

The Book of Abraham and the Bible

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It is well known and beyond reasonable dispute that the Book of Abraham is not in any meaningful sense a translation of any of the extant fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Criticisms of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham usually focus on this point. In this article, the authenticity of the Book of Abraham will be considered from another perspective. What does the Book of Abraham say and how does it compare with the Bible? More specifically, this article will address the following issues:

- the relationship between Book of Abraham chapters 2, 4, and 5, and the Book of Genesis
- the teaching of the Book of Abraham and how it compares to the teaching of the Bible
- how the evidence challenging the authenticity of the Book of Abraham compares to the evidence pertaining to the authenticity of the Bible

As a foundation for this study, let's summarize the contents of the five chapters of the Book of Abraham:

- **Chapter 1:** Abraham's people, including his own father Terah, tried to have Abraham killed on an altar by the priest of Pharaoh, but God's angel delivered Abraham. The text refers specifically to the vignette known in the Book of Abraham as Facsimile 1.
- **Chapter 2:** An account parallel to but somewhat longer than Genesis 11:28-12:13, the early part of the Abraham narrative. God's promise of blessing to Abraham's seed is explained as involving the gospel and the priesthood. It was God's idea for Abraham to lie to the Egyptians about Sarai being his wife.
- **Chapter 3:** Abraham uses "the Urim and Thummim" to learn about astronomy, the preexistent spirits of the human race, and God's plan for those spirits. The star nearest God's throne is Kolob. All spirits are eternal but vary from one another in intelligence, with the Lord being the supremely intelligent being. Abraham and other noble spirits helped to make the earth as a testing ground for our preexistent spirits. Facsimiles 2 and 3 are interpreted in the Book of Abraham as pertaining to the subject matter of this chapter.
- **Chapter 4:** Alternate version of Genesis 1, the narrative of the creation of the universe, living things, and man. The Gods went down from heaven and organized and formed the heavens and the earth. "They (the Gods)" did all of the works of creation, including making man in Their image. The creation events are said to have taken place over a period of six "times" of unstated duration.
- **Chapter 5:** Alternate version of Genesis 2, the narrative of the creation of the first man and woman. Since human spirits preexisted before creation, the Gods took the spirit of Adam "and put it into him." God formed and brought the animals to Adam after, not before, the making of the first woman.

The Book of Abraham and the Book of Genesis

As the above summary shows, three of the five chapters of the Book of Abraham closely parallel Genesis chapters 1-2 and sixteen verses at the beginning of the Abraham narrative in Genesis (11:28-12:13).¹ An obvious and important question is the relationship, if any, between the Book of Abraham and the Book of Genesis. Two starkly contrasting answers are possible:

1. The Book of Abraham is an ancient, long-lost precursor to the Book of Genesis; that is, it was a source used by the ancient author of Genesis (traditionally identified as Moses).
2. The Book of Abraham is a modern text based on the Book of Genesis; that is, Genesis was a source used by the modern author of the Book of Abraham (i.e., Joseph Smith).

Which of these two views best explains the literary evidence of the two texts? The place to begin to answer this question is a close comparison of the two books, especially in those chapters of the Book of Abraham that everyone agrees display close parallels to the Book of Genesis. Keep in mind the differences between the translations of Genesis in the KJV and (on the assumption of its authenticity) of the Book of Abraham by Joseph Smith (see table below).

	Book of Abraham (claimed)	Genesis (KJV)
First written	19th-18th cent. BC	15th cent. BC or later
Original language	Egyptian	Hebrew
Nature of text	autobiographical	historical narrative
Earliest copy (claimed/known)	19th-18th or 3rd-1st cent. BC	1st cent. BC
Number manuscripts consulted	One	Six or more
Other language versions	None	Greek, Latin
Earlier English versions	None	Several
Date of translation	1835-42	1611
Translators	American prophet	British biblical scholars

The two books, assuming the authenticity of both, were written several centuries apart in different languages by different men as different types of narratives. One was then copied for more than a millennium in its original language; the other, if genuine, must also have been copied for more than a millennium in its language (although, as has been explained earlier, Joseph Smith identified the papyrus as the original that was written by Abraham in his own day). Both of those different languages went through their own massive changes during those many centuries. One was translated into many other languages including two that directly influenced the modern translators; the other has no other translations attested for it. One had already been translated several times into English (by Wycliffe, Tyndale, et. al.); the other had never even been seen before by English-speaking people. Both were translated in modern times two centuries apart on different continents (factors that would result in significant changes in idiom and style) by different men working under different conditions and using very different methods.

¹ For a complete comparison of the two books side by side, see Robert M. Bowman Jr., “The Book of Abraham and the Book of Genesis” (Cedar Springs, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 2017).

Close Parallel Wording of the Two Books

Given all of these differences, surely the wording of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Abraham, even in places where the subject matter was the same as in Genesis, should be very different from the wording of the KJV of Genesis. Yet we find there are passages in the two books that parallel each other very closely, in some cases with no verbal differences whatsoever. Here is a simple example from early in Abraham 2, with differences shown in bold type:

Genesis 12:1 KJV	Abraham 2:3
Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee:	Now the Lord had said unto me : Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

Here is a thirty-word verse in Genesis that appears verbatim in the Book of Abraham, with only the word *me* added and the sentence punctuated differently to make Abraham 2:3 read as an autobiographical statement by Abraham himself. Recent editions use *Abraham* instead of *Abram* in this verse, but in the handwritten manuscripts and the first printed edition of the Book of Abraham the name *Abram* is actually the one used. Recent editions at Abraham 2:3 also modernize the spelling of *shew* to *show*, but again the original wording used the spelling *shew*.

Next is a longer example, also from Abraham 2:

Genesis 12:8-13 (KJV)	Abraham 2:20b-25
<p>8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, <i>having</i> Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.</p> <p>9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.</p> <p>10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine <i>was</i> grievous in the land.</p> <p>11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:</p> <p>12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife:</p>	<p>20 ...and removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched my tent there, Bethel on the West, and Hai on the East; and there I built another altar unto the Lord, and called again upon the name of the Lord.</p> <p>21 And I, Abraham, journeyed, going on still towards the South; and there was a continuation of a famine in the Land; and I Abraham concluded to go down into Egypt, to sojourn there, for the famine became very grievous.</p> <p>22 And it came to pass when I was come near to enter into Egypt, the Lord said unto me: Behold, Sarai, thy wife, is a very fair woman to look upon;</p> <p>23 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see her, they will say—She is his wife;</p>

and they will kill me , but they will save thee alive.	and they will kill you , but they will save her alive; therefore see that ye do on this wise: 24 Let her say unto the Egyptians, she is thy sister, and thy soul shall live. 25 And it came to pass that I, Abraham, told Sarai, my wife, all that the Lord had said unto me; therefore say unto them , I pray thee, thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee.
13 Say, I pray thee, thou <i>art</i> my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.	say unto them , I pray thee, thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee.

If we exclude the unit of 44 words in Abraham 2:23b-25a with no parallel at all in Genesis, these two passages are closely parallel except for minor verbal differences. Eight pronouns in the Genesis passage are changed to reflect the fact that in the Book of Abraham the writer is supposed to be Abraham himself. One word is modernized (from “buiilded” to “built”). The only significant difference in these parallel verses is that the words “now, I know that thou art” in Genesis are omitted and the words “the Lord” are added in the Book of Abraham, according to which these words were spoken by the Lord to Abraham about Sarai. The other changes are extremely superficial, such as changing “having” to “there,” changing “went” to “concluded to go” and “was” to “became,” adding “very” twice, and omitting “that” twice.

All of the differences between the two passages are easily explicable on the assumption that Joseph Smith was editing the Genesis text. What is not otherwise easily explicable is why the two passages should be so similar in wording, given that they are supposed to be translations by different men in different centuries of different texts written in different languages by men living several centuries apart.

Duplication of Minor Translation Inaccuracies

As the above example illustrates, throughout the Book of Abraham one finds various sorts of differences with Genesis, but these are embedded in a text that is remarkably similar to Genesis specifically as it reads in the King James Version (KJV). In some cases the similarities are of a very specific nature such that they constitute strong evidence that the Book of Abraham was based directly on the KJV of Genesis. Consider, for example, the following passages in the two books:

Genesis 12:6 KJV	Abraham 2:18
And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto <u>the plain of Moreh</u> .	And then we passed from Jershon through the land, unto the place of Sechem. It was situated in <u>the plains of Moreh</u>, and we had already come into the borders of
And the Canaanite was then in the land.	the land of the Canaanites, and I offered sacrifice there in <u>the plains of Moreh</u>, and called on the Lord devoutly....

Some of the language of Abraham 2:18 is identical to language in the KJV of Genesis 12:6 (shown in bold type). One basic change that is found throughout the Book of Abraham is that Abraham speaks in the first person (“I” or “we”) whereas he is spoken of in the third person in Genesis. There are more substantive changes, mostly in the form of expansions, as in the second half of Abraham 2:18. Much of this linguistic comparison is hypothetically explicable under either of the two explanations mentioned above: the Book of Abraham might have been a source for Genesis or Genesis might have been a source for the Book of Abraham.

However, one similarity between the two books is a tell-tale sign as to which of these hypotheses is correct. Abraham 2:18 retains (and repeats) the expression “the plain of Moreh,” merely changing the word *plain* from singular to the plural form *plains*. We know that this expression must come from the KJV for a very simple reason: it is a mistranslation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 12:6. The Hebrew word *’ēlôn* means “oak” (or perhaps a similar large, great tree), not “plain” or “plains,” as all contemporary English versions recognize (for example, the ESV, NASB, NET, and NRSV). There is simply no other reasonable explanation for the inclusion in the Book of Abraham of a mistranslation in the KJV of a word in the Genesis text, other than that it derives from the KJV itself.

Genesis 1:21 KJV	Abraham 4:21
And God created great <u>whales</u> , and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind.	And the Gods prepared the waters that they might bring forth great <u>whales</u> , and every living creature that moveth, which the waters were to bring forth abundantly after their kind; and every winged fowl after their kind.

The same kind of phenomenon occurs later in the Book of Abraham’s creation narrative. Compare Genesis 1:21 KJV and Abraham 4:21 (shown above). That these texts are parallel to one another is obvious, and the verbal similarities are good evidence that the Book of Abraham has used the wording of the KJV in the parallel passage in Genesis. The use of the word *whales* in both texts, however, is especially strong evidence that Genesis in the KJV is the source of the Book of Abraham text. This is because “whales” is a questionable translation of the Hebrew word *tannînim*, which meant the “great sea monsters” (NASB, NRSV) or “great sea creatures” (ESV, NET, NKJV), thought of as dragons or sea-serpents, great or fierce creatures that ancient people had mythologized. (Genesis does not teach or endorse mythological beliefs about such large sea creatures, but it uses a term that would be recognizable in ancient Israelite society from such myths.) “Whales” is at best an overly specific paraphrase and at worst a mistranslation; either way, its use in the Book of Abraham betrays the influence of the KJV of Genesis 1:21.

A clear mistranslation in the KJV that also appears in the Book of Abraham is the use of the word “replenish” in Genesis 1:28. The verse appears nearly verbatim in Abraham 4:28, where “the Gods” are reported as saying: “We will cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” The underlined words are identical to the words in Genesis 1:28, sufficient evidence that the “translation” of Abraham 4:28 is dependent on the translation of Genesis 1:28 in the KJV. What makes this conclusion beyond reasonable dispute, however, is the mistranslation “replenish” for the Hebrew word

(*mil'*), which meant “fill” (ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, etc.), not *refill* or *replenish*. The mistake can have theological consequences, since some people have read this verse in Genesis to mean that the earth was once “full” but some cataclysm had wiped out most or all of its earlier inhabitants, necessitating human beings to repopulate the earth! Here again, the only plausible explanation is that the text of the Book of Abraham is dependent on the text of Genesis as it reads in the KJV.

One curious parallel like these might be dismissed as coincidence, but three establish a pattern of evidence sufficient to draw a reasoned conclusion. That there is a literary relationship between Genesis and the Book of Abraham is obvious and no Mormon would ever deny it. The standard Mormon view is that the Book of Abraham was written centuries earlier than Genesis and so was a major source used to produce the text of Genesis. However, we have presented two strong evidences that in fact Genesis in the early modern translation of the KJV was a major source for the text of the Book of Abraham. First, the wording of the two books in their parallel passages is so similar in many places that one must conclude that the English translation of Genesis in the KJV has influenced the wording of the English text of the Book of Abraham. Second, in at least three places we have found that the Book of Abraham happens to have the same mistranslation of a Hebrew word in Genesis as the KJV. These mistranslations really settle the issue definitively: the literary dependence of the Book of Abraham on the KJV is the *only* plausible explanation for the similarities.

Might Joseph Have Been Inspired to Use the KJV?

How might a Mormon apologist deal with this evidence? The most likely strategy would be to acknowledge that the English translation of the Book of Abraham reflects awareness of the KJV text of Genesis but then argue that Joseph was inspired to use the KJV wording where it was sufficiently similar to the Book of Abraham original to convey the basic idea. A similar explanation has been used by some Mormon scholars to explain the obvious verbal similarities between the Bible chapters in the Book of Mormon and the KJV translation of those chapters. Two observations need to be made regarding this kind of explanation.

First, such an explanation creates another problem, which is to explain the many places where the Book of Abraham *deviates* from the wording of Genesis *in insignificant ways*. Why change “having” (Gen. 12:8) to “there” (Abr. 2:20) or omit “that” twice (Gen. 12:11, 12; Abr. 2:22, 23)? Why change “went” (Gen. 12:10) to “concluded to go” (Abr. 2:21)? There are many such inconsequential differences between the two texts that do not affect their meanings at all. If Joseph had been inspired to use the KJV of Genesis where it was “close enough” to the meaning of the Book of Abraham, then he would have used it where it was “close enough,” which means he would not have changed the wording of parallel verses in what are clearly insignificant ways. What the explanation really seems to mean is that Joseph used the wording of the KJV wherever it was suitable except when he didn’t—which is no explanation at all.

Second, the explanation effectively acknowledges that much of the Book of Abraham can be understood as a revision of certain chapters in Genesis. Everyone agrees that Joseph had free access to a Bible while he was “translating” the Book of Abraham and could have consulted the text of Genesis whenever he wished. The evidence shows that he did in fact use the KJV text of Genesis in producing the Book of Abraham. Chapters 2, 4, and 5 of the Book of Abraham not only can be understood as revisions of the KJV of three chapters in Genesis, the evidence shows that is exactly what they are.

The clear dependence of the Book of Abraham on Genesis, and specifically on Genesis in the KJV, is yet another reason to question the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. This evidence confirms that the book is not an ancient document written by the patriarch Abraham but is instead a modern forgery.

A Biblical Assessment of the Teachings of the Book of Abraham

The reason why the issue of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham is important is because the Book of Abraham is part of the scriptures of the LDS Church and therefore part of the foundational texts on which its prophets and apostles base their teaching. A full examination of the Book of Abraham and the Bible therefore requires an evaluation of the Book of Abraham's teachings in the light of the Bible.

God. The most foundational, fundamental doctrinal subject is God. In biblical revelation, one God, known in the Old Testament as Yahweh (Jehovah, the LORD), is the sole creator, maker, sustainer, and ruler of the heavens and the earth and everything in them. He is therefore the only God who is rightly the object of our worship, religious devotion, and unreserved trust (Gen. 1:1-2:4; Deut. 4:35, 39; 5:6-7; 6:4-5; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 102:25-27; 148:2-5; Isa. 44:6-8, 24; 45:18; Acts 17:24-25; Rom. 1:25; 4:18; 1 Peter 4:19; Rev. 4:11). Every other aspect of Christian doctrine properly depends on this basic understanding of Almighty God.

The Book of Abraham completely negates this basic truth of biblical faith. Toward the end of Abraham 3, Abraham says that the Lord told him that there were numerous spirits or "intelligences" that existed eternally, before the world was made, with no beginning and no ending (Abr. 3:18). Some intelligences are more intelligent than others, and the Lord says he is the most intelligent of all (3:19). God designated many of the superior intelligences, including Abraham himself, to be "rulers" for him (3:22-23). One of these intelligences, who was "like unto God," said to the others that they would go down and make an earth from existing materials (3:24). Then chapter 4 refers to this group of noble intelligences as "the Gods" that went down to organize the earth: "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" (Abr. 4:1). The plural term "the Gods" is used 48 times in Abraham chapters 4 and 5 to designate the intelligences or spirits that performed all of the creative works corresponding to those that Genesis 1-2 says were done by one God.

Mormons often try to justify the use of the plural "Gods" in the Book of Abraham's version of the creation account. Their main argument is to appeal to the fact that grammatically the Hebrew word *elohim* translated "God" in the Old Testament is a plural form. Joseph Smith himself made this argument in defense of his doctrine of a plurality of Gods.² However, this argument reflects, frankly, an amateurish understanding of the biblical text. Biblical Hebrew often used plural nouns with a singular meaning, a phenomenon that scholars have called an "intensive" plural. We know this is how *elohim* is used in Genesis 1-2 and nearly everywhere else in the Old Testament (some 2,600 times) for several reasons.

1. The Hebrew noun *elohim*, though grammatically plural, in these texts takes a singular verb and is modified by singular adjectives. For example, the Hebrew verb *bārā'* ("created") in Genesis 1:1 is singular, not plural.

² *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 372.

2. The proper name *Yahweh* (“Jehovah,” usually “the LORD” in English Bibles) is used as a name for *elohim* throughout the Hebrew Bible, as in Genesis 2:4, “in the day that the Lord God [*Yahweh Elohim*] made the earth and the heavens”). Here it is clear to everyone that *elohim* is a title for one deity, not a reference to a plurality of Gods.
3. The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, translated *elohim* in these contexts as “God,” not “Gods.” For example, Genesis 1:1 in the Septuagint says, “In the beginning **God** [*theos*, the singular word for “God”] made the heavens and the earth.”
4. The Greek New Testament routinely uses the singular Greek word *theos* in quotations from the Old Testament where the Hebrew has *elohim*. For example, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 as saying, “You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (Matt. 4:10). In the Hebrew text, Deuteronomy 6:13 says *elohim*. In both the Septuagint and in the quotation in Matthew, the Greek word used is the singular *theos*.

These four points explain why all biblical scholars translate *elohim* throughout Genesis 1-2 as a singular “God,” not as a plural “the Gods.”

A second argument Mormons often use to support the Book of Abraham’s “Gods” is that in Genesis 1:26 God speaks in the plural: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness.” This use of plural pronouns by God to refer to himself when he is quoted as speaking occurs just three or four times in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; possibly but probably not in Is. 6:8). A variety of dubious explanations have been proposed, such as that the plural pronouns are a deliberative plural (as when a person says to himself, “Let’s see...”) or a plural of majesty (the royal “we”). These explanations are unlikely because there is little or no evidence for the use of such plurals in ancient Israelite times. It is also unlikely that God is including the angels in these plurals, because the very next verse states, “So God created man in *his* own image, in the image of God *he* created him; male and female *he* created them” (Gen. 1:27, emphasis added). Verse 27 also refutes the plural Gods explanation, as it makes clear that one God was responsible for making man (as is also taught later, such as in Genesis 2:7, 18-22). As out of favor as the Trinitarian explanation is in many quarters, it remains the best explanation: one God created man, but within this one God there is some plurality of persons. In any case, the plural pronouns in Genesis 1:27 cannot overturn the grammatical evidence that *elohim* is used throughout the passage to refer to a singular God.

Let us be clear about the seriousness of the theological error here. The issue is not simply that the Book of Abraham refers to a group of beings as “Gods.” The issue is that the Book of Abraham credits this group of “Gods” as collectively making the world. This claim is radically opposed to the consistent doctrine of the Bible, as the lengthy list of biblical citations given near the beginning of this section demonstrates. The resulting doctrine in the Book of Abraham is one in which the Lord is simply the most advanced of all the spiritual beings that exist. There is no qualitative fundamental difference of being between the Lord and other spirits; they are all intelligences, but one is more intelligent than all the others. There are many “Gods,” one of whom is more advanced than the others, and there are other spirits that may also become “Gods” if they progress spiritually during their testing time on earth (see Abr. 3:25-26). Godhood becomes a sliding scale of divinity and glory in which some spirits are further along and greater in glory than others, in which some spirits have attained Godhood and others have not yet attained it but may do so, and in which some Gods are greater in Godhood than others. Thus, whereas in the Bible human beings are creatures who owe their existence to a transcendent

Creator, in the Book of Abraham they are eternal, uncreated beings that have already achieved a measure of divine glory and are here to make further progress toward their full attainment of Godhood.

Jesus Christ. Along with this radically unbiblical concept of deity, the Book of Abraham presents in somewhat indirect fashion an unbiblical view of the person of Christ. The Book of Abraham implicitly teaches that Christ is a God but one to be distinguished from the Lord who is the chief or greatest God. Jesus is never mentioned by name in the book, but there are one or two references to him. The intelligence described as “like unto God” (3:24) is very likely Jesus, and the one “like unto the Son of Man” (3:27) is certainly Jesus. The expression “like unto” probably should not be understood as implying that Jesus is not properly designated “God,” any more than it implies he is not properly called “the Son of Man.” Nevertheless, the way this figure is introduced makes it clear that he is not Almighty God. Immediately after describing the “souls” or “spirits” that God chose from among all of the “intelligences” to be rulers on his behalf (3:22-23), the text says, “And there stood *one among them* that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him...” (3:24). This statement clearly introduces this figure, who is presumably Jesus Christ, as one among the many spirits that were inferior in glory and intelligence to the Lord. Likewise the one “like unto the Son of Man” is chosen by the Lord to go on his behalf instead of another spirit who vied for the job (3:27). In context this indicates that the first figure is one of the many noble spirits under the authority of the supremely glorious intelligence, the Lord. Thus, the Book of Abraham implicitly denies that Jesus Christ is the Lord God himself; he is rather one of “the Gods” that worked under the authority of the Lord in the formation of the earth as a testing ground for all of the intelligences.

Lying. It is an axiom of the biblical view of God that God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2; see also Heb. 6:18). As the God of truth (Isa. 65:16), God would certainly never *tell someone* to deceive others.³ Yet the Book of Abraham changes the story of Genesis 12 by having the Lord tell Abraham to ask his wife Sarai to deceive the Egyptians by saying she was Abraham’s sister (Abr. 2:22-24, quoted above). The text presents this divine direction as part of the narrative in a matter-of-fact manner, with no justification or explanation as to why it was permissible to deceive the Egyptians. Such a claim clearly contradicts the biblical view of God, as seen in the texts cited above. It also turns on its head the account in Genesis, in which it was Abram’s idea for Sarai to lie to protect him (Gen. 12:11-12). The consequence of the Pharaoh believing this lie is not explained in the Book of Abraham, but it is in Genesis: he and his house were struck with plagues *by the Lord* (Gen. 12:17). The Book of Abraham’s account would imply that the Lord told Abram to have his wife lie for him in order to give him a reason to afflict Pharaoh and his house. That is simply an unacceptable distortion of the biblical narrative.

Furthermore, by introducing this idea into the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith created a new inconsistency within the book itself. The main story of chapter 1 of the Book of Abraham is of the Lord dramatically and supernaturally rescuing Abraham from an attempt by Pharaoh’s

³ In a few instances in the Old Testament, God blesses someone who has lied, such as the Hebrew midwives who told Pharaoh that they didn’t kill the male Israelite newborns because the mothers gave birth to them before the midwives could arrive (Exod. 1:15-22). However, in neither this instance nor any other does God tell someone to lie. Furthermore, in this incident God blesses the midwives, not for lying, but for fearing God and refusing to kill the newborn males (1:17). Likewise, Rahab of Jericho was rewarded not for lying to the king’s men but for fearing the Lord and risking her life to hide the Israelite spies (Josh. 2:2-7). See Kaiser’s helpful comments on these and similar passages in *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., et. al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 137-39, 181-82, 210-11, 230-31.

priest to kill him. Then in chapter 2 we are supposed to believe that the Lord inspired Abraham to have his wife lie for him so the Egyptians would not kill him!

A natural question to ask is why Joseph Smith would include such a claim in the Book of Abraham, one that is so obviously out of keeping with the moral character of God in the Bible. There is a historical, biographical explanation in Joseph's life. Beginning apparently in 1841, Joseph had begun practicing plural marriage.⁴ That is, although he was legally married to Emma Hale Smith, Joseph began claiming secretly that God had called him to take additional wives. The LDS Church's own introduction to the revelation concerning plural marriage in Doctrine & Covenants 132 states that Joseph Smith had known about the principle of plural marriage "since 1831." Yet Joseph never recorded anything affirming the practice until that revelation in 1843, and even then efforts were taken to try to keep the matter from becoming public knowledge. The historical evidence shows clearly that Joseph asked those who knew about his plural wives (including the women themselves, of course) to deceive others by denying or hiding the practice. This suggests that Joseph inserted the verses about the Lord inspiring Abraham to ask Sarai to lie for him as a "scriptural" precedent for his expectation that the Saints would cover up his polygamy in order to protect *him*. The similarities are striking: in both cases a prophet's wife is asked to participate in a deception concerning whether she is his wife so as to protect the prophet from being killed.

The chronology of the production and publication of the Book of Abraham fits with this historical explanation in Joseph Smith's life for the inclusion of this idea of the Lord directing Abraham's wife to lie for him. The first published portion of the Book of Abraham appeared in the LDS newspaper *Times and Seasons* on March 1, 1842 (volume 3, number 9), and included Abraham 1:1-2:18. The second installment appeared in number 10 of the same publication on March 15, 1842, and included the rest of what we know as the Book of Abraham, including the entirety of the passage dealing with Sarai lying for Abraham (Abr. 2:20-25). Between these two issues of *Times and Seasons*, we know that Joseph was engaged in translating as well as editing at least portions of the text of Abraham 2:19-5:21. In Joseph Smith's journal entry for March 8, we read: "Commenced Translating from the Book of Abraham, for the 10 No of the Times and Seasons—and was engaged at his office day & evening." His entry for the next day, March 9, says that Joseph "in the afternoon continued the Translation of the Book of Abraham" and that he "continued translating & revising & Reading letters in the evening."⁵ These entries prove that Joseph was engaged in both translating and revising or editing his translation of the second installment of the Book of Abraham prior to its publication in the March 15 issue of *Times and Seasons*.⁶

⁴ The earliest known plural marriage of Joseph Smith was to Louisa Beaman, a 26-year-old single woman, on April 5, 1841. The only possible plural wife sealed to Joseph before 1841 was Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris; some scholars think she was sealed to Joseph in 1838 but a better case can be made for 1841. There is no credible basis for counting Fanny Alger, with whom Joseph had an affair in the early 1830s, as one of his plural wives. See further Robert M. Bowman Jr., "[Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger](#)" (Cedar Springs, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 2014).

⁵ *The Papers of Joseph Smith, Volume 2: Journal, 1832-1842*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1992), 367.

⁶ Note that this conclusion does not preclude the possibility that Joseph had worked on the passage earlier, even in 1835; his work on the Book of Abraham in March 1842, by his own account, included both "translating" and "revising." See further Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen, "'The Work of Translating': The Book of Abraham's Translation Chronology," in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life's Work of Robert L. Millet*, edited by J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret, 2016), 139–62.

March 1842 is the most plausible context in which Joseph would have introduced the notion that God wanted Sarai to lie on behalf of her prophet husband. During the preceding eleven months Joseph had sealed to himself at least six women as his plural wives⁷:

- Louisa Beaman (April 1841)
- Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs (October 1841)
- Presendia Lathrop Huntington Buell (December 1841)
- Agnes Moulton Coolbrith (January 1842)
- Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner (January 1842)
- Sylvia Porter Sessions Lyon (February 1842)

Four of these six women had living husbands at the time: Zina was legally married to Henry Bailey Jacobs; Presendia, Zina's older sister, was legally married to Norman Buell; Mary was legally married to Adam Lightner; and Sylvia was legally married to Windsor Lyon. All of these women continued to live publicly as the wives of their legal husbands even though they had supposedly been sealed to Joseph as his wives. It is obviously understandable why Joseph would want to be able to point to some scriptural support for asking these women to hide their relationship with him.

On March 9, 1842, Joseph had himself sealed to yet another married woman: Sylvia's mother Patty Bartlett Sessions, who was legally married to David Sessions. This date coincides *exactly* with the date of Joseph's work on the translation of Abraham 2:19-5:21 for publication in the following week's issue of *Times and Seasons*. As documented above, Joseph did work on the translation of this part of the Book of Abraham on March 8 and 9, 1842—and it was on March 9 that he was sealed to Patty Bartlett Sessions. The fact that she was not only legally married to another man but was *the mother of one of Joseph's other plural wives* would have made public knowledge of this sealing especially scandalous. Christians and even most non-Christians, both then and now, generally have accepted the Old Testament's stern warnings against a man marrying or having sexual relations with a woman's sister or mother (Lev. 18:17-18; 20:14) and viewed such unions as extremely immoral.

These facts provide strong, compelling evidence that the account of the Lord telling Abraham to ask Sarai to lie on his behalf was created by Joseph Smith as scriptural support for his practice of entering into secret plural marriages to women who were legally other men's wives (and in some cases also related to one another by blood). It is difficult to imagine more graphic evidence of the all too human origin of the Book of Abraham.

Humanity. We have already seen that the Book of Abraham teaches that human beings existed eternally, with no beginning, as spirits or intelligences prior to the making of the earth. This is another claim that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible. The biblical doctrine is that human beings are creatures, beings brought into existence by God. The first man, Adam, "became a living being" when God formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him (Gen. 2:7). This means that Adam did not exist prior to God's making him from the

⁷ This information is widely available and is discussed even in published accounts by LDS scholars. See Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith—Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804-1879* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984); Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997); and Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013).

physical substance of the earth. The point is confirmed later when God tells Adam, “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Human beings do have a soul or spirit distinct from the body, but it is part of their nature as earthly creatures made in God’s image, not an eternal, potentially divine entity that has been placed in the body.

Passages in other parts of the Bible confirm that human beings did not exist as eternal spirits before their physical lives on earth. For example, when the Lord spoke to Job from the whirlwind, he exposed Job’s ignorance by asking him a series of questions about creation:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding,
Who set its measurements?
Since you know.
Or who stretched the line on it?
On what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its cornerstone,
When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7 NASB)

In this passage God refers to other creatures who did exist at the time of creation, called here “the sons of God” (verse 7). Job, however, was not one of those spirits. The Lord’s questions here are rhetorical questions that presume Job’s answers, if they were truthful, would have to be in the negative: Job wasn’t there when God laid the foundation of the earth; he wasn’t there when he laid its cornerstone and the sons of God shouted for joy. This passage clearly refutes the Book of Abraham’s claim that we existed as uncreated spirits and that some of us even participated in making the earth. God’s interrogation of Job continues throughout the rest of Job 38, with a series of rapid-fire rhetorical questions to which Job’s answers would all have to be negative.

According to the Bible, there has been only one person in history who had existed in heaven before his human, physical life on earth: Jesus Christ. John the Baptist said, “He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all” (John 3:31). In this statement, “He that cometh from above,” who “cometh from heaven,” is Jesus Christ; John the Baptist, like the rest of us, “is of the earth.” Thus, John the Baptist, like all of us, is of earthly origin, as Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 teach, whereas Jesus Christ is unique among human beings in that he is from heaven. Unlike the rest of us, Jesus “had come forth from God and was going back to God” (John 13:3). Jesus told his disciples, “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father” (John 16:28). When he said this, he was clearly saying something about himself that was not true about everyone else.

In the context of the Book of Abraham, its teaching that human beings preexisted as intelligences means that humans are Gods or potential Gods, beings whose intelligence and glory have simply not advanced as far as other beings. Indeed, the Book of Abraham implies that no clear line can be drawn between beings that are “Gods” and beings that are not “Gods.” This is because “the Gods” that “organized” the earth apparently included the preexistent spirits of noble individuals like Abraham:

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: *Abraham, thou art one of them*; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. *And there stood one among them* that was like unto God, and *he said unto those who were with him*: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and *we will make an earth* whereon these may dwell (Abr. 3:22-24).

Although these “noble and great ones” are called “the Gods” in the next chapter (Abr. 4:1, etc.), this does not mean that their advancement as intelligences is complete: “they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (3:26). This statement means that the spirits that become physical beings on earth (their “second estate”) will increase in glory forever if they prove faithful in that condition, “if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (3:25). Thus, the Book of Abraham views human beings as including both “Gods” (in some lesser sense than the Lord) and beings with the potential to become “Gods” by increasing in glory, just as those who were already Gods can do so by proving themselves in this mortality.

The crucial implication of the Book of Abraham account of human origins is that mortal human life with all of its evils was the original plan for our eternal intelligent spirits to make further progress toward becoming more glorious beings. We *needed* sin, suffering, and death in order to advance in the realm of the intelligences, in order to advance in Godhood. This idea was already explicit in some of Joseph Smith’s earlier revelations (2 Nephi 2:22-25; also Book of Moses 5:11).

The Bible has a very different view of sin and its consequences. Of course, we agree that God knew that Adam and Eve would sin and that he knew what the consequences would be. God knows all things, including all future events, including the sinful choices that human beings will make (e.g., Gen. 15:13-14; Exod. 3:19-20; Matt. 26:21-25). However, this does not mean that God had a meeting with the preexistent spirits of human beings in Heaven and worked out a plan with them in which they would deliberately violate a commandment in order to become mortal! Nor does it mean that human beings needed to sin for their own spiritual advancement—just as Abraham did not need to have Sarai lie for his protection. Sin was a major setback for humanity, not a step in the right direction.

Thankfully, God had a plan to overcome sin and its consequences, to free us from the curse of the Fall, and to reconcile us to him. The Bible teaches that God planned from before creation to send his Son Jesus Christ into the world to redeem us (Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Peter 1:18-21). Christ did not come to the earth to help us move up the ladder toward Godhood; he came to bring us out of darkness into light, out of sin into a right relationship with God (John 12:46; Acts 26:18; Rom. 5:21; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Col. 1:12-14; 1 Peter 2:9). The New Testament gives many different descriptions of the benefits of salvation—adoption, forgiveness, glorification, justification, propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, regeneration (new birth), sanctification, etc.—but never describes salvation’s goal as becoming Gods. Although the Book of Abraham mentions the “gospel” (Abr. 2:10, 11), its doctrines of God and man radically undermine the biblical framework of the true gospel of salvation.

The preceding brief study of the teachings of the Book of Abraham shows them to be at odds with the teachings of the Bible on the most basic and crucial of subjects. It teaches false doctrine especially concerning the nature of God, our own nature as human beings, the identity of Jesus Christ, and God's purpose in sending Christ into the world. Even if we were unsure of the historical authenticity of the Book of Abraham, for Christians who respect the Bible as the trustworthy word of God the Book of Abraham must be rejected as scripture. The overwhelming evidence that it is a modern fiction rather than a translation of an ancient text simply confirms this biblical assessment of the scriptural claims made for the Book of Abraham.

But Is the Bible Any Better?

When questions about historical authenticity are raised about the LDS scriptures, including the Book of Mormon as well as the Book of Abraham, LDS apologists often respond by claiming that similar concerns might be raised about the Bible. In a more personal vein, when Mormons discover that the Book of Mormon or Book of Abraham is a modern fiction, this often leads them to doubt or reject the authenticity and reliability of the Bible as well. What about these claims and concerns? Is the Bible really no more authentic or reliable than the Book of Abraham? If you conclude that the Book of Abraham is fraudulent, should you put the Bible into a similar category?

Before throwing out the Bible with the Book of Abraham, here are some things to consider.

1. Counterfeits do not invalidate the real thing.

The production of counterfeits is an all too common activity of human beings. Counterfeit currency, cheap knock-offs of designer clothes and accessories, plagiarized school papers, forged driver's licenses and other IDs, fake pharmaceuticals—the human capacity for substituting imitations for the genuine seems almost limitless. Obviously, the existence of such fraudulent products is no reflection on the items they mimic. If anything, counterfeits are backhanded testimonials to the value of the originals.

If the Book of Abraham is fraudulent, it is because it is a counterfeit scripture, an imitation that reflects the value that so many people rightly put on the Bible. History is replete with examples of such knock-off scriptures, from the Gnostic “gospels” of the second century to the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ in the twentieth century. The existence of such works attests to the power of the Bible. (There is no comparable body of literature written in imitation of the Qur'an, for example.) Joseph Smith actually produced *two* imitation scriptures based on Genesis—his “inspired translation” of the early chapters of Genesis known as the Book of Moses being the other one. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the production of fraudulent scriptures that mimic the Bible is evidence of its spiritual power.

2. The antiquity of the Bible, unlike the Book of Abraham, is beyond dispute.

The Book of Abraham makes its appearance in world history in 1835, when Joseph Smith claimed that an Egyptian papyrus roll purchased by the LDS Church that year contained the writings of the biblical patriarch Abraham. In all of recorded history there is no mention before 1835 of any book even approximating the Book of Abraham. As has been proven, the text on the

extant fragments of the scroll that Joseph claimed to have translated was actually that of a pagan Egyptian funeral text, not an autobiographical writing of Abraham.

The situation with the Bible is quite different. There is a continuous stream of documentary evidence for the New Testament writings going back to the late first and early second centuries, some of it within a century or less of their original composition. The documentary evidence from the early centuries is quite varied—papyrus fragments, whole manuscript copies, translations into Latin, Coptic, and Syriac, and quotations in the writings of other early Christians. The language of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament is clearly determined to be Greek of that time period, in contrast to the earlier classical Greek style or the Greek style of later centuries.⁸ There is also a similarly continuous and rich paper trail of evidence for the books of the Old Testament (especially the Dead Sea Scrolls) going back two centuries earlier than the New Testament—which is about as far back as most literary evidence for *any* ancient texts goes, no matter how old they are. Of course, the Jewish and Christian communities that accept the Bible have existed continuously since their origins in biblical times.

3. Modern translations of the Bible, unlike the “translation” of the Book of Abraham, are continuously vindicated when checked against ancient manuscript discoveries.

For more than a century the Book of Abraham circulated as Mormon scripture as a “translation” only, with no original-language manuscripts with which it might be compared. In 1966 this changed with the public surfacing of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Rather than vindicating the Prophet, the study of those papyri created a crisis of faith for many who had sincerely believed that Joseph Smith was an inspired translator. The text of the papyri turned out to have no connection whatsoever to Abraham or to the material in the Book of Abraham.

Matters are very different with the Bible. Thousands of biblical manuscripts have been discovered during the past two centuries. These discoveries have filled in our knowledge of the history of the process of the copying of the books of the Bible from the second century down to the invention of the printing press. Until the late nineteenth century there were no extant manuscript fragments of the New Testament from the second century; now there are over a hundred such fragments, each of which has been carefully studied by scholars (both Christian and non-Christian). Until the 1940s there were no Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament from earlier than about AD 900; now we have numerous such manuscripts dating from a thousand years earlier. Far from disproving the authenticity of the Bible, these discoveries have consistently vindicated the Bible’s antiquity and its verbal reliability.

This doesn’t mean scholars have not made meaningful advances in translating the Bible. In fact, hundreds of scholars have worked on translations of the Bible; their understanding of the original-language text can be (and is!) checked by other scholars of various religious and non-religious perspectives. Anyone who puts in the effort needed can learn ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and can study the Bible in those original languages and assess the accuracy of the modern English translations (or those in other languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, or Spanish). As manuscript discoveries have allowed scholars to refine our understanding of the precise wording of the books of the Bible, scholars have noted such information and incorporated them into modern versions (as in the case of the three inaccurate

⁸ Christophe Rico, “New Testament Greek,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 61-62.

translations in the KJV of Genesis discussed earlier). But such changes have been mere refinements; the essential contents of the Bible have not been challenged by them at all.

4. The Bible lacks the characteristic signs of fraud that mark the Book of Abraham.

Although much could be said on this subject, let us consider just three characteristics of apocryphal literature (books falsely claiming to be scriptural revelations).

Self-Naming References

First, in biblical narratives (in contrast to epistles or the books of prophetic oracles) the authors generally say nothing about themselves, rarely even giving their names. For example, the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles say nothing at all about their authors. While the epistles usually begin with their authors' names, the Gospels and Acts do not identify their authors by name, although Luke and John do refer to themselves in a few places in other ways. Later apocryphal "gospels," on the other hand, claim (falsely) to be written by specific named individuals (such as Thomas, Mary, or Judas). Similarly, the Book of Abraham actually names Abraham and makes it explicit that he is its author (see Abr. 1:1, 12, 28, 31). There is nothing inherently impossible about a scriptural narrative book bearing its author's name, but it is uncharacteristic of biblical narrative books while it is characteristic of fraudulent ones.

Not only does the Book of Abraham identify Abraham as its author, it emphasizes his authorship through an excessive use of self-naming statements. In just five short chapters, the Book of Abraham contains *fourteen* statements with the expression "I, Abraham," "I, Abram," or "me, Abraham" (1:1; 2:2, 6, 14 [twice], 17, 20, 21 [twice], 25; 3:1, 11, 22; 5:13). By comparison, Daniel, the only book of the Old Testament with any apparent self-naming statements at all,⁹ has only nine such statements (Dan. 7:15, 28; 8:1, 15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5), even though it is twice the length of the Book of Abraham.¹⁰ The occurrence of ten such statements in a span of just under a thousand words in the Book of Abraham (from 2:2 to 3:1) seems egregiously repetitive.

One other reason may be given for judging the self-naming autobiographical emphasis of the Book of Abraham as a modern anachronistic fiction: the same phenomenon is found throughout the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon purports to have been written by eleven men, all of whom make self-naming statements—most of them multiple times. In all the Book of Mormon contains an astonishing 158 self-naming statements. A close examination of the pattern

⁹ It is possible that none of the "I, Daniel" statements are actual self-naming statements. Instead, it may be that a later author was quoting Daniel's first-person accounts in which Daniel referred to himself as "I," and the later author added "Daniel" to distinguish the speaker from himself. We would represent this in our typographical convention as "I [Daniel]." That this explanation is correct is suggested by the wording of the first of these statements: "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters. Daniel spake and said, I saw..." (Dan. 7:1-2a KJV). This narrative framing statement refers to Daniel in the third person and contains the only reference to Daniel writing, strongly supporting the view that the first-person account of the dream that follows was being quoted by a later author. Up to this point Daniel has been referenced consistently in the third person except in dialogue. A similar narrative third-person reference to Daniel followed by a quotation from Daniel about another vision occurs later (Dan. 10:1-2, 7). It may well be that all of the "I, Daniel" and "me, Daniel" statements in Daniel 7-12 can be explained as authorial insertions of the name "Daniel" by a later author, in which case Daniel himself made no "I, Daniel" statements in his own writing.

¹⁰ The Book of Abraham text (excluding the facsimiles and their explanations) runs about 5,550 words, while Daniel in the KJV runs about 11,600 words. This makes the Book of Abraham text about 48% the length of Daniel.

of these statements shows that they are modern in origin.¹¹ By far the most likely explanation for the surprising frequency of these statements in both the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon is that they were both composed by the same author, namely Joseph Smith.

Anachronisms

Second, the Bible is not marked by the kinds of anachronisms that one finds in the Book of Abraham. An *anachronism* is a feature that doesn't belong in the place and time period in which it is reported, such as a story about Leonardo da Vinci eating a peanut butter sandwich or George Washington using a laptop computer on Air Force One. An example of such an anachronism in the Book of Abraham is its explanation of God's promise to Abraham using explicit language about the "Gospel" and "eternal life":

And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father; And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal. (Abr. 2:10-11)

The above elaborately worded explanation draws on New Testament language, especially from the apostle Paul, to clarify the meaning of the Abrahamic covenant. Compare the passage above with Paul's statement to the Galatians: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:8-9 KJV). The expressions "life eternal" and "eternal life" occur 44 times in the New Testament but only once in the Old Testament, in the Book of Daniel (12:2), written well over a thousand years after Abraham.¹² This sort of anachronistic language is highly characteristic of fraudulent scriptures.

Clarifications for Modern Readers

Third, apocryphal scriptures commonly seek to clarify biblical teachings or to resolve theological or intellectual difficulties associated with the biblical writings they imitate. One sees an example of the attempt to clarify the Abrahamic covenant in the passage just considered. A good example of the attempt in the Book of Abraham to resolve an intellectual difficulty with Genesis appears in Abraham 4. Genesis 1 speaks of God performing his various acts of creation in six "days," wording that by Joseph Smith's day was already beginning to seem problematic in

¹¹ Robert M. Bowman Jr., "[I'm Mormon](#)": How Book of Mormon Authors Name Themselves" (Cedar Springs, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 2016).

¹² The Book of Daniel is traditionally dated in the sixth century BC, or roughly twelve to thirteen centuries after the death of Abraham. The expression is also sometimes translated "everlasting life" or "life everlasting" in the KJV. The use of self-naming statements in the Book of Abraham discussed earlier, for which the only Old Testament parallel is again the Book of Daniel, is another anachronism.

view of developments in modern science.¹³ Abraham 4 eliminates the problem by using the vaguer word “times” in place of the term “days” throughout the creation narrative. The genuine ancient scriptural writings of the Bible contain statements that modern readers, separated from the authors by thousands of years and radically different cultures, are going to find puzzling or difficult to understand and even accept. If they didn’t contain such difficulties or puzzles, that lack would itself be puzzling! Modern scriptures purported to be long-lost ancient texts typically lack such culturally foreign elements and difficult statements. That lack makes them seem easier to understand for modern readers, but alerts historically informed readers that what they are reading is in fact modern and not ancient.

5. Whether or not the LDS scriptures are true, the central events of the Bible—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—remain true.

The core, essential historical claim of the Bible is that Jesus of Nazareth, a first-century Galilean, was crucified by order of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, died on the cross, was buried, and rose from the grave with immortal life. If this claim is historically true, then Christianity, in some form, is true. One may have all sorts of unanswered questions about other issues, but if Jesus died and rose again then he is the promised Messiah, the one who came to save his people from their sins.

On this point, believers in Jesus Christ have the evidence firmly on their side. The historical evidence convinces all but a tiny number of fringe scholars that Jesus was a real person, that he was a Galilean teacher in the first century, and that he was put to death on a cross by order of Pilate.¹⁴ Historical analysis also convinces most historians, even non-Christians, that Jesus’ disciples at the very least had experiences that sincerely convinced them that Jesus had risen from the grave and vindicated himself as the Messiah. When all of the alternative (and highly speculative) explanations for the evidence are considered, it turns out that the resurrection of Jesus is by far the most cogent explanation for the historical facts.¹⁵

It is crucial to understand that Mormonism is dependent on Christianity, not the other way around. If Christianity is false—if Jesus Christ did not die on the cross and rise from the grave to free us from our sins—then Mormonism must also be false, because Mormonism assumes that this basic, core claim of Christianity is true. On the other hand, if Christianity in

¹³ Throughout the 1700s and the early 1800s many naturalists, such as James Hutton, Georges Cuvier, and Charles Lyell, had already begun inferring from various geological evidences that the earth was hundreds of thousands or even millions of years old. Some popular commentaries on the Bible and other Christian publications by such scholars as James Douglas and Thomas Chalmers had already begun to advance interpretations of Genesis 1 to show that it was not incompatible with such long eons of geological history. For example, half a century before Joseph Smith produced the Book of Abraham, one Scottish minister had stated: “Many well-informed persons have therefore been inclined to suppose that the earth was created in six expanses of time instead of six days”; James Douglas, *A Dissertation on the Antiquity of the Earth* (London: Logographic Press, 1785), 40. This sort of explanation of Genesis 1, which by Joseph Smith’s day had become well known, is clearly reflected in Joseph Smith’s changing of the word “day” to “time.”

¹⁴ For a recent informative example from a notoriously agnostic biblical scholar, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012). For an up-to-date overview see Robert M. Bowman Jr., “[Did Jesus Exist?](#) The Bottom-Line Guide to Jesus, Part One” (Cedar Springs, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 2017).

¹⁵ For a popular-style overview of the historical evidence for the resurrection, see Robert M. Bowman Jr., “[Knowing the Truth about the Resurrection](#)” (YouTube, 2012). A recent academic treatise on this subject is Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

that sense is true, Mormonism *might* be true—or it might be false. This means that if Mormonism turns out to be false, that conclusion in no way reflects badly on Christianity. If the Book of Abraham is fraudulent, this does not in any way imply that Jesus' resurrection is a myth or deception. If Joseph Smith was a false prophet, then he was simply one of many false teachers and false prophets to come along in the history of Christianity, as Jesus himself said would happen (Matt. 7:15-23; 24:11, 23-26; Mark 13:21-22).

In short, if the basic message of the Bible were false, Mormonism could not possibly be true; but if Mormonism is false, that in no way undermines the truth of the Bible. The Bible stands without the Book of Abraham. The realization that the LDS scriptures are not what they claim to be should not lead to skepticism about the Bible. It should, rather, lead to a greater appreciation for the truth of the Bible and of its central message of the crucified and risen Son of God, Jesus Christ.