of the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 305.

⁷ L. Tom Perry, "Heed the Prophet's Voice," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, p. 17.

⁸ *Deseret News*, June 18, 1873.

⁹ *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 13, p. 95.

¹⁰ *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, p. 77.

charges of blasphemy, the Church proclaims the eternal truth: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be."¹⁶

If Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and James E. Talmage were prophets of God, how are we to reconcile their doctrines with Isaiah's proclamation of one eternal God? They can't all be right.

LDS Apostle Harold B. Lee declared:

I bear you my solemn witness that we have a living prophet, seer, and revelator. We are not dependent only upon the revelations given in the past . . . we have a mouthpiece to whom God is revealing his mind and will. **God will never permit him to lead us astray.** As has been said, God would remove us out of our place if we should attempt to do it.¹⁷

Joseph Smith was killed at the age of 38, a month after teaching his most famous sermon on the plurality of gods.¹⁸ Brigham Young, on the other hand, lived to be 76 and taught many doctrines not embraced by the LDS Church today.¹⁹ Why didn't God remove him for teaching false doctrine?

Mormon leaders undercut the authority of scripture and past prophets by pointing everyone to the current prophet to determine truth. But this leads to the question, how can we be sure the prophet is speaking an eternal truth? As with Brigham Young's Adam-god doctrine, is today's teaching going to become tomorrow's false doctrine?

Prophecy

Another problem with the claim that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God is that the majority of his prophecies failed. In 1832 he dictated section 84 of the *Doctrine and Covenants* in which God reportedly told the saints to gather to Independence, Missouri, build a temple and the city of New Jerusalem. However, the Mormons were driven out of the area the next year and the temple still has not been built.

In verses 114-115 of section 84 Bishop Newel K. Whitney was instructed by God to travel through the cities of New York, Albany and Boston warning the people that if they rejected the message of Mormonism, God's judgment was at the door and they would face "desolation and utter abolishment." This prophecy was obviously a failure.

In 1838 Smith tried again to gather the church, but this time to Far West, Missouri. Section 115 states that God called the church to build a temple in Far West but this failed as well. The Mormons were driven out of that area and no temple has been built on the site.

Keep in mind that these revelations had a direct impact on people's lives. Mormon families repeatedly moved,

many losing their land and possessions, following these instructions.²⁰

While Deuteronomy 18:22 declares that if a prophet's words fail he is to be judged a false prophet, Mormons have no such standard. There seems to be an unending stream of rationalizations as to why Smith's prophecies failed.²¹ Mormons say Christians have an unrealistic view of testing prophets, insisting that prophets can make mistakes the same as anyone. Mormon apologist Jeff Lindsey defended Smith's prophetic track record in these words:

. . . **many critics** of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including some members, have **unreasonable** expectations of Church leaders. . . . In spite of his **mistakes and errors in judgment**, Joseph Smith was a prophet of God— . . . **His divine calling as prophet was not based on his error-free track record or supernatural judgment, but was based on the fact that God made him prophet** and put him in that office of the Church.²²

But why should anyone accept the claim that "God made him prophet"? What is the standard? Since it is the leaders who continually insist that the prophet cannot lead them astray, why is it unrealistic to hold him to that standard? One is left to wonder where to draw the line between false and true prophets. At what point would Mormons concede that their prophet crossed the line?

I once asked a Mormon how many failed prophecies it would take to determine that a man was a false prophet. Since he was already aware of many of Smith's failed prophecies he had to give Smith wide leeway. He finally said if 80% of his prophecies failed he could be judged a false prophet.

He felt that the December 25, 1832, prophecy about the civil war was one of the best examples of Smith's prophetic gift. I pointed out to him that it didn't require a revelation for Smith to predict the civil war in section 87, as both North and South Carolina had just threatened to leave the union.²³ That would be like me prophesying that there will be new eruptions of violence in the Middle East in the next 5 years. Some future events are pretty easy to guess.

Also the Mormons did not put that revelation into the *Doctrine and Covenants* until 1876. The fact that it wasn't put in earlier editions makes it look like they were waiting to see if there was a civil war before canonizing the prophecy.

2. SEER

Now we move to the second title given to the Mormon president, that of Seer. Smith was probably influenced by such passages as 1 Samuel 9:9 where the Biblical view of

¹⁶ James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, Deseret Book, 1981 ed., p. 390 [p. 442, 1899 ed.].

¹⁷ *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual* - Religion 333, 1987, chap. 3, part 7.

¹⁸ For more on Smith's doctrine of God, see <http://tinyurl.com/ybjerq>

¹⁹ See <http://tinyurl.com/y96w97g>

²⁰ For other examples of false prophecies, see our web site, www.utlm.org/onlinesources/falseprophecies.htm

²¹ <http://www.fairlds.org/apol/ai065.html>

²² <http://www.jefflindsay.com/fallible.shtml>

²³ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987, pp. 190-191, 195H.

“seer” is synonymous with “prophet” and refers to one who speaks for God. But Joseph Smith connected the seer’s power with the use of an object sometimes referred to as “Urim and Thummim,” “interpreters,” or a “seer stone.”

Joseph Smith claimed that when he retrieved the ancient record preserved on gold plates from their hiding place in a hill outside Palmyra, New York, in 1827, he also took away an object later referred to as the “Urim and Thummim,” which was supposedly prepared by God to aid in the translation of the record.²⁴ This was described as two crystals set in silver bows, like large eye glasses.²⁵

By the way, LDS Church illustrations of Smith translating never depict him using these large spectacles. He is usually shown sitting at a desk and simply looking at the plates.



Illustration from
LDS.net

Joseph borrowed the name “Urim and Thummim” from the Old Testament objects used by the High Priest to determine God’s will.²⁶ These were possibly small pieces of stone or wood and kept in the priest’s vestments. There does not seem to be any case in which they were used to translate a document.

The Book of Mormon has several references to these objects and associates them with the ability to translate unknown languages. In Mosiah, chapter eight, we read of some records that were found but were in an unknown script so they were taken to the king

for he has wherewith that he can look, **and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters.** . . . And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called **seer**.²⁷

Even though God had reportedly preserved the Urim and Thummim, or interpreters, for centuries and had them buried with the plates to insure their translation, Joseph only used them for the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon, which were lost by Martin Harris. All of the present Book

of Mormon was evidently translated by use of a seer stone Smith found in a neighbor’s well. Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer described the process as follows:

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, . . . A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing.²⁸

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But if God is responsible for the English text, one wonders why there would have been the need for thousands of corrections to the various editions of the Book of Mormon?²⁹

Whitmer also discussed a failed revelation that came through Smith’s stone. Martin Harris was having trouble selling a portion of his farm to help pay for the printing of the Book of Mormon. Joseph’s brother, Hyrum, suggested that the copyright to the book could be sold in Canada to help cover the debt. Whitmer wrote:

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. . . . but they failed entirely to sell the copy-right, returning without any money. . . . 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.” So we see that the revelation to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right was **not of God**, but was of the devil or of the heart of man.³⁰

24 Book of Mormon, Ether 3:22-28.

25 Scott H. Faulring, editor, *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, Signature Books, 1989, p.7.

26 “URIM AND THUMMIM,” *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1988.

27 Book of Mormon, Mosiah 8:10-13.

28 David Whitmer, *An Address To All Believers in Christ*, 1887, p. 12.

29 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*, Introduction, Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

30 David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in the Book of Mormon*, 1887, p. 31.

If Smith could give false revelations through the stone, why should we trust his Book of Mormon translation through that object?

As a point of interest, Smith's seer stone is preserved in the LDS Church First Presidency's vault but we have never seen any reference to its use in recent times.³¹ Why wouldn't the church leaders be proud of the object used to produce one of their books of scripture? Is it possible that they also know that it is simply a piece of folk magic?

Without the Book of Mormon plates scholars are unable to test Smith's translation. However, we can examine other instances of failed seership in Mormonism.

Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible

Shortly after Smith published the Book of Mormon he began working on a corrected version of the Bible. Numerous sections of the *Doctrine and Covenants* refer to this work.³² While the LDS Church only prints extracts from Smith's revision in the back of their Bible, LDS apostle Bruce R. McConkie maintained that Smith's version is "one of the great evidences of the divine mission of Joseph Smith."³³ However, Smith was not translating from any ancient text, but simply revising the verses as he felt led. Consequently, his work is not accepted by Bible scholars. One example of the way he expanded the text can be seen in John 1:1. The King James Version reads:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Joseph Smith, however, changed this verse to read:

In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.³⁴

To our knowledge Joseph Smith's rendition of this verse is not supported by any evidence. In fact, an early Greek manuscript of John 1:1, known as Papyrus Bodmer II, P66, is dated about 200 A.D. and translates like the King James Version.³⁵

Another interesting change is Smith's expansion of chapter 50 of Genesis, where he inserts a prophecy about himself. In his expanded text we read:

And again, a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins, . . . And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; . . . and his name shall

be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father . . .³⁶

Again, there is no textual evidence for his expansion of Genesis. Mormons will often challenge a Christian on the reliability of the Bible, insisting that it has had numerous revisions. When they are asked about Joseph Smith's Inspired Version they will usually respond that he never completed the project, even though he stated in his history that he had done so.³⁷

Even if Smith did not complete the work, why hasn't any succeeding president taken up the project? Why was God so insistent that Smith work on this project, even commanding him to publish the work only to let it languish in some drawer for years? If each succeeding president has been a seer in the same sense as they claim for Joseph Smith, one of them should have been able to finish the Inspired Version. Researcher Ed Ashment concluded:

Shortly after publication of the Book of Mormon in March 1830, Smith's second canonical project was to correct errors and omissions in the Bible. . . . Smith declared that many more ancient records would come to light as part of the "restoration of all things." . . . The belief that more books could be added to the canon has continued in Mormonism and become one of its most exciting and controversial calling cards. Since Joseph Smith's death, however, the opening in the heavens has become more restricted. While the Reorganized LDS church [now Community of Christ] has continued to add revelations to its Doctrine and Covenants, only four revelations and two "Official Declarations" produced since Smith's lifetime have been canonized by the Utah church.³⁸

Not only were there no new books added to Joseph Smith's Bible revision, he even left one out, the Song of Solomon.

Book of Abraham

A second area where Joseph Smith's gift of translating can be put to the test is the Book of Abraham. In 1835 a man named Michael Chandler came to the Mormon community in Kirtland, Ohio, to show Smith his collection of Egyptian mummies and scrolls.

The Mormons then bought the collection for \$2,400 and Smith began his work of translation. In his *History of the Church* we read:

. . . I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt . . .³⁹

31 D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, Signature Books, 1998, pp. 245-246.

32 *Doctrine and Covenants*, sec. 35:20; 42:56; 45:60-61; 73:3-4; 93:53; 94:10; 104:58; 124:89.

33 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, Bookcraft, 1979, p. 384.

34 Holy Bible, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints, 1979, p. 807.

35 Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* p. 381.

36 Holy Bible, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, p.799.

37 Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pp. 386-387.

38 George D. Smith, editor, *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, "Historiography of the Canon," Signature Books, 1992, p. 282.

39 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Deseret Book, Vol. 2, p. 236.

This culminated in the Book of Abraham, which is part of the *Pearl of Great Price*. The heading for that work specifically claims that it is a translation of the Egyptian scrolls:

A Translation of some ancient Records, that have fallen into our hands from the catacombs of Egypt.—The writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.

Joseph Smith's translation was made at a time when Egyptian hieroglyphics were just beginning to be understood. LDS apostle Orson Pratt boasted:

The Prophet translated the part of these writings which, as I have said is contained in the *Pearl of Great Price*, and known as the Book of Abraham. Thus you see one of the first gifts bestowed by the Lord for the benefit of His people, was that of revelation—the gift to translate . . . ancient records. Have any of the other denominations got this gift among them? Go and inquire through all of Christendom and do not miss one denomination. Go and ask . . . “Can you translate ancient records written in a language that is lost to the knowledge of man?” “No,” he would say, “we cannot, it is out of my power to do it.”⁴⁰

However, by the end of Smith's life scholars were able to translate many of the hieroglyphics. Egyptologists have now translated the papyri owned by Joseph Smith and they are simply part of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and have no relationship to Abraham.⁴¹

Mormon scholars try to dismiss this problem by either claiming that the particular piece of papyri dealing with Abraham has been lost or that Smith's rendition doesn't need to directly correspond to the hieroglyphics as it could be a revelation, as opposed to a literal translation. But this explanation would run counter to the specific claim made in the heading to the Book of Abraham that it is a translation from the papyrus. Smith's claims of translating the papyri can now be put to the test and he fails.

Kinderhook Plates

Another test came to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. On May 1, 1843, the Mormon publication, *Times and Seasons*, announced that six ancient brass plates had been found in Kinderhook, Illinois.⁴²

The plates were then brought to Nauvoo for Joseph Smith's inspection. William Clayton, Joseph Smith's private secretary, recorded the event:

I have seen 6 brass plates . . . covered with ancient characters of language containing from 30 to 40 on each side of the plates. Prest J[oseph Smith] has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth.⁴³

The problem is that the plates were later proven to be forgeries.⁴⁴ If Smith were truly a prophet with the gift of seership he would have known that these were fakes. Instead, he claimed that they contained the history of a descendant of Ham. How could Smith retrieve any information from fraudulent plates?

Hofmann's documents

This leads us to the modern day test of the Mormon president and his claim of being a seer; the Mark Hofmann documents. The May 3, 1980, *Deseret News* announced that document dealer Mark Hofmann had discovered “A hand-written sheet of paper with characters supposedly copied directly from the gold plates in 1828, and also bearing other writing and the signature of Joseph Smith . . .” The paper went on to state, “This would make it the oldest known Mormon document as well as the earliest sample of the Prophet's handwriting.”

The article was accompanied by a photograph showing Mark Hofmann and the LDS First Presidency examining the document referred to as the Anthon transcript.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, this was the beginning of the greatest fraud scheme to hit the LDS Church, which would end with many investors losing their money and the murder of two Mormons by Mr. Hofmann. If President Kimball was truly a “prophet, seer and revelator,” one wonders why he was not able to discern that the document was a forgery?

Had Mr. Hofmann been exposed at that time, two Mormons would not have been killed.

Less than a year after the LDS Church leaders met with Hofmann regarding the Anthon transcript, the church bought a copy of a revelation given to Joseph Smith designating his son as his successor.⁴⁶ The document even carried the wording, “thus saith the Lord.” This too turned out to be a forgery of Mr. Hofmann's and an embarrassment to the LDS Church leaders' claim of prophetic discernment. Whatever gift of translating that Smith possessed, it evidently doesn't function in the LDS Church today.

3. REVELATOR

The third title given to the LDS president is that of Revelator. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie declared that “the Lord's Church must be guided by continuous revelation. . . . The presence of revelation in the Church is positive proof that it is the kingdom of God on earth.”⁴⁷ However, the number of “Thus Saith the Lord's” has certainly diminished since Joseph Smith's day.

⁴³ William Clayton's Journal, May 1, 1843, as cited in *Trials of Discipleship — The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon*, p. 117. This later became the basis of the account in the *History of the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 372.

⁴⁴ <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/kinderhookplates.htm>

⁴⁵ *Deseret News*, Church News section, May 3, 1980, p.3.

⁴⁶ *Deseret News*, March 19, 1981.

⁴⁷ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 650.

⁴⁰ Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 20, p. 65.

⁴¹ Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pp. 294-369D.

⁴² *Times and Seasons*, Vol. IV, No. 12, May 1, 1843, pp. 185-186.

Even before he established the Mormon Church in April of 1830, Smith had received numerous revelations. Over one hundred of his revelations are canonized in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

However, not all of his revelations have been placed in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. For instance, the LDS Church has a copy of the failed Canadian revelation, but is only now preparing to make it public in their new series, *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

If revelations came so plentifully to Joseph Smith, why has there been such a dearth of published revelations since his death? Bruce R. McConkie admitted:

It is true that not many revelations containing doctrinal principles are now being written, because all we are as yet capable and worthy to receive has already been written. But the Spirit is giving direct and daily revelation to the presiding Brethren in the administration of the affairs of the Church.⁴⁸

First, by using McConkie's reasoning, one could argue there was no need for Joseph Smith's revelations as we are still not able to live up to the teachings in the Bible.

Second, if revelation now comes through the less spectacular means of inner conviction, how is this any different from a Christian pastor praying about an issue and feeling the Holy Spirit leading in a particular direction? In fact, when their sixth prophet, Joseph F. Smith was questioned in 1904 during the Reed Smoot Senate hearings, regarding the revelatory process in Mormonism, he answered, "I have never pretended to nor do I profess to have received revelations." He went on to state:

I am susceptible, I think, of the impressions of the Spirit of the Lord upon my mind at any time, **just as any good Methodist** or any other good church member might be. And so far as that is concerned, I say yes; I have had impressions of the Spirit upon my mind very frequently, **but they are not in the sense of revelations.**⁴⁹

If Joseph F. Smith was only susceptible to the impressions of the Spirit of the Lord as "any good Methodist," then why should his word be trusted above that of any other good minister?

In 2002 a reporter for *The New Yorker* asked President Gordon B. Hinckley if he had any communications from God:

When I asked him to describe his own revelations, Hinckley demurred. "They're very sacred to me. **They're the kind of things you don't want to put before the world,**" he said. But he added, "There's no doubt in my mind we've experienced a tremendous undertaking in the building of temples across the world, having just dedicated

the hundred-and-second working temple of the Church. I believe the **inspiration** to move that work forward came from the Almighty."⁵⁰

Notice that he used the word "inspiration," not "revelation." Since Joseph Smith published accounts of his visions and revelations, one is left to wonder why President Hinckley would not do the same if he had received any revelations?

Book of Commandments

While the Mormons continually criticize the preservation of the Bible, it is the LDS scriptures that have sustained deliberate alterations.

Joseph Smith's revelations were first compiled in a book in 1833, under the title, *Book of Commandments*. In the first revelation in that book God is reported as saying, "Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them, shall all be fulfilled."⁵¹

However, just two years later a new edition was printed, called the *Doctrine and Covenants*, where dozens of words were changed in the revelations. David Whitmer, one of the Book of Mormon witnesses, objected to the revisions:

Some of the revelations as they now appear in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants have been changed and added to. Some of the changes being of the greatest importance as the meaning is entirely changed on some very important matters; as if the Lord had changed his mind a few years after he give [sic] the revelations, and after having commanded his servants (as they claim) to print them.⁵²

Chapter four of the *Book of Commandments* specifically stated that the only gift God had given Joseph Smith was to translate the plates of the Book of Mormon. Yet two years later this revelation was reworded to state that translating the plates was only Joseph's first gift, thus reversing the original statement. If we are to believe that the revelations were from God and printed in 1833 by His direction, why would there be a need to rewrite many of the revelations just two years later?

Besides the changes in Joseph Smith's revelations, textual revisions have been made in the Book of Mormon, Book of Moses and Book of Abraham. Each of these books is claimed to have come through divine revelation.

Plural Marriage

Our next example of changing revelations is the LDS doctrine on marriage. Section 101 of the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants* stated that the LDS Church denounced polygamy and believed a man should have only one wife. However, Joseph Smith was secretly teaching that God revealed to him

⁴⁸ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 650.

⁴⁹ *Proceedings Before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Protests Against the Right of Honorable Reed Smoot, a Senator from the State of Utah, to Hold His Seat*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904, commonly referred to as the *Reed Smoot Case*, Vol. 1, pp. 99, 483-484.

⁵⁰ *The New Yorker*, Jan. 21, 2002.

⁵¹ *Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ*, 1833, chapter 1, p. 6.

⁵² Letter written by David Whitmer, published in the *Saints' Herald*, Feb. 5, 1887.

the doctrine of plural marriage, even sending an angel with a drawn sword to press him into obedience to the command.⁵³ This doctrine was considered so important that Smith secretly married thirty-seven women in this new order.⁵⁴

His revelation on plural marriage is printed in the current *Doctrine and Covenants* as section 132. In it God instructs Smith that once this doctrine is revealed to a man, he must live it or be damned.⁵⁵

Smith soon introduced the doctrine to his close associates and by the time the Mormons left Nauvoo in 1846 there were 196 men and 719 women secretly living in polygamy.⁵⁶ The fact that plural marriage was illegal in Illinois shows how important the practice must have been to the early Mormons. They considered it a command of God. Yet today the LDS Church has changed the emphasis of section 132 and teaches that only temple marriage, not polygamy, is necessary for eternal life. In fact, references to Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's plural wives are carefully edited out of current LDS teaching manuals.

Brigham Young took this doctrine so seriously that he eventually married fifty-five women in plural marriage.⁵⁷ After the Mormons settled in Utah territory Brigham Young proclaimed "The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy."⁵⁸ In response to the growing pressure from the government to abandon polygamy in 1865, the LDS magazine *Millennial Star* proclaimed:

We have shown that in requiring the **relinquishment of polygamy**, they [the US Government] ask the renunciation of the **entire faith of this people**. . . . There is no half way house. **The childish babble about another revelation is only an evidence how half informed men can talk.**⁵⁹

This was the position of the LDS Church up until 1890. After federal laws had been enacted against polygamy, years of arrests and resisting the government's demand that the practice be stopped, the president of the LDS Church issued the 1890 Manifesto instructing the Mormons to cease entering into plural marriages.⁶⁰ When one reads Declaration-1, in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, it comes across as a decision made to keep the leaders of the church out of jail.

Even though the suspension was claimed to come by way of revelation, no such document has been published, only a statement that such a revelation was given. Evidently the top church leaders didn't feel bound by the Manifesto as at least 220 of them secretly took additional wives after 1890. It wasn't until the Smoot hearings in 1904 that the church genuinely made an effort to end plural marriage.⁶¹

But how does one reconcile the change? Section 132 is presented as a revelation from God on the "new and everlasting covenant" which included plural marriage. Then how can the church change it? Does God bow to political pressure? If baptism were outlawed, would the Mormons give that up as well? How could both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young declare that polygamy was necessary for eternal life only to have a later prophet state just the opposite? How does this give a person a firm foundation regarding doctrine?

Blacks

Another problem in relation to LDS revelatory claims is their changing position on blacks. Even though a few blacks were allowed to be ordained to the priesthood during Joseph Smith's lifetime, there was no clear teaching regarding their ordination. Smith's writings gradually moved toward viewing blacks as unqualified.

The Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham carry statements relating to those who are black and who can't hold the priesthood.⁶² From these Brigham Young concluded that all blacks were to be denied the priesthood until the return of Christ. In 1854 Young preached:

When **all** the other children of Adam have had the privilege of receiving the Priesthood, . . . and have received their **resurrection** from the dead, then it will be time enough to remove the **curse** from Cain and his posterity. . . . he is the **last** to share the joys of the kingdom of God.⁶³

This was the church position for over one hundred years. Now there is a division among Mormon apologists as to whether the restriction on blacks was a matter of doctrine or a practice.

In a 1954 interview with Dr. Sterling M. McMurrin, of the University of Utah, LDS President David O McKay stated:

There is **not** now, and there never has been a doctrine in this Church that the Negroes are under **a divine curse**.⁶⁴

However, no such public statement was issued by the church and the majority of members continued to believe the ban was based on revelation. For instance, in the 1966 edition of *Mormon Doctrine*, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Negroes in this life are denied the Priesthood; . . . **It is the Lord's doing**, is based on his eternal laws of justice, and grows out of the **lack of Spiritual valiance** of those concerned in their first estate.⁶⁵

Then in June of 1978, President Spencer W. Kimball issued what is now referred to as Declaration-2 in the *Doctrine and Covenants* lifting the ban.

In September of 1978, three months after the ban was lifted, McConkie made this explanation about the

⁵³ Joseph F. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 20, p. 28-29.

⁵⁴ George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, Signature Books, 2008, pp. 621-623.

⁵⁵ *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:3-4.

⁵⁶ George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 310.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

⁵⁸ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 11, p. 269.

⁵⁹ *Millennial Star*, Oct. 28, 1865.

⁶⁰ *Doctrine and Covenants*, Official Declaration-1.

⁶¹ *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, by B. Carmon Hardy, University of Illinois Press, 1992, pp. 130, 169, 182, 206, 251, 260, Appendix 2.

⁶² Abraham 1:20-27; Moses 5:16-41; 7:8, 22.

⁶³ *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 143.

⁶⁴ *David O. McKay and the Rise of Early Mormonism*, by Gregory A. Prince and W. R. Wright, 2005, University of Utah Press, p. 79.

⁶⁵ *Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, pp. 527-528.

contradiction between prior statements by LDS prophets and the new position on blacks:

There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren which we have interpreted to mean that the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality. . . . Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a **limited understanding** and **without the light and knowledge** that now has come into the world. . . . It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June of this year, 1978.⁶⁶

If past prophets could speak from "limited understanding" and without "light and knowledge," couldn't this apply to the president of the church today? By this reasoning a future prophet could conceivably reverse the whole position and go back to restricting blacks from holding the priesthood or reinstitute plural marriage.

But if the restriction against blacks was a practice, and not a doctrine, why did it take a revelation to change it? And why didn't God give the revelation during Brigham Young's era? Why wait until after the civil rights movement had gained popularity and civil rights legislation had been passed?

President Spencer W. Kimball announced that a revelation had been received to end the ban but didn't publish the actual revelation, just a statement about a revelation. But the actual process seems to have been more a matter of the top leadership having countless meetings to discuss and pray about the possibility of a change.

When they finally gained unanimous consensus among the First Presidency and the entire Twelve Apostles, they formulated the statement printed in the *Doctrine and Covenants* as Declaration-2.⁶⁷ Their statement reads in part:

. . . **we have pleaded long and earnestly** in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

This whole process seems to put the burden of prejudice on God with the lofty-thinking brethren pleading with God to change His mind.

Modern Day Revelation

Since 1876, revelation seems to be more a matter of modifying past revelation than giving new instruction. In 1876 the church removed from the *Doctrine and Covenants* the section on marriage that denounced polygamy, replacing it with section 132 commanding polygamy. Then

⁶⁶ "All Are Alike Unto God," by Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, *CES Religious Educators Symposium*, BYU, August 18, 1978.

⁶⁷ D. Michael Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, Signature Books, 1997, pp. 15-16.

in 1890 the church reversed its stand on polygamy, and issued the Manifesto. However, section 132 remains in the *Doctrine and Covenants* to this day.

Then in 1921 they removed the Lectures on Faith from the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which were first added in 1835. It was evidently decided that they contained defective teaching on the nature of the Godhead. Throughout the twentieth century the temple ceremony, supposedly given by revelation, was modified. Then in 1978 the priesthood ban on blacks was reversed. But these all seem to be reversing past doctrine, not giving further light.

If revelation today is more a matter of spiritual impressions not needing canonization, how does that differ from any pastor seeking divine guidance for his congregation?

In Declaration-1 President Wilford Woodruff is quoted as saying:

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. . . . If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, . . .

If the brethren can not lead us astray, how could Joseph Smith have been wrong about selling the Book of Mormon copyright? How could Brigham Young have taught false doctrine? How could Spencer W. Kimball be fooled by Mark Hofmann?

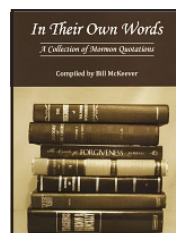
As a Mormon I often heard people refer to 2 Nephi 4:34 in admonishing someone not to put their trust in the arm of flesh. Yet the brethren continually tell the Mormons to trust them, they will not lead them astray. How is unquestioning obedience not trusting in the arm of flesh?

Christians test doctrine on the basis of its agreement with the Bible, not man. Once I put the Bible before the words of men, I realized that I must reject the Mormon prophets.

As we have the opportunity, let us reach out in love to our LDS friends and neighbors, sharing with them the good news that Christ is the only prophet we need today. He, alone, is the one who will never lead us astray.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24 NKJ)

◆ NEW BOOK ◆



In Their Own Words:
A Collection of Mormon Quotations

By Bill McKeever

\$20.00

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS AND EMAILS

March — I read your “testimonies”, and it is a shame you couldn’t find Jesus in an LDS service. I am only 31, and I have had more experiences with Christ in that time than it appears you have had in your long lives. You should have been paying more attention during sacrament meeting.

April — I am LDS. This is not an angry rebuttal. . . . If you choose to continue to try to find ways to dispute the prophet, instead of asking God if that person or church is of Him, that is your right, and I don’t have anything against it. I think Paul referred to it as “kicking against the pricks.” I would suggest you keep it to yourself though. Better for you to perish spiritually than to take others with you.

May — I am a former Missionary and member of Mormonism [in Liberia]. I served mission in 2002 [in Nigeria] but left the church last year after I found out that its teachings was based on fraud and lies. . . . It is my fervent prayers that the Lord Jesus Christ bless, protect and give you and your husband long lives.

May — As someone who is leaving the church after 18 years, FOR ONCE, I LIKE READING THE TRUTH! . . . I was a temple-attending, calling-holding, every-Sunday-going, faithful LDS sister for 18 years—my husband, in for 30 years, was a RM, seminary teacher and in 5 bishoprics—NEITHER OF US KNEW JOSEPH SMITH WAS A POLYGAMIST!! Don’t you think there’s something a little, ahem, wrong with that picture? And that, my friend, was just the tip of the iceberg that we did not know. . . .

If I had ever known, at 18 years of age, that “the new and everlasting covenant” that I was entering into in the temple marriage ceremony was eternal polygamy, I would have RUN away screaming. You just keep doing what you’re doing; you’re touching more lives than you know. . . . God bless you in your efforts to lead people to the true Christ of the Bible.

May — I think the biggest thing that keeps me from believing you is the fact that you are focused on attacking one single religion and want to draw people away from it. . . . There is no need to attack and point out contradictions and mistakes if you really have the truth.

May — I had to read *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* to get the point. Before that, when I heard an objection, I would find a way to answer it. When I read *MSoR*, I realized that even if I answered a hundred objections or five hundred, there would still be too many contradictions and too many things wrong with the LDS Church. [That’s] when my prideful house of cards collapsed because it was built on a foundation of sand . . .

May — Although your newsletter, among other things, has brought me safely through my passage from staunch multi-generation Mormon and returned missionary to wised-up (and grafeful) post-Mormon, I still benefit from receiving the newsletter.

Every month as my member wife invites the missionaries to dinner at my house, and one of my three children remains a member, I am always looking for opportunities to share a non-distorted perspective on the saints.

May — Enclosed you will find the trash literature you sent to me this past week. . . . The Lord’s work will go forward and people such as yourself will live to regret your actions.

May — I have been a Mormon my whole life and when I really needed to rely on the Church it kept resulting in the guilt or blame as though it was my fault so I did the pray pay and obey thing until I really was about to either check out or find why it wasn’t working.

From there I followed the counsel to avoid any non-Mormon source for any material as at that time I was questioning my faith as I felt something was really wrong. Even in that material I found so much stuff that was totally wrong and offensive to me and later I bought a book titled “The Writings of JS” that had just been released . . . in it over and over he damned anyone that disagreed with him or wouldn’t do what he said. Clearly what I read there I found shocking when I had thought he was what the Church claimed.

From there I read Fawn Brodie. I felt so sick over all of it. I then wrote and UTLM sent me some material that when I did . . . hundreds of hours of reading and research on [it], all turned out to be the truth.

Then finally I turned to the Church for a few answers and was told I was an apostate and had lost my faith in Christ. As I asked questions on Church websites I had been directed to at BYU, I was attacked and accused as an imposter trying to destroy the Church over and over and even got calls from these guys . . . Since then I continued to research and stick to good sources like yours . . .

June — Joseph Smith was certainly not who I was always taught he was. Thank you for helping us to know the truth. We are now putting our faith in the truth according to the Holy Bible.

June — I recently ran across a copy of your Salt Lake City Messenger entitled, “Sacred Marriage or Secret Affair?” . . . It is sad that anyone would have such a distorted, incorrect perception of Joseph Smith, Jr. . . . One might ask, “What commandments(s) were you unable to keep that caused you to leave the only true and living Church on the face of the whole earth?” . . . Please be sure to enjoy all the money and celebrity which [you] have in this life, Sandra, for in the resurrection and throughout eternity you and your late husband will be remembered only as reprobate apostates . . . Mark my words, and you will see on your judgment day just how terribly mistaken you have been. . . . I call you to repentance of your evil doings in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

June — I just wanted to thank you so much for your Messenger. . . . My boyfriend is Mormon, and he and his family have been trying to convert me to the church for the past three years, but I decided that I wanted to do some research before hand. I respect the Messenger, and I am so grateful to have found your website!!! . . . I have decided that I have no interest in converting to the Mormon church, which has upset his family, . . .

June — I need to say a HUGE Thank you!!! I have been dating and am now marrying a former LDS member. [Sandra] and her wonderful knowledge allowed me to show my fiancé the truth of the LDS church.

July — I left the church 7 years ago. I worked as a CES full time teacher, Coordinator, Director (Seminaries and Institutes) for 27 years.

July — I was a convert to the Mormon Church in 2002, served my mission—Spanish speaking in 2005, and returned home only 8 months after being in the mission field. The doubts were just too much for me, and upon further investigation I painfully had to realize that I had been deceived.

I resigned my membership in 2006. Since then, I have exhaustively studied, written about, and been a strong advocate for sharing the gospel with my Mormon friends, and teaching others about Mormonism.

July — I see now why continue to do what you are doing . . . the money. Other wise it is not necessary to attack anyone about anything. Or maybe it is pride . . . pride can have a strong hold on a person . . . I watched one of your you-tube videos today . . . It would be lovely to watch you teaching about Christ to a group of people, instead of preaching about anti-Mormonism.

July — I have been an LDS member since 1978 when I was 18 years old. I remember the bishop asked me at the time if I had any reservations about being baptized in the LDS church, and I said to him, "I could never accept or live polygamy." He told me during this baptismal interview that I would never have to live polygamy. At 18, I naively accepted his statement and was baptized, not understanding that polygamy was still of the Mormon doctrine, just not currently practiced. . . . [Years later] I decided to start researching online about "celestial marriage" and came across your website. I began to read your research, including your online book, [The Changing World of Mormonism](#). I also ordered and read the books, [Mormon Enigma](#), and [No Man Knows My History](#).

After reading these books and everything else on your website, and reading excerpts to my husband each night for the last 2 months, and talking things over with him, we have come to the conclusion that the LDS church is not based on truth, but deceit and manipulation. Considering myself to be a devoted Mormon, I was crushed at this realization and cried several times during this process of enlightenment . . . but I am in the acceptance stage now, and am at peace with the Savior, Jesus Christ.

July — I came out of the closet on my leaving the Church. In a single day I lost 11 friends on facebook. About ten others gave me all kinds of crazy responses. My family has basically cut me off and no longer takes me serious. . . . There is a huge part of me that wishes this was someone else that learned the truth.

August — Your site has been invaluable to me over the last 18 months. My journey out of Mormonism has been difficult, and is actually not quite complete, but I am still moving forward.

After the initial shock of seeing all this information and realizing I had been deceived all these years, I began to talk to my family about this. If I was required to select one single issue which stands on its own as proof positive of Joseph Smith's deception, it would have to be the Egyptian Papyri and Book of Abraham (especially when considered with the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar).

August — My invitation to you is: Read the Book of Mormon and pray with real intent, without any preconceived ideas and God the Father will tell you the truth. I know that, because I have done so.

August — Thank you for your online information regarding the so-called "Mark of Cain" and the blatant bigoted racist verses found in the pages of the Book of Mormon.

I was going to start attending the LDS ward just two blocks away from my home. Now, I want them out of my neighborhood. My wife is from India and that makes my children Indian as well . . . an "interracial" family.

I am so glad that I read the quotes regarding the so-called Lamanites and their curse from your website. How offensive, how human and how revealing. It is impossible that the BOM is divine and now Joseph Smith is exposed, in my mind, as the fraud he really is. I told the missionaries, who were trying to rope me into the LDS system, that I would never attend or subject my loved ones to a "church" or any organization for that matter, that actually believes that dark skin pigment is the result of sin. WOW!

It's alarming to me that the LDS church is growing the way it is with prejudiced teachings such as these.

August — I dropped out of the LDS Church in '98, just two months after being baptized, because I was told by the two Elders who got me to join the Church, to read the Book of Mormon from beginning to end. . . . I started questioning how there could already be horses, cows, pigs, & other farm animals in America, when Nephi, Laman & the rest of their family members arrived prior to Christ. . . . I started questioning the Elders & other Church members . . . I wanted to know why there were no archeological findings that supports early Hebrews, as being the first white settlers to the Americas . . . but got no good reasonable explanations . . . I found God's true church, which I have found amongst so many good true Christians & Believers.

September — I find it sad that you say whatever you want without even listening to the truth. . . . No matter what you say or what "proof" you think you have you will never be able to disprove the Book of Mormon.

September — I realized a long time ago while living in Utah that I was living a lie and could not continue. I was pressured into joining by my ex, and his relatives . . . I also am most grateful for your book that I found at our library here. It has given me the strength to realize there is life beyond Utah & Mormonism. . . . am finally gaining a sense of peace in my life that has never been there before.

September — Wow, your website is ridiculous! Really though . . . who do you think you are? Yes everyone has the right to their opinion but why do you feel you must bash other peoples religions? It is quite sad what you are doing.

September — Having graduated from BYU [my daughter] felt the absolute necessity of being married in the Temple. I was not deemed worthy nor were the grooms parents. His mother was especially devastated, not being able to see her only son married.

Now, after many years and three beautiful children, they have decided to renew their vows [as Christians].

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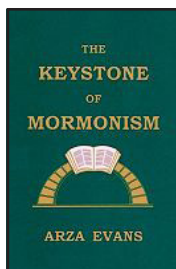
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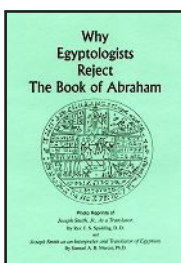
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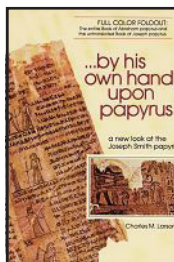


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By Charles M. Larson



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