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# Book of Abraham
## Translation or Invention?

When Marlin K. Jensen, retired General Authority and historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was asked in November of 2011 if the LDS leaders were aware that people are leaving the Mormon Church in droves after learning of troubling aspects of church history, he responded:

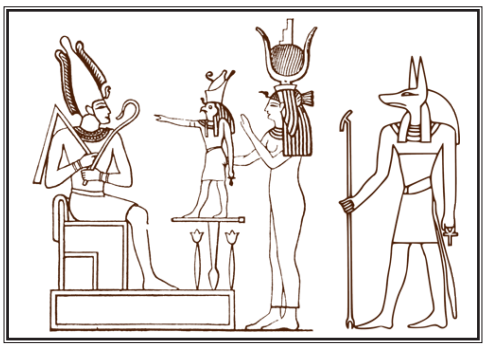
> The fifteen men [First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve] really do know, and they really care. And they realize that maybe since Kirtland, we never have had a period of, I'll call it apostasy, like we're having right now; largely over these issues.[1]

Evidently in response to the growing number of Mormons disturbed by researching sensitive topics on the Internet, on September 9, 2014, the LDS Church issued a directive to all "General Authorities; Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents" informing them of the new Gospel Topics section of the LDS Church's website (lds.org/topics):

> The purpose of the *Gospel Topics* section is to provide *accurate and transparent* information on Church history and doctrine within the framework of faith. . . . When Church members have questions regarding Church history and doctrine, possibly arising when detractors spread *misinformation and doubt*, you may want to direct their attention to these resources.[2]

According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, "For about a year, the LDS Church has been posting on its website carefully worded, scholarly essays about touchy topics from the faith's history and theology."[3] A few of these essays are:

"First Vision Accounts"
"Are Mormons Christian?"
"Book of Mormon Translation"
"Race and the Priesthood"
"Plural Marriage and Families in Early Utah"
"Book of Mormon and DNA studies"
"Becoming like God"
"Peace and Violence among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints"
"Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham"



Drawing of the Egyptian deities Osiris, Horus, Isis, and Anubis.

## The Book of Abraham

In 1835 Michael Chandler brought his traveling exhibit of Egyptian artifacts to the Mormon town of Kirtland, Ohio. Upon examination, Joseph Smith offered to buy the collection as he had discerned that two of the Egyptian papyri contained the writings of the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham and Joseph. After purchasing the mummies and scrolls for $2,400 (approximately $65,500 in today's dollars), Smith embarked on his new translation project, starting with the Book of Abraham scroll. If these were truly the writings of Abraham it would be the oldest known biblical text. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls would dim in comparison. Smith's new scripture was officially canonized by the LDS Church in 1880.

1 Marlin K. Jensen, "Q&A", John A. Widtsoe Association for Mormon Studies, Utah State University (November 11, 2011); online at http://mormon-chronicles.blogspot.com/2012/01/rescue-plan-to-address-difficulties-of.html

2 Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormon Leaders Spread Word About Controversial Essays," *Salt Lake Tribune* (September 23, 2014).

3 *Ibid.*

Like the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith professed to be translating an ancient record, preserved by God to come forth in these last days. However, Egyptologists find no connection between the Egyptian text on the papyri and Smith's Book of Abraham. Smith's supposed translation has been challenged for over one hundred and fifty years, starting with Theodule Deveria in 1861, concluding with Dr. Ritner's 2014 article, "A Response to 'Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham.'"[4]

In July of this year the LDS Church added "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham" to Gospel Topics in an effort to downplay the fact that the papyri Joseph Smith purchased in 1835 have nothing to do with Abraham. The church-owned *Deseret News* reported:

> A new essay published Tuesday by the LDS Church on its website says scholarly or critical efforts to determine Joseph Smith's ability to translate papyri are "likely futile."[5]

The new Gospel Topics essay acknowledges that the papyri have no relationship to the text of the Book of Abraham:

> Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham . . .[6]

The essay concludes:

> The *veracity* and value of the book of Abraham *cannot be settled by scholarly debate* concerning the book's translation and historicity. The book's status as scripture lies in the eternal truths it teaches and the powerful spirit it conveys. . . . The truth of the book of Abraham is ultimately found through careful study of its teachings, sincere prayer and the confirmation of the Spirit.[7]

Notice how they concede that the papyri contain nothing about Abraham yet maintain the Book of Abraham is scripture on the basis of a spiritual experience. However, when Joseph Smith examined the papyri he specifically claimed to be translating the ancient documents. On July 5, 1835, Smith commented:

> 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, etc.[8]

In fact, the declaration that it is a literal translation is still reflected in the heading of the book itself:

> 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*.[9]

That Smith was purporting to literally translate the Egyptian material is seen in an entry in the *History of the Church*:

> The remainder of this month [July 1835], 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*.[10]

## Identifying the Scroll for the Book of Abraham

While the LDS Church states that it is not known which piece of the papyri Smith used for his new scripture, it is clear that he was claiming to translate the scroll called "Breathing Permit of Hor." The first illustration on this papyrus, with added details, became Facsimile 1 in the Book of Abraham. It is stated very specifically in Abraham 1:12 "that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to *the representation at the commencement of this record*." But herein lies the problem: Scholars agree that Facsimile 1 has nothing to do with Abraham. In the LDS article we read:

> None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham's name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.[11]

4 Dr. Robert Ritner, "A Response To 'Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham,'" Signature Books, August 2014, online at http://signaturebooks.com/2014/08/a-response-to-translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham-by-dr-robert-ritner/

5 "LDS Church Publishes New Web Essay on Book of Abraham," *Deseret News*, (July 8, 2014).

6 "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," online at https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng

7 *Ibid*.

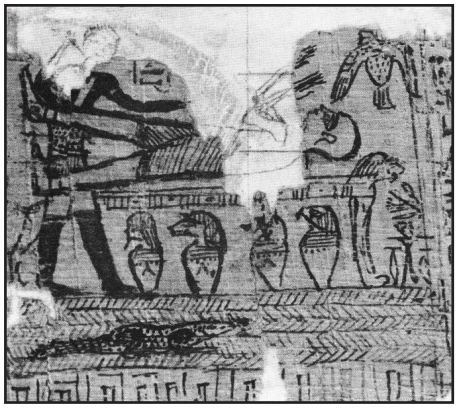
8 *History of the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 235-236.

9 "Book of Abraham," *Pearl of Great Price*, 2013.

10 *History of the Church,* vol. 2, p. 238.

11 Gospel Topics, "Translation . . . Book of Abraham."

Now that the original papyrus used for Facsimile 1 has been identified it is clear that it was damaged in certain areas before it came into the Mormons' possession. Evidently Smith or one of his associates penciled in what they thought would have been the missing parts.

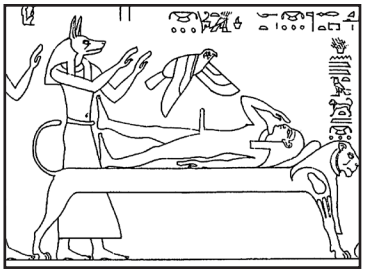


Papyrus with missing parts drawn in pencil

Facsimile 1 as printed in the Book of Abraham

Restoration based on modern Egyptology, from *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus*, page 65.

However, they guessed wrong. The black standing figure is Anubis, god of the underworld, who would have had the head of a jackal, not that of a man, and he would not have been holding a knife. The following example is a similar scene in an Egyptian funeral text, showing the god Anubis standing over Osiris.



Similar scene from Robert Ritner's *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, page 91.

Dr. Robert Ritner, Professor of Egyptology at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, explains:

> The published text of the Book of Abraham is accompanied by three woodcut "Facsimiles" with explanations authored by Joseph Smith himself. The facsimiles are all based on ancient Egyptian documents, and the Egyptian texts of all three can now be deciphered. In addition, *the representations of all three conform to well-known Egyptian models*. Facsimiles 1 and 3 represent sections of one papyrus: the "Breathing Permit of Hor" (P.J 1), . . . Comparison of the surviving initial vignette of the Hor papyrus with Facsimile 1 proved beyond doubt, as the LDS web post agrees, that it was "the vignette that became facsimile 1." However, neither Facsimile 1 nor 2 is a true copy, and both contain added forgeries, including the human-head and knife of the supposed "idolatrous priest of Elkenah" (Fig. 3 on Facsimile 1) as can be seen in the crude pencil additions to the original papyrus sheet as mounted and "improved" for publication by the LDS church in 1842.[12]

Dr. Ritner further commented:

> All of Smith's published "explanations" are incorrect, including the lone example defended by the new [LDS] web posting: the water in which a crocodile is swimming (Fig. 12 of Facsimile 1), supposedly a representation of "the firmament over our heads . . ." Although Egyptians might place heavenly boats in the sky, that is not relevant "in this case" where the water is placed below the figures and represents the Nile, not the sky. The selective defense of these explanations by the church is telling, and all other explanations are simply indefensible except by distorting Egyptian evidence.

## Smith's Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar

Shortly after the Mormons purchased the papyri, Joseph Smith started working on an alphabet and grammar of the Egyptian language to aid in his translation work.[13]

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12 Ritner, "A Response to 'Translation . . . of the Book of Abraham.'"

13 H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*, (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2009); Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), pp. 311-326.

The LDS Gospel Topics article continues with its emphasis on Smith's study of the characters and his translation:

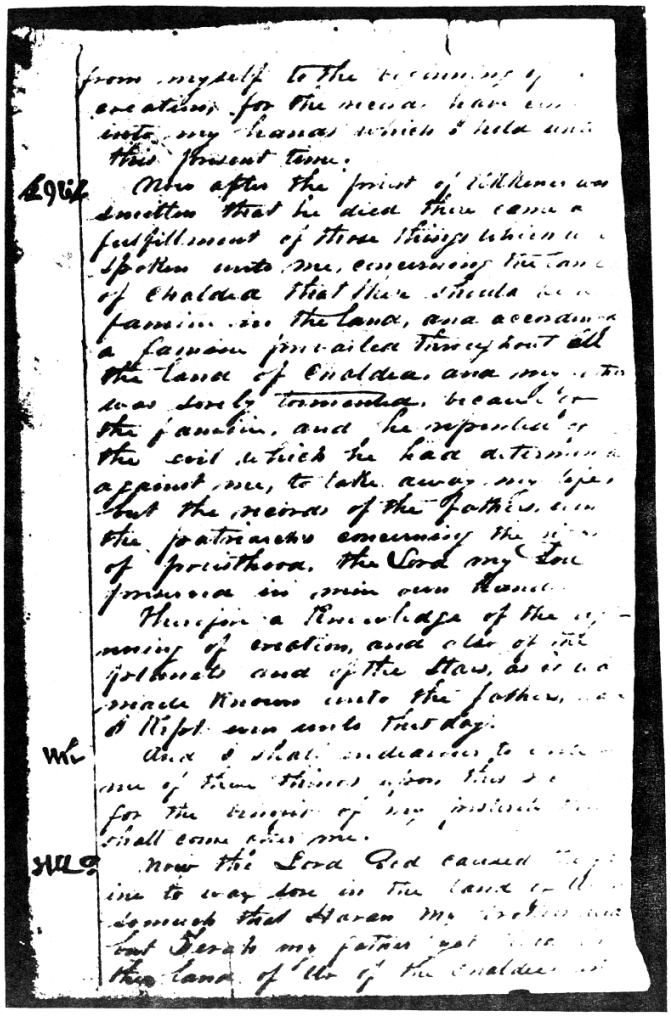
> Some evidence suggests that Joseph *studied the characters on the Egyptian papyri* and attempted to *learn the Egyptian language.* His history reports that, in July 1835, he was "continually engaged in *translating* an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language *as practiced by the ancients*. This grammar, as it was called, consisted of columns of hieroglyphic characters followed by English *translation* recorded in a large notebook by Joseph's scribe, William W. Phelps. Another manuscript, written by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, has Egyptian characters followed by explanations.
>
> The relationship of these documents to the book of Abraham is not fully understood. *Neither the rules nor the translations in the grammar book correspond to those recognized by Egyptologists today.* Whatever the role of the grammar book, it appears that Joseph Smith began *translating* portions of the book of Abraham almost immediately after the purchase of the papyri.[14]

The lack of correlation between Smith's Alphabet and Grammar and the papyri demonstrate Smith's total lack of knowledge of anything Egyptian. Included in Smith's Egyptian working papers are parts of the text of the Book of Abraham lined up with Egyptian characters taken from the Breathing Permit document which were attached to the original drawing of Facsimile 1. Researcher Christopher C. Smith observed:

> Consistent with this conclusion, three handwritten Book of Abraham manuscripts from the Kirtland period contain, in their margins, sequential Egyptian characters from the first column of the Hor Document of Breathing (pJS XI). These characters are matched up with discrete units of English text. They appear to be aligned this way in order to show which portions of the English text were translated from which Egyptian characters.[15]

In the next column is a photo of a manuscript page for the Book of Abraham, with the Egyptian characters copied from the papyrus in the left hand column.[16]

Smith's representation of whole paragraphs being translated from one or two Egyptian symbols is consistent with his earlier claim that the Nephites wrote in "reformed Egyptian" because it took less space than Hebrew (*Book of Mormon*, Mormon 9:32-33). This is not actually the case,



A manuscript page for the Book of Abraham

but it gave Smith an excuse for being able to translate whole paragraphs from simple characters.

On the following page is another example of Smith purporting to translate the "Breathing Permit" in the manuscript pages for the Book of Abraham contained in his Alphabet and Grammar.[17]

Notice the dozens of words supposedly translated from a character resembling a backward *E*. Dr. Ritner comments:

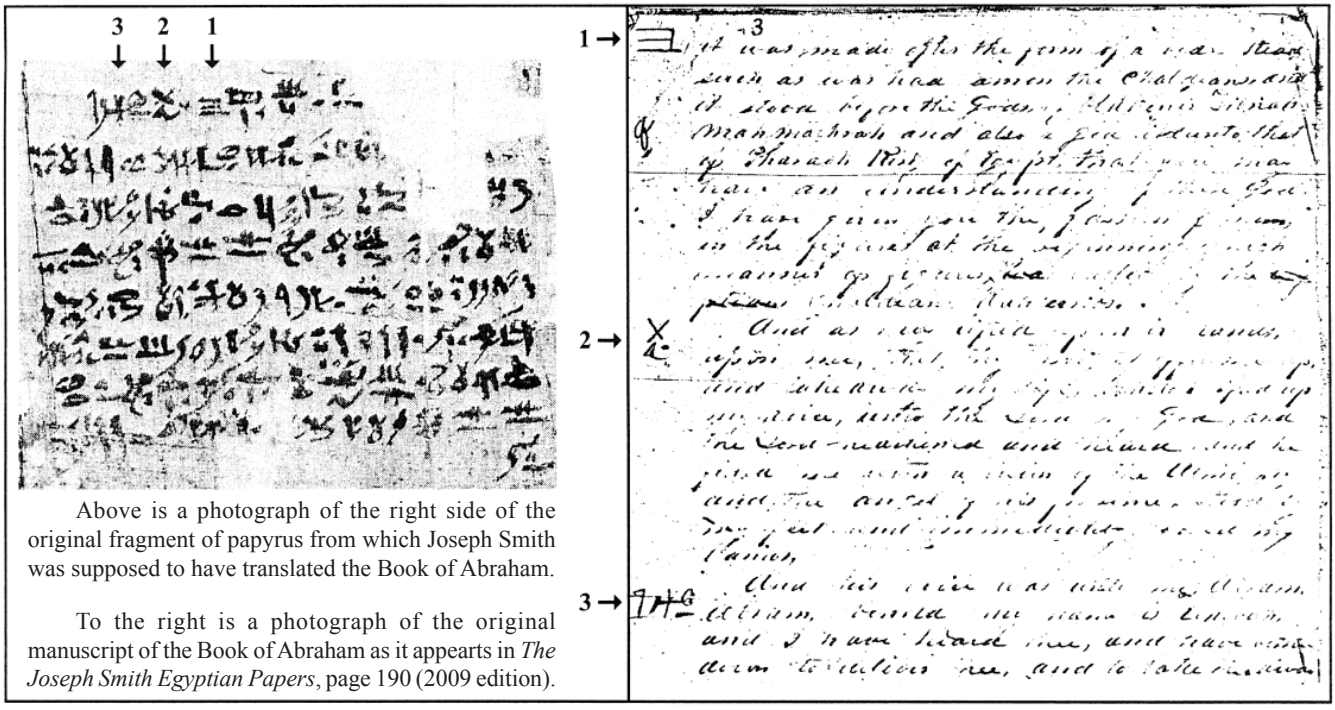
> It is now evident that over half of the text of the Book of Abraham was invented by Smith from only two incomplete lines in the "Breathing Permit of Hôr" (P. JS 1, col. 2 [=Fragment XI], lines 1-2). The few Egyptian words "great lake of Khonsu, [and the Osiris Hôr, the justified] born of Taikhibit, the justified, likewise" were spun into the full Book of Abraham 1:4-2:2.
>
> It is not surprising that Smith's translation of just a few Egyptian words could become a lengthy narrative.

14 "Translation . . . Book of Abraham," www.lds.org/topics

15 Christopher C. Smith, "That which is Lost": Assessing the State of Preservation of the Joseph Smith Papyri, *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, (Spring/Summer 2011), vol. 31, no. 1, p. 74.

16 Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* p. 312.

17 Grant S. Heward and Jerald Tanner, "The Source of the Book of Abraham Identified," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, (Summer 1968), pp. 92-98.




Above is a photograph of the right side of the original fragment of papyrus from which Joseph Smith was supposed to have translated the Book of Abraham.

To the right is a photograph of the original manuscript of the Book of Abraham as it appears in *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*, page 190 (2009 edition).

> Before the 1822 decipherment of hieroglyphs by Jean-François Champollion in France, it had been wrongly assumed that the Egyptian writing system was purely symbolic, not phonetic.[18]

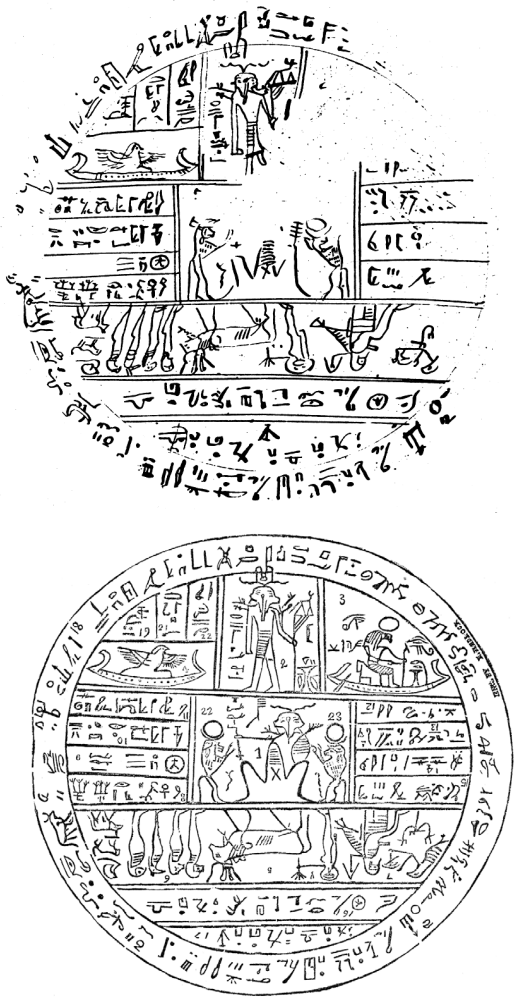
Further evidence that the Book of Abraham could not have been translated from the Egyptian papyri can be seen in Dr. Ritner's book, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*.

## Facsimile Two

Beneath each of the three facsimiles in the Book of Abraham is Smith's explanation of the drawings. Unfortunately, none of Joseph Smith's material matches the descriptions given by the Egyptologists. One problem area is Smith's attempt to restore the missing portions of the round disc known as a hypocephalus, which was placed under the head of the mummy. In LDS scriptures it is referred to as Facsimile 2. Dr. Ritner writes:

> Facsimile 2 derives from a separate burial, for an individual named Sheshonq. Large portions of this published "facsimile" were improperly inserted from unrelated papyri.[19]

In the next column is a photo of the earliest drawing of Facsimile 2, taken from Joseph Smith's Kirtland Egyptian papers.[20] Notice in the second drawing the blank areas were filled in when it was printed in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842.



18 Ritner, "A Response to 'Translation . . . of the Book of Abraham.'"

19 *Ibid.*

20 Robert Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2011), p. 273.

We now know that the Egyptian characters used to fill in the blank spots on Facsimile 2 were actually copied from the Breathing Permit scroll and haphazardly placed on the hypocephalus, rendering the text at that point unintelligible.[21]

Mormon scholar Michael D. Rhodes observed:

> A careful examination of Facsimile 2 shows that there is a difference between most of the hieroglyphic signs and the signs on the right third of the figure on the outer edge as well as the outer portions of the sections numbered 12-15. These signs are hieratic, not hieroglyphic, and are inverted, or upside down, to the rest of the text. In fact, they are a fairly accurate copy of lines 2, 3, and 4 of the Joseph Smith Papyrus XI, which contains a portion of the Book of Breathings. Especially clear is the word *snsn*, in section 14, and part of the name of the mother of the owner of the papyrus, (tay-)uby.t, repeated twice on the outer edge. An ink drawing of the hypocephalus in the Church Historian's office shows these same areas as being blank. It is likely that these portions were destroyed on the original hypocephalus and someone (the engraver, one of Joseph Smith's associates, or Joseph himself) copied the lines from the Book of Breathings papyrus for aesthetic purposes.[22]

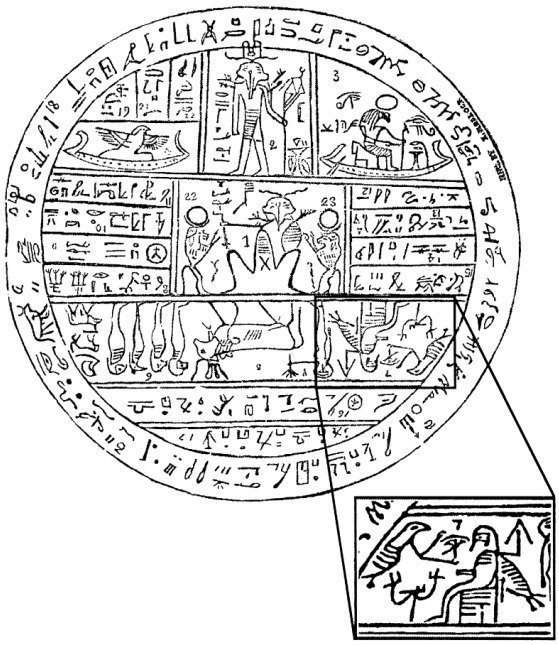
This would be equivalent to finding that your Bible was missing a page so you tore a page from a history book and inserted it in the Bible, upside down, so that the book would have the right number of pages. But the added text would make no sense next to the other pages. Obviously Joseph Smith totally lacked any understanding of the Egyptian material.

## Is Min God?

When the hypocephalus was prepared for publication in 1842 Smith had the engraver add numbers to certain figures that would correspond to the explanations underneath the drawing. He identified number 7, the seated figure (lower right area, upside-down) as God:

> Represents God sitting upon his throne, revealing, through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood; as, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham, in the form of a dove.[23]

However, this is actually a representation of Min, the Egyptian god of fertility, shown with an erection. LDS scholars have defended Smith's use of Min to represent



God in his regenerative powers. For instance, LDS Egyptologist Michael Rhodes explains:

> 7. A seated ithyphallic god with a hawk's tail, holding aloft the divine flail. . . . Before him is what appears to be a bird of some sort, presenting him with an Udjat-eye. . . .
>
> The seated god is clearly a form of Min, the god of the regenerative, procreative forces of nature, perhaps combined with Horus as the hawk's tail would seem to indicate.
>
> Joseph Smith mentions here the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove and God "revealing through the heavens the grand key-words of the priesthood." The procreative forces, receiving unusual accentuation throughout the representation, may stand for many divine generative powers, not least of which might be conjoined with the blessings of the Priesthood in one's posterity eternally.[24]

This would fit with the LDS theology of God being a resurrected being from another world who achieved godhood and has a tangible body. Brigham Young, the second prophet of the LDS Church, explained:

> The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood—*was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers.*[25]

While a sexually active god may fit in with LDS theology, it does not represent the God of the Bible. In the book of Numbers we read:

21 Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality*, pp. 338-344.

22 Michael D. Rhodes "The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Twenty Years Later," p. 2; http://home.comcast.net/~michael.rhodes/JosephSmithHypocephalus.pdf

23 *Pearl of Great Price*, Facsimile 2 from the Book of Abraham.

24 Michael D. Rhodes, "A Translation and Commentary of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus," *BYU Studies,* (Spring 1977), p. 273.

25 Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 268.

> God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent. (Numbers 23:19)

In the book of Romans Paul declared:

> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. . . They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. (Romans 1:22-25 NIV)

The Joseph Smith hypocephalus, with its multiple drawings of Egyptian deities, is similar to numerous ones preserved in various museums. Below is a drawing of a hypocephalus in the Leiden Museum in Germany that is very close to the one in the Book of Abraham. Notice that it also has the god Min in the same location on the disc.[26]

The LDS article claims that "the book of Abraham largely follows the biblical narrative but *adds important information regarding Abraham's life and teachings.*"[27] The fact that it changes the nature of God is one of the doctrinal problems in the Book of Abraham. The Old Testament is very emphatic that there is only one God—i.e. Isaiah 43:10-11; Isaiah 44:6 and 8. Yet the Book of Abraham introduces a plurality of gods. Below is a comparison between Smith's translation and Genesis:

> *Pearl of Great Price*: Abraham 4:1 – And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, *and they, that is the Gods*, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.
>
> Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning *God* created the heaven and the earth.

Why should anyone accept the new concepts in the Book of Abraham (plural gods, pre-mortal existence, racial cursing) when there is no historical validity to the book, and its teachings run counter to those of the Bible?[28]

## Facsimile Three

Joseph Smith also totally misidentified all the figures in Facsimile 3. Below is a side by side comparison of the identification of the figures. [29]

| Joseph Smith Translation | Egyptologists Translation |
|---|---|
| Fig 1. Abraham upon Pharaoh's throne | Fig 1. This is Osiris |
| Fig 2. King Pharaoh | Fig 2. Isis the Great, the God's Mother |
| Fig 3. Signifies Abraham in Egypt | Fig 3. Libation table (oils, wine, etc) |
| Fig 4. Prince of Pharaoh, King of Egypt | Fig 4. Maat, mistress of the gods |
| Fig 5. Shulem, one of the King's waiters | Fig 5. The Osiris Hor, Justified forever |
| Fig 6. Olimla, a slave | Fig 6. Anubis, guide of the dead |

Dr. Ritner explains:

> In Facsimile 3, Smith confuses human and animal heads and males with females. No amount of special pleading can change the female "Isis the great, the god's mother" (Facsimile 3, Fig. 2) into the male "King Pharaoh, whose name is given in the characters above his hand," as even the LDS author Michael D. Rhodes accepts. Here Smith also misunderstands "Pharaoh" as a personal name rather than a title meaning "king," so he reads "king king" for a goddess's name that he claims to have understood on the papyrus![30]

Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles in the Book of Abraham were refuted over one hundred years ago, in 1912, when the major Egyptologists of the day gave their evaluation of the drawings.

26 http://www.bhporter.com/images/Hypos/Leiden_Museum_Tanetirt.gif. See also http://www.bhporter.com/Hypocephali-Gallery.htm

27 Gospel Topics, lds.org

28 *Salt Lake City Messenger*, "The Oldest Biblical Text?" Doctrinal Innovation, (November 2009) no. 113, online at http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no113.htm#doctrinal

29 *Debunking FAIR's Debunking,* on Book of Abraham, online at http://cesletter.com/debunking-fairmormon/book-of-abraham.html#9

30 Ritner, "A Response to 'Translation . . . of the Book of Abraham.'"

Dr. Arthur Mace, Assistant Curator for the Department of Egyptian Art of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York:

> The Book of Abraham, it is hardly necessary to say, is a pure fabrication. Cuts 1 and 3 are inaccurate copies of well-known scenes on funeral papyri, and cut 2 is a copy of one of the magical discs which in the late Egyptian period were placed under the heads of mummies. There were about forty of these latter known in museums and they are all very similar in character. Joseph Smith's interpretation of these cuts is a farrago of nonsense from beginning to end. Egyptian characters can now be read almost as easily as Greek, and five minutes' study in an Egyptian gallery of any museum should be enough to convince any educated man of the clumsiness of the imposture.

Dr. A. H. Sayce from Oxford, England:

> It is difficult to deal seriously with Joseph Smith's impudent fraud. The fac-simile from the Book of Abraham No. 2 is an ordinary hypocephalus, but the hieroglyphics upon it have been copied so ignorantly that hardly one of them is correct. I need scarce say that Kolob, etc., are unknown to the Egyptian language. . . . Smith has turned the Goddess into a king and Osiris into Abraham.

Dr. Flinders Petrie of London University:

> In the first place, they are copies (very badly done) of well known Egyptian subjects of which I have dozens of examples. Secondly, they are all many centuries later than Abraham. . . . the attempts to guess a meaning for them, in the professed explanations, are too absurd to be noticed. It may be safely said that there is not one single word that is true in these explanations.

Dr. James H. Breasted of the Haskell Oriental Museum, University of Chicago:

> It will be seen, then, that if Joseph Smith could read ancient Egyptian writing, his ability to do so had no connection with the decipherment of hieroglyphics by European scholars . . . The three fac-similes in question represent equipment which will be and has been found in unnumbered thousands of Egyptian graves . . . The point, then, is that in publishing these fac-similes of Egyptian documents as part of an unique revelation to Abraham, Joseph Smith was attributing to Abraham not three unique documents of which no other copies exist, but was attributing to Abraham a series of documents which were the common property of a whole nation of people who employed them in every human burial, which they prepared.

The full statements of these renowned Egyptologists can be read in our publication, *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham.*[31]

31 F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith Jr., As a Translator*, 1912, pp. 23-27, reprinted in *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham,* Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

## Possible Answers

In an attempt to obscure the problem of purporting the Book of Abraham to be an actual translation the church is now proposing two alternate answers—

1. We may not have the right piece. Since the surviving pieces of papyri have no relationship to Abraham, his writings may have been on one of the missing artifacts. The article states:

> It is likely *futile* to assess Joseph's ability to translate papyri when we now have *only a fraction* of the papyri he had in his possession. . . . The loss of a significant portion of the papyri means the relationship of the papyri to the published text cannot be settled conclusively by reference to the papyri.[32]

2. Smith's use of the word "translate" does not require a typical definition. The papyri may have served as a catalyst for revelation. Following this line of reasoning, Smith didn't need the missing pieces. He could have just as easily used a book on geography for his inspiration. The LDS article explains:

> According to this view, *Joseph's translation was not a literal rendering of the papyri* as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and *revelation*. They *catalyzed* a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a *revelation* about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation *did not directly correlate to the characters* on the papyri.[33]

Either way, the church is now admitting that there is absolutely nothing on any of the papyri in its possession that has anything to do with Abraham, that all the pieces of papyri only relate to the Egyptian religion. This would include the three illustrations in the Book of Abraham. Egyptologists can translate most of the material on these drawings and find them to be standard Egyptian burial documents, depicting their numerous deities.

While the LDS article suggests the Book of Abraham material may have been attached to the end of the Breathing Permit papyrus, scholars Andrew W. Cook and Christopher C. Smith have challenged that assumption:

> The question then becomes whether the undamaged scroll of Hôr was ever long enough to accommodate a hieratic Book of Abraham source text. The Book of Abraham translation contains 5,506 English words. The hieratic text in the instructions column of the Document of Breathing translates to ~97 English words. This

32 Gospel Topics, "Translation . . . Book of Abraham," www.lds.org

33 *Ibid*.

> column is ~9 cm wide. Hence, if the Book of Abraham were written on the scroll in the same hieratic font as this portion of the Document of Breathing, it would have taken up ~9(5,506/97)=~511 cm of papyrus. Since the Book of Abraham translation is incomplete, the actual space required for a hieratic original would presumably have been even longer.[34]

The authors then use mathematical calculations to demonstrate that the papyri could not have been long enough to contain the text of the Book of Abraham.

The LDS Church feels the issues can be resolved through prayer, however, non-Mormon scholars remain unconvinced. After spending considerable time examining the papyri owned by the LDS Church, Dr. Ritner stated:

> Such a declaration [that the veracity of the Book of Abraham is to be found in prayer] may seem reasonable to those already predisposed to accept it, but on closer reading, the LDS church posting suggests discomfort with its own conclusions and reasoning. Not a single opposing scholar is mentioned by name, nor are their reasons for rejecting the Book of Abraham. Yet the LDS paper attempts to engage in scholarly debate from a one-sided position, repeatedly citing in the footnotes the same limited set of apologists who are primarily church employees at BYU in Provo.[35]

While conceding that the truthfulness of the Book of Abraham is a "matter of faith" the *Pearl of Great Price Student Manual* promotes Joseph Smith's translation as a great accomplishment since Egyptian could not be deciphered at that time:

> The book of Abraham is an evidence of the inspired calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It came forth at a time when the study of the ancient Egyptian language and culture was just beginning. The scholars of the 1800s had scarcely begun to explore the field of Egyptology, and yet, *with no formal training in ancient languages* and no knowledge of ancient Egypt (except his work with the Book of Mormon), Joseph Smith began *his translation of the ancient manuscripts*. His knowledge and ability came through the power and gift of God, together with his own determination and faith.[36]

With such emphasis on Smith having "no formal training in ancient languages" and that "study of the ancient Egyptian language" was just beginning, this statement would lead one to conclude that Smith's translation would have corresponded to an Egyptologists translation. Yet no connection has been found.

## Conclusion

Non-LDS Egyptologists have long argued that Smith's work has no relationship to the ancient Egyptian papyri purchased in 1835. Dr. Ritner, in his article responding to the Gospel Topics essay, observed:

> Scholarly rejection of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham is not new and has continued unabated since the study by Jules Remy and Theodule Deverial in 1861, with multiple scholars (including A. H. Sayce, Arthur Mace, Flinders Petrie, and James H. Breasted) dismissing the book's validity in 1912. With the rediscovery of the papyri at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1967, analysis by John Wilson, Richard Parker and Klaus Baer (all 1968) and even the LDS apologist Hugh Nibley (in 1975) disproved any possibility that the Book of Abraham could be an acceptable translation of the surviving Egyptian papyri. My own works on the papyri (in 2002, 2003, 2011 and 2013) showed the same result, as did the LDS-sponsored translations by Michael Rhodes (2002) and the 2005 revision of Nibley's volume. Thus has arisen a host of alternative defenses for the Book of Abraham, questioning the meaning of the word "translation," the length of the original papyri, the possibility of a now lost section with the Abraham text, etc.[37]

Even if one were to concede (which critics do not) that the text for the Book of Abraham was actually contained on one of the missing pieces of papyri, it is clear from the extant papyri that Smith was indeed using them for his supposed "translation." He believed that the three illustrations taken from the papyri (which were copied and printed with the Book of Abraham) conveyed the same story of Abraham that he was supposedly "translating" from the text, whether that text is on the extant papyri or on the lost pieces. To simply say that "we don't have all the papyri" does not dismiss the fact that the parts that *we do have* were clearly used by Smith in creating the Book of Abraham, to one extent or another, and their contents clearly depict not a story of Abraham but rather a common Egyptian funerary scene, as has been concluded by Egyptologists for decades.

In 2011 John Dehlin, a fifth generation Mormon and founder of Mormon Stories podcast, conducted a survey of 3,000 former Mormons, examining the reasons for their loss of faith. One of the top reasons given was loss of faith in Joseph Smith's supposed translation of

34 Andrew W. Cook and Christopher C. Smith, "The Original Length of the Scroll of Hor," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, (Winter, 2010), pp. 1-42.

35 Ritner, "A Response to 'Translation . . . of the Book of Abraham.'"

36 *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual, Religion 327*, LDS Church, 2000, p. 29.

37 Ritner, "A Response to 'Translation . . . of the Book of Abraham.'"

the Book of Abraham.[38] The LDS Church's latest article on the Book of Abraham does not provide the answers necessary to stem the tide of defection. Dr. Robert Ritner has responded to their article and demonstrates that their arguments are spurious.[39]

The LDS article concedes that there is no connection between the papyri and the text of the Book of Abraham. Yet that is exactly how it has been presented to the world for over 170 years. It is time for the LDS Church to decanonize the Book of Abraham and admit that it is a product of Joseph Smith's imagination.

38 John Dehlin, "Understanding Mormon Disbelief," 2012; online at www.whymormonsquestion.org/survey-results

39 Ritner, "A Response to 'Translation . . . of the Book of Abraham.'"



## Excerpts from Letters and Emails

**April 2014:** Thank you does not even come close to expressing my deep gratitude for the service you are rendering, God bless you!

I have been on what seems like a life long quest for the truth in all areas, but most importantly, [em]pathizes with those that know the truth.

I am in such a precarious place, all of my family and closest friends are strong Mormons. I have three brothers, one of which is a bishop, one in the bishopric, and the oldest a student of the "scriptures." They have alienated me and think me lost for all eternity.

**April 2014:** I have seen you as a guest on "Polygamy What Love is This." I am very impressed with your vast knowledge of the LDS doctrine and history. I was LDS my entire life, until a few years ago. It is because of what I have learned from you, Doris Hanson and Shawn McCraney, that it has been proven to me that the LDS doctrine contradicts the bible, and it's based on the lies of a false Prophet.

**April 2014:** I really enjoy hearing you speak. It has helped me coming out of Mormonism. Since I was 16 I've always wondered about Joseph Smith and the gold plates. Now I'm 84 and know the truth for the past 6 yrs.

**April 2014:** As a 73 year old woman, I cannot thank you enough or express my gratitude enough for you and your website. I came out of Mormonism 27 years ago . . . I was not raised Mormon but converted when going thru a difficult time. I found them to be wonderful people, but I could never believe the Joseph Smith story.

**May 2014:** Now that my husband and I have studied church history I can't believe that we ever believed it at all. What a shame that the LDS church has hidden the true history of the church. The terrible part is that we taught our children the lies. I doubt we will ever be able to get thru to one of our sons.

**May 2014:** I cannot believe that you delude yourself so much you can actually believe this stuff. I can only assume you say and do these things to appease your new followers because they hang on your every vengeful and derogatory post. I hope you have a change of heart in your tactics whether or not you have a change of heart about the church.

**May 2014:** My wife and I . . . were both very active LDS, up until last summer. I will be 38 years old this year and still can't believe how firm I thought my "testimony of Mormonism" was, up until last year. Both sides of my family go back to the 1830s in Mormonism. On my Mom's side, my "multiple great" grandfather is William Clayton. I was on track to becoming a lifelong LDS leader and then really found out who Jesus Christ is and now enjoy attending an incredible Bible Fellowship about 10 minutes from our home, here in Texas. . . . Easter Sunday . . . we attended two different Bible Fellowship Services. Both of them were, hands down, the most powerful and uplifting Easter Services we had ever experienced! Easter Sunday, in Mormonism, was such a let down every year. . . .

During my many years as a novice LDS historian and a professional LDS Religious Educator, you and your husband's names were infamous as THE anti-Mormons of our day. Even as a TBM, I never felt comfortable with such a label . . . I want to apologize for the unfair and unjust treatment you and your late husband have endured for decades, just for following Christ and having the courage to tell the truth! . . . We devastated our family and friends by leaving it all. But, we have discovered a vast group of wonderful, like-minded people, with the help of the internet, and a truck load of supporting evidence for our decision. . . . Finally, I have to tell you of the absolute peace and clarity my sweet wife and I feel as we have come to know the pure Love of Jesus Christ in our lives. HE IS ENOUGH and that is such a relief, after decades of trying to be "worthy" in the legalism of Mormon orthodoxy.

**May 2014:** So very grateful for your television ministry, many years ago God used you on The John Ankerberg show [www.jashow.org/television-shows/] to help my husband become free from Mormonism and he has been walking with God ever since. Thank you! Bless you!!! BLESS YOU!!!!!

**May 2014:** Thankful for how God has used you and your husband. I still remember looking at your plagiarism page in 1997 when you compared 1 Corinthians to [Mosiah]. God used that in getting me to doubt the BOM as the authority.

[Book of Mormon, about 121 B.C.] Mosiah 5:15: "Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, . . ."

[Bible, about 51-60 A.D.] 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

**May 2014:** I was aware of your publications early on, but approached them from the perspective of a true believer; seeds can take a long time to germinate! It took me many years to overcome the mind control used by the Mormon Church, after my converted brother brought in about half of our family.

I was such a true believer that I took Brigham Young's words seriously, about "God's law of polygamy" being eternal. Thus I was brought under the spell of [a polygamist sect] for a brief time. . . . Anyway, I thought it would be a good time to thank you for your work, and encourage you to keep freeing people from this horrible, horrible "religion." . . . What helped me most was Ann Eliza Young's Wife Number 19. [www.utlm.org/onlineresources/brighamyoungswives.htm]

**May 2014:** I just viewed your 4 part interview with John Dehlin. What an amazing story. . . . Watching and reading your material has helped me find the grace in Jesus Christ after being a Mormon for over 30 years. I am the first in my family of 10 siblings to leave Mormonism. Today I'm 57 and I've been a Christian for 3 years. . . . My 4th great grandmother was Patty Sessions and 3rd great grandmother was Silvia Lyon Sessions. When I was a child my mother proudly told us children that we're to keep the polygamist relationship a secret because it was sacred, as they were sealed to Joseph Smith. When I attended Rick's College a church history professor told me I was of "royal blood." Mother always told us children that Joseph had several wives but he never ever had sexual relations with any of them except Emma. And of course I was never informed that 11 were already married to living husbands, and that our great grandmothers were mother-daughter wives. Even as I write this it is tasteless!

**May 2014:** I listened to your recent interview with John Dehlin [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxq5opj6GqODZPewqYxZWLoD_fD1MtZiM] and loved it. I am a recent convert FROM mormonism and appreciate your work and your insights into these difficult topics. My wife and I aren't sure exactly where our spiritual journeys will lead us; but right now we are quite happy attending a local Methodist church and are very active there. My wife and I both came precariously close to leaving mormonism in favor of Atheism. It's a common transition for ex-mormons as you know. That is why your work is so vital, I believe. I am not against the Mormon church. I feel that it has done and currently does good in the lives of many. I have felt God speak to me when I was an active member and I cannot deny it. But I feel Him continuing to speak to me outside of "the Church" and I am grateful.

**June 2014:** Your interview with John Dehlin [MormonStories podcast] was absolutely incredible. I've shared it with many people. I was an LDS convert, but left two years ago. I too believe in the historical Christ. I have hope, and faith, but still, some questions about God. Your story gave me such hope.

**June 2014:** First off I want to apologize for any negative thoughts I ever sent your way. I don't live in Utah and was never an orthodox Mormon but I did believe that you were fighting a lost cause for no reason. Second I need to thank you for that fight. How you managed to do this without the internet is mind-boggling but you have and did.

I recently left the church after questioning for years. My "shelf" finally fell but my husband is a Mormon blue blood who believes with every fiber of his being and it breaks my heart.

**June 2014:** I'm from Brazil. I'm a third generation mormon. . . . I was raised an ultra-believing mormon. I've been a missionary myself and have served five years as a bishop. I was serving for two years as a High Councilor when my eyes were finally opened and I saw the Church as it really is.

It was a terrible experience to realize everything I was was based on lies by a handful of 19th Century crazy villains. For weeks I stood alone in my realization, fearful of the consequences of telling my wife, parents, siblings and extended family. I think I will bear the scars of the psychological damage forever. Eventually, I told my wife (a fourth generation mormon), who believed me, and my parents, who respected my decision even if they would rather not research themselves.

I immediately asked to be released from the Stake High Council and sent my resignation letter, along with my wife and children. As I was a very visible figure in the Stake, of course it sent shockwaves throughout the membership. Half a dozen have already left the Church after I did and others are still reeling from it.

The final trigger to the process that led me out of the Church were the "essays" [Gospel Topics on www.lds.org], but I know they were a mere consequence of the work you two pioneered many decades ago. I'm so thankful to the courage you had to invest your life to help people that had nothing but hate for you. I've watched Sandra's interview on MormonStories [podcast], and I can only imagine the huge personal cost you had to pay as individuals and as a family . . . I don't know if there's a god, but if there is, I hope he will reward you for standing for what is right. My family and descendants for many generations will be free because of your sincere work.

**June 2014:** Hey just wanted to let you know that I loved your interview with john dehlin. I was not planning on listening when he said he was interviewing you but I found you so sincere, and interesting. I appreciate the work you do:) . . . It gave me good advice on how to proceed with my wife and children. I feel like god can get our family through this. Although it will be very tough . . .

My wife has a strong testimony. I feel bad bc we married as strong members and I feel that it's letting her down, and not giving her what she planned when we married in the temple. She is troubled w[ith] the idea of having to live polygamy in the next life tho.

**July 2014:** I am always amazed at people like you....if you want to try to discredit the L.D.S Church.....what do you have that I would want in my life... nothing....after you have gone to University why would you want to return to grade one.....it must be easy to tell people the L.D.S Church is wrong. Didn't you act in or present "The God Makers"? I watched that movie and I could disprove everything that was said.....my comment to the people like you or that showed it .....was this.....why don't you do something good with your life instead of running down something in that is so good and true.....Is your Church man made.....it sounds like it is.....I have 17 points that prove that the L.D.S Church is true.....do you know that Satan shows a few truths and the rest are lies.....

[Nothing was deleted from the message. The man inserted all the periods.]

**July 2014:** First, let me say that Mrs. Tanner . . . has given me "new light" on Mormonism and the many fallacies therein. I thank her and I want her and all of you associated with UTLM to know that I, as a black man, am sincerely grateful for your candid, open, honest exposure . . . This for me started, obviously, with the "mark of Cain" issue. As an intelligent, information seeking hound it became a personal crusade of mine to just understand the strange beliefs of Mormonism. And thanks to UTLM and other resources, I am much more equipped to help in the plight of misguided Mormons. Thanks.

**July 2014:** Just wanted to say: if two years ago someone would have told me I would 'like' something "Sandra Tanner" said on Facebook, I would have called them crazy! . . .

I listened to one or two of Dehlin's podcasts before but somehow recently had the time to listen to all of yours with him. It really opened my eyes as to how 'The Church' — both formally and informally — manages its image. Your (and your husband's) story was — totally believable! I'm so glad to be now seeking out information on my own rather than taking only what gets endorsed by the church. Cheers to you, and thank you for sharing your story!

**July 2014:** I know the church is true and Book of Mormon and the bible and Doctrine Covenants Pearl of Great Price are the fullness of the gospel. . . . You need to come back to the church Sandra. Your salvation depends on it.

**August 2014:** I have just watched a few of your youtube videos. I bought your book Mormonism Shadow or Reality back in 1978 and ate it up. I was in my last year of Bible College at the time. I commend you on your stedfastness through all these years. God Bless you!

**August 2014:** I just watched ALL of your fascinating interviews with John Dehlin of Mormon Stories. Thanks . . . They opened to me an even clearer picture of the outrageous treachery of Joseph and most of the leaders who followed him. I was struck by your simple honesty in reporting your and Jerald's courageous journey over many years and sharing your vast knowledge about the machinations of the Mormon hierarchy. Though I have not been a member of the Mormon church for many years, I still find it necessary to explore writings which reveal truths more recently uncovered. It broke my heart to leave the Mormon church, but I knew it was necessary to prevent the slow strangling of my soul.

**August 2014:** You, my friend, are sunshine. I'm early on in my journey, still going to church most Sundays but it is becoming harder to separate myself and just go to my mental happy place when I hear things that aren't quite true. I've begun to broach tough subjects with my cute hubby, but the last thing I want to do is have people think I'm filled with darkness when this new awareness in me of true Christianity is making me feel filled with light. Not sure where to go from here but I'm trying to learn all I can and be honest about things without being antagonistic and picking a fight. Tricky balance when I've always just tried to make people happy and not stressed. Thank you for your courage and research and candor. I really hope to get to meet you someday!!!

**August 2014:** I previously ordered UTLM's first seven digital (PDF) book offerings and am delighted with the quality and portability of those books most of which I also own in their original print editions.

# Early Deseret Almanacs and the Doctrine of God

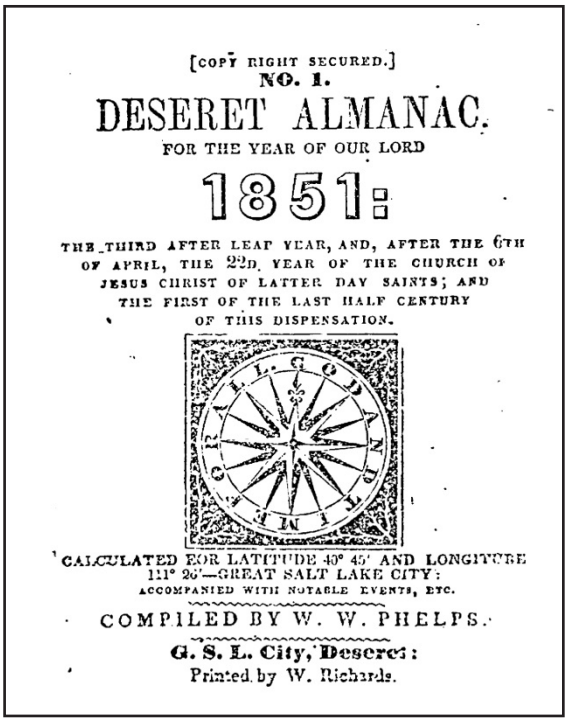
**By Kurt Van Gorden**

***Kurt Van Gorden*** is an ordained minister and directs two missions to the cults, Jude 3 Missions and the Utah Gospel Mission. He is a researcher, contributor, and editor for 16 apologetic books. (www.utahgospelmission.com)

In 2007, while co-writing *The Kingdom of the Occult* (Nelson, 2008), I was investigating whether astrology or horoscopes carried any sway among Mormon leaders.[1] That was when I discovered thirteen issues of the *Deseret Almanac* series, published from 1851-1865, which I had never seen before. They were compiled by a respected Latter-day Saint and educator, William Wines (W. W.) Phelps,[2] and printed by a member of the LDS First Presidency, Willard Richards, the Second Counselor to Brigham Young. Not to be confused with the modern LDS publication under a similar name, *Deseret News Church Almanac* (1974 to the present), the nineteenth-century publication followed the motif of New England and European almanacs, with calendric coordination of planetary movement and weather forecasting, although the *Deseret Almanac* rejected astrological (occult) forecasting.

These early publications yield a trove of new quotations, offering fresh insights of nineteenth-century Mormon doctrine, its propagation, and in some cases, its changes.[3]

This cache of documents, which seems like an odd place for doctrine, provides us with multiple references about the uniquely Mormon concepts that God the Father is a resurrected mortal man who was born on another planet, that the Father has a father god who is Jesus' grandfather god, that the Father is married to the Queen of Heaven, also known as Mother God, that the Father was married to Mary to prevent Jesus from being an illegitimate child, that many gods exist, that Satan is also a spirit son of God, that the sun, moon, and stars are inhabited by humans, that dark-skinned people (particularly Lamanites and Blacks) are under a curse, and that the Bible contains a great many blunders. Numerous curiosities are mentioned in passing, such as Adam came to Earth from the planet Kolob and brought seeds to plant the Garden of Eden and that he lived in the Americas (Missouri, in particular) for 997 years.



[COPY RIGHT SECURED.]
NO. 1.
DESERET ALMANAC.
FOR THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
1851:
THE THIRD AFTER LEAP YEAR, AND, AFTER THE 6TH OF APRIL, THE 22D YEAR OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS; AND THE FIRST OF THE LAST HALF CENTURY OF THIS DISPENSATION.
CALCULATED FOR LATITUDE 40° 45' AND LONGITUDE 111° 26'—GREAT SALT LAKE CITY:
ACCOMPANIED WITH NOTABLE EVENTS, ETC.
COMPILED BY W. W. PHELPS.
G. S. L. City, Deseret:
Printed by W. Richards.

Title Page of 1851 *Deseret Almanac*.
*All images are from the digitized collection of Kurt Van Gorden. Public Domain.*

Various repositories yielded clear copies of each edition of the *Deseret Almanac* and I was amazed at the doctrinal items crammed into the calendar pages. Eventually, I collected enough scans and photographs to make a feasible set.[4] In a search of hundreds of Mormon books, only a few acknowledged the almanac's existence. Stranger yet, none of these references gave any indication that they contain a wealth of LDS doctrinal matters, including the only scholarly analysis of them, by David J. Whittaker, in his *BYU Studies* essay. [5]

1 Walter R. Martin, Jill Martin-Rische, Kurt Van Gorden, *The Kingdom of the Occult* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008).

2 W. W. Phelps, was appointed a regent for the Deseret University, which later became the University of Utah. Cf., *Deseret Almanac, 1852*, 48. See also David J. Whittaker, who wrote that one purpose of almanacs was to educate, "Almanacs in the New England Heritage of Mormonism," *BYU Studies*, 29:4, (Fall 1989), 100, 104.

3 This is the first full publication and categorization of these quotations, although this article is based upon my former lecture "New Discoveries in Old Documents" at the 2014 Capstone Conference in Salt Lake City, April 12, 2014.

4 The LDS Church just recently put a set of the almanacs online, but their copies are copyrighted by the Intellectual Reserve, Inc. (the copyright arm of the church). All images used herein are from my digitized scans, photographs, and collections in the public domain and do not infringe in any way upon the copyright of IRI.

5 Whittaker, 89-113. Another scholarly assessment that focused on the occult genre, but avoided all of the religious statements, is D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1987), 215-216.

## Background of the Deseret Almanac

Whittaker creates an exciting atmosphere as he threads together how the earliest Mormons, from Joseph Smith's family to other New England Mormons, used and relied upon almanacs. Indeed, almanacs, in general, held a rich heritage in early America. Phelps considered his almanacs indispensable to Latter-day Saints, stating in an 1860 advertisement that "A person without an almanac is somewhat like a ship without a compass; he never knows what to do, nor when to do it." Like any good salesman, he added, "Buy Almanacs, and pay the maker" (*Almanac*, 1860, 32). Whittaker adds these almanacs to other historical works that "constitute a large body of source material for those who wish to probe the intellectual and cultural history of early Mormonism."[6] "Almanacs," he said, "were mirrors of, as much as they were windows to, early Mormons."[7]

William W. Phelps was the original periodical publisher for the Mormon Church.[8] He was one of Joseph Smith's scribes and was, uniquely, Smith's ghostwriter for certain works.[9] It is not a stretch to say that he knew the prophet's mind and was trusted by Smith to convey his thoughts. During these early years, as one Mormon historian observes, Phelps was a "Prominent Church leader 1831-38."[10] Still, he ran afoul of Smith in 1839, causing a brief excommunication, but Smith restored him through rebaptism the following year.

Phelps supported Brigham Young's prophetic succession, though he was again briefly excommunicated and rebaptized in 1847, he still followed Young and the Mormons to Salt Lake City in 1849, residing there until his death in 1872.[11] When he began publishing the almanacs, it was conducted with the counsel and approval of Brigham Young.[12] The two were so closely associated on the almanac project that Brigham Young's surviving copy of the 1854 *Deseret Almanac* is a special, leather-bound edition with the title and his name embossed in gold.[13]

There were thirteen almanacs published by Phelps between 1851 and 1865.[14] The title changed three times; initially it was the *Deseret Almanac*, covering 1851 through 1858. It changed to the *Almanac* in 1859 through 1864 and then back again to the *Deseret Almanac* in 1865. Collectively I will refer to them as the *Deseret Almanac*.

The 1851 almanacs were originally distributed and sold through the Post Office.[15] Willard Richards, who was the editor of the *Deseret News*, provided editorial space for Phelps to explain why the almanacs are important and why they lack astrological information.[16] Richards had a personal stake in promoting the almanac, so he published an announcement in the *Deseret News*, stating that it is "desirable, useful, and acceptable to the Saints of Deseret."[17] The LDS Church also profited by distributing the almanacs. Beginning in 1852, they were sold through the Church's Tithing Office. There, the almanacs could be purchased by "cash, butter, eggs, cheese, lard, tallow, and such other chicken fixins [*sic*] as may be convenient and valuable."[18]

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6 Whittaker, 109.

7 Whittaker, 216.

8 Phelps printed the first official LDS periodical, *The Evening and Morning Star*, in Independence, Missouri (1832). He suffered persecution by vigilante mobs who attacked his house and his printing office, destroying his printing press in 1833. He served on scripture compilation committees and wrote hymns that remain in the LDS hymnal.

9 Whittaker, 112, n. 42, where he references a personal letter from Phelps to Brigham Young in which Phelps claimed to pen some of Smith's work. See also Samuel Brown, "The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps," *Journal of Mormon History,* vol. 34, no. 1, (Winter 2008), 26-62.

10 Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books Co., 1985), 87.



11 Cook, 87-88. Phelps served on the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah (1841-1857), was the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and was appointed the Superintendent of Meteorological Observations (1857). Interestingly, his associate for the almanacs, Richards, was President of the Legislature Assembly while Phelps served his position.

12 Whittaker references a number of personal letters between Phelps and Young, where he sought Young's counsel and input prior to publishing them. See Whittaker, 112, n. 40, 42, 45, 46, 48, and 113, n. 50.

13 Anonymous editorial, *Improvement Era*, 1948, in *LDS Collector's Library 2005*, software edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

14 Del Van Orden, Guy L. Dorris and David J. Whittaker incorrectly state that Phelps had fourteen published almanacs. They are counting the 1866 manuscript as "published," when it never saw the press. See Van Orden, Dell. "Almanacs" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vols. 1-4 (New York: Macmillian, 1992), 1:36. Dorris, Guy L. "Almanacs" (Garr, Cannon and Cowan, eds., *Encyclopedia of LDS History*) in *LDS Collector's Library 2005*, software edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

15 *Deseret News*, (8 February 1851): 2. This is not surprising, since Richards, the printer, was also the Postmaster for the Post Office at the time.

16 *Ibid.* Also in *Deseret News*, (8 March 1851): 3.

17 *Deseret News*, (25 January 1851): 5.

18 *Deseret News*, (2 July 1852): 2.

Phelps published a renouncement of astrology in the first three almanacs, 1851-1853. His article for the *Deseret News* was rationally sound and contained reasons why astrology is untrustworthy. Later, though, in 1857, Brigham Young persuaded him that astrology was true and belonged to the holy Priesthood, so Phelps changed his mind accordingly. Both Young and Phelps rejected astrology again in 1861.[19]

## The Contents

The first few almanacs (1851-1854) contain most of the theological statements of interest to students of Mormonism. The *Improvement Era* commented on them in 1948, "Of course the *Deseret Almanacs* were published for the benefit of the Church and contained Church historical material, including the birthdates of the General Authorities."[20] Still, there will be Mormons who will object to these quotations but the implications cannot be ignored.

First, we have theological statements that are exclusively LDS. The Mormon cosmology of gods and goddesses, interplanetary kingdoms, and spirit-children, are examples of these exclusive doctrines. These speak of a restoration to a Mormon, but unusual or heretical concepts to a Christian.

Second, Mormons may attempt to brush them aside as merely Phelps's opinion. This, however, magnifies the problem rather than solving it, since Phelps relied upon input from Brigham Young and Willard Richards, both members of the First Presidency. Nobody is claiming scriptural status for the almanacs, but only succinct doctrinal statements from one who was entrusted by Smith as his ghostwriter.

Third, there were no retractions or corrections of the Mormon doctrinal statements in subsequent editions, like what there was for astrology. Astrology was renounced in 1851, then reevaluated and codified by Young in 1857, and once again renounced in 1861.[21] Yet all of the Mormon doctrinal statements remain intact without alteration by Phelps, Young, Richards, or any other LDS leader.

Fourth, the dissemination of the almanacs primarily came through the Church Tithing Office. This speaks volumes about the acceptance of the Mormon doctrinal statements contained in them. It was not shocking or surprising to Latter-day Saints when they read the doctrinal statements in the almanacs, because that is what was already being taught.

Fifth, there are three newer arguments that are offered by Mormon intellectuals that we may encounter. One of these is the "obscure source" argument. The thinking is that if the quotation can be marginalized as either an obscure source or a thoughtless, random one-time statement, then they no longer need to deal with it. This argument fails to recognize the fifteen-year historical weight of Phelps's almanacs and its distribution by the LDS Church. Their historical significance belies any attempt to marginalize them.

Another tactic is to diminish the importance of a quotation from an older LDS source based upon what some Mormon defenders call "Mormon Reformation" thinking. They believe that by assigning undesirable quotations to the reformation time frame, then they do not a have to account for its subject or its existence. Former BYU professor Robert Millet has popularized this and he attempts to draw a parallel between the Mormon Reformation and the fiery sermons preached by Jonathan Edwards and Protestant revivalists.

The fallacy of a false analogy arises in Millet's position. Jonathan Edwards and Protestant revivalists did not preach false doctrine in order to bring people to the truth. Essentially, Millet and others argue for using false doctrine, like Brigham Young's "blood atonement" sermons (their best example), to bring wayward Mormons back to restoration truth. This objection does not diminish Phelps's doctrinal statements, which were written for the purpose of dissemination under the authority and counsel of the First Presidency. The almanacs, mainly from 1851-1854, do not fit the time period of the Mormon Reformation, which is restricted by two Mormon scholars from late 1855 to mid-1857 or more narrowly between early 1856 and mid-1857.[22]

Another popular objection that we encounter is the "yawn" effect. That is, the Maxwell Institute (formerly the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon

19 This is one of Whittaker's most interesting footnotes. He wrote, "Phelps, of course, was not a farmer, and by 1857 changed his mind about astrology after a discussion with Brigham Young. After President Young told him that he believed astrology was true, Phelps wrote to Young, 'I believe I did wrong in saying I did not know what astrology was . . . so I will now say that astrology is one of the sciences belonging to the holy Priesthood perverted by vain man.'" Whittaker, 112-113, n. 50.

20 *Improvement Era*, (1948).

21 See n. 16 on previous page. In January 1857, the Utah Territorial Legislature created an office of Superintendent of Meteorological Observations and appointed Phelps as its first superintendent. Whittaker, 103. This may have fostered renewed discussion about the place of astrology in Mormon thinking, which Young then favored.

22 See Thomas G. Alexander, "Wilford Woodruff and the Mormon Reformation of 1855-57," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 25, no. 2, (Summer 1992), 25-38, and Gustive O. Larson, "The Mormon Reformation," *Utah Historical Quarterly,* vol. 26, no. 1, (January 1958), 45-63.

Studies—FARMS) fosters the idea that Evangelical Christians rehash the same old worn-out statements and quotations that have been published for decades.[23] Apparently, the reasoning is that if a quotation can be labeled as boring, with a yawn for emphasis, then it no longer needs to be answered or even acknowledged.

However, merely closing one's eyes to it does not make it go away. One reason why Evangelical Christians often repeat the same theme is simply because each time they have a new audience. By analogy, one would be remiss to condemn a school teacher as boring because he or she teaches the same lessons without considering that each year it is also a new audience. The same is true among Evangelicals who compare Christianity with competing religious truth claims.

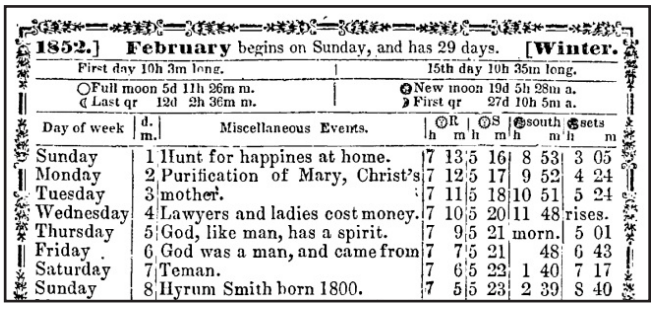
### God the Father is a resurrected mortal man who was born on another planet.

The Mormon view that God progressed from a man to an exalted Being is different from anything found in the history of Christianity. In proper theology, the nature and attributes of God are perfect and absolute. We call God immutable for good reason, since he himself declared, "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3:6).[24] God does not change with time, he does not grow older (Psalm 102:26) or learn new things (Psalm 139:1-6) or become more powerful (Matthew 19:26). He is immutable. This prevents him from becoming a lying, evil, or unholy being, which is impossible, according to (Hebrews 6:17-18).

Mormonism supersedes biblical teachings with new revelation about God. In the *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith wrote, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's . . ." (130:22). His revelatory powers were on full display when he preached one of his most famous sermons, the King Follett Discourse. In it, he told Latter-day Saints that their God began with a human body like theirs. Smith said, "I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of a being God is . . . God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man . . . God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did."[25] In this April 7, 1844, funeral sermon, Joseph Smith revealed that God the Father was a man from another earthlike planet.

The planet where God the Father was born and grew up, where he "dwelt on an earth," is not Kolob. Kolob is the planet mentioned in the Book of Abraham as "nigh unto the throne of God" (Abraham 3:9). The planet where the Father was born remained a mystery to many Mormons. If we look back to the mid-1850s, we will find that the name of the Father's birth planet was known by quite a number of Latter-day Saints. In fact, all subscribers and readers of the *Deseret Almanac* knew about it. Phelps made the following statements on the daily calendar about Teman being the planet where God the Father was born, reared, and worshiped a god who preceded him. In poetic form, he wrote,

> God, like man, has a spirit,
> God was a man and came from Teman.
> (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 7).



1852.] **February** begins on Sunday, and has 29 days. [**Winter.**

First day 10h 3m long. | 15th day 10h 35m long.

○Full moon 5d 11h 26m m. | ●New moon 19d 5h 28m a.
☾Last qr 12d 2h 36m m. | ☽First qr 27d 10h 5m a.

| Day of week | d. m. | Miscellaneous Events. | ☉R h | m | ☉S h | m | ☽south h | m | ☽sets h | m |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sunday | 1 | Hunt for happines at home. | 7 | 13 | 5 | 16 | 8 | 53 | 3 | 05 |
| Monday | 2 | Purification of Mary, Christ's | 7 | 12 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 52 | 4 | 24 |
| Tuesday | 3 | mother. | 7 | 11 | 5 | 18 | 10 | 51 | 5 | 24 |
| Wednesday | 4 | Lawyers and ladies cost money. | 7 | 10 | 5 | 20 | 11 | 48 | rises. | |
| Thursday | 5 | God, like man, has a spirit. | 7 | 9 | 5 | 21 | morn. | | 5 | 01 |
| Friday | 6 | God was a man, and came from | 7 | 7 | 5 | 21 | | 48 | 6 | 43 |
| Saturday | 7 | Teman. | 7 | 6 | 5 | 22 | 1 | 40 | 7 | 17 |
| Sunday | 8 | Hyrum Smith born 1800. | 7 | 5 | 5 | 23 | 2 | 39 | 8 | 40 |

*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, page 7 shows how "filler" appears in the almanacs.

The following two statements are in the same edition where Teman is mentioned:

> OUR FATHER IN THE HEAVENS.
> . . . Then our Father in his youth,
> Came from Teman full of truth . . .
> (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 8)

> PHILOSOPHY OF THE HEAVENS.
> . . . Every world "rolls on its wings," and is controlled by a God . . .
> —and, as quick as sight or thought, a look, a sign, or a hint to God in Kolob, Teman, or any glorified kingdom, brings assistance, that earth and hell cannot demonstrate.
> (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 37)

Phelps wrote that preexistent spirit babies lived on Kolob. Teman, though, is where God keeps records.

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23 For more information about these and other arguments, see my review of *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack Latter-day Saints* (Aspen, 1998) in the *Christian Research Journal*, 1999, volume 21, no. 4; and Matthew A. Paulson, *Breaking the Mormon Code: A Critique of Mormon Scholarship* (Livermore, CA: Wingspan Press, 2006).

24 The immutability (changelessness) of God is itself a divine attribute. It is based upon both observations of his nature in Scripture and his self-declaration. The word "immutable" is used twice in Hebrews 6:17-18, to declare God's absoluteness in his decrees and nature. God, in Malachi 3:6 states it strongly, "I change not," and Hebrews 1:10-12 tells us that He remains the same.

25 Joseph Smith—*The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (7 vols.) 6:305-306.

Call, O call me back to Kolob,
When the resurrection's pass'd!
For I love my Father's garden—
Where the first will be the last:—
(*Deseret Almanac*, 1854, 6)

In his mansion with my mother
As I sat upon her knee!—
Sacred records kept in "Teman,"
Till the flesh has conquered sin,—
By the Priesthood, faith and virtue.
Then I'll know them all again!
(*Deseret Almanac*, 1854, 8)

Brigham Young also taught that the Father came from Teman. In a sermon, found in the *Journal of Discourses*, Young used a verse from Habakkuk as his proof that God is a man:

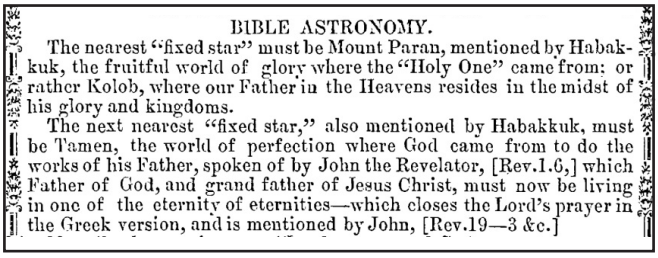
> Our former religious traditions has taught us that our Father in heaven has no tabernacle, that his center is everywhere and his circumference nowhere. Yet we read that "*God came from Teman*, and the Holy One from Mount Paran." . . . The idea that the Lord our God is not a personage of tabernacle is entirely a mistaken notion. He was once a man. (9:286)

A search of Mormon books on DVD databases produces little information about the Father's birth planet, but it seemed popular in the nineteenth century. The verse that Young uses from Habakkuk has nothing to do with a star or planet. The verse speaks of Teman as a place to the south of Israel. Biblical commentaries have identified Teman as Africa. It began as an individual's name in the Old Testament (Genesis 36:11). His posterity built dwelling places to the south of Israel, which was later called Teman. It has nothing to do with a fixed star and certainly nothing to do with a planet where the Father was born.

## God the Father had a Father God before him, who is Jesus' grandfather god.

In the article below, Phelps synthesized the Book of Abraham with Smith's teaching about the Father's god, who is Jesus' grandfather god. This is based upon a false reading of Habakkuk 3:3.

> BIBLE ASTRONOMY.
>
> The nearest "fixed star" must be Mount Paran, mentioned by Habakkuk, the fruitful world of glory where the "Holy One" came from; or rather Kolob, where our Father in the Heavens resides in the midst of his glory and kingdoms.
>
> The next nearest "fixed star," also mentioned by Habakkuk, must be Teman, the world of perfection where God came from to do the works of his Father, spoken of by John the Revelator, [Rev. 1.6,] which Father of God, and the grandfather of Jesus Christ, must now be living, is one of the eternity of eternities—which closes the Lord's prayer in the Greek version, and is mentioned by John [Rev. 19—3, &c.]
>
> If, as Paul says, there are "Lords many, and Gods many," and each has the control of a renewed or resurrected world, which continually shines as a "fixed star;" Heaven must be a large blessed universe of intelligent worlds. What say the learned D.D's. on this head? Paul ascended to the third Heaven, and heard things unlawful to utter then,—but all things are to be revealed in the last days.—Open the windows of Heaven. (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 5)



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*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, page 5. Jesus' grandfather god.

Joseph Smith claimed that God the Father had a Father when he was on his earthlike planet. Smith used Revelation 1:6 (*And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;*) to support his idea, which Phelps repeated. However, Smith misread the King James Version in Revelation 1:6 and did not check his rendering of it against the Greek New Testament. Smith and Phelps are reading it as two persons, "God *and his* Father," whereas the Greek New Testament text has one definite article, indicating one person, which is properly translated as "His God and Father."[26]

Joseph Smith contradicts his earlier rendering with his "Joseph Smith Translation" on Revelation 1:6. When he had the opportunity to call attention to the two gods that he preached in 1844, from Rev. 1:6, he instead translated it as one God: "And hath made us kings and priest unto God, his Father: to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Smith removed the word "and," making both "God" and "Father" descriptions of one person.

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26 See Jameson Fausset, *Brown Bible Commentary*, at reference cited, Ages Software edition (Albany, OR: 1997). See also A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the Greek New Testament*, at reference cited, Ages Software edition, (Albany, OR: 1997), where he states, "Unto his God and Father (tōi theōi kai patri autou). Dative case and autou (Christ) applies to both theōi and patri. Jesus spoke of the Father as his God (Mat 27:46; Joh 20:17) and Paul uses like language (Eph 1:17), as does Peter (1Pe 1:3).

**God the Father is married to a celestial goddess wife, the Queen of Heaven, also known as Mother God in Mormonism.**

The Mother God doctrine in Mormonism is an elusive one. Only in recent years have we seen more sincere, open and frank discussions about the Father's heavenly wife among Mormons. Most quotations about her, though few, were indirect and were implied with vague terms, like "heavenly parents." The most popular and perhaps boldest quotation is the third stanza of the 160-year-old hymn, "O My Father," penned by Eliza Snow in October 1845, and it remains in the Mormon hymnal today:

> In the heavens are parents single?
> No; the thought makes reason stare!
> Truth is reason, truth eternal
> Tells me I've a mother there.[27]

Phelps, whose doctrinal input is the core of our study, wrote a hymn about Mother God a year ahead of Snow, he indirectly wrote of her in the *Times and Seasons*, but by the end of 1844, he was calling her the Father's partner, "Mother, the Queen," in a hymn sung during the dedication of the Nauvoo Seventies Hall, in December 1844:[28]

> Come to me; here's the myst'ry that man hath not seen:
> Here's our Father in heaven, and Mother, the Queen,
> Here are worlds that have been, and the worlds yet to be:
> Here's eternity,—endless; amen: Come to me.[29]

Still, aside from Snow's popular hymn, there are two often-quoted General Authorities who published books that included Mother God up to the mid-1900s, Apostle James E. Talmage, in 1901, and Milton Hunter, a member of the First Council of Seventy, in 1945.

Talmage, in his exposition of the LDS Articles of Faith, wrote, "Neither of the sexes is complete in itself as a counterpart of Deity. We are expressly told that God is the Father of spirits, and to apprehend the literalness of this solemn truth we must know that a mother of spirits is an existent personality."[30]

Hunter wrote, "The stupendous truth of the existence of a Heavenly Mother, as well as a Heavenly Father, became established facts in Mormon theology."[31] In later years, he added, "Thus males were created in the image and likeness of God the Eternal Father while the females were formed in the image and likeness of God their Eternal Mother."[32] Other than that, the discussions were privileged and infrequent, intended for the faithful Saints at LDS Conferences or faithful readers of *Improvement Era* and *Ensign*.

It was not until the more open years in the last half of the twentieth century that we find candid references to Mother God, especially in topical references, like the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992) and Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* (1966), where each devoted an entry to her. By the twenty-first century, we find Mormon publications venturing into the discussion along with books by Mormon women of a feminist flair.[33] None are quite as authoritative as the official website of the LDS Church, where an essay directly referenced her in 2014.[34] Earlier published references have been scant to say the best of them. The exception is the *Deseret Almanac* of the mid-1850s, which provide six published and circulated direct quotations about her.

There are three views of "the Queen of Heaven" among Mormon writers. One is in the doctrinal sense, where the Queen of Heaven is Mother God. The other two are condemned as pagan by Mormons, both in Jeremiah's day, where the people worshiped the Queen of Heaven, and in the Christian era, where Catholics venerate Mary as the Queen of Heaven. Returning to the former, the sense in which Mormons believe that it describes Mother God, this originated in Nauvoo, in 1844, with Phelps' *Times and Seasons* hymn and the following article.

27 Originally under the title "My Father in Heaven," it was published in the Mormon periodical, *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 November 1845): 1039, and it entered the Mormon hymnal in 1851. So beloved is her hymn that it has been quoted in a few LDS Conference speeches by General Authorities as a reference. Other General Authorities have quoted her in their books when discussing Mother God in a more genteel manner, as "heavenly parents."

28 The less direct reference by Phelps states, "The woman hid for good, When she, as queen of heaven, In gold of Ophir stood," in *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 February 1844): 431.

29 W. W. Phelps, "A Voice From the Prophet. 'Come to Me,'" in *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 January 1845): 783.

30 James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1901), 401.

31 Milton R. Hunter, *Gospel Through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1945), 104.

32 Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1951), 114.

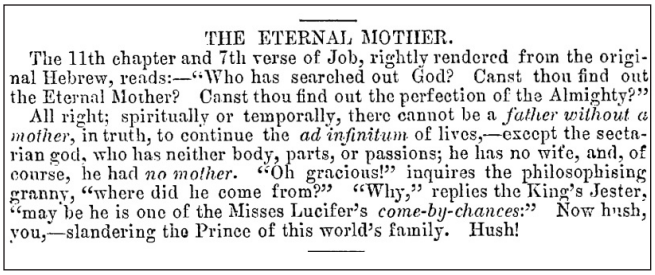
33 For thorough study of nearly 600 direct and indirect references to Mother God, see David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "A Mother There: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven" in *BYU Studies* (50:1 Winter 2011), 71-97; and Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

34 "Becoming like God," accessed March 2014, at https://www.lds.org/topics/becoming-like-god?lang=eng.

A letter by William Smith, one of Joseph Smith's brothers, dated November 10, 1844, was published in the *Times and Seasons* by the editor, John Taylor, an Apostle at the time. W. W. Phelps was assigned to answer it, which he did on December 25, 1844. In his answer, we find Mother God referred to twice as the Queen of Heaven in an official LDS periodical.[35] These two periodicals precede the *Deseret Almanac* by ten years.

Phelps expanded on this idea in an 1852 Deseret Almanac article entitled, "The Eternal Mother." Below is the first article solely devoted to Mother God in Mormonism.

> THE ETERNAL MOTHER.
>
> The 11th chapter and 7th verse of Job, rightly rendered from the original Hebrew, reads:—"Who has searched out God? Canst thou find out the Eternal Mother? Canst thou find out the perfection of the Almighty?"
>
> All right; spiritually or temporally, there cannot be *a father without a mother*, in truth, to continue the *ad infinitum* of lives,—except the sectarian god, who has neither body, parts, or passions; he has no wife, and, of course, he had no mother. "Oh gracious!" inquires the philosophising [*sic*] granny, "where did he come from?" "Why," replies the King's Jester, "maybe he is one of the Misses Lucifer"s *come-by-chances*:" Now hush, you,—slandering the Prince of this world's family. Hush! (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 32)



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*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, page 32.

Notice here that Phelps found it irresistible to take shots at the biblical God because we, as Christians, do not teach that the Father has a body, a wife, and a mother. He then ridiculed Christianity as an entity by calling us Lucifer's family, "the Prince of this world's family." In this article, he agrees with Joseph Smith that the Father had a Father, but he goes further by opening up a succession of Mother Gods; the Father had a Mother too.

Prior to this, in the 1851 issue, he asked "Who is the Queen of Heaven?" His answer followed, "The King's wife" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1851, 9). Then in the calendar "fillers" for the following year, he added, "there are Kings, there are Queens . . . The Queen of heaven hath a husband" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 10, 13). We further find a blessing by the Heavenly Parents upon their Son, "the blessing of the King and Queen of heaven, upon their Son, before he came down, upon his mission . . ." *(Deseret Almanac*, 1854, 24). Phelps, who adapted well to prose and poetry, wrote a short blurb about "The Epitome of Truth." In it, he includes, among other things, "The Virtues of the Queens of Heaven" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1855, 20).

No current Mormon writer credits Phelps with the origin of his 1852 statement, "There cannot be a father without a mother," yet it has been often quoted in Mormon speeches and was included in Bruce R. McConkie's *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:159.

## Polytheism—the belief that many gods exist and man can become a god.

One does not have to worship multiple gods in order to be a polytheist. All one has to do is recognize the existence of more than one god and, by definition, one is a *poly*-theist. Everything we have seen so far, the Father's Father, the Father's Mother, the Father's wife, and the heavenly Kings and Queens, speak of polytheism, which doctrine is rejected by the Bible. Jews, and therefore Christians, are strictly monotheists. Both the Old and New Testaments attest to this. If one God exists without compromising the terms, then everything discussed so far in Mormonism falls woefully short of the truth. Consider these verses:

> Know therefore this day, and consider *it* in thine heart, that the LORD he *is* God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: *there is* none else. (Deuteronomy 4:39)
>
> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD. (Deuteronomy 6:4)
>
> Ye *are* my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. (Isaiah 43:10)
>
> Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it*? Ye *are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any*. (Isaiah 44:8)

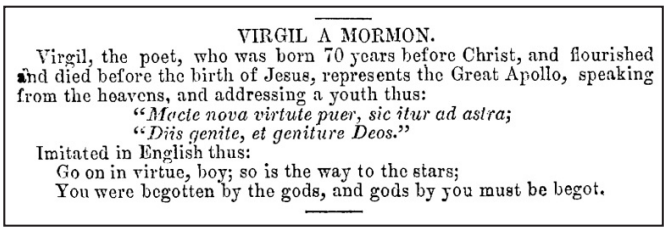
35 Phelps wrote, "Thy father is God, thy mother is the Queen of heaven, and so thy whole history, from eternity to eternity, is the laws, ordinances and truth of the 'Gods' embracing the simple plan of salvation . . . In fact the Jews thought so much of this coronation among Gods and Goddesses; Kings and Queens of heaven, that they broke over all restraints and actually began to worship the 'Queen of heaven,' according to Jeremiah." *Times and Seasons*, vol 5 (1 January 1845): 758. Note here that he bifurcates between what he sees as the true Queen and the false worship of her.

> And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. (Mark 12:29)

> Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (James 2:19)

Whether one calls it polytheism or plural gods, it is the same. We begin with another short article by Phelps in which he not only promotes polytheism, but he claims that Virgil was a Mormon!

> VIRGIL A MORMON.
>
> Virgil, the poet, who was born 70 years before Christ, and flourished and died before the birth of Jesus, represents the Great Apollo, speaking from the heavens, and addressing a youth thus:
>
> *"Macie nova virtute puer, sic itur ad astra;*
> *"Diis genite, et geniture Deos."*
>
> Imitated in English thus:
>
> Go on in virtue, boy;
> so is the way to the stars;
> You were begotten by the gods,
> and gods by you must be begot.
>
> (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 32)



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Go on in virtue, boy; so is the way to the stars;
You were begotten by the gods, and gods by you must be begot.

*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, page 32.

We see that Phelps enjoys the idea that Virgil's polytheism parallels his, including gods begetting humans and humans begetting gods. The myriad of begotten gods in Mormonism is reflected in the *Deseret Almanac*, in 1852, where it is stated that gods control the planets, "as Paul says, there are "Lords many, and Gods many," and each has the control of a renewed or resurrected world, which continually shines as a "fixed star" (1852, 6).

This is one of the most misapplied Bible verses used by Mormons, 1 Corinthians 8:5b, "as there be gods many, and lords many." Paul is using it as an argument against polytheism and he completes his argument for monotheism in verse 6, "But to us there is but one God. . . ." Yet the Latter-day Saints often quote it, out of context, in support of polytheism.

The following quotations from the almanacs leave no doubt that polytheism is embraced:

> Eternity enlarges the scope of universal pleasure amid the glory of Gods. (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 47).

> Salvation belongs to saved beings—but exaltation belongs to the Gods. (*Deseret Almanac*, 1853, 7)

> Light is as the great ocean of the Gods, for the commerce of the heavens, without attraction or gravity. (*Deseret Almanac*, 1853, 13)

> Economy in labor, economy in land, economy in living, economy in salvation, economy in heaven, and economy with God, constitute one portion of glory, that is as infinite and eternal and perpetually progressive, as the perfections of the Gods, which increase with the ceaseless rounds of eternities. (*Deseret Almanac*, 1854, 12)

> The Book of Abraham as translated by Joseph Smith, gives seven thousand years for the creation by the Gods. (*Almanac*, 1860, 22)

> Zion Is the house of the Gods, said Obadiah. (*Almanac*, 1864, 26)

## Preexistent spirit-children and Mary's other husband, God.

In Mormonism, the Father was once a mortal and evidently retains procreative powers in his resurrected, exalted state. He procreates children in heaven with his wife, among whom Jesus was the firstborn and Lucifer was the second (cf. Book of Moses 1:13), and everyone else followed. The term "sired" is used frequently in Mormonism to describe the sexual procreative act of the Father begetting spirit children in heaven and siring the body of Jesus on earth. Of Jesus' preexistence, Phelps wrote, "…he had a Father and Mother in heaven" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1854, 22).

In a search of the word *sired*, as used in a database of Mormon books, it is used seven times to represent God the Father begetting us through his goddess wife, as preexistent spirit children and twice of him siring the preexistent Jesus.[36] The word *sired* is used nineteen times to describe the Father siring the body of Jesus on earth through Mary, which is why two early Mormons, Brigham Young and Orson Pratt, legitimized it by claiming that the Father was married to Mary, as her other husband. Now we have another source stating the same thing, from the *Deseret Almanac*. This was not a hidden doctrine in the 1850s. It was published widely through *The Seer*, by Pratt, Young's sermons (*Journal of Discourses*), and the *Deseret Almanac*, by Phelps.

Phelps stated, "God was married, or how could he beget his Son Jesus Christ lawfully, and do the works of his father?" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1853, 7). In other words, had the Father not been married to Mary, then their child Jesus would have been illegitimate. This accords

36 Cf., *LDS Collectors Library 2005* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2005).

perfectly with what Young and Pratt said on the same subject, but Phelps and the *Deseret Almanac* would have been first to publish it, which makes Apostle Pratt and Prophet Young following his lead.[37]

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wednesday | 23 | God was married, or how could | 6 | 45 | 5 | 43 | 6 | 24 |
| Thursday | 24 | he beget his Son Jesus Christ | 6 | 44 | 5 | 44 | 7 | 13 |
| Friday | 25 | lawfully, and do the works of | 6 | 42 | 5 | 45 | 8 | 1 |
| Saturday | 26 | his father? | 6 | 41 | 5 | 46 | 9 | 13 |

*Deseret Almanac*, 1853, page 7.

The Father sired all of the preexistent spirit children in heaven with his goddess wife. The Mormon plan of eternal increase and progression necessitates that the spirits are sent to the earth for probation. Once here, depending upon their obedience to the laws and covenants of the gospel, they can resurrect as potential gods and continue the cycle. In reference to this heavenly act of siring, the almanacs refer to it as "breeding" in the "celestial marriage bed." Phelps wrote, "And the Saints, all sinless, royal Infant spirits breed—Blessing thus, as Michael did, The celestial marriage bed; Holy worlds!—progression is eternal: so decreed." (*Almanac*, 1862, 32).

Good old world! you will be so, when you are new, indeed!
And the Saints, all sinless, royal infant spirits breed—
Blessing thus, as Michael did,
The celestial marriage bed;
Holy worlds!—progression is eternal: so decreed.

*Deseret Almanac*, 1862, page 32.

Phelps spoke again of the preexistence, "To give a full history of Spirits, begotten, raised, educated, and destinated, in the celestial world, would require the 'memory' and 'experience' we left there when we chose to take our mission for this world" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1854, 22). He also mentioned the preexistence of Lucifer as a spirit child of God. Satan's birth was part of our lost memory that he referred to, "Nobody on earth knows Satan's nativity" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 27). To claim that Satan has a nativity is consistent with the Book of Moses 5:13.

37 Orson Pratt wrote, "The Father and Mother of Jesus, according to the flesh, must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and Wife; hence the Virgin Mary must have been, for the time being, the lawful wife of God the Father…Inasmuch as God was the first husband to her, it may be that He only gave her to be the wife of Joseph while in this mortal state," ("Celestial Marriage," in *The Seer*, vol. 1, no. 10 (October 1853), 158. Young made his declaration August 19, 1866, "The man Joseph, the husband of Mary, did not, that we know of, have more than one wife, but Mary the wife of Joseph had another husband. On this account infidels have called the Savior a bastard." (*Journal of Discourses*, 11:268). Young and Pratt use both arguments that Phelps used, the Father was Mary's husband to prevent Jesus from being illegitimate.

## Adam and the Garden of Eden in Missouri.

In the preexistence, according to some Mormon writers, Adam (some say all of us) helped to make the earth. It is taught among the Mormons that the earth is a copy of another planet. Everything was brought here in seed form and planted, often referred to as first spiritual then temporal. The *Deseret Almanac* clarifies it, "Who is the 'oldest inhabitant?' Adam, according to the Bible. Where did Adam get his seed for the garden of Eden? Brought it from his father's garden. Earthly things are pattern'd after heavenly" (1853, 8).

Adam planted seeds in the earth, particularly in the Garden of Eden that was located in today's Missouri, and he lived there for nearly 1,000 years. The council of Gods sent Adam to the earth, "English bids fair, to become the great, last, and best, till the Lord restores a 'pure language,' even the one that Adam brought from Kolob, or the celestial garden, when he came to this globe and gave names to all,—according to the council of the Gods in the 'elder world'" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1853, 14). Phelps also stated, "Adam, in Adam-ondi-Ahman [Missouri], held a blessing meeting, and blessed his children—aged 997 years, three years previous to his death" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, 38).

In this article, Phelps is praising the strengths of the United States in relationship to the Bible. He states that Adam lived in what is now the United States, as did Enoch, and Noah, where he also built his ark. He wrote:

> The land where the "United States" once flourished as a free government for the good of mankind, was a "choice land" beyond the common knowledge of the world. Upon that land was planted the Garden of Eden, before Satan brought sin along to try virtue. Upon that land, Adam offered sacrifice, repented, was baptized, received the gift of the Holy Ghost, raised a large family by Eve. Upon that land, Enoch built up Zion, which was translated to heaven. Upon that land, Noah built the Ark, which saved some of all flesh for the present world. (*Almanac*, 1862, 30)

## Condemnation of the Bible.

The eighth Article of Faith in the LDS Church states, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Notice that doubt is cast only upon the Bible, but not upon the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon fostered skepticism about the Bible in several places, so it is no wonder that Mormons question the Bible.[38] The *Almanac* states it with these words:

38 Cf., 1 Nephi 29:3-6; 29:10.

TRANSLATORS' BLUNDERS.

The Bible contains a great many blunders which causes the unlearned to doubt the divine authority of revelation. The Book of Mormon, the Saints true interpreter, says, all the most plain and precious parts of Scripture were taken away—by the translators. (*Almanac*, 1861, 22)

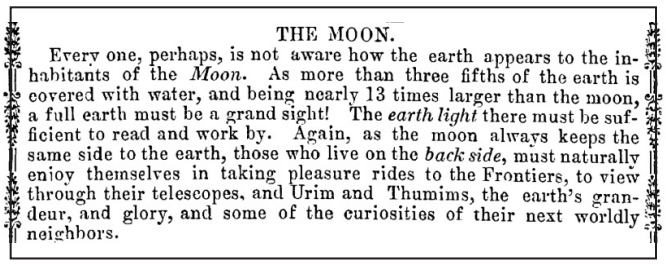
## People on the sun, moon, and stars.

There have been statements made from the time of Joseph Smith to Brigham Young, claiming that there were inhabitants of the moon and the sun. Young said, "Who can tell us of the inhabitants of this little planet that shines of an evening, called the moon?. . . when you inquire about the inhabitants of that sphere you find that the most learned are as ignorant in regard to them as the ignorant of their fellows. So it is in regard to the inhabitants of the sun. Do you think it is inhabited? I rather think it is. Do you think there is any life there? No question of it; it was not made in vain."[39]

This was not an uncommon thought in the nineteenth century. As a church publication, though, we would not expect such speculation. The *Deseret Almanac* references people on the sun, "Now who lives in the sun? Now Sects! Wonder! Philosophers stare!" (1852, 13). The almanac had even more to say about the inhabitants of the moon, who view the earth through their telescopes and read by the light of the earth:

THE MOON.

Every one, perhaps, is not aware how the earth appears to the inhabitants of the *Moon*. As more than three fifths of the earth is covered with water, and being nearly 13 times larger than the moon, a full earth must be a grand sight! The *earth light* there must be sufficient to read and work by. Again, as the moon always keeps the same side to the earth, those who live on the *back side*, must naturally enjoy themselves in taking pleasure rides to the Frontiers, to view through their telescopes, and Urim and Thumims, the earth's grandeur, and glory, and some of the curiosities of their next worldly neighbors.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*Deseret Almanac*, 1852, page 23.

39 *Journal of Discourses*, 13:271.



Aside from our neighboring planets in this solar system, the distant stars are also inhabited, "The stars are worlds of people" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1853, 5). Phelps also taught the "Priesthood" presides "over the planets and stars, and their beings, forever . . . to the millions of worlds and their people, forever" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1851, 3).

## Racist statements about Indians and Blacks.

The Book of Mormon presents the world with the idea that sinfulness directly influences skin tone. The Book of Mormon divides people into two classes, white and dark. It classifies one group of people as "white, exceedingly fair, and delightsome," the Nephites (2 Nephi 5:21). The other group, "a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations," who are the Lamanites (1 Nephi 12:23). These people were cursed by God with dark skin, "the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them (2 Nephi 5:21).

Joseph Smith added the same concept to the Book of Moses, with a racist curse upon Blacks, "and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people . . . the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them" (Book of Moses 7:8, 22).

The almanacs also carried the racist idea that Lamanites and Blacks are cursed with dark skin, "What Makes the difference in color among men? Transgressions of crime" (*Deseret Almanac*, 1851, 9). And, Phelps published this poem at the brink of the Civil War, in 1860:

> And then, alas! Ham's Canaan,
> So dark—must dig (ah me !)
> The "'servants' servant," be
> The under stock of ages
> —Still cursed, and black.
> (*Almanac*, 1860, 28)

## Conclusion:

There was a wealth of information to mine from these almanacs that have rarely been cited in any works. The usefulness of these quotations is not so much a question of their authority to speak for the LDS Church, though they were distributed through the Tithing Office, but they show us that some of the teachings that circulated in the mid-1800s were not isolated statements or random thoughts. They were teachings that were left in a record that sheds light upon the Mormon thinking and culture of the day.

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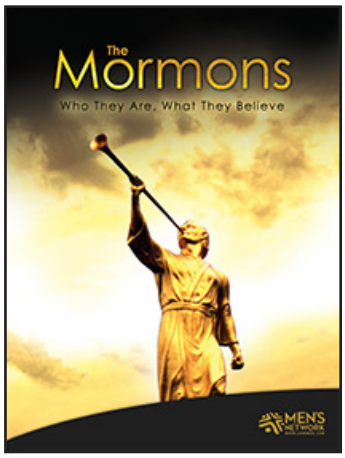


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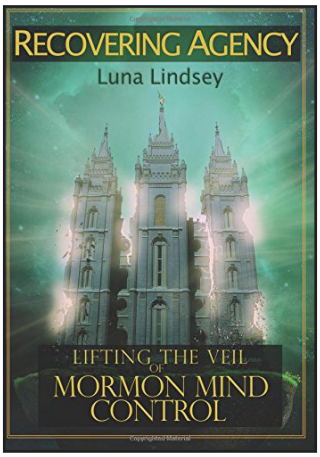


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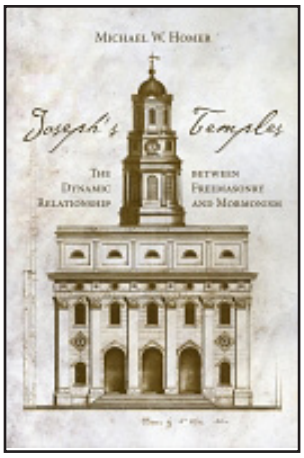


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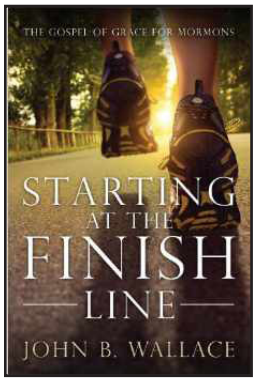


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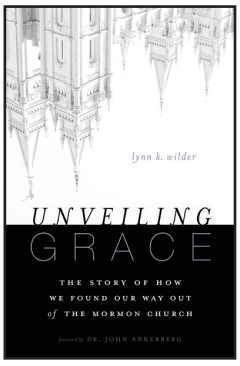


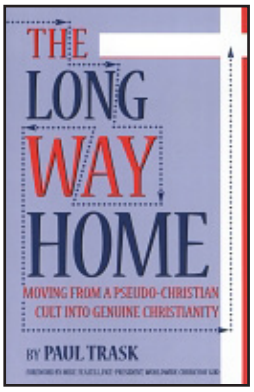


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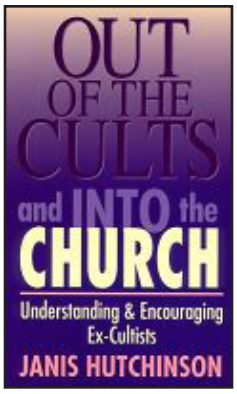

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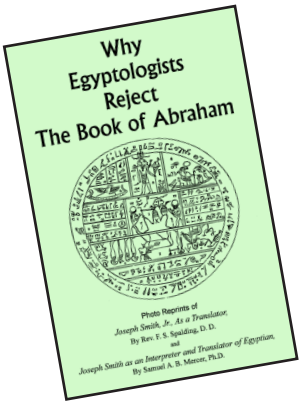


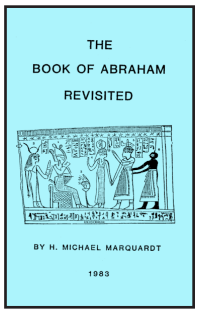


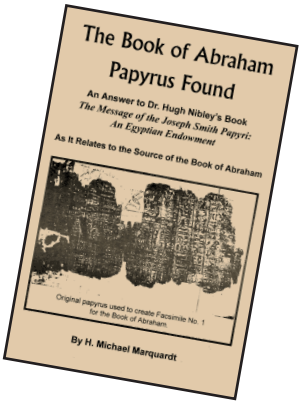


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