

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Perils of the *Pearl*

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There is nothing hidden but what shall be brought to light, and nothing secret but what shall be discovered.

—Parley P. Pratt, LDS leader¹



For a Mormon, the *Pearl of Great Price* is quoted less than other LDS scripture, and has few exciting stories in it to compare with the adventures of Nephi or Alma in the *Book of Mormon*. In ten years of Mormonism I was never asked to read this, the shortest of all books of LDS scripture. When I did read it, it was on my own initiative. Many of its doctrines were so deep or so controversial that they were rarely discussed in public meetings.

It was this book, which I was looking at in the fall of 1973, that rocked my foundations as a Mormon. Its woodcuts—pictures copied from the papyrus scrolls that were supposedly the source of the text of the Book of Abraham—stopped me cold, shocking me into the recognition that Joseph Smith was no translator of Egyptian. It was not until much later, though, that I went back and more thoroughly and objectively examined the *Pearl of Great Price*.

THE CONTENTS OF THE *PEARL OF GREAT PRICE*

It is not easy to talk about the *Pearl of Great Price* as an entity because its contents, even more than those of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, are so divergent. Whereas the *Book of Mormon* purports to be the records of the ancient Americans, and the *Doctrine and Covenants* the revelations given to early LDS church leaders, no such blanket statement of contents will suffice for the *Pearl of Great Price*. This short volume contains various short writings. Briefest of all is a listing of the LDS “Articles of Faith,” a creed upon which LDS doctrine is loosely based, formulated by Joseph Smith. The *Pearl of Great Price* also contains other writings of the prophet, including a book called “Joseph Smith—History.”

¹ Parley P. Pratt, *Millennial Star*, July 1, 1842.

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This tells of his first vision, the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*, a visit of John the Baptist, and the rise of the Church. There is also an extract from his Inspired Version of the Bible, a passage from Matthew (called “Joseph Smith—Matthew”).

The other two-thirds of the *Pearl of Great Price* are supposed to be from the writings of two Old Testament patriarchs, Abraham and Moses. Abraham’s writings purport to provide details of that prophet’s life not found in the Bible, as well as information about the preexistence, the council in heaven, and divine principles of astronomy. Moses’ writings supposedly clarify the events that led to the creation and humankind’s history from Adam to Noah.

This anthology of sorts was first compiled by Franklin D. Richards of the Council of the Twelve. He published it under the title *Pearl of Great Price* in Liverpool, England, in 1851. It underwent various adjustments before being canonized as scripture in 1880. It was revised again in 1902 when all the material incorporated into the 1876 *Doctrine and Covenants* was dropped from its contents so as to avoid duplication.² Then too it was divided into chapters and verses with references. In its revised form in 1902 it was accepted as a “standard work,” joining the Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, and the *Doctrine and Covenants*. But all in all, this little book has undergone thousands of word changes since its 1851 edition.

THE WRITINGS OF JOSEPH SMITH

One of the most oft-quoted elements of the *Pearl of Great Price* is known as the Articles of Faith. These thirteen doctrinal statements were composed by Joseph Smith after John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, wrote to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, asking for a brief statement of the doctrinal beliefs of the Latter-day Saints. They are considered to be scripture. A Christian casually observing the Articles of Faith would find few quarrels there. But as we shall see in later chapters, the distinctively LDS doctrines hinge upon the meanings that Mormons assign to the Christian-type terminology of the Articles of Faith. For instance, such concepts as being “saved” or “punished,” and the idea of “authority,” are uniquely Mormon as Latter-day Saints interpret these words.

The inclusion in the *Pearl of Great Price* of Joseph Smith’s own “inspired” translation of Matthew 23:39 and all of Matthew chapter 24 has raised questions in the minds of Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Joseph Smith considered this passage important, and

² In April 1976 the LDS Church authorized the inclusion of two items into the *Pearl of Great Price*. One was the record of a vision Joseph Smith said he received in January of 1836. The second was the record of a 1918 vision of Joseph F. Smith, sixth president of the LDS Church. Both were later transferred to the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

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for years it was the only New Testament part of his Inspired Version to be singled out as scripture by the Utah church. (The “Community of Christ,” previously known as the Reorganized LDS Church, of course, has always accepted the whole Inspired Version as scripture.) This brief passage is a mysterious monument to Smith’s ability to conglomerate scriptures for his desired effect, and its name, *Joseph Smith—Matthew*, is fitting.

Also included is *Joseph Smith—History*, a short autobiography of his early life and the history of the young Church. Of particular interest is *Joseph Smith—History* 1:14–20, which details the appearance of God and Christ to the boy Joseph. This is the most relied upon passage by which Mormons justify their doctrine that God and Christ possess separate physical bodies.

THE BOOK OF MOSES

These writings of Joseph Smith—the Articles of Faith, the Matthew “translation,” and Joseph Smith’s early history—make up a little over one-fourth of the *Pearl of Great Price*. The rest of this book deals with what Mormons believe to be the writings of Moses and Abraham. Moses’ writings were “revealed” to Joseph Smith in 1830 when he was working on his translation of the Old Testament. This “Book of Moses” is supposedly the unabridged story upon which they believe our “incomplete” Genesis account was based. It was first published in six installments printed at irregular intervals from August 1832 until January 1844. Basically the Book of Moses is a revision of the Genesis account that includes a heavy injection of “Christian-type” doctrines into the old-covenant writings. It teaches:

1. Man can talk to God literally face-to-face (1:1; 7:4) and see him with spiritual eyes (1:11).
2. This record of Moses is not included in our Bible because of the wickedness of men (1:23) and is to be shown only to those who believe (1:42).
3. There are many “earths” that God has created (1:29, 33).
4. Joseph Smith is considered by God to be one “like Moses” (1:41).
5. The speaker, God (Elohim) himself alone created everything but man (2:1–25), but he was helped in man’s creation by his Only Begotten (2:26).
6. All living things were first created spiritually before being created physically (3:7).

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7. Trees are living souls (3:9); thus, by implication, all living things have souls.
8. Satan was a son of God (5:13), brother to Christ and to all humankind. He rebelled when his plan promising compulsory, universal salvation was rejected by God (4:1–4).
9. Adam received the Holy Ghost (5:9).
10. Adam rejoiced after and as a result of his transgression (5:10–11; versus Gen. 3:10).
11. Cain was cursed because he made a secret pact with Satan for gain (5:29–33; note that priesthood is not mentioned).
12. The first polygamist, Lamech, covenanted with Satan (5:49), and kept not God's command (5:52).
13. The "Gospel" was preached in antediluvian days, and was confirmed by the Holy Ghost (5:58–59).
14. The priesthood is said to have originated with Adam (6:7).
15. Genealogies were kept in Adam's day as they should be kept now (6:8).
16. Christ atoned for original sin (6:54).
17. Adam was given the Comforter (6:61).
18. After receiving the Holy Ghost, Adam was baptized—with water (6:64) and with fire and the Holy Ghost (6:66).
19. Canaanites were cursed with a blackness of skin that caused them to be despised by all people (7:8).
20. Enoch built a city called Zion (7:18–22), which was taken up to heaven with him (7:69).
21. The seed of Cain was a race with black skin (7:22).
22. A purgatorial prison was built for those who perished in the flood (7:38).
23. The earth is female in gender, and has a soul and a voice (7:48).

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24. An actual thousand-year millennial reign by Christ upon this earth is promised (7:65).
25. Noah taught repentance and baptism for the gift of the Holy Ghost (8:24).
26. Noah, not God, was sorry that man had been created (8:25–26; versus Gen. 6:6–7).

It is interesting to know that this section of the *Pearl of Great Price* has undergone 1,195 word changes since first being published in 1851. How this can be justified is beyond my understanding, in view of the fact that Mormons claim Joseph Smith received this by direct revelation from God. I can see the LDS point of view when they say that God can give modern-day revelations to individuals, which need to be revised or revoked as situations change. (I can see it, though I don't agree with it.) I *cannot* see why their deity could not accurately relay to Joseph Smith the contents of a record supposedly written by Moses thousands of years ago.

HISTORY OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Since the original record does not exist, we cannot check Joseph Smith's version of the Book of Moses except against the Genesis account. But the remainder of the *Pearl of Great Price*, the Book of Abraham, *can* be checked, for the original records are available today. The LDS Church possesses several papyrus fragments, from one of which the Book of Abraham was *translated* by Joseph Smith, according to the prefatory passage in the *Pearl of Great Price*: "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."

Here is another tribute to the resourcefulness of Joseph Smith, who could use anything that came his way to further his own purposes. Early in his life Joseph found a smooth rock that became a "seer stone." Later he used a workman's carving on one of his temples to show what the face of God looked like—except, he observed, the nose was just a *little* too broad. And when a man traveled to him with mummies and papyrus, Joseph couldn't resist building some of his most fantastic doctrines around the history and contents of those scrolls.

To understand the situation in which Joseph Smith thus found himself, we must consider the end of the eighteenth century—the era of Napoleon's visits to Egypt. Everyone in those days knew something about Egyptian art and mummies, but its mysterious ancient hieroglyphic language was a locked door. Then, just six years before the unheralded birth of one Joseph Smith in Vermont in 1805, an equally unappreciated stone was discovered.

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But when someone noticed that this two-thousand-year-old black rock contained three passages in three different languages—Greek, hieroglyphics, and demotic (a simplified hieroglyphic writing)—then the Rosetta Stone, as it was named, began to receive the notice it deserved.

During the time that Joseph Smith was supposedly receiving the first vision, a young man named Jean Francois Champollion theorized that if the names in all three passages on the Rosetta Stone were equivalent, then the other information probably was. The Greek could be used to decipher the Egyptian, Champollion rightly concluded. In America, Joseph Smith began writing the *Book of Mormon*. At the same time as the organization and early years of the LDS Church, many scholars pored over the Rosetta Stone, painstakingly wresting from this basalt slab the possibility of reading all the silent writings on the walls of tombs and temples.

In the same year, 1832, that Brigham Young became a Mormon, Champollion died, and it wasn't until after his death that the scholarly world truly capitalized on his groundbreaking work. In 1837 the Herculean task of assembling the first ancient Egyptian dictionary was completed. No one had ever supposed that such a thing could be done—least of all, Joseph Smith.

In June of 1835 a frustrated young man by the name of Michael H. Chandler sought out the famed LDS prophet. Chandler had acquired eleven Egyptian mummies. His disappointment at finding that the bodies carried no jewels was barely compensated for by the fact that there was a papyrus roll on the breast of one of the mummies, and a few scraps of papyrus on the others. Chandler had earned a little money traveling around the country exhibiting the curiosities. When he met Benjamin Bullock III, a relative of Joseph Smith's friend Heber C. Kimball, he was told that the "Mormon prophet" could translate anything. As soon as Joseph laid eyes upon the papyrus fragments that Chandler had had examined by other "experts," the Mormon sage asked to be excused, and retired into his "translating room." When he returned a short while later, he carried a written translation in English of the fragment's writing. What the "translation" said, we may never know, but it so impressed Chandler that he presented Joseph with a certificate stating:

Kirtland, July 6, 1835

This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, showed to the most learned; and from the information that I could ever learn, or meet with, I find that of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., to correspond in the most minute matters.

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—(signed) Michael H. Chandler
Traveling with, and proprietor of, Egyptian mummies³

Soon afterwards, Joseph Smith offered to buy the papyri, but Chandler refused to sell them without their owners, the mummies. The sale was consummated to the tune of \$2,400. Joseph identified one of the mummies as King Necho,⁴ and another time he said one of the mummies was that of a king's daughter. But the mummies were of only peripheral interest to Joseph Smith—the scrolls were what fascinated him. He said that one scroll had on it the “autograph of Moses” and additional writings by his brother Aaron.⁵ (Unfortunately we do not have Joseph Smith's “translation” of this latter record.)

There is no question that Joseph Smith claimed that he could translate ancient languages. “I can read all writing,” he once boasted.⁶ Another time he claimed when discussing his idiosyncratic translation of the Hebrew in Genesis 1:1 (which he said told of a council of gods), “But I am learned, and know more than all the world put together.”⁷

Nor do we have the translation of what Joseph Smith in his journal called “the writings of Joseph of Egypt.” Joseph Smith, speaking as Nephi in the *Book of Mormon*, mentioned the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt, or the Joseph of the Bible (2 Nephi 4:2). Though some LDS authorities say that Joseph Smith *did* translate the Chandler papyri (as writings Smith attributed to Joseph of Egypt),⁸ the translation has never been published, supposedly because its prophecies were “‘too great’ for the people of this day.”⁹

However, there is proof that Joseph Smith did indeed translate and publish a portion of the scrolls he bought from Chandler. Joseph said that one portion of the papyrus was written in the handwriting of Abraham himself—which made it much older than the Bible account of Genesis which was recorded long after the fact by Moses. Dr. Sidney Sperry, an LDS authority, has even gone so far as to say that the Book of Abraham (like the Book of Moses) was an original document upon which Genesis was based.¹⁰

³ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:235.

⁴ The words of Josiah Quincy, who visited Joseph Smith at Nauvoo. From William Mulder and Russell Mortensen, ed., *Among the Mormons* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 136–37, as quoted by Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 298.

⁵ Keith C. Terry and Walter Whipple, *From the Dust of Decades, A Saga of the Papyri and Mummies* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 76.

⁶ As cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 363.

⁷ *Journal of Discourses* 6:5. In addition, see 6:4 for Smith's discussion of the Hebrew word.

⁸ Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study*, 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰ Dr. Sidney Sperry, *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1938), 81.

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The translation was completed in 1842 and published in the Nauvoo, Illinois, *Times and Seasons* between March 1 and May 16, 1842. Joseph Smith oversaw the printing and commissioned a young woodcarver, Reuben Hedlock, to reproduce sections of the scrolls' illustrations for printing to accompany the translations.

Joseph Smith promised further extracts from the Book of Abraham (indicating that what he had published hardly covered the entire document), but was killed in the Carthage jail before doing so. After his death, Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, took over the scrolls and mummies, exhibiting them to curious visitors who were fascinated by her colorful descriptions of them. Until her death in 1855, Lucy lived with Joseph's widow, Emma, and her second husband, Charles Bidamon. One year later Emma and her son Joseph III sold the Egyptian artifacts to a Mr. A. Combs. The sales receipt of this transaction is still in existence. Evidently some of these artifacts were given to Combs's housekeeper. By 1859 at least part of the scrolls and mummies had been loaned or donated to the St. Louis Museum. In 1863 they were on catalog in the Chicago Museum. It was long assumed that the entire collection burned in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 that destroyed a great deal of the Chicago Museum.

DOCTRINES OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

That part of the *Pearl of Great Price* which is known as the Book of Abraham was translated from these scrolls, and is the basis for many unique doctrines of Mormonism. If we were to scan it we would find it teaching that:

1. The LDS priesthood was first held by Adam and passed down to Abraham, the writer of this record (1:3).
2. Pharaoh's wicked priest tried to sacrifice Abraham (1:6–15).
3. The land of Egypt was settled by the descendants of Ham (1:23–24).
4. Pharaoh did not hold the priesthood because he was “cursed ... as pertaining to the priesthood” (1:26–27).
5. The priesthood was promised to Abraham's seed (2:9).
6. The “gospel” was preached in Abraham's time (2:10).
7. God commanded Abraham to lie about Sarah's marital relationship to him (2:22–25).
8. Abraham possessed the Urim and Thummim (3:1).

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9. The star named Kolob is near to God's throne (3:2–3).
10. Since Kolob revolves once in each one thousand years, one of its days is equal to one thousand of our years in God's perspective (3:4).
11. All spirits are eternal and incapable of being created (3:18–19).
12. Certain persons were forechosen by God, before the world was formed, to be his rulers (3:23–24).
13. Satan rebelled when he was not chosen to accomplish God's aims (3:27–28).
14. "The Gods" organized and formed the heavens and the earth (4:1), as well as collectively carrying out the entire creation process as outlined in Genesis 1 and 2.
15. When the Gods decreed that Adam would die the same day that he ate of the forbidden fruit, they were speaking of the one-thousand-year days of God (5:13).

The record of Abraham was by Smith's own admission incomplete. LDS leaders have theorized that on the basis of some of the Book of Abraham's illustrations, subsequent translation would have told about Abraham's further adventures in Egypt.

THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM UNDER FIRE

While most Mormons of the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century speculated on what Joseph Smith would have written if he had lived longer, the experts of the Egyptian language scoffed at Joseph's translating abilities. The certificate that Mr. Chandler had given Joseph attesting to his abilities as a translator of ancient Egyptian was worthless because neither Chandler nor the other men he had consulted (like Dr. Anthon, who refused to certify Smith's translations of "reformed Egyptian") could read enough ancient Egyptian to certify *anyone's* translations.

The first proofs of the fraudulent nature of the Book of Abraham began in 1860 when Louvre expert M. Theodule Deveria examined the facsimiles which were printed in the *Pearl of Great Price*. Since Joseph Smith had claimed to translate several names and some of the information on the scrolls from which the woodcuts were copied, Deveria was able to make his own translations and then compare them to those of Joseph Smith. Though hindered in several places by the poor quality of the woodcut reproductions and by untranslatable sections, Deveria was nonetheless able to ascertain categorically that not only were Joseph Smith's translations incorrect, but also that Joseph Smith had

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apparently altered the original documents themselves. Of course Deveria based his opinions on the facsimiles printed in the *Pearl of Great Price*, but these were also the facsimiles Joseph Smith presented as part of the Word of God.

The flame of controversy was fanned again in 1912 when Franklin S. Spaulding, the Episcopal bishop of Utah, published a book called *Joseph Smith Jr. as a Translator*. In researching his book, Spaulding approached several of the most eminent authorities of the science of Egyptology and asked them their opinions of the woodcuts of the *Pearl of Great Price* and Joseph Smith's interpretations of those woodcuts. The list of experts consulted by Spaulding reads like an honor roll of the best Egyptologists, and included Drs. W. M. Flinders Petrie and James H. Breasted. Every expert had the same thing to say: Joseph Smith had no idea of even the basics of translating ancient Egyptian. A sampling of their comments on Joseph's translations: "an impudent fraud," "pure fabrication," "the work of pure imagination."

The LDS Church was stunned by this publication, and lost no time in coming out with a reply to it. They chose a man to write their "answer" who worked as a professional writer and who at one time in his career wrote a book defending the liquor industry. This man, J. C. Homans, wrote under the pen name of Robert C. Webb, and gave himself the title of PhD—an honor never bestowed upon him by any university. His book was a confusing mass of circumlocution that alternated between generalizations about the culture of ancient Egypt and attacks on the credentials of the experts quoted by Spaulding.

In 1965, Modern Microfilm Company (now known as Utah Lighthouse Ministry or UTLM) operated by Jerald and Sandra Tanner of Salt Lake City, reprinted Spaulding's work,¹¹ which was by then out of print. This reprinting could have caused as big a stir as its first, but an event of much greater importance intervened.

ATIYA'S "DISCOVERY" OF THE SCROLLS

A professor of Middle Eastern studies at the University of Utah was visiting the New York Metropolitan Museum in the early spring of 1966, doing research for a book he was writing about Eastern Christianity. This man, Dr. Aziz S. Atiya, an Egyptian by birth and Coptic by faith, worked at a university in the middle of Mormon country, and thus was familiar with Latter-day Saint doctrine and scriptures. As he was looking through a large box of Egyptian documents brought to him by a museum attendant, one particular piece of papyrus attracted his attention. Upon closer examination, he saw that the papyrus,

¹¹ UTLM offers a publication entitled *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham*. It consists of photo-reprints of *Joseph Smith, Jr. as a Translator* by Rev. F. S. Spaulding, DD, and *Joseph Smith as an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian* by the eminent Egyptologist Samuel A. B. Mercer, PhD.

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which had some parts missing, had been glued onto a piece of more modern paper, and the missing parts drawn in pencil onto the newer paper. Whoever had drawn in the missing sections had done so in a very peculiar manner—and the completed vignette looked just like Facsimile 1 in the *LDS Pearl of Great Price*. Atiya's suspicions were confirmed when he found ten more pieces of papyrus along with the bill of sale signed by Emma Smith Bidamon and her son Joseph Smith III in a storage file.

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The history of the scrolls soon came to light. Apparently the Mr. Combs who bought the scrolls from Emma had given them to his housekeeper. The housekeeper's son-in-law sold the scrolls to the New York museum in 1947. There they had been ever since, with the full knowledge of the museum officials. It is not therefore strictly accurate to say that Atiya "discovered" the scrolls, since the museum knew of their whereabouts and significance for almost twenty years. Nor could it be said that Atiya was the first to tell members of the LDS Church of the scrolls' location. One Mormon later coauthored a book, *From the Dust of Decades*, about the "discovery" of the papyri. This man, Walter Whipple, said he himself knew of the location of the papyri and actually had photographs of them back in 1962. There is also evidence that the LDS Church actually leaked to Atiya the existence and location of the scrolls.¹²

I am not implying that Dr. Atiya cooperated with the LDS Church in faking the find. But one must wonder why the Metropolitan Museum did not notify the Mormons about it earlier. (An official of the museum said tactfully, "Frankly, we didn't know what the LDS Church's wishes were.")¹³ It wasn't because the papyri weren't genuine. Atiya and other qualified experts have not argued with the fact that the scrolls are uncontested examples of ancient Egyptian papyri. When Atiya found the scrolls and notified the LDS Church, they expressed great appreciation. The New York Metropolitan Museum, realizing the importance of the scrolls to the Mormons, presented them to LDS officials in a formal ceremony on November 27, 1967. But the LDS Church, I am sure, wishes it had never seen those scrolls again.

Why? Because in 1967, the Egyptian language was no longer the barrier it was in Joseph Smith's day. Today a competent Egyptologist can read the *Pearl of Great Price* papyri (formally known as "Joseph Smith Papyri I through XI") and accurately tell you the one thing that Mormons don't want to hear: The papyri say absolutely *nothing* about Abraham, or Joseph, or God, or anything even remotely related to Mormonism.

¹² An interview with Dr. Henry G. Fischer, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Winter 1967): 56–58, as quoted by Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 302ff.

¹³ Terry and Whipple, *From the Dust of Decades*, 113.

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TRANSLATING THE SCROLLS

As soon as the news of the scrolls came to light, some Mormons began to rejoice that here, finally, could Joseph Smith be vindicated as a translator. But the Church warned members that, pending a new translation by an LDS Egyptologist, no one should depend upon the scrolls to “prove” Joseph Smith’s abilities as a translator. Hugh Nibley, the LDS Church’s go-to expert on ancient history, had no comforting words. “LDS scholars are caught flatfooted by this discovery,” he confessed in Brigham Young University’s newspaper.¹⁴ Many Mormons felt confident that the president of the Church, the “prophet, seer, and revelator,” would be able to translate the papyri.¹⁵ These were surprised when the documents were given to Hugh Nibley, who kept them for a long time and only translated *one* word from them—and that incorrectly.¹⁶

Nibley began writing a series of articles for the Church’s periodical, *The Improvement Era*, which stretched over a two-year period from January 1968 until May 1970. He used over two thousand footnotes and quoted from such sources as old rabbinical writings to try to find parallels between ancient Egyptian culture and that portrayed in Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Abraham. Even though at the time I was very interested in the whole issue, Nibley’s ponderous display of unrelated facts was impenetrable.¹⁷ I decided that the whole matter was too deep for anyone without a doctorate in ancient languages. In retrospect, that was probably the express purpose of Nibley’s writings, for I know that he was more capable of coming to the point than he showed himself there. Once waist-deep in his circumlocution, I, like most other Mormons, forgot to ask the cogent question of the whole issue: What do the papyri *say*?

WERE THESE THE JOSEPH SMITH POPYRI?

All subsequent research by qualified Egyptologists outside the LDS Church has shown that those eleven papyrus fragments made up the following elements:

1. Part of a “Book of the Dead” — an ancient funerary text — for a deceased woman by the name of Ta-Shere-Min.

¹⁴ *Daily Universe*, December 1, 1967.

¹⁵ *Doctrine and Covenants* 107:91–92.

¹⁶ Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: UTLM, 1968), 2:140.

¹⁷ This impression was shared by then-LDS author Grant H. Palmer. He noted that Nibley’s articles ignored the writing around the facsimiles “and instead focused on Egyptian temple ritual, assembling culturally and spatially unrelated Abrahamic legends over several thousand years of history to demonstrate that the Book of Abraham had the support of some ancient traditions.” Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, 16.

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2. An illustration of a judgment scene from another “Book of the Dead” made for a female musician named Amon-Re Neferinub.
3. A “Book of Breathings” (a late Ptolemaic Period version of the “Book of the Dead”), also called “Sen Sen” because of the repetition of this word throughout the text—made for a deceased man named Hor.

Of course, some LDS who heard of the undeniably pagan nature of the texts of the papyri thought that perhaps a mistake had been made; perhaps these weren't the same papyri once owned by Joseph Smith. With some of the papyri there was no question—Reuben Hedlock had copied their illustrations—even preserving the ancient Egyptian scribe's misspellings intact in the *Pearl of Great Price* woodcuts. (The LDS Church agreed from the beginning that the papyri were the source of at least one of the *Pearl of Great Price* woodcuts.) Part of the Metropolitan Museum papyri hadn't been used as a basis for the woodcuts, it is true, but they fit exactly the descriptions given by contemporaries of Joseph Smith who had seen and described the scrolls. The Reverend Henry Caswell, for instance, visited Nauvoo and was shown the papyri by Joseph Smith.¹⁸

A recent book by LDS apologist Robert L. Millet, *Getting at the Truth: Responding to Difficult Questions about LDS Beliefs*, however, refutes these claims by quoting the late H. Donl Peterson, professor of ancient scriptures at BYU, who said, “The Book of Abraham and Joseph papyri were described as ‘Beautifully written on papyrus, with black, and a small part red, ink or paint, in perfect preservation.’ ” Peterson claimed there was no red ink on these papyri, and therefore concluded that the Metropolitan Museum fragments only comprised Facsimile 1 and “some other fragments unrelated to the published account of the present Book of Abraham.” Thus, said Peterson, dodging the whole controversy, the papyri now owned by the LDS Church could not be the source of their scriptures.¹⁹ Two problems exist with this explanation. First, photographs do show red ink.²⁰ Second, we *do have* the Egyptian translations of the identifications of people in the woodcut pictures (again, the LDS Church doesn't deny that the papyri now in their hands is the source)—translations which Joseph Smith undeniably botched. Researchers have

¹⁸ Reverend Henry Caswell, *City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo* (London: 1842), 22–23.

¹⁹ Millett, *Getting at the Truth*, 103.

²⁰ The color photographs of the papyri as printed in the book *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Institute for Religious Research, 1992) definitely show red writing. Author Charles Larson, though, says that the portions with red ink were identified by Joseph Smith as “the writings of Joseph of Egypt” (85–86) and not the Book of Abraham. Larson's entire book—including the photographs—can be downloaded from the Internet at no cost at the Institute for Religious Research—www.irr.org/mit/Book-of-Abraham-page.html.

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also noted that some of the papyri fragments are glued to heavy paper with handwritten references linking them to Joseph Smith.²¹

In addition, Joseph Smith and/or a scribe copied hieroglyphs from the scroll into three handwritten notebooks. These notebooks lie at the crux of the whole LDS dilemma of the relationship between the papyri and the Book of Abraham. These notebooks show, beyond any doubt, that Joseph Smith went through the motions of a deciphering process so that his people would think that he had actually translated the hieratic characters.

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Joseph Smith began these notebooks, which are referred to by Mormons as “The Kirtland Egyptian Papers” or by their more descriptive title “The Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” in the year 1835. They are now in the possession of the LDS Church.²²

“The Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar” consists of sheets divided into columns. They contain characters copied by Joseph Smith or a scribe from the small Sen Sen papyrus, Smith’s pronunciations of the characters, and their “translations” with Smith’s commentary. One section of the “Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar” shows Book of Abraham 1:4–28 “translated” using this method. A great number of English words were assigned to each Egyptian symbol, which LDS apologists say implied that each hieratic character could be broken down into individual strokes (just as the English letter “A” could be broken down into three strokes). Each stroke was assigned a weird-sounding name and a meaning.

Some Mormons, including Hugh Nibley, have said that the Grammar is just an illustration of how Joseph Smith liked to play around with other languages for his own amusement, citing as evidence the fact that Joseph Smith never publicized the “Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” but rather kept it to himself.²³ But in considering this explanation, it must be remembered that Joseph Smith didn’t think he would ever be found out. Though Champollion at that time was finally getting recognition for his decipherment of hieroglyphics (unfortunately posthumous recognition), the science of Egyptian translation was still relatively unknown. Certainly Joseph Smith had no access to a complete ancient Egyptian dictionary, so he made up his own. The fact that he did not publish it doesn’t matter as much as the fact that he went to all the trouble to formulate it at the very time he said he was “translating” the papyri.

²¹ That the papyri were “linked to Joseph Smith” is demonstrated by Larson (op.cit.), who said the backing paper on which they were attached contained drawings of the LDS community of Kirtland, Ohio, and its temple.

²² Photocopies of *The Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar* are available from UTLM.

²³ Nibley admitted that the LDS Church kept the document “hidden and suppressed” for 130 years. Hugh Nibley, “Prolegomena to Any Study of the Book of Abraham,” *BYU Studies* 8, no. 2 (1968): 171–90.

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PROBLEMS WITH THE POPYRI

Some Mormons have zealously maintained the veracity of Joseph Smith's bizarre translating methods by means of several complex arguments. Many feel forced to defend his translations because the introduction to the Book of Abraham as printed in the *Pearl of Great Price* does, after all, state that the scripture was "translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith." Also, Joseph Smith actually quoted some of his made-up Egyptian in public.²⁴ In attempting to clear up this confusion, some Mormons have evolved complicated systems whereby they claim that Joseph Smith used deeper, second-level or third-level meanings of the Egyptian words to find the story of Abraham hidden in the pagan "Book of Breathings." Some claim that the funerary text was a memory-jogging device to help a reader remember the elements of the Abraham story, which one critic compared to memorizing the book of Jonah by tying it to the French national anthem.²⁵

In addition to the problem of the popyri not saying what Joseph Smith said they did, there is the additional dilemma of the age of the papyrus which Joseph Smith used. The Sen Sen was a type of funerary text which was not even in use until the seventh century BC.²⁶ Other experts have dated the particular Shaiten Sen Sen used by Joseph Smith for the Book of Abraham to the Ptolemaic Period of Egypt—after 332 BC. The popyri were supposedly the source of "the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus"²⁷ and added to by the Bible's Joseph, Moses, and Aaron.

Even Mormons must now admit, though, that the scrolls do not date from the time of Abraham at all but perhaps nearer to the time of Christ. Mormons generally offer this explanation: Joseph Smith's boast to an observer that the scrolls contained the "signature of the patriarch Abraham"²⁸ was not accurate, they say—what he meant was that the scroll he had in his possession contained a copy of Abraham's signature. They say that Abraham did indeed write the original papyrus manuscript, but it was passed down and altered by individuals who did not understand it, until it was finally buried with a princess who may or may not have realized its significance. This won't square with Smith's description of the "writings of Abraham" which, remember, he specifically said were "written by his own hand upon papyrus."²⁹

²⁴ Fawn McKay Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 292.

²⁵ Wesley P. Walters, "Joseph Smith Among the Egyptians," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1973). As reprinted by Modern Microfilm—now UTLM—in 1973.

²⁶ Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1968), 2:163.

²⁷ As stated in the heading to the Book of Abraham (in the *Pearl of Great Price*).

²⁸ Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 321.

²⁹ Also cited in *History of the Church*, 2:235–36, 348–51.

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TRANSLATIONS OF THE POPYRI

From the symbols on this papyrus, Joseph Smith fashioned 5,470 words of the text of the Book of Abraham. It seems strange that he could have given Mr. Chandler an immediate “while you wait” translation, but had to go to all the trouble in a busy time of his life to formulate an Egyptian grammar. In fact, Joseph Smith rendered one single symbol³⁰ (which in Egyptian is *Khon*, the moon god) into the following passage:

And his voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father’s house, and from all thy kinsfolk, into a strange land which thou knowest not of; And this because they have turned their hearts away from me, to worship the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; therefore I have come to visit them, and to destroy him who hath lifted up his hand against thee, Abraham, my son, to take away thy life. Behold, I will lead thee by my hand, and I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy father, and my power shall be over thee.

As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God. (*Pearl of Great Price*, Abraham 1:16–19)

How Joseph Smith could get all this—with the proper names of Abraham, Jehovah, Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, Pharaoh, Egypt, Priesthood, and Noah—out of a one-syllable word is hard to understand. At another point he “translated” the sixty-one words of Abraham 1:11 from the Egyptian symbol meaning “the” or “this,”³¹ and Mormons have been elated that this passage contains both words.

“All of the first two rows of characters on the papyrus fragment can be found in the manuscript of the ‘Book of Abraham’ that is published in Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” noted Jerald and Sandra Tanner. “A careful examination of this manuscript reveals that Joseph Smith used less than four lines from the papyrus to make forty-nine verses in the ‘Book of Abraham.’ These forty-nine verses are composed of more than 2,000 English words!”³² The forty-six symbols used by Joseph Smith in a 1,125-word passage from the “Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar” wouldn’t even cover the

³⁰ Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 323. *Fall of the Book of Abraham*, www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech11a.htm.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 324.

³² Tanner and Tanner, *Changing World of Mormonism*, 343.

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vocables/phonetic entities in the proper names in the passage under investigation, and would have left an additional 1,060 words unaccounted for.

Thus Joseph Smith could not have “translated” the Book of Abraham from the small Sen Sen papyrus, at least not by any process that could properly be called translating. But this just leads Mormons to further speculations—that the Book of Abraham was translated with the Urim and Thummim (in spite of what Joseph Fielding Smith said about that instrument having been returned to the Angel Moroni along with the gold plates³³)—or that the Book of Abraham was translated by means of a seer stone which the Church possesses even today—or that Joseph Smith was simply “inspired” to bring forth the Book of Abraham using the papyri in a manner we cannot understand. (I’m not sure I can understand any of the proposed methods.)

This uncertainty led to caution in some LDS publications. Many Mormons refuse to use the word *translation* in referring to the Book of Abraham anymore. They refer to the Sen Sen as “an aid to inspiration” and some speak of the symbols thereon as “super-cryptograms,”³⁴ claiming that if Christians can get a spiritual meaning out of the Song of Solomon, then the same should be true of the “Book of the Dead.” But Joseph Smith stated that the Book of Abraham was *translated* from the writings of Abraham himself, on the papyrus purchased from Chandler.

What does the small Sen Sen really say? According to an Egyptologist, it reads:

Osiris shall be conveyed into the Great Pool of Khons—and likewise Osiris Hor, justified, born to Tikhebyt, justified—after his arms have been placed on his heart and the Breathing Permit (which [Isis] made and has writing on its inside and outside) has been wrapped in royal linen and placed under his left arm near his heart; the rest of his mummy-bandages should be wrapped over it. The man for whom this book has been copied will breathe forever and ever as the bas of the gods do.³⁵

³³ As quoted by McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 818. Smith claimed that any later references to the presence of this instrument were either “errors” or misidentification with seer stones.

³⁴ *Newsletter and Proceedings of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* (Brigham Young University, October 25, 1968), 1–4. As quoted by Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 328.

³⁵ Klaus Baer translation, quoted in Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 317. Baer’s translation has been ratified by Robert K. Ritner, former teacher at Yale and the University of Chicago. Robert K. Ritner, “The ‘Breathing Permit of Hor’: Thirty-Four Years Later,” *Dialogue* 4, no. 33 (Winter 2000). *Dialogue*,

content.lib.utah.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/dialogue&CISOPTR=8716&CISOSHOW=8519&REC=6.

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THE FACSIMILES

The translation done by Joseph Smith must be considered to be printed exactly as he wrote it, because he was the editor of the *Times and Seasons* when the Book of Abraham was printed therein. The woodcuts which were illustrations of some of the pictures on the scrolls must have met with his approval too, for we read in *History of the Church* that Joseph inspected and corrected the work done by the woodcarver Hedlock.³⁶

Even LDS scholars, though, admit the quality of the woodcut illustrations has worsened with each printing of the *Pearl of Great Price*. But it is not hard for me to understand why the LDS Church does not publish new editions of the *Pearl of Great Price* with photographs of the papyri illustrations upon which the woodcuts were based. The reason is that the papyri betray even worse than the woodcuts the fact that Joseph Smith was completely unfamiliar with the things the papyri depicted. One LDS apologist, Nephi Jensen, tried in the early 1940s to prove that Joseph Smith had been able to interpret some of the symbols on the facsimiles. But usually the nearest that Joseph Smith could get to a true interpretation of the illustrations was when he labeled a great percentage of the elements as “gods.” By the law of averages and considering the fact that papyri depicted obviously fantastic beings, he was right at least part of the time.

There are three facsimiles printed in the *Pearl of Great Price*. The first one was identified by Joseph Smith as a representation of an attempt by a wicked Egyptian priest to sacrifice Abraham on an altar. The only things in the woodcut which look strange—that is, uniquely un-Egyptian—do not appear on the original papyrus. For instance, part of the papyrus where the jackal head of the god of embalming, Anubis, once appeared had flaked away, even in Joseph Smith’s day. Some nineteenth-century person, probably Joseph Smith, simply glued the papyrus to a piece of paper and penciled in a new head—that of a human—and labeled it “the idolatrous priest of Elkenah.” He also drew a knife into the “priest’s” hand to reinforce his assertion that this was a sacrificial scene. Joseph Smith called the representation of the dead man’s “ba” or soul, which hovered over his body, the Angel of the Lord—which blows all kinds of holes in the LDS argument that angels don’t have wings.

Facsimile 2 is a poor copy of what Egyptologists would call a hypocephalus. This was a disc placed under the head of a mummy. Unfortunately, the original hypocephalus was not in the collection found in the New York Metropolitan Museum, and its whereabouts are unknown. There are enough extant copies of authentic hypocephali, though, to ascertain what one should look like. Egyptologists were puzzled for many years when

³⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:519.

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they tried to determine the translation of the inscription written around the rim of Joseph Smith's copy of his hypocephalus. Then in the late 1960s researcher Grant Heward discovered that some of the hieroglyphic writing had been replaced by a few lines copied from the Hor Sen Sen fragment. This was evidently done by someone who couldn't read Egyptian—which makes Joseph Smith a prime suspect!—because the hieratic (cursive) Sen Sen characters were sketched in upside down, complete with the spelling errors of the scribe who wrote the Sen Sen.³⁷

On the inside portion of the hypocephalus, another missing portion was filled in with a boat containing the hawk-headed god Ra. This god was apparently copied from the papyrus fragment commonly known as the "Trinity" fragment because of the three-headed god represented on it. In addition, Joseph Smith identified a pagan god with an obviously erect phallus as "God upon his throne." This is the way it was depicted when first printed in 1842, but by the time I was a Mormon the official depiction of this god had no phallus. It reappeared when the LDS Church printed the *Pearl of Great Price* in its 1979 and later editions.

An additional problem associated with Joseph Smith's identification of a hypocephalus with Abraham is the fact that no such thing existed until late in Egypt's history—at least a thousand years after Abraham. Some Mormons have concluded that Abraham began the hypocephalus drawings, and that later scribes completed them and put them into the form of a hypocephalus. This is stretching the whole issue far too much for comfort.

Facsimile 3 has also been a great problem for Mormons, because the figures that Joseph Smith labeled as (1) Pharaoh; (2) Abraham; (3) a prince; (4) Shulem, a waiter; and (5) a slave have their real names written above them on the papyrus. They are accurately identified as (1) the goddess Isis; (2) the god of the dead, Osiris; (3) the goddess of truth, Maat; (4) a dead man named Hor for whom the scroll was written (obviously the focal point of the whole picture, for all the others are looking at him); and (5) the god Anubis (part of whose head was missing in the original papyrus). This was the facsimile which so disturbed me when I realized that Joseph Smith had identified the two women as men. Critics of Mormonism have also noted that Abraham 1:27 states that Pharaoh was a descendant of Ham (and thus a Negro), yet the figure that Joseph Smith labeled as Pharaoh is white.

BLACKS, THE PRIESTHOOD, AND THE POPYRI

The whole issue of denying Mormon priesthood to blacks came from this Egyptian "Book of Breathings." Even the verse in the Book of Abraham (1:26), which talked of blacks and

³⁷ Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 338–39.

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the priesthood, came from a *hole in the papyrus*. But in stubbornly defending this impious fraud, the LDS Church for over a hundred years gave blacks a second-class status in their organization.

The *Book of Mormon* was first published in 1830, and in it 2 Nephi 26:33 teaches racial equality. How did the LDS Church make such a complete turnabout in doctrine to arrive at its racist policies that began in the mid-nineteenth century? Wallace Turner, in trying to analyze the developments concerning the anti-Negro policies, noted that the early Mormons were mainly from New England, New York, and Ohio—all abolitionist areas. But when the Mormons moved to Missouri, a slave state, problems began to erupt between them and Missourians, who thought the Mormons wanted free blacks to immigrate to their state. The Missourians got this impression from an imprudently worded editorial printed in the LDS periodical *Evening and Morning Star*, July 1833. Mormons overreacted in trying to remove that impression, and by 1836 the LDS publication *Messenger and Advocate* was saying it was fine to free slaves after purchasing them from their owners—just so you put the freed blacks on another continent.³⁸

PAST POLICIES OF THE CHURCH CONCERNING BLACKS

Negroes were defined by Brigham Young as those having a “flat nose and black skin.”³⁹ He enlarged upon this by making a statement which haunted and frustrated Mormons for over a century. He said that no man with even a single drop of Negroid blood in his veins could hold the LDS priesthood.⁴⁰

Of course LDS leaders when I was a Mormon were not willing to bear the entire burden of answering those who would want to know why they denied the priesthood to blacks. After all, even the “prophet” David O. McKay once commented that the whole issue was based upon only the one verse in the Book of Abraham. With such a thin foundation for such a controversial issue of doctrine, Mormons such as Apostle Mark E. Petersen looked to God to show that he is the great Segregator, “for did he not place the first blacks way over there in darkest Africa?”⁴¹

³⁸ *Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 7 (April 1836): 299. This publication, 1834–36, is at *Messenger and Advocate*, www.centerplace.org/history/ma/.

³⁹ *Journal of Discourses* 7:290.

⁴⁰ Address by Brigham Young, as recorded in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1833–1898, vol. 4, typescript, edited by Scott G. Kenney (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983), 97.

⁴¹ Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems as They Affect the Church” (address, Convention of Teachers of Religion on the College Level, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, August 27, 1954). As quoted by Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 279.

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In Brigham Young's day, anyone of the "chosen seed" who was found mixing his blood with "the seed of Cain" would be subject to an immediate death penalty. Brigham intended this as an eternal principle, for he actually stated that this "law of God" would "always be so."⁴²

The LDS historian, B. H. Roberts, said that Cain, because he murdered his brother, was cursed with black skin. His Negro blood was passed down and preserved during the flood through Egyptus, the black wife of Ham.⁴³ The question might arise as to why God would allow such a cursed race to continue through the flood. Brigham Young taught that Cain recognized that if he killed his brother Abel, all his own posterity would be cursed, but he, and the preexistent spirits who would become his descendants, agreed to share the burden together.⁴⁴ (Such premeditation is uncharacteristic of the Cain I read of in Genesis!) LDS President John Taylor said in the *Journal of Discourses* that it was necessary for the posterity of Cain to continue through the flood so that the devil could be represented on the earth through them, and through their influence help provide the "opposition" Mormons believe is so necessary.⁴⁵

According to the *Pearl of Great Price*, Ham and the Negress Egyptus had a daughter whom they also named Egyptus. Her son, Pharaoh, was the first ruler of the land of Egypt, which his mother had discovered. Pharaoh, being of the blood of Egyptus and Ham, was "cursed ... as pertaining to the priesthood" (Abraham 1:26; see also v. 27). Here, then, is the entire scriptural basis⁴⁶ upon which Mormons built the anti-Negro teachings they held for so long. You can look through the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Book of Mormon* and never find anything else to substantiate this view—and of course, the Bible teaches that the gospel—in its fullness—is for all people with no regard for their race (Gal. 3:28).

As early as 1843 Joseph Smith was advocating "national equalization" for blacks while restricting them by law to marry only those of their own race.⁴⁷ Brigham Young went even further with his rabid abhorrence of black-white relations, insisting that Negroes, because of their supposed inherent stupidity, were *meant* to serve whites. He stated: "The

⁴² *Journal of Discourses* 10:110.

⁴³ Quoted in Tanner and Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism*, 2:171.

⁴⁴ Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (1976 edition), 15. See *Curse of Cain*, www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/curseofcain_part2.htm.

⁴⁵ *Journal of Discourses* 22:304.

⁴⁶ Grant H. Palmer, in his book *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, 16–17, argues convincingly that many of these ideas could have come from Joseph Smith's readings of *Antiquities of the Jews* by Flavius Josephus.

⁴⁷ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1956), 270.

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Canaanite cannot have wisdom to do things as the white man has.”⁴⁸ The *Juvenile Instructor*, an LDS publication, spoke of the Negro’s intelligence as being “stunted.”⁴⁹ A president of the LDS Church when I was a member, Joseph Fielding Smith, once spoke of Negroes as being “an inferior race.”⁵⁰ Smith later tried to soften his hard public stand against Negroes with his remark in *Look* magazine that “ ‘darkies’ are wonderful people, and they have their place in our church.”⁵¹

What Joseph Fielding Smith objected so much to, and why he was so adamantly opposed to Negroes, was the thought of white Mormons marrying blacks—Mormon or not. LDS apostle Mark E. Petersen went so far as to say in 1954 that Negroes had as a primary objective in life the mingling of their race with whites through intermarriage.⁵²

Again, Mormons were not willing to bear the responsibility for their racial views alone. Whereas they blamed earthly segregation of Negroes on the God who placed Negroes in Africa, they blamed the Negroes themselves for their years without the LDS priesthood. According to Alvin R. Dyer and many other LDS authorities, Negroes before 1978 did not have the priesthood because they themselves *rejected* it in the preexistence. In the time before the world was created, Negroes were: “not faithful,”⁵³ “less valiant,”⁵⁴ “indifferent in their support of the righteous cause,”⁵⁵ and “less worthy,”⁵⁶ according to LDS teachings of the past.

All these remarks have to do with the old LDS teachings that when Christ and Satan squared off in the preexistence, one-third of the spirits there went with Satan (and were cast down to earth); and of the remainder, some sided enthusiastically with Christ, and the rest just kind of dragged along with the Savior. For this lack of devotion, these last

⁴⁸ Woodruff quoted Young as cited by Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism Like Watergate* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm [now Utah Lighthouse Ministry], 1974), 15.

⁴⁹ *Juvenile Instructor*, 3:157. This was first an unofficial, then official publication of the LDS Church from the 1860s to 1930, at which time it was renamed *The Instructor*.

⁵⁰ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 101, quoted in Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Mormons and Negroes* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm [now Utah Lighthouse Ministry], 1974), 2.

⁵¹ *Look* (October 22, 1963), 79.

⁵² As quoted by Tanner and Tanner, *Changing World of Mormonism*, 306. Utah Lighthouse Ministry, www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech10a.htm.

⁵³ Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:186.

⁵⁴ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 476. This has been removed from subsequent editions.

⁵⁵ B. H. Roberts, *The Contributor*, 6:296–97, as quoted by Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner in their online version of *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 293. Utah Lighthouse Ministry, www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech10a.htm.

⁵⁶ John J. Stewart and William E. Berrett, *Mormonism and the Negro* (Orem, Utah: Bookmark, 1960, 1967), 51, as quoted by Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Mormons and Negroes* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 6.

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spirits were sent to earth in black bodies that would be a sign to priesthood holders that they should not pass on their priesthood to these sluggish spirits. Negroes could be baptized but could not hold the priesthood.

Now, the implications of being a black LDS man were these: Unlike your white counterparts, you were barred from receiving any vital inspiration for anyone except your wife and children, since you could hold no priesthood authority over anyone else. Your wife and children were yours for life only, because you couldn't be married "for eternity" in an LDS temple. Without such higher ordinances, you had no hope of being exalted in the celestial kingdom as your white brothers were—though you could go there as a servant to them. (In fact, a Negro woman was once formally "sealed" to Joseph Smith as a servant. LDS leaders seemed piqued that this "did not satisfy her, and she pleaded for her endowments.")⁵⁷

A friend of Joseph Smith, a Negro man by the name of Elijah Abel, was ordained an elder, and later a seventy. He served a mission in Canada too before his death in 1884. Mormons said this was done "before the word of the Lord was fully understood," and they considered Abel's ordinations as a fluke in their history. However, Abel's son Enoch and grandson Elijah were ordained to the priesthood—the younger Elijah as late as 1934, in Logan, Utah.⁵⁸

Lester Bush, writing in the liberal publication *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, related that one late-twentieth-century president of the Church, David O. McKay, let a young Negro be ordained to the priesthood because the blessing the young man received from his patriarch said that, despite the outward appearances of the young man and his relatives, he was not of the "cursed" lineage. McKay also authorized the sealing in a temple of two Negro children to the white LDS couple who had adopted them.⁵⁹

David O. McKay also stated privately once that he, unlike most other Mormons, didn't believe that Negroes were under any curse. In fact, he thought the whole Negro issue within Mormonism hinged on a practice, not a doctrine, which he hoped would soon be discontinued.⁶⁰ The Negro problem was surely burdensome to Mormons during McKay's presidency, for that was the time that many Western Athletic Conference schools boycotted athletic events with Brigham Young University. Pressure from black

⁵⁷ This according to President Joseph F. Smith in "Excerpts from the Weekly Council Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles," as documented by Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 305. The Tanners' entire book, though out of print, is available in a free online edition at www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changecontents.htm.

⁵⁸ Tanner and Tanner, *Mormons and Negroes* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.), 11.

⁵⁹ Lester Bush, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1973): 45.

⁶⁰ Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 290, quoting David O. McKay.

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organizations was levied on the LDS Church, but to no avail. The Church's stand on Negroes and the priesthood could only be changed, Mormons insisted, by a revelation from God.

The Reorganized Church (known today as The Community of Christ) meanwhile had managed to avoid all these problems almost before they began. Joseph Smith's son, Joseph Smith III, in 1865 announced that he had received a revelation (now in their scriptural canon) which cleared the way for ordination of blacks.

BLACKS IN THE CHURCH

In the absence of a like revelation, the Utah church tried to make visible changes that would appease its critics. In 1970, for instance, the first black singers were admitted to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The church openly welcomed blacks who joined the Church too.

Some black Mormons weren't happy without the priesthood, and said so. And non-LDS Negroes living in Utah know how the LDS doctrine has clouded the atmosphere in that state for them. David H. Oliver, a black lawyer, in 1963 wrote a self-published book, *A Negro on Mormonism*, in which he said that Utah was worse than the South for blacks who wanted employment other than menial labor.

Though most Mormons have tried to welcome blacks into their church as members, this has caused considerable cognitive dissonance for those who remember the formerly "eternal" teachings of the LDS Church, recalling situations that existed prior to the proclamation that black men could hold priesthood. For years before that, Polynesian men who had joined the LDS Church were given the priesthood, because they were from the "isles of the sea."⁶¹ (The *Book of Mormon* story forced Mormons into the assumption that the islanders too were Semitic.) Of course, anthropologists know that most people of, say, the Fiji Islands are Negroid. Mormons, then, had been bestowing their priesthood on certain blacks for many years prior to 1978.

In 1963 the LDS Church announced that it would send missionaries to eastern Nigeria. But the Nigerian government refused to give visas to missionaries because of the Church's racist policies. Black Nigerian Mormons continued to write to Salt Lake City for instructions and books on doctrine for their newfound religion. By 1965 *Time* magazine reported a Mormon membership of seven thousand Ibibio, Ibo, and Efik tribesmen in Nigeria.⁶² Then the whole LDS African system started to crumble. The Nigerian LDS

⁶¹ 2 Nephi 10:20–21.

⁶² *Time* (June 18, 1965), 56.

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leader, Anie Dick Obot, set himself up as bishop over a council of seventy-five elders, unaware that the priesthood was “necessary” for such an organizational move. The Utah leaders meanwhile were appalled by this, and by publicity regarding Nigerians’ practice of the LDS tenet of polygamy. The Nigerian LDS empire of the 1960s disappeared almost without a trace, like the wicked cities of the Old Testament, when the Nigerians learned of the LDS Church’s teachings of the “inferiority” of their race.

THE NEW “REVELATION”

It was about 1963 too that Church leaders began openly discussing a possible change in their Negro policy. Apostle Hugh B. Brown, a general authority and a member of the First Presidency, said that the “problem” was being “considered.”⁶³ Each time an LDS leader was asked when Negroes could receive the priesthood, the reply would be like that given by Apostle Brown—that it would be “in the own due time of the Lord.”⁶⁴

As a Mormon, I never thought I’d see the day that a Negro would hold the priesthood. Brigham Young had said many times that God would never allow a black to rule over a white in government or religion. He also said that the seed of Cain (who had supposedly rejected the priesthood in the first place) wouldn’t have the priesthood until after death⁶⁵ and after *all* of Adam’s other children’s seed (that is, all non-blacks) “had the privilege of receiving the Priesthood ... and have received their resurrection from the dead.”⁶⁶ The tenth president of the Church, the late Joseph Fielding Smith, explored the implications of Young’s teachings on when Negroes could receive the priesthood and concluded that Abel, Adam’s son, must be resurrected, achieve godhood, and raise up posterity “on some other world” before any faithful descendants of his murderer could receive the priesthood.⁶⁷

On June 8, 1978, I heard an announcement from a national news service that the LDS Church had introduced a new policy regarding Negroes and their priesthood: The First Presidency had released a statement saying that “the long-promised day has come.”⁶⁸ The statement portrayed LDS leadership as intercessors who had begged the Lord to change his mind about blacks, and that the Lord had relented. Unlike the revelations of the nineteenth-century church, the exact text of this revelation was not given.

⁶³ *Newsweek* (June 17, 1963), 60.

⁶⁴ As quoted by Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 290.

⁶⁵ *Journal of Discourses* 11:272.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:143.

⁶⁷ Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:188 (1958 edition).

⁶⁸ The exact wording of “Official Declaration—2” states: “Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color.”

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But I don't think LDS President Spencer W. Kimball received anything more in that upper room than the end result of his realization that the Church had to make a decision between "revelation" and revenue. In the 1970s and 1980s a legal case that eventually was settled by the Supreme Court, *Bob Jones University v. The United States*, threatened the tax-exempt status of organizations that could be seen as discriminating against people of color.⁶⁹ The Church must have seen in this the beginning of the kind of pressure that the United States government put on it before the polygamy "manifesto" was issued. It was mirrored in the case of Doug Wallace, a young Mormon who had passed his priesthood on to a black friend. When Wallace came up with what ex-Mormon writer Bob Witte called "an ironclad case" and presented it to a judge, the judge apparently contacted President Kimball and told him that there'd better be a new revelation on the way giving the priesthood to blacks or Wallace would win this new case, with disastrous financial and publicity results for Mormondom.⁷⁰

However, one of the most prominent propelling forces that influenced the Kimball presidency was the explosive growth of the LDS Church in Brazil and the pending temple dedication there. This was a temple in whose ordinances black men—and nearly half of all Brazilians are undeniably of black ancestry⁷¹—would not be able to participate.

Even decades after the LDS Church began granting priesthood to Negro men, Mormons still squirm trying to explain to outsiders why the ban was there in the first place. Armand L. Mauss, an LDS apologist, suggests that the biblical and *Pearl of Great Price* scriptures always cited as requiring the denial of LDS priesthood to blacks never explicitly said any such thing; thus it can be concluded that Mormonism, like its nineteenth-century American religious counterparts, simply partook of an omnipresent antebellum racist atmosphere of the day and overlaid it onto sacred writ.⁷²

Someone might ask if I don't think it good that the LDS Church finally gave its priesthood to blacks. Though I hope that this would be a good beginning to the breakdown of traditional prejudices, I cannot be happy with any cosmetic change that this organization

⁶⁹ *Bob Jones University v. United States*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983). Findlaw, caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/cgi-bin/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=461&invol=574.

⁷⁰ The examples of factors that may have influenced the LDS Church's decision to grant its priesthood to blacks is covered in much more detail and with greater documentation by the Tanners in various books. However, the most accessible to the average reader is the online version of Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*.

⁷¹ Current figures of Brazilian population show that nearly half its citizens are black or mulatto (mixed white and black). Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/br.html#People.

⁷² Armand L. Mauss, "Dispelling the Curse of Cain: Or, How to Explain the Old Priesthood Ban Without Looking Ridiculous," *Sunstone* (October 2004): 57.

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might effect to make itself and its ungodly doctrines more attractive to my black brothers and sisters.⁷³

⁷³ Scott, L. C. (2009). *The Mormon Mirage* (pp. 124–147). Zondervan.