

Leaving the Church

A Compilation of the Evidence Against the LDS Church

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“The man who cannot listen to an argument which opposes his views either has a weak position or is a weak defender of it. No opinion that cannot stand discussion or criticism is worth holding. And it has been wisely said that the man who knows only half of any question is worse off than the man who knows nothing of it. He is not only one sided, but his partisanship soon turns him into an intolerant and a fanatic. In general it is true that nothing which cannot stand up under discussion and criticism is worth defending.”

– James E. Talmage –

(quoting “The Intolerant Spirit.” Editorial. *Pittsburgh Leader*. November 13, 1919.)

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Introduction

I hope those of you who read this document do not get the wrong idea: I am not leaving the Church out of anger, sin, or laziness. I am not leaving due to anti-Mormon literature or to pursue different lifestyle choices. And I am not leaving in hopes of bringing others with me. Rather, I am leaving for only one simple reason: I no longer believe fundamental Church doctrines.

I realize my decision to leave the Church will be both disappointing and painful to my family and friends. In drafting this document, it is not my intent to cause additional heartache, particularly in light of all that the Church has given me. The Church has molded me into a better individual, husband, and father. It has provided me with life-changing experiences and life-long friends. Walking away from the only faith I have ever known feels a lot like leaving behind a loyal friend.

My crisis of faith began in 2008. At the time, I was serving as Branch President. In so doing, I met and counseled with many individuals who were struggling with their testimony. During these counseling sessions, several members raised difficult questions about seemingly obscure doctrines and certain aspects of church history. Initially, I dismissed these concerns and tried to shift their focus to better-understood doctrines and principles. About that same time, I invited a friend and co-worker to take the missionary discussions. He agreed to do so, but supplemented the discussions with his own Internet research, which he then conveyed to me through several conversations. In so doing, my friend raised some of the same concerns that I had previously discussed with various branch members. Once again, I dismissed these concerns as the product of false, anti-Mormon literature.

At the conclusion of these conversations, I felt somewhat dissatisfied with the way I handled the various questions and concerns. As a Branch President, I felt an obligation to have answers and insights to gospel questions. I therefore decided to delve into a research project in order to squarely address these unresolved issues.

In the days and weeks that followed, I studied a variety of LDS sources fully-intending to find answers to my questions. To my surprise, however, I discovered that the concerns at issue were both factual and legitimate. Although I was secure in my testimony, I was shaken by the fact that I had never heard of these issues. Occasionally, I began to wonder what else I didn't know about the church. For the first time in my life, I began having small doubts of my own.

Over the next several months, I put my doubts aside and hoped they would simply go away. Or, at the very least, I thought I could diminish the doubts with increased faith and church service. To my dismay, my doubts were unrelenting.

As the months morphed into years, I fruitlessly searched a variety of LDS-friendly sources looking for answers. Instead, my research both reinforced my concerns and created new ones. In turn, I began feeling increasingly uncomfortable at church. Sacrament meeting talks about Joseph Smith and the early church no longer rang true. I frequently felt inadequate in my calling and fraudulent during priesthood blessings. I felt trapped between what I wanted to believe and what I was discovering about my faith.

I tried to cobble together a set of beliefs that could somehow reconcile my faith in the church with the many problematic aspects of Joseph Smith's life and church doctrine. But every time I settled on a position, I discovered new cracks in the foundation.

My crisis of faith initially caught me off guard and, in turn, my emotions ran the gamut. I felt loneliness, frustration, something comparable to betrayal, sadness, confusion, and hopelessness. But I have found peace in my chosen path.

I am now coming to understand that my story is not unique. In recent years, numerous news outlets have detailed the so-called Mormon exodus. A recent Reuters article, [Mormonism Besieged by the Modern Age](#), quotes Elder Marlin K. Jensen, then-Church Historian and General Authority, as saying: "Maybe since Kirtland, we've never had a period of - I'll call it apostasy, like we're having now." The article speculates that this collective crisis may be attributable to an Internet-age where the Church's warts are subject to examination. [Recent research](#) (including a 3,000 member survey) indicates that the crisis may also be attributable to the fact that the Church does not adequately brace its members for what they will find upon engaging in a thorough examination.

Unfortunately, our discussions at church are often an inch deep and a mile wide. We seem to yearn for a simple religion. We never learn in church, for example, the differences in the various First Vision accounts. We never learn that the Book of Abraham papyri were discovered and analyzed by Egyptologists and ultimately translated much differently than by Joseph Smith. We do not talk about the revisions to the Book of Mormon, the details of Joseph Smith's polygamist marriages, or the DNA studies implicating the Book of Mormon. Questions about such topics are frowned upon because they are uncomfortable. Moreover, many members do not understand the force of this "new" information. Not knowing how to respond, they react defensively.

They are inclined to dismiss much of the evidence as anti-Mormon. In turn, doubters are often instructed to return to the familiar formula: scriptures, prayer, and church attendance.

This approach has isolated many of us from the rest of the Church and ultimately proven unhelpful. Part of the problem is that church members too often believe that faith should not be questioned or examined unless the premise and endgame remains constant: the Church is true. I believe quite the opposite: an unwillingness to subject one's beliefs to rigorous scrutiny is, inherently, a weakness of faith.

My acorns of inquiry and doubt did not mature into oak trees of understanding through prayer and scripture study. On the contrary, my doubts festered and continually undermined much of what I wanted to believe until they eventually became debilitating. Nonetheless, for several years I continued exercising faith in the Church because I hoped it was true and I didn't think there was any way to definitively prove or disprove its truthfulness. But as I carefully studied church history and doctrine, it became apparent that certain LDS teachings and beliefs are objectively false. As these issues added up, I found it increasingly difficult to trust those aspects of the Church that must be accepted by faith alone. A burnt child dreads the fire, so to speak.

My decision to leave the Church is the product of a five-and-a-half-year journey that included countless hours of research, study, and prayer. And now that I have arrived at this point, I feel compelled to provide an explanation for my decision. The following essays analyze the evidence undermining both the Church and my once-flourishing testimony. I have compiled the following information from many sources (most of which would be considered friendly to the Church) and, in many instances, copied without attribution.¹

I realize that many of my loved ones will never agree with my decision to leave the Church, but I hope those who read these essays can come to appreciate the depth of my doubts, the sincerity of my search, and my rationale in parting from a faith that has, despite my heartfelt efforts, proven elusive.

¹ I initially discovered a great deal of the information contained in this document while reading books, essays, and articles written by LDS authors (including Richard Bushman, Terryl Givens, B.H. Roberts, Todd Compton, Michael Ash, etc.) or authors who are viewed credibly within the LDS community (including Grant Palmer, Simon Southerton, Charles Larson, etc.). However, I ultimately relied heavily on Jeremy Runnels' [Letter to a CES Director](#) and [mormonthink.com](#) during the drafting process, as these sources (1) were available online, (2) quoted many of the LDS sources I had read previously, and (3) contained information that I was largely able to verify with LDS-friendly sources. In so doing, I essentially utilized Runnels' letter/outline as the foundation for this document; I modified much of the wording and some of the issues, discarded aspects that did not cause me concern, and supplemented and added information relating to aspects that I deemed most problematic.

Book of Abraham

1. Background

Perhaps the most problematic issue undermining the Church is the Book of Abraham. In July of 1835, a traveling showman named Michael Chandler brought an exhibit consisting of four Egyptian mummies and papyri to Kirtland, Ohio, then the home of the Latter-day Saints. The papyri contained Egyptian hieroglyphics, which intrigued Joseph Smith. Joseph was given permission to look at the papyri scrolls in the exhibit, upon which he pronounced a marvelous discovery:

“[W]ith W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery as scribes, I commence the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc. - a more full account of which will appear in its place, as I proceed to examine or unfold them. Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth.” ([History of the Church](#), Vol. 2, p. 236).

Astounded by their good fortune in finding the writings of Abraham and Joseph of Egypt, several members of the Church purchased the papyri and mummies for \$2,400. Shortly thereafter, Joseph apparently received confirmation that the scrolls contained the writings of Abraham.

The prophet took [the scrolls] and repaired to his room and inquired of the Lord concerning them. The Lord told him they were sacred records, containing the inspired writings of Abraham when he was in Egypt, and also those of Joseph, while he was in Egypt. . . (Orson Pratt, [Journal of Discourses](#), vol. 26.)

Approximately seven years later, Joseph finished translating the scroll he called the *Book of Abraham*, but died before translating the Book of Joseph scroll.

The LDS Church believes the *Book of Abraham* was written by Abraham himself, as shown in the preface to the Book of Abraham:

"THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

"TRANSLATED FROM THE PAPYRUS, BY JOSEPH SMITH

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

In addition, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his diary on February 19, 1842 that the Book of Abraham was literally written by Abraham. This would make the Book of Abraham the only existing original copy of a scriptural book. It would also date the record of Abraham (about 2,000 B.C.) to some 500 years prior to the Book of Genesis authored by Moses, between 1440-1400 B.C.

“Joseph the Seer has presented us some of the Book of Abraham which was written by his own hand but hid from the knowledge of man for the last four thousand years but has now come to light through the mercy of God.” (*Diary of Wilford Woodruff*,

entry of February 19, 1842, LDS archives; also in Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1969), p. 221.)

After completing the translation, Joseph used the Book of Abraham material in sermons, lectures and other writings. In 1880, the Book of Abraham, by unanimous vote of LDS authorities, was "canonized" as official scripture of the LDS Church as part of the Pearl of Great Price.

2. Suspicions and Concerns with Translation

When Joseph translated the papyri in the first half of the 19th century, no one in North America could decipher Egyptian. So Joseph Smith could say the hieroglyphics meant anything he wanted, and he could not be proven wrong. However, once scholars learned to decipher the Egyptian language, Joseph's translation became subject to considerable analysis and examination. In virtually all instances, scholars concluded that the Book of Abraham was a fraud.

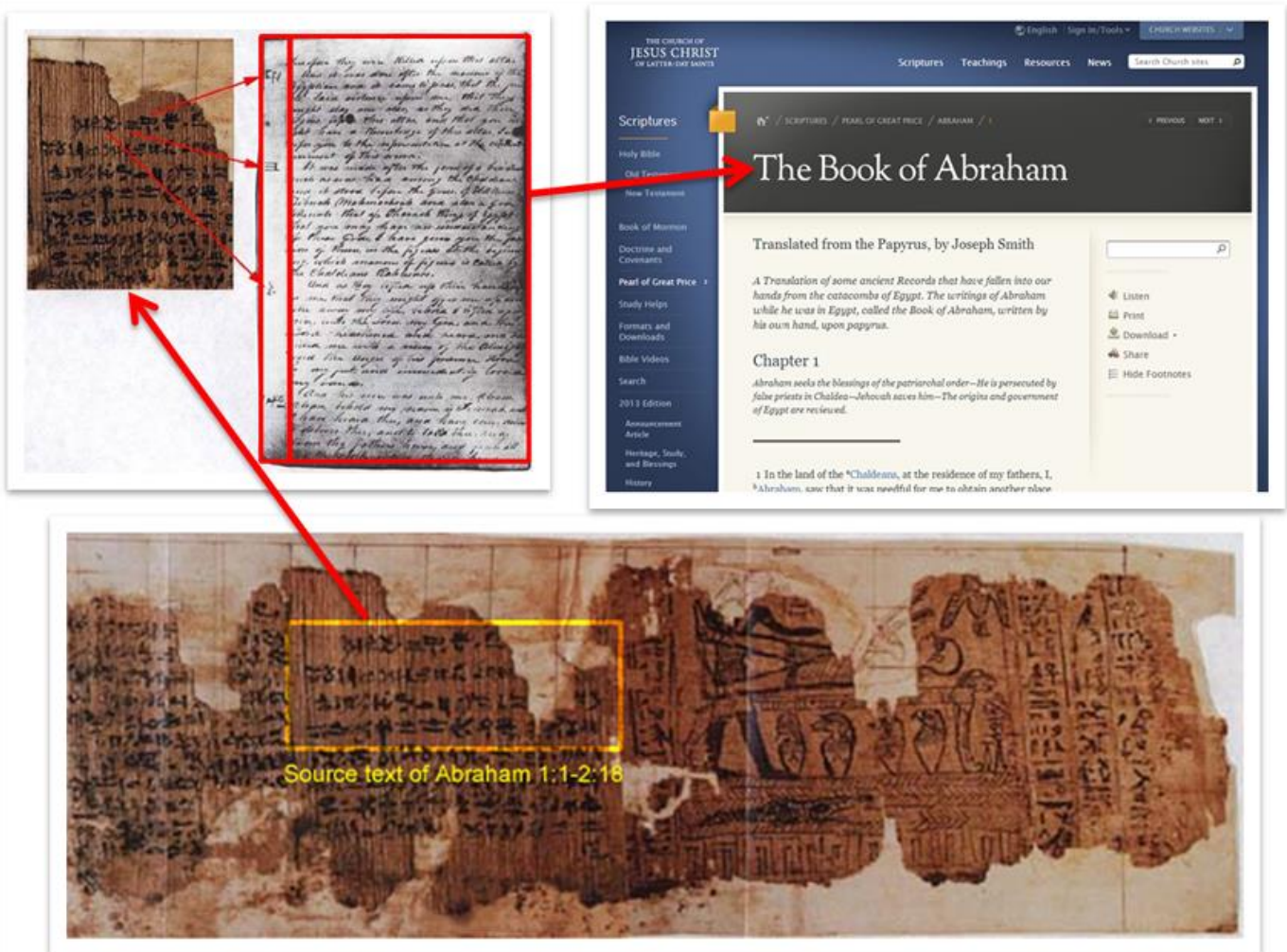
1856 Challenge: In 1856, a copy of the Pearl of Great Price found its way to the Louvre in Paris and was brought to M. Theodule Deveria. As one of the pioneers in Egyptology, Deveria was asked to offer an analysis of the book. Deveria immediately recognized all three facsimiles published with the Book of Abraham as copies of common Egyptian funerary documents, which he had examined on hundreds occasions. Deveria dismissed Joseph's translation as fraudulent nonsense. His comments first appeared in a two-volume work by Jules Remy, "Voyage au Pays des Mormons."

1912 Challenge: Joseph's translation of the ancient papyri was further scrutinized by Rt. Reverend Franklin S. Spalding, Episcopal Bishop of Utah, in 1912. Spalding sent copies of the three facsimiles from the Book of Abraham to some of the world's leading scholars of Egyptology, asking each for an independent assessment of Joseph Smith's interpretations. The eight Egyptologists and Semitists who responded were unanimous in their scathing verdict: Joseph Smith's papyri were common Egyptian funerary texts and wholly unrelated to the Book of Abraham.

- "Joseph Smith's interpretation of these cuts is a farrago of nonsense from beginning to end," adding that "five minutes study in an Egyptian gallery of any museum should be enough to convince any educated man of the clumsiness of the imposture;" (*Dr. Arthur Mace, Assistant Curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Dept. of Egyptian Art.*)
- "[D]ifficult to deal seriously with Smith's impudent fraud," wrote another from Oxford, England. "Smith has turned the Goddess into a king and Osiris into Abraham." (*Dr. A. H. Sayce, Oxford, England.*)
- "[The evidence] very clearly demonstrates that [Joseph Smith] was totally unacquainted with the significance of these documents and absolutely ignorant of the simplest facts of Egyptian Writing and civilization." (*James H. Breasted, Ph.D., Haskell Oriental Museum, University of Chicago.*)
- "[T]he attempts to guess a meaning are too absurd to be noticed. It may be safely said that there is not one single word that is true in these explanations." (*Dr. W.M. Flinders Petrie, London University*)

3. **Book of Abraham Papyri Rediscovered:** In 1966, a University of Utah researcher at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York made a startling find in the museum archives: he had [rediscovered some of the original papyrus fragments](#) that the LDS Church purchased in 1835. In 1967, the Museum presented the papyri as a gift to the Church.

Analyzing the rediscovered papyri (in conjunction with Joseph Smith’s personal papers) provides us with a great deal of insight into how Joseph attempted to translate the papyri. Specifically, the [Church has retained](#) a copy of the [Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language](#) (GAEL), which was written in one of Joseph Smith’s notebooks. The GAEL contains handwritten copies of the original translation work that showed the individual Egyptian figures from the papyrus down the left margin of a page, with the English translation next to it. The handwriting on these copies belonged to Joseph’s scribes, who assisted him with the translation. These Egyptian figures appear in a portion of one of the recovered papyrus, all in exactly the same order that they appear on the handwritten "translation" pages. Kevin Mathie’s analysis of this issue in his book, [Examining the Book of Abraham](#), demonstrates that [Joseph Smith used the recovered papyrus in translating the Book of Abraham](#). The following pictures demonstrate how Joseph Smith tried to construct the Book of Abraham based on each hieroglyphic character on the papyrus.



4. **“Book of Abraham Papyri” Exposed as Ordinary Funerary Documents:** In time, researchers obtained adequate copies of the rediscovered papyri and began comparing them with the Book of Abraham text. But scholar after scholar, both inside and outside the LDS Church, concluded that there was no connection between the Book of Abraham text and the papyri scrolls. Rather, Egyptologists identified the papyri as ordinary Egyptian funerary documents. The section of the papyri used by Joseph was from a document called the *Book of Breathings* and contained the specific name of the deceased individual for whom it had been prepared. Other papyrus fragments from the collection were from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, an earlier collection of writings with a similar purpose. In fact, the papyrus used by Joseph Smith to “translate” the Book of Abraham has been dated by scholars to the first century AD, almost 2000 years after the time of Abraham.

Before discussing the specific translation issues, it is important to note that the LDS Church admits that the Book of Abraham text bears no relationship to the papyri scrolls. In July 2014, the [Church released an essay](#) stating: “Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the Book of Abraham.” Moreover, Dr. Stephen E. Thompson is an LDS scholar who holds a Ph.D. in Egyptology from Brown University. In a paper given at the 1993 Sunstone Symposia, Dr. Thompson presented his reasons for concluding that Joseph Smith did not produce the Book of Abraham by translating it from an Egyptian papyrus scroll he obtained in 1835. Here is a link to a PDF copy of his paper, [Egyptology and the Book of Abraham](#).

Likewise, University of Chicago Egyptology Professor Robert Ritner wrote a paper in 2003 about the Book of Abraham. (Dr. Robert Ritner, "The Breathing Permit of Hor' Among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, July 2003 issue, Volume 62, Number 3, pp. 161-180.) Ritner is a highly-respected Egyptologist and his interpretation of the papyri is consistent with that of every other non-LDS Egyptologist: the BOA bears no relationship to the papyri. Ritner stated: “Except for those willfully blind, the case is closed.” Ritner also identifies many of the deceitful tactics that LDS apologists use to defend the BOA. You can read the [article here](#).

5. **Facsimile 1:** The following is analysis of Facsimile 1. The picture on the left shows the rediscovered papyri (including images Joseph Smith and his scribes penciled in). The picture on the right is the final version that appears in the canonized Book of Abraham.



The following image is what Facsimile 1 should have looked like had Joseph Smith correctly finished the image:



The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile #1 versus what it actually says according to modern Egyptologists:

The Book of Abraham

A common funerary document.

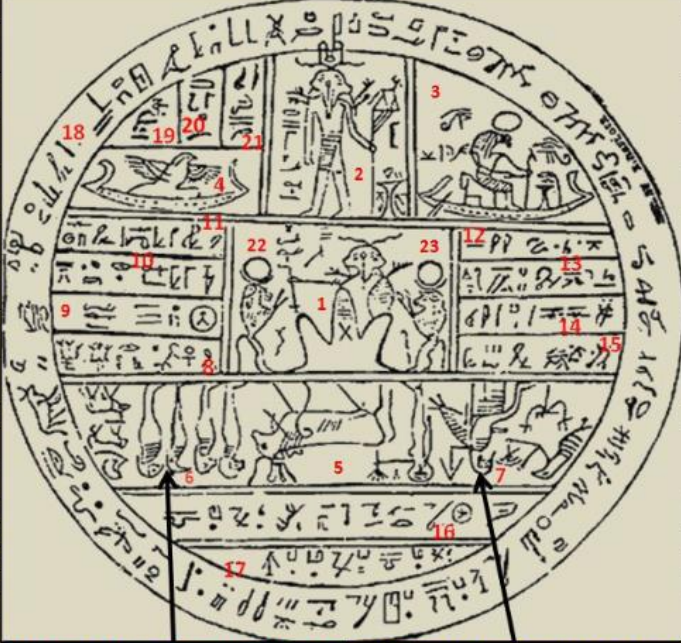






| Joseph Smith's Interpretation | Translated Correctly? Facsimile #1, Book of Abraham | Modern Egyptological Interpretation |
|--|--|---|
| The Angel of the Lord. | 1 | 1 The spirit or "ba" of Hôr (The deceased fellow) |
| Abraham fastened upon an altar | 2 | 2 The deceased: His name was "Hôr" |
| The idolatrous priest of Elkenah | 3 | 3 Anubis (see original image not facsimile, this figure was originally portrayed with the head of a Jackal) |
| The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh. | 4 | 4 A common funeral bier or "lion couch" |
| The idolatrous god of Elkenah. | 5 | 5 |
| The idolatrous god of Libnah. | 6 | 6 Canopic jars containing the deceased's internal organs. |
| The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah. | 7 | 7 |
| The idolatrous god of Korash. | 8 | 8 |
| The idolatrous god of Pharaoh. | 9 | 9 This is the god "Horus" |
| Abraham in Egypt | 10 | 10 A libation table bearing wines, oils, etc. |
| Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians. | 11 | 11 A palace façade, called a "serekh" |
| Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be hig, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word, Shaumahveen. | 12 | 12 This is just the water that the crocodile swims in. |

Joseph Smith's Interpretation available at: <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/abr/fac-1>
 Modern Egyptological Interpretation compiled at: http://www.bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA_6.htm
 FAIR LDS explanation at http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Abraham/Joseph_Smith_Papyrus/Facsimiles/Facsimile_1

6. **Facsimile #2:** The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile #2 versus what it actually says according to Egyptologists:

The Book of Abraham

Hypocephalus; a funerary amulet

| Joseph Smith's Interpretation | Translated Correctly? Facsimile #2, Book of Abraham | Modern Egyptological Interpretation | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| Kolob, The residence of God |  | 1 The god Khnumu. | | | | | | | | |
| Stands next to Kolob | | 2 'Amun-Re', god with two faces representing rising & setting sun. | | | | | | | | |
| God sitting on his throne, clothed with power and authority | | 3 "Horus-Re" riding in his boat | | | | | | | | |
| Raukeyang; also the number 1,000; The measuring of time of Oliblish | | 4 Represents Sokar, not a number | | | | | | | | |
| Enish-go-on-dosh; a governing planet | | 5 Cow of Hathor, behind which stands a uzat-headed goddess holding a sacred tree. | | | | | | | | |
| Represents this earth in it's four quarters | | 6 The four (4) sons of Horus, they can represent the four cardinal points of earth | | | | | | | | |
| God sitting on his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood Contains writings that can only be revealed in the temple. | | 7 The god "Min", an ithyphallic god; that is, a sexually aroused male deity. | | | | | | | | |
| Ought not to be revealed at the present time. | | 8 "grant that the soul of Osiris Shechonk may live." | | | | | | | | |
| | | 9 "the netherworld (below the earth) and his great waters" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 10 "O might god, lord of heaven and earth" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 11 "O god of the sleeping ones from the time of creation" (Read in order 11, 10, 9, 8) | | | | | | | | |
| | | 12 "near" and "wrap" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 13 "which made by" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 14 "breathings" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 15 "this book" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 16 "and may this soul and its possessor never be desecrated in the netherworld" | | | | | | | | |
| Will be given in the own due time of the Lord | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>JOSEPH SMITH vs EGYPTOLOGISTS</td> <td>JOSEPH SMITH vs EGYPTOLOGISTS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 quarters of earth vs "Sons of Horus"</td> <td>God on his throne vs Min, phallic God</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Scholars say the Sons can also represent the cardinal points so in that way there is some agreement</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> | JOSEPH SMITH vs EGYPTOLOGISTS | JOSEPH SMITH vs EGYPTOLOGISTS | 4 quarters of earth vs "Sons of Horus" | God on his throne vs Min, phallic God |  |  | Scholars say the Sons can also represent the cardinal points so in that way there is some agreement | | 17 "May this tomb never be desecrated" |
| JOSEPH SMITH vs EGYPTOLOGISTS | JOSEPH SMITH vs EGYPTOLOGISTS | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 quarters of earth vs "Sons of Horus" | God on his throne vs Min, phallic God | | | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | | | | | | | |
| Scholars say the Sons can also represent the cardinal points so in that way there is some agreement | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 18 "I am Djabty in the house of Benben in Heliopolis, so exalted and glorious. [I am] copulating bull without equal. [I am] that mighty god in the house of Benben of Heliopolis... that might god..." | | | | | | | | |
| | | 19 "You shall be as that god, the Busirian" | | | | | | | | |
| | | 20 Writing: "The name of this mighty god" | | | | | | | | |
| No Annotation Given | | 21 | | | | | | | | |
| | | 22 | | | | | | | | |
| | | 23 Figures 22,23; Baboons are adoring souls of that realm | | | | | | | | |

Joseph Smith's Interpretation available at: <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/ptpp/abrac-2>
 Modern Egyptological Interpretation compiled at: http://www.bookofabraham.com/boamathiefBOA_7.html
 FAIR LDS explanation at http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Abraham/Joseph_Smith_Papyrus

Panel Comparison by: mormoninfographics.com

Strangely, Joseph Smith claimed that figure 7 in Facsimile 2 represented "God sitting on his throne." Egyptologists, however, have determined that it is actually Min, the pagan Egyptian god of fertility or sex.

7. **Facsimile #3:** The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile #3 versus what it actually says according to Egyptologists and modern Egyptology:



Joseph Smith Translation

Egyptologist Translation

- Fig 1. Abraham upon Pharaoh's throne
 Fig 2. King Pharaoh
 Fig 3. Signifies Abraham in Egypt
 Fig 4. Prince of Pharaoh, King of Egypt
 Fig 5. Shulem, one of the King's waiters
 Fig 6. Olimla, a slave

- Fig 1. This is Osiris
 Fig 2. Isis the Great, the God's Mother
 Fig 3. Libation table (oils, wine, etc)
 Fig 4. Maat, mistress of the Gods
 Fig 5. The Osiris Hor, Justified forever
 Fig 6. Anubis, guide of the dead

8. **Discredited Science:** The Book of Abraham (particularly in chapter 3) teaches a Newtonian view of the universe. However, the Book's Newtonian astronomy concepts, mechanics, and models of the universe have been discredited by 20th Century Einsteinian physics. In fact, Keith Norman, an LDS scholar, has written that, "It is no longer possible [for the LDS Church] to pretend there is no conflict" between the discredited Newtonian "science" contained in the Book of Abraham and the scientific discoveries of today. (Keith E. Norman, Ph.D., [Mormon Cosmology: Can it Survive the Big Bang?](#), *Sunstone Magazine*, 1986)

Many of the astronomical and cosmological ideas found in both Joseph Smith's environment and in the Book of Abraham are now out of vogue, and some of these Newtonian concepts are scientific relics. The evidence suggests that the Book of Abraham reflects concepts of Joseph Smith's time and place rather than those of an ancient world. (Grant Palmer, [An Insider's View of Mormon Origins](#), p.25.) As one example, Facsimile 2, Figure #5 states the sun gets its light from Kolob. However, the sun's source of energy is internal, and not external. The sun shines because of thermonuclear fusion; not because it gets its light from any other star as claimed by the Book of Abraham.

9. **Book's Use of KJV Text:** The primary source for chapters 2, 4, and 5 of the Book of Abraham is Genesis chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12. Sixty-six out of 77 verses are quotations or close paraphrases of KJV wording. (Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, p.19). The Book of Abraham is supposed to be an ancient text written thousands of years ago "[by \[Abraham's\] own hand upon papyrus.](#)" Why is 17th Century King James Version text contained in the Book? What does this say about the book being anciently written by Abraham?
10. **Anachronisms:** The Book of Abraham contains numerous anachronisms (which are words, objects, or events that are placed in a time or setting where they do not belong or could not have existed). These [anachronisms](#) constitute clear evidence against the book's authenticity. For example:
- **Facsimile 1:** This vignette is specifically referred to in the text of the Book of Abraham (Abr. 1:12, 14), but the vignette itself dates to approximately 150-100 B.C.E.
 - **Chaldea:** This name occurs in Abraham 1:1, 8, 13, 20, 23, 29, 30, and 2:4. The Chaldeans appeared in the ninth century B.C.E. in the land south of present-day Iraq (Babylonia), and, apparently, migrated from Syria. If the Chaldeans appeared in the 9th century B.C.E., and Abraham lived prior to 1500 B.C.E., then the reference to the "Chaldeans" in the Book of Abraham is an anachronism of 700 years or more.
 - **Pharaoh:** The Book of Abraham uses the word "Pharaoh" as the name of rulers of Egypt (Abr 1:6, 20, 26) and says that the meaning of the word (Abr 1:20) is "king by royal blood." The first ruler named "Pharaoh" is identified as a great-grandson of Noah (Abr 1:25). The linguistic problem is that the word "pharaoh" originally meant "great house." It did not become a title for the king until the beginning of the New Kingdom (18th Dynasty), which began about 1567 B.C. long after Abraham's death.
 - **Egyptus** (Abr 1:23-25): The Book of Abraham states that "Egyptus" was the wife of Ham (the son of Noah) and the mother of Pharaoh who established the first Egyptian government. (Abr 1:23). The name "Egyptus" is obviously intended to be the source of the name of the country. But here is the linguistic problem: the name "Egypt" is not Egyptian, but Greek ('Aigyptos'), and thus was not used for the name of the country until the Greeks had contact with it, long after Abraham's time. Simply stated, the word was not even in existence when Abraham was alive.
11. **Church Essay Debunked:** On July 8, 2014, the Church published an essay concerning the Book of Abraham in the topical guide of LDS.org: [Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham](#). The essay theorizes how Joseph Smith could have "translated" the Book of Abraham when Egyptologists have determined that the Book of Abraham bears no relationship to the papyri from which it was translated. Although numerous scholars have responded to the Church's essay, Dr. Robert Ritner, Professor of Egyptology in the Oriental Institute, housed at the University of Chicago, published one of the more persuasive rebuttals. In so doing, Ritner deconstructs many of the Church's claims. [Ritner's response can be found here](#).

Oddly, the essay does not provide any definitive conclusions as to how the Book of Abraham came about but instead offers three different theories. Each theory is discussed below.

Theory 1: Joseph translated Egyptian papyri into English. The essay states:

Some evidence suggests that Joseph studied the characters on the Egyptian papyri and attempted to learn the Egyptian language. His history reports that, in July 1835, he was "continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients."

. . . it appears that Joseph Smith began translating portions of the book of Abraham almost immediately after the purchase of the papyri. Phelps apparently viewed Joseph Smith as uniquely capable of understanding the Egyptian characters: "As no one could translate these writings," he told his wife, "they were presented to President Smith. He soon knew what they were."

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the idea that Joseph believed that he literally translated (i.e. rendering from one language into another) the papyri into the Book of Abraham. First, Joseph created the "[Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language](#)" after obtaining the papyri, indicating that he was attempting a literal character-by-character translation.

Second, Joseph's own statements clearly indicate that he believed he was translating the papyri in the literal, traditional manner. For example:

- "I, with W[illiam] W. Phelps and O[liver] Cowdery, as scribes, commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham; another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, &c, a more full account will appear in their place, as I proceed to examine or unfold them.

"As Mr Chandler had been told that I could translate them, he brought me some of the characters, and I gave him the interpretation" (From the [Joseph Smith Papers](#), July 6, 1835.)

- "[July, 1835] – The remainder of this month I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language s practiced by the ancients." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2, pg. 238.)
- "October 1 [, 1835] – This afternoon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers O. Cowdery and W.W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham" (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2, pg. 236.)
- "November 17, 1835 – Exhibited the alphabet of the ancient records, to Mr. Holmes, and some others." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2, pg. 316.)
- "The record of Abraham and Joseph, found with the mummies, is beautifully written upon papyrus, with black, and small part red, ink or plant, in perfect preservation." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2, pg. 348.)

The Church, however, has a serious problem if Joseph literally translated the papyri as he claimed. Every non-LDS Egyptologist, and a significant portion of LDS Egyptologists, who have examined the papyri in conjunction with the Book of Abraham have concluded that the Book of Abraham bears no relationship to the papyri. In fact, the Church's essay admits as much:

Neither the rules nor the translations in the grammar book correspond to those recognized by Egyptologists today. None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham's name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the Book of Abraham.

In other words, the papyri that Joseph used to translate the Book of Abraham have nothing to do with the Book of Abraham. How, then, did the book come about? If Joseph literally translated the papyri (as he claimed and as the evidence suggests), then the most logical conclusion is this: Book of Abraham is a fraud.

Theory 2: The papyri translated into the Book of Abraham are missing. The essay states:

Eyewitnesses spoke of 'a long roll' or multiple 'rolls' of papyrus. Since only fragments survive, it is likely that much of the papyri accessible to Joseph when he translated the book of Abraham is not among these fragments. The loss of a significant portion of the papyri means the relationship of the papyri to the published text cannot be settled conclusively by reference to the papyri.

This theory first surfaced after Egyptologists discovered the conflict between the papyri in the Church's possession and the Book of Abraham. However, this theory is, at best, suspect. The theory originated from Hugh B. Nibley in a series of articles he published in 1968. According to Nibley, Joseph F. Smith visited the Joseph's Mansion House in Nauvoo in 1843 or 1844. During the visit, Joseph F. Smith saw the papyri and indicated that one of the rolls of papyri, when unrolled on the floor, extended through two rooms of the Mansion House. However, there are numerous problems with this account. First, Joseph F. Smith was only five years old when he saw the papyri. Second, Joseph F. Smith did not describe the length of the papyri until 1906, nearly 65 years after it occurred. Third, Nibley's depiction of the events relies on multiple levels of hearsay, as we do not have Joseph F. Smith's first-person account. Rather, Joseph F. Smith related his memory of the papyri (which occurred 65 years earlier when he was five or six years old) to Preston Nibley (Hugh B. Nibley's older half-brother), who then relayed the story to Hugh B. Hibley, who then published the story in a series of articles in 1968. Clearly, Theory 2 is not based on reliable information.

Regardless, when the essay states that it only has a "fraction" of the papyri, the Church implies that the lost portion of the papyri is the actual source of the Book of Abraham. But scholars have mathematically measured the scroll and discredited this claim. For example, Egyptologist [Robert Ritner](#) (who published his findings in his book, "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition," 2013), as well Andrew W. Cook and Christopher C. Smith (who published their findings in their article, "[The Original Length of the Scroll of Hor](#)," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*,

Winter 2010) have studied the issue extensively and determined that the Church has the vast majority of the original papyri.

Moreover, the Grammar and Alphabet that Joseph produced, along with the transcribed hieroglyphs and correlating interpretations of the hieroglyphs (which appear in the Book of Abraham), make it clear that Joseph had virtually no understanding of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Notably, the Church's essay makes a disingenuous claim in support of Theory 2: "The loss of a significant portion of the papyri means the relationship of the papyri to the published text cannot be settled conclusively by reference to the papyri." The Church essentially claims that we cannot test Joseph's translation because we do not have the actual fragments Joseph used. However, the Church admits that we do have three vignettes or facsimiles that Joseph claimed to have translated. These facsimiles appear in the canonized version of the Book of Abraham along with numerous footnotes containing Joseph's translation of various depictions in the facsimiles. Oddly, the Church claims that we cannot test Joseph's translation because we do not have the actual fragments Joseph used in translation while ignoring the fact that the Church possesses (and even published with the Book of Abraham) three facsimiles along with Joseph's corresponding translation.

More importantly, the essay fails to explain why Joseph's translations of the canonized facsimiles are conclusively refuted by Egyptologists.

Theory 3: Joseph did not translate the Book of Abraham in the traditional sense but received it via revelation. The essay states as follows:

Alternatively, Joseph's study of the papyri may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words translator and translation. According to this view, Joseph's translation was not a literal rendering of the papyri as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and revelation. They catalyzed a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a revelation about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri."

As previously discussed, Joseph frequently used the word "translate" in reference to his work with the papyri. Accordingly, the Church theorizes that perhaps Joseph did not actually translate the Book of Abraham in the traditional sense but instead received it through revelation. The Church's essay goes so far as to claim that "Joseph Smith did not claim to know the ancient languages of the records that he was translating." Therefore, the Church alters the definition of "translate" to mean that Joseph "transmitted" information about Abraham from a heavenly sphere to an earthly sphere. If we follow this logic, Joseph could have been presented with any object (including objects wholly unrelated to the Book of Abraham) and learned about the life and teachings of Abraham (or any other topic).

As a preliminary matter, the Church's assertion that Joseph "did not claim to know ancient languages" is inaccurate. As noted by Ritner, in Joseph Smith's published 1844 "Appeal to the Freemen of the State of Vermont, the 'Brave Green Mountain Boys,' and Honest Men," Smith claimed to know Chaldean and Egyptian, among other languages.

Regardless, the Church's re-definition of the term "translate" is accompanied with a variety of problems and unanswered questions. Why would Joseph need a physical object, such as the papyri, to receive revelation (particularly when he received numerous revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants without the assistance of a revelatory catalyst)? Why would Joseph pay \$2,400 to obtain papyri that bore no relationship to Abraham in order to then receive the Book of Abraham via revelation?

More importantly, why would Joseph (1) tell people he was translating the papyri; (2) study the Egyptian on the papyri; and (3) create an entire Grammar and Alphabet if he was not actually translating the papyri? Joseph clearly knew the difference between translation and revelation as evidenced the differing origins of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. Why, then, would he claim to have translated the Book of Abraham if he actually received it through revelation?

Simply stated, the Church's assertion that the papyri were merely a catalyst for revelation does not withstand careful scrutiny.

12. Joseph Smith's Five Sources for Composing the Book of Abraham: Nearly all of the Book of Abraham can be accounted for in five different 19th Century texts that were available to Joseph Smith. LDS historian and former CES educator [Grant Palmer](#) analyzes these five texts in chapter 1 of his book, [An Insider's View of Mormon Origins](#). The following is a summary of his analysis (and a more detailed excerpt can be found [here](#)):

- **Abraham 1; Facsimile #1, #3:** Abraham's biographical information in Abraham 1 and Joseph Smith's claim of what these two Facsimile pictures portray comes from *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. Joseph owned an 1830 edition of this book. Joseph's detailed explanations for the individual Egyptian characters on these two Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham have been thoroughly discredited by Egyptologists.
- **Abraham 2, 4-5:** Eighty-six percent of the verses in these three chapters came from Genesis, 1, 2, 12, and 11:28-29. This material came from a 1769 edition or later printing of the King James Version of the Bible (including its translation errors).
- **Abraham 3; Facsimile 2:** The text of Abraham 3 and Facsimile 2 contains some remarkable resemblances to the astronomical concepts, phrases, and other motifs found in Thomas Dick's, *Philosophy of a Future State*. Smith owned an 1830 copy of this book.
- **Abraham 3; Facsimile 2:** Thomas Taylor's 1816 book, *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*, especially volume 2, also contains most of the motifs in Abraham 3 and Facsimile 2. Dick and Taylor both contain a number of exact phrases found in Abraham 3 and Facsimile 2.

- **Strange names:** The few Hebrew names and phrases found in the Book of Abraham are compatible with Joseph Smith's study with Hebrew scholar Joshua Seixas during the winter of 1835-36, in Ohio.

13. Information: There is a great deal of readily-available online information regarding the Book of Abraham, including Charles M. Larson's book, [By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus](#), and Kevin Mathie's [Examining the Book of Abraham](#). Additionally, the [following video](#) gives a concise overview of the Book of Abraham.

14. Conclusions: Kevin Mathie identifies the following conclusions we can draw from the BOA:

- Joseph Smith was clear in his statements and in his writings that he was "translating" text from the papyri (rather than just using the papyri as a catalyst for revelation). Furthermore, Church leaders after Joseph, beginning with Brigham Young, were adamant that the Book of Abraham is a holograph written by Abraham.
- Scholars now know how to read ancient Egyptian, and are very familiar with ancient Egyptian religious concepts and practices. The very same papyri that were used in the creation of the Book of Abraham, can be, and have been, translated by competent Egyptologists (including those at BYU). These scholarly translations make no mention of Abraham, nor do the papyri contain anything resembling the text of the Book of Abraham.
- The existing Facsimiles have been thoroughly examined by Egyptologists and have been found to be very different from Joseph Smith's interpretations. At best, there are only superficial similarities in a few figures.
- The text of the Book of Abraham contains anachronisms — names of people and places that did not exist in Abraham's day. Even Facsimile #1 could not have been produced "by the hand" of Abraham, having been dated to be at least 14 centuries too recent. Additionally, there are specific concepts in the Book of Abraham that reflects a 19th-century, Newtonian cosmology.

The evidence demonstrates that the Book of Abraham is not what Joseph Smith claimed. Joseph may have *thought* he was utilizing a holographic document from Abraham, but it is clear that this was not the case. The papyrus that Joseph claimed to be the Book of Abraham is dated at least 1,400 years after Abraham's death, and very possibly close to 2,000 years later (not to mention the fact that scholars can now translate the papyrus and determine what they really say). And, even if Joseph received the Book of Abraham solely from inspiration and unrelated to any papyrus or physical document — as some church members are now beginning to claim (despite statements from numerous prophets to the contrary) — this theory does not explain the anachronisms found within the Book of Abraham. A much more plausible explanation is that the Book of Abraham was created by Joseph Smith rather than Abraham.

Kinderhook Plates

- 1. Background:** On April 16, 1843, Robert Wiley began digging a deep shaft in the middle of an Indian mound located just outside of Kinderhook, Illinois. The *Quincy Whig* newspaper reported that Wiley began the excavation project after dreaming of buried treasure beneath the mound. He initially undertook the excavation process alone before engaging the help of 10 to 12 men to assist him. In time, they unearthed "six plates of brass of a bell shape, each having a hole near the small end, and a ring through them all, and clasped with two clasps." A member of the excavation team, W.P. Harris, took the plates home, washed them, and treated them with sulphuric acid. Once they were clean, he discovered that they were covered in strange characters resembling hieroglyphics.

The plates were briefly exhibited in the city, and then sent to Joseph Smith. The public was curious to know if Joseph would be able to decipher the symbols on the plates. The [*Times and Seasons*](#) claimed that the discovery of the Kinderhook plates lent further credibility to the Book of Mormon's authenticity.

Joseph's clerk and private secretary, [William Clayton](#), recorded that upon receiving the plates, Joseph sent for his "Hebrew Bible & Lexicon," suggesting he intended to translate the plates. On May 1, 1843, Clayton wrote in his journal that Joseph confirmed that the Kinderhook plates were genuine and that he had translated part of them:

"I have seen 6 brass plates . . . covered with ancient characters of language containing from 30 to 40 on each side of the plates. Prest. J. [Joseph Smith, Jr.] has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found and he was a descendent of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth." (William Clayton, Joseph Smith, Jr.'s secretary, *William Clayton's Journal*, May 1, 1843, as quoted in *Trials of Discipleship – The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon*, p. 117.)

Additionally, the History of the Church attributes the following statement to Joseph Smith: "I have translated a portion of [the plates] and find they contain the history of the person whom they were found. He was a descendent of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth." ([*History of the Church, Vol. 5, p. 372.*](#))

Joseph Smith thought enough of "the history" of this Jaredite descendant of "Ham" to direct Reuben Hedlock to make woodcuts of the plates for future publication. *History of the Church*, 5:372-79. Just a month before his death, newspapers reported that he was "busy in translating them. The new work which Jo. is about to issue as a translation of these plates will be nothing more nor less than a sequel to the Book of Mormon. . . ." (*Warsaw Signal*, May 22, 1844.) The fact that Joseph Smith was actually preparing a translation of the plates is verified by an article published by an LDS newspaper, *The Nauvoo Neighbor*, on June 24, 1843. The article, containing facsimiles of the plates, stated: "The contents of the plates, together with a Fac-simile of the same, will be published in the 'Times and Seasons,' as soon as the translation is completed." For years after the discovery, the Church heralded the plates as authentic.

2. **Plates Revealed as Fraud:** The Kinderhook hoax, however, began to unravel in 1855 when W.P. Harris, a witness who had helped unearth the plates, wrote a letter indicating that the plates were fraudulent. (W.P. Harris, letter to W.C. Flagg, 25 April 1855.) In June 1879, Wilbur Fugate – another of the original group who recovered the plates – confessed that the plates were fabricated in order to undermine Joseph Smith’s credibility as a prophet. (Wilbur Fugate, letter to James T. Cobb, 30 June 1879, in Welby W. Ricks, “The Kinderhook Plates,” *Improvement Era* 65 (Sept. 1962): 656, 658.)

Testing Confirms the Fraud: Some LDS members questioned whether the Harris and Fugate statements were credible and pointed to the fact that the artifacts were not available for independent testing, as they were lost about the time of the Civil War. In 1920, however, one of the plates came into the possession of the Chicago Historical Society. Welby W. Ricks, President of the BYU Archaeological Society, hailed the discovery as a vindication of Joseph Smith's work:

A recent rediscovery of one of the Kinderhook plates which was examined by Joseph Smith, Jun., reaffirms his prophetic calling and reveals the false statements made by one of the finders. . . . The plates are now back in their original category of genuine. . . . Joseph Smith, Jun., stands as a true prophet and translator of ancient records by divine means and all the world is invited to investigate the truth which has sprung out of the earth not only of the Kinderhook plates, but of the Book of Mormon as well. (Welby W. Ricks, *The Kinderhook Plates*, reprinted from the *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1962.)

In 1965, the LDS church granted permission to George M. Lawrence, a Mormon physicist, to examine the plate. In his report Lawrence wrote: “The dimensions, tolerances, composition and workmanship are consistent with the facilities of an 1843 blacksmith shop and with the fraud stories of the original participants.”

In 1980, the Church authorized Dr. D. Lynn Johnson, a Northwestern University materials engineer and Latter-day Saint, to use the destructive methods necessary to accurately determine the plate’s age. In so doing, Dr. Johnson concluded that the plate was not of ancient origin. Instead, it was produced in the 1800s in a manner exactly as the Fugate had claimed. Dr. Johnson said: “The plate owned by the Chicago Historical Society, and known as the Kinderhook Plates, is made from a brass alloy consistent with the technology of the middle 19th Century. The characters on the plate were formed by etching with acid, probably nitric acid.” (D. Lynn Johnson, “Analysis of the Kinderhook Plate Owned by the Chicago Historical Society,” 10 pp., Nov. 1980.)

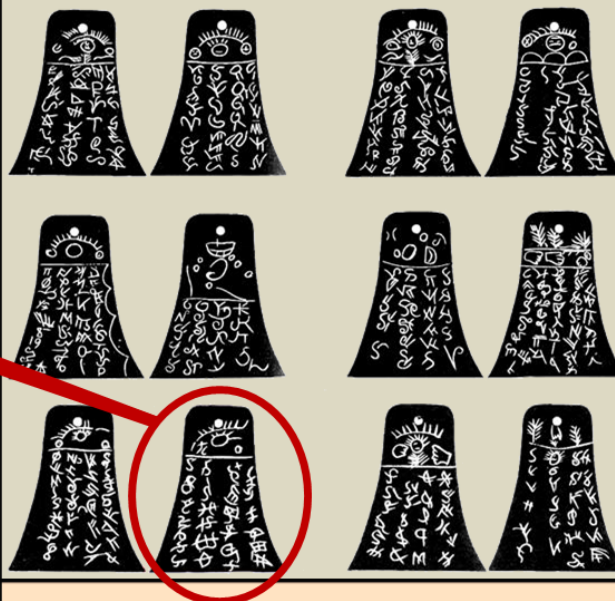
Additionally, further analysis verified that the tested plate could not have been a forgery of the Kinderhook Plates, but was in fact one of the actual plates discovered in Kinderhook in 1843. These tests confirmed the statements by Harris and Fugate about how the tablets were created in April 1843. Thereafter, the August 1981 edition of the *Ensign* confirmed that the plates were a hoax.

According to LDS historian Richard Bushman: “Church historians continued to insist on the authenticity of the Kinderhook plates until 1980 when an examination conducted by the Chicago Historical Society, possessor of one plate, proved it was a nineteenth-century creation.” (Bushman, [Rough Stone Rolling](#), p. 490.)

Kinderhook Plates

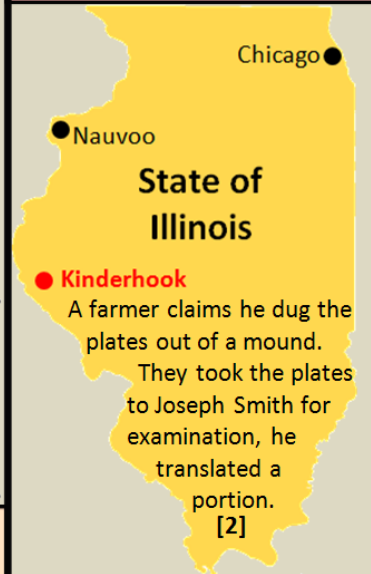
History of the line of Ham or Hoax?

This is an actual plate that is currently with the Chicago Historical Society. [1]



Above are facsimiles of the 6 double-sided Kinderhook Plates

Plates were named after the town in which they were found



Joseph Smith translation:

"I insert fac-similes of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook... **I have translated a portion of them**, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth."
Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. [3]



The Hoax Uncovered [4]

The plates turned out to be a hoax. Metallurgical tests revealed the plates to be of late 19th century construction. In addition, the script was created using a 19th-century chemical etch process.

In August, 1981 LDS Ensign Magazine conceded: "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a 19th-Century Hoax"

Joseph couldn't discern the fraud. The LDS church now concedes it's a hoax. What does this tell us about Joseph Smith's gift of translation?

[1] Letter from the Chicago Historical Society, 5/23/2005, <http://www.mormonthink.com/kinderhookweb.htm#wheresplatetoday>

[2] Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends, Volume 1, 1886, Affidavit, pp 207-8

[3] History of the Church, v. 5, p. 372

[4] Ensign Magazine, August 1981, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax", Stanley B. Kimball

- 3. Questions and Concerns:** The evidence (including the Church's own publications) establishes that Joseph claimed the Kinderhook plates were of ancient origin and that he had begun to translate them. Also, LDS historian Richard Bushman, in his book *Rough Stone Rolling*, relies on the evidence to indicate that Joseph Smith did start a translation of the fraudulent Kinderhook Plates.

The fraudulent plates raise several troubling concerns. How could the prophet Joseph Smith claim to have translated these invented symbols? How can it be true that the made-up symbols themselves provide an account of a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, as Joseph claimed? More importantly, in light of problems discovered with the Book of Abraham and the Kinderhook plates, can Joseph Smith be trusted in his claim that he translated a set of gold plates into the Book of Mormon?

- 4. Implications on Joseph Smith's Role as Prophet and Seer:** Since the gold plates (from which the Book of Mormon derived) were taken back by the angel Moroni, there is no tangible evidence to determine whether Joseph translated the plates correctly. In that context, both the Book of Abraham papyri and the Kinderhook Plates are incredibly valuable, as they can be objectively tested to verify many of Joseph Smith's prophetic claims.

As outlined in the [Book of Abraham](#) section, Joseph Smith got everything wrong about the BOA papyri, the facsimiles, the names, the gods, the context, and the fact that the papyri and facsimiles were First Century funerary texts. There is not a single non-LDS Egyptologist who supports Joseph's claims as they relate to the Book of Abraham. Even LDS Egyptologists acknowledge there are serious problems with both the Book of Abraham and Joseph's claims. Likewise, Joseph claimed the Kinderhook plates were of ancient origin and that he had the ability to translate the plates. These claims proved to be false.

Joseph Smith made a scientific claim that he could translate ancient documents. This is a testable claim. Joseph failed the test with the Book of Abraham, and he failed with the Kinderhook Plates. In light of the historical evidence and Joseph Smith's background, it is incredibly difficult to believe Joseph's claim that he translated the Book of Mormon (particularly in the manner that will be described hereafter).

[Book of Mormon Translation](#)

1. **Book of Mormon Translated with a Peep Stone:** Contrary to general Church teachings, Joseph Smith did not use the gold plates in translating the Book of Mormon. Rather, he used a [rock in a hat to translate](#) the plates into the Book of Mormon. The Church acknowledged this fact in its December 2013 essay, entitled [Book of Mormon Translation](#), published on LDS.org.

There were numerous witnesses to Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon. They all tell essentially the same story: while Joseph and his brother were employed as a treasure seekers (commonly referred to as a "money diggers"), he found a peep stone or "seer stone" while digging a well on Willard and Mason Chase's property. Joseph later used this same stone to translate the Book of Mormon. Specifically, Joseph put the stone in a hat and then, burying his face in the hat, proceeded to dictate the Book of Mormon to his scribe. Joseph claimed to see the words he dictated in the darkened hat. However, during the entirety of the translation process, the gold plates were either covered in a cloth where no one, including Joseph, could see them or they were in a different room or location during the translation process.

- **Emma Hale Smith**, Joseph's wife, was the first person to serve as Joseph's scribe. Here is her testimony as recounted to her son Joseph Smith III: "In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us." *The Saints Herald*, Vol. 26, No. 19, p.289

Robert N. Hullinger, in his book: [Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism](#), cites a personal interview Emma Smith (then Emma Smith-Bidamon) gave in 1879 to a committee of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He notes on pages 9-10: "Smith's wife Emma supported Harris's and Whitmer's versions of the story in recalling that her husband buried his face in his hat while she was serving as his scribe."

- **David Whitmer** was one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. The majority of the translation work took place in the Whitmer home. Whitmer stated:

"I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. . . He [Joseph Smith] did not use the plates in translation."

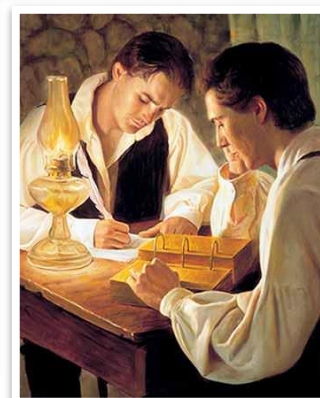
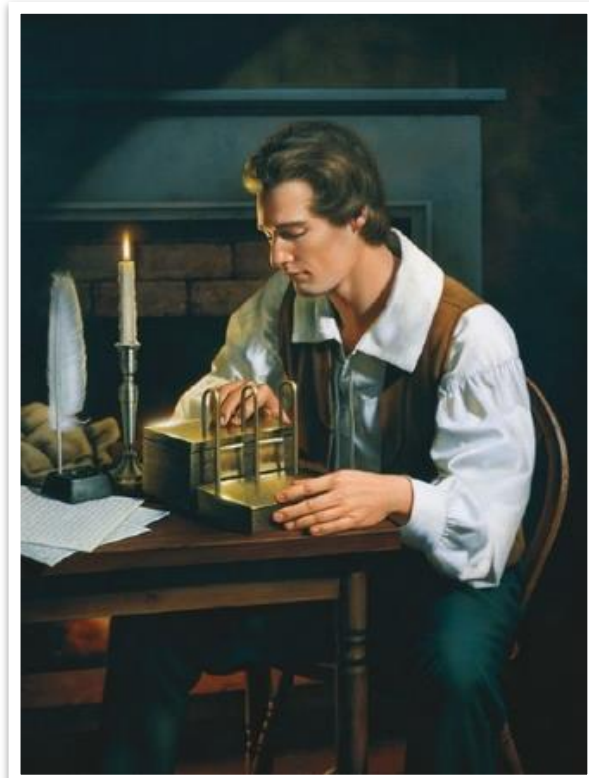
REF: Page 11 of his book [An Address to All Believers in Christ, Part First, Chapter 1](#). Also, Interview given to *Kansas City Journal*, June 5, 1881, reprinted in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints *Journal of History*, vol. 8, (1910), pp. 299-300.

- **Martin Harris**, who served as a scribe for the [lost 116 pages](#) as well as one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, confirmed that Joseph used a seer stone (as opposed to the Urim and Thummim) during the translation process. In his [Comprehensive History of the Church](#) ("CHC"), LDS historian and President of the First Quorum of the Seventy B.H. Roberts quotes Martin Harris as saying that Joseph's seer stone was a "chocolate-colored, somewhat egg-shaped stone which the Prophet found while digging a well in company with his brother Hyrum." Harris went on to say it was by using this stone that "Joseph was able to translate the characters engraven on the plates" (CHC 1:129).

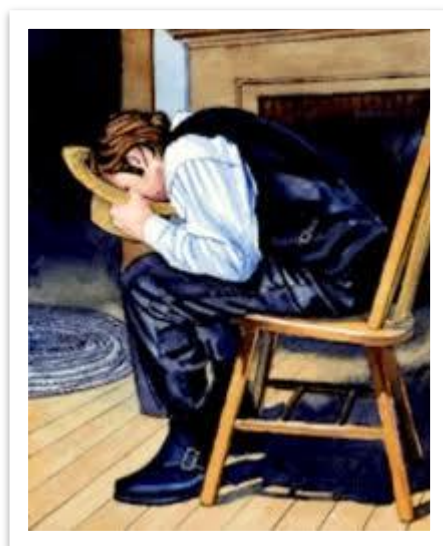
In other words, Joseph used the same methods he used in his treasure-hunting: he would put the rock – or a peep stone – in his hat and then put his face in the hat to tell his customers the location of buried treasure. He used the exact same method while the gold plates were covered or put in another room or buried in the woods while translating the Book of Mormon. These facts are confirmed in "[Rough Stone Rolling](#)" (p. 71-72), by FAIR [here](#) and [here](#), by [Neal Maxwell Institute \(FARMS\)](#), as well as in a [1992 talk given by Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles](#).

2. **Church Has Not Accurately Taught the BOM Translation Process:** The translation process described above (as well as in an October 2015 [Ensign article](#)) is odd for a variety of reasons. For the last century, the Church has rarely discussed the details of the translation process and, when it has, it has not done so in an honest manner. Prior to the October 2015, the *Ensign* only printed quotes discussing Joseph's rock-in-the-hat translation on two occasions -- in July 1993 and September 1977.

Even now, church manuals publish images depicting Joseph Smith translating the BOM with the gold plates directly in front of him and usually without any seeing devices present. For example, the following are depictions (copyrighted by the Church) of how the Church portrays the translation process:



The following are depictions of how the Book of Mormon was actually translated:



Simply stated, the Church does not teach members how Joseph Smith actually translated the Book of Mormon.

- 3. Urim and Thummim:** The Church's representations regarding the Urim and Thummim are also misleading. Specifically, the [Urim and Thummim](#), the very instrument preserved by the Nephites in a stone box for thousands of years for the sole purpose of translating the plates, was not used to translate the Book of Mormon as the church claims. The Urim and Thummim, described as a set of stones set in a pair of spectacles fastened to a breastplate, were taken away by the angel Moroni when Joseph lost the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon and were never returned.

In fact, the Urim and Thummim was never mentioned by Joseph with reference to translating the Book of Mormon until after 1833, some three years after the Book of Mormon was published. In 1833, W.W. Phelps, speculated that the ancient Nephite interpreters mentioned in the Book of Mormon might be the Urim and Thummim of the Old Testament. Phelps' speculation quickly became popular to the point where the Church re-wrote passages in the Doctrine and Covenants to make sure that the seer stones were always referred to as the Urim and Thummim. David Whitmer, however, in an 1885 interview with the RLDS *Saints' Herald*, stated that the entire Book of Mormon text came through Joseph's seer stone and not through the Nephite interpreters.

Regardless, there is no evidence the Urim & Thummim mentioned in the Old Testament was a translation device. The object is mentioned seven times in the Old Testament (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65; Deuteronomy 33:8; Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6; in the latter two passages "Urim" is used alone). The Urim & Thummim described in the Old Testament appears to more of a 'Yes/No' tool like a pair of dice rather than an actual translation device. I have not found any evidence that the Biblical Urim and Thummim had anything to do with "translating languages", or that they resembled "giant spectacles" as Book of Mormon witnesses claimed.

- 4. Gold Plates Not Used During Translation:** The golden plates, which were carefully and painstakingly made and cared for over thousands of years, were never used in the translation process. Rather, according to the witnesses, the plates were always covered in a cloth or not even in the room when the translation was taking place. Regardless, even if they were in the same room and uncovered, Joseph couldn't see the plates when his face was buried in a hat.

Joseph Smith's translation process raises a number of questions. Most notably, why did ancient prophets painstakingly record their actions on golden plates for over a thousand years when the plates were not even used during the "translation" process? If God simply revealed the writings from the plates to Joseph through a stone, why have the plates at all? God or Moroni could have simply revealed the history of the earliest Americans without the worry of protecting the golden plates that Joseph claimed to have unearthed in the Hill Cumorah.

- 5. Translation Timeline Raises Additional Concerns:** In 1822, Joseph Smith found a peep stone while digging a well and then began using it as part of a career to find lost treasure. In fact, Joseph used the stone as part of a treasure-seeking business in which clients paid him to look into the stone to find lost treasure (which, it should be added, he was never able to find). Several clients testified that Joseph looked into the stone and claimed that the treasure was close but, upon arriving at its location, Joseph would claim that it slipped out of reach so that no one could obtain it, let alone see it.

In 1826, Joseph was [arrested](#) and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York, for trial for fraud. He was arrested after Josiah Stowell's nephew accused Joseph of being a "disorderly person and an imposter." Specifically, Joseph was charged with seeking lost treasure under false pretenses (i.e., that he was guided through supernatural powers and a special peep stone). Joseph was convicted of the crime, which was a misdemeanor. A copy of the judgment, which is reproduced and discussed in the Book of Mormon Witnesses section, referred to Joseph as "The Glass Looker."

In 1827, Joseph said he received the gold plates from Moroni and was told that no one was allowed to see them. By 1829, Joseph finished "translating" the BOM and he then returned the plates to Moroni. Eleven witnesses claim they saw the plates, but most of them (as discussed in the Book of Mormon Witnesses section) admit they didn't see them with their natural eyes.

The foregoing timeline casts doubt on Joseph's motives and methods for producing the Book of Mormon. In fact, it seems as if the gold plates and interpreters were merely an extension of Joseph's treasure-hunting and peep stone activities.

- 6. Translation Process Raises Troubling Questions:** If Joseph Smith did receive the Book of Mormon text through his peep stone, then the text presumably came directly from God via revelation. (Plus, Joseph Smith called it the most correct book on earth.) If this is the case, why were so many changes made to the Book of Mormon text? (For a more complete analysis of the changes made to the BOM, see the Book of Mormon section of this outline.) For example, early editions of the Book of Mormon taught a Trinitarian view of the Godhead before subsequent revisions altered the text. Joseph Smith's early theology (even after the First Vision) also subscribed to the doctrine of the Trinity. Including minor grammatical changes, the Book of Mormon has undergone over [100,000 changes](#) and at least [3,913 substantive changes](#). However, some of those changes were quite significant and made to reflect Joseph's evolving view of the Godhead.

If the BOM text was received via revelation, why does it contain so many [anachronisms](#) and refer to so many objects and animals that did not exist in the Americas during BOM times?

If the BOM was received through revelation, why does it contain numerous errors found in the 1769 KJV edition of the Bible, which Joseph Smith owned but was published long after the BOM was allegedly written? These errors suggest that Joseph copied portions of the Bible and inserted them into the Book of Mormon. Moreover, why does the BOM contain [numerous other errors](#)?

[Book of Mormon](#)

1. **DNA Evidence Disproves BOM Claims:** [DNA analysis](#) undermines the premise of the Book of Mormon. Specifically, DNA evidence establishes that Native American Indians originate from Asia and not from the Middle East or from Israel as claimed by the Book of Mormon and various prophets. The thousands of DNA samples from every known Native American tribe indicate an Asiatic origin (rather than Semitic origin, as LDS leaders have speculated) and widely support the theory of a prehistoric Asiatic migration across the Bearing Strait over 50,000 years ago. This evidence refutes the Church's claim that American Natives are the descendants of Semitic migrants who arrived in America in 590 B.C. Even LDS researchers, such as anthropologist [Thomas W. Murphy](#), have concluded that the substantial collection of Native American genetic markers now available are not consistent with any detectable presence of ancestors from ancient Middle East. This DNA evidence likely contributed to the Church changing the introduction page of the 2006 edition Book of Mormon from "[the Lamanites] are **the principal** ancestors of the American Indians" to "[the Lamanites] are **among the** ancestors of the American Indians."

LDS defenders attempt to rebut this damning DNA evidence by claiming that it may not be reliable due to "genetic drift," "swamp effect," and "bottleneck effect" upon the initial migrant population of the Book of Mormon. Notably, none of these defenses provide a cohesive hypothesis reconciling current DNA evidence with Book of Mormon claims. Rather, these largely unsupported defenses focus instead upon pushing the Book of Mormon text outside the realm of scientific provability.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the DNA evidence undermining the Book of Mormon is a book written by molecular biologist and former LDS bishop Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (which is excerpted [here](#)). Southerton has also written a [comprehensive article](#) in response to LDS criticisms of his book.

Recently, the Church published an essay entitled, [Book of Mormon and DNA studies](#). Many of the theories and much of the information contained in the essay contradicts 170 years of Church teachings on the subject. Southerton recently published a response essay exposing some of the Church's "[corporate doublethink](#)." Moreover, buried within the lengthy essay, the Church concedes that Lamanite DNA has not been found and that most Native Americans are descended from Asians. Additionally, Southerton's article, "[Could Generations of Lamanite DNA just disappear?](#)" thoroughly refutes the idea that Lamanite DNA could have simply disappeared, as the Church suggests. The following paragraphs from the article illustrate some of the recent DNA developments implicating the Book of Mormon.

"The research on Neanderthals and Denisovans clearly illustrates that if ancestors of other ethnic backgrounds are hiding unnoticed in our family trees, traces of their DNA can be found in our genomes. Even after tens of thousands of years. It is no longer reasonable to claim that Lamanite DNA cannot be found. The recent advances in whole genome sequencing and analysis have changed the research landscape. Genetic tests are now so sensitive, that it is possible to detect a tiny fraction of a percent of mixed ancestry in a person's DNA."

“Let's suspend disbelief for a moment and consider that the apologists are on to something, and all the prophets have been misguided. Lehi and his small band colonize a restricted region of the Americas. The Book of Mormon records that Lehi's descendants multiplied exceedingly and spread upon the face of the land. Their Middle Eastern nuclear DNA would have spread, over the last 3,000 years, throughout adjacent populations like a drop of ink in a bucket of water. At the very least their genes would have spread over many hundreds of kilometres. It would be exceedingly unlikely that their genomic DNA would go extinct and scientists exploring the genomes of Native Americans would stumble on it if it was there. But apparently the Lamanite generation, along with their genes, are nowhere to be found beyond the pages of the Book of Mormon.”

The main idea is this: DNA evidence has definitively established that Native American Indians originate from Asia and not from the Middle East or from Israelites as the Book of Mormon claims.

2. **Errors and Anachronisms:** The Book of Mormon contains numerous [errors](#), including many [anachronisms](#), in that it refers to words, phrases, animals, etc. that simply did not exist during the Book of Mormon timeline. For example:
- **Horses** are referred to in Alma 18: 9, Alma 18: 12, Alma 20: 6, and 3 Ne. 3: 22, but did not exist during Book of Mormon times. Horses evolved in North America, but became extinct at the end of the Pleistocene (2.5 million to 12,000 years ago) period. Horses did not reappear until the Spaniards brought them from Europe in 1519.
 - **Elephants** are mentioned (Ether 9:19) in the Jaredite era (2500 BC). There is no fossil evidence to support this placement. Mastadons and Mammoths lived during the Pleistocene in the New World, however, the fossil record indicates that they became extinct at the end of the last Ice Age (10,000 years ago).
 - **Domesticated cattle** are mentioned in Ether 9:18, but no evidence has been recovered suggesting that Old World cattle inhabited the New World prior to European contact in the 16th Century AD.
 - **Goats and swine** (Ether 9:8) are referred to as though they are domesticated. There is evidence that some wild varieties of goats and pigs were present in pre-Columbian America, but there is no evidence that these animals were domesticated. There is no artwork portraying either of these types of animals. Furthermore, animals that did exist are not mentioned, such as deer, sloth, monkeys and jaguars.
 - **Barley and wheat** are mentioned numerous times. However, domesticated forms of these grains were not introduced until a thousand years after the end of the Book of Mormon era.
 - **Chariots** are mentioned numerous times in the Book of Mormon (Alma 18:9-10, 12, Alma 20:6, 3 Nephi 3:22). There is no archeological evidence to support the use of wheeled vehicles in the pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. This is probably because there were no large domesticated animals to pull wagons, carts, plows, or chariots.
 - **Steel and iron** are mentioned several times (1 Nephi 16:18, 2 Nephi 5:15, Jarom 1:8, Ether 7:9). There is no evidence for hardened steel in the pre-Columbian Americas. The Book of

Mormon also refers to “swords,” stating that “the blades thereof were cankered with rust” (Mosiah 8:11). This reference is in context of the discovery of the Jaredites’ final battlefield where an estimated 250,000 warriors were killed. No such battlefield has ever been found in archeological study, nor has any “sword” as we know them.

- “**Cimiters**” (presumably scimitars) are mentioned numerous times in the BOM. A scimitar is a long, curved sword used by the Persians and Turks. These weapons did not exist in the Americas (or anywhere else) until 450 AD, approximating the close of the BOM period. Furthermore, the word was not used by the Hebrews (a linguistic anachronism).
- The Book of Mormon refers to a type of **monetary system** based on weights of precious metals (Alma 11). Such a system, however, has not been discovered in Mesoamerica.
- **Silk** is mentioned six times (1 Nephi 13:7,8, Alma 1:29, Alma 4:6, Ether 9:17, Ether 10:24), but is a product of the Orient and was unknown in the pre-Columbian Americas.
- The BOM describes cultures whose **language and writing** was rooted in Hebrew and Egyptian. Archaeological evidence shows that the only people who ever developed a written language in America were the Mayans. The Mayan language has no resemblance to Hebrew or Egyptian.

The Book of Mormon mentions numerous animals, objects, etc. that did not exist in the Americas between 2200 BC and 421 AD. Unless the Book of Mormon is a work of fiction, how does one account for the numerous errors, mistakes, and anachronisms?

3. **Archaeology:** There is [no archaeological evidence](#) to directly support the Book of Mormon or the Nephites, Lamanites, or Jaredites who purportedly numbered in the millions.

The Book of Mormon is purportedly a record of two great civilizations that lived on the American continents spanning a period of over 2,600 years from approximately 2,200 BC to 480 AD. During this time frame, the Book of Mormon describes highly-populated cultures developing from extremely small colonization groups. This presents at least two problems. First, the millions of people referred to in the Book of Mormon could have only come about if the [population grew at a rate many times greater](#) than what was ever achieved in ancient history. Second, if the Book of Mormon people grew as large and as sophisticated as the depicted in the book’s text, there should be some archeological evidence of their existence.

For example, the Book of Mormon depicts two major battles that took place at the Hill Cumorah (Ramah to the Jaredites). Approximately 230,000 Nephites and Lamanites were slain in the 5th Century AD, and 2 million Jaredites were killed in 600 BC in the same place. (Ether 15:2.) To compare how big these battles were, the American Civil War claimed the lives of 620,000 soldiers over a four-year period. These Book of Mormon battles claimed over three times as many lives and in a much more localized area and in a much shorter time frame. However, no evidence (including steel swords, armor, horses and chariots) has been found to substantiate these cataclysmic battles.

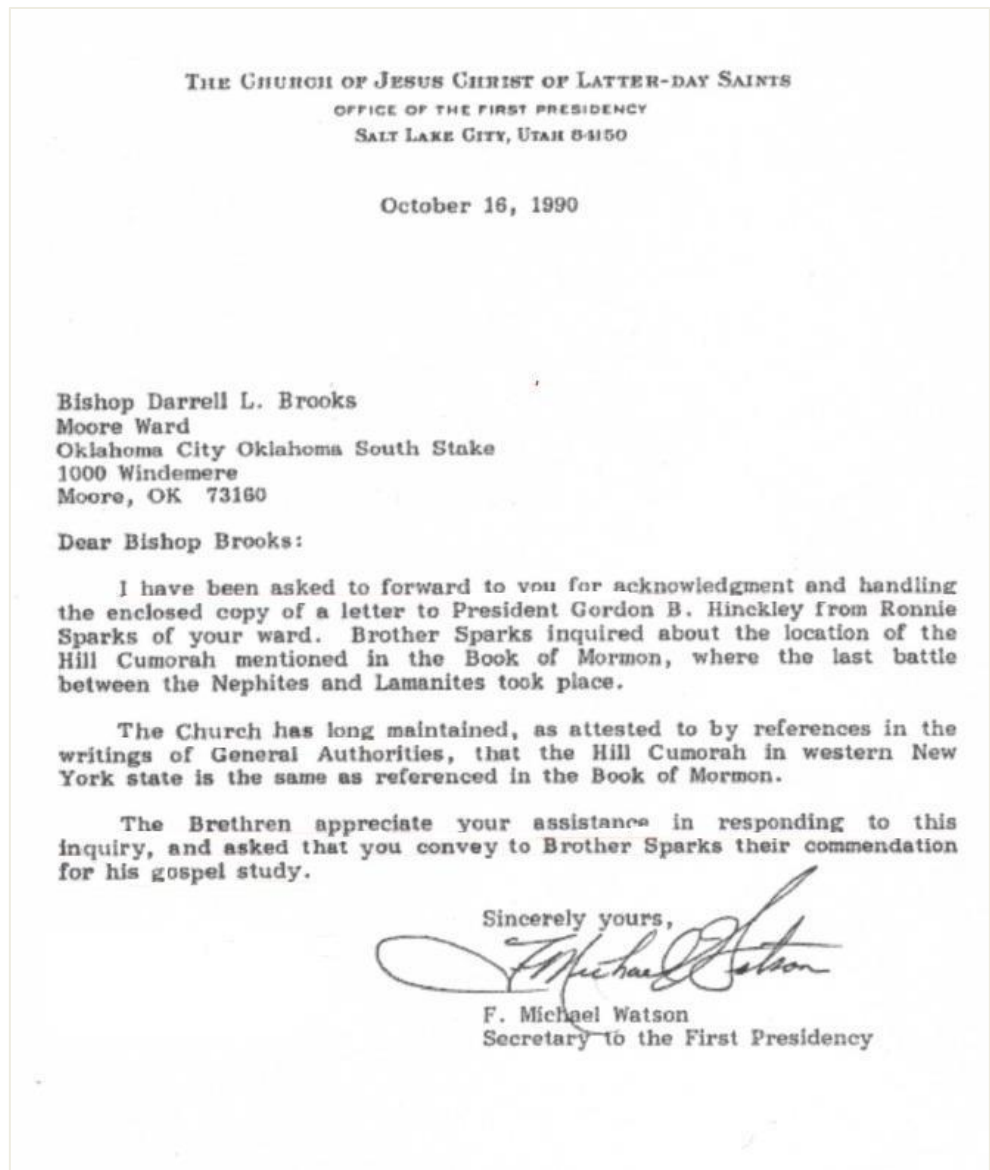
As noted by [Jeremy Runnells](#), “compare this to the Roman occupation of Britain and other countries. There are abundant evidences of their presence during the first 400 years AD such as

villas, mosaic floors, public baths, armor, weapons, writings, art, pottery, and so on. Even the major road systems used today in some of these occupied countries were built by the Romans. Additionally, there is ample evidence of the Mayan and Aztec civilizations as well as a civilization in current day Texas that dates back 15,000 years. Where are the Nephite or Lamanite buildings, roads, armors, swords, pottery, art, etc.?"

The lack of archeological evidence supporting the Book of Mormon is one of the reasons why some church members now push the "[Limited Geography Model](#)" (i.e., the Nephites and Lamanites lived

in a limited area in Central or South America, etc.) and that the real Hill Cumorah is not in Palmyra, New York but is likely in Mesoamerica. This is in direct contradiction to what Joseph Smith and other prophets repeatedly taught. For example, the following link provides numerous statements from church leaders [linking the Hill Cumorah to Palmyra, New York](#).

In fact, as late as October 16, 1990, the First Presidency reiterated that the Hill Cumorah referenced in the Book of Mormon is located in Palmyra, New York. To the right is a copy of a letter issued by the First Presidency to an LDS bishop relating to the location of the Hill Cumorah.



Aside from the location of Cumorah, the Book of Mormon contains many other archeological problems. Consider the wheel. According to the Book of Mormon, Lehi's family brought one of the world's inventions with them, the wheel, which they used to make chariots. Yet no chariots or other large wheeled objects have been found in ancient America. That would mean that all

knowledge of this most useful intention was lost and not used by the Nephite and Lamanite descendants, which is highly unlikely.

Simply stated, archeologists have been unable to find any archeological evidence of Book of Mormon events. Latter-day Saint Thomas Stuart Ferguson was BYU's archaeology division (New World Archaeological Funding) founder, which was financed by the Church. NWAFF and Ferguson were tasked by BYU and the Church in the 1950s and 1960s to find archaeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon. After 17 years of work, Ferguson concluded as follows:

"[Y]ou can't set Book of Mormon geography down anywhere – because it is fictional and will never meet the requirements of the dirt-archaeology. I should say – what is in the ground will never conform to what is in the book."

– [Letter dated February 2, 1976](#)

Additionally, in 1973, [Michael Coe](#), one of the best known authorities on New World archaeology, published a paper on Book of Mormon archeology. In so doing, he stated:

"Mormon archaeologists over the years have almost unanimously accepted the Book of Mormon as an accurate, historical account of the New World peoples.... Let me now state uncategorically that as far as I know there is not one professionally trained archaeologist, who is not a Mormon, who sees any scientific justification for believing the foregoing to be true, and I would like to state that there are quite a few Mormon archaeologists who join this group. . . .

"The bare facts of the matter are that nothing, absolutely nothing, has even shown up in any New World excavation which would suggest to a dispassionate observer that the Book of Mormon, as claimed by Joseph Smith, is a historical document relating to the history of early migrants to our hemisphere." ([Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought](#), Summer 1973, pp. 41, 42 & 46)

Ferguson and Coe's conclusions are universally accepted within the archeological community. For example, in August 2013, a 17-year-old named Zachary emailed 60 college professors specializing in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica Archaeology, Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica Anthropology, and/or Egyptology. Zachary sought their professional opinion on the historicity of the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham. Of the 60 professors Zachary emailed, 25 responded, and 14 gave Zachary permission to publish their names and comments. The consensus from these experts is that neither the Book of Mormon nor the Book of Abraham is historical, factual, or congruent to the current and existing data and evidence. The responses from these professors and experts can be read [here](#).

Additionally, consider the [National Geographic Society's letter](#) on the matter, which states in pertinent part: "Archaeologists and other scholars have long probed the hemisphere's past, and the Society does not know of anything found so far that has substantiated the Book of Mormon." The letter went on to state:

[S]tudents of prehistoric American by and large conclude that the New World's earliest inhabitants arrived from Asia via the Bering "land bridge." (Lower sea levels

during ice ages exposed the continental shelf beneath Bering Strait, allowing generations of ancient Siberians to migrate east.)

Not only did the National Geographic Society conclude that there is no evidence to substantiate the Book of Mormon, it also endorsed the [following statement](#), from the Smithsonian Institute.

STATEMENT REGARDING THE BOOK OF MORMON

1. The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see no direct connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book.
2. The physical type of the American Indian is basically Mongoloid, being most closely related to that of the peoples of eastern, central, and northeastern Asia. Archeological evidence indicates that the ancestors of the present Indians came into the New World—probably over a land bridge known to have existed in the Bering Strait region during the last Ice Age—in a continuing series of small migrations beginning from about 25,000 to 30,000 years ago.
3. Present evidence indicates that the first people to reach this continent from the East were the Norsemen who briefly visited the northeastern part of North America around A.D. 1000 and then settled in Greenland. There is nothing to show that they reached Mexico or Central America.
4. One of the main lines of evidence supporting the scientific finding that contacts with Old World civilizations, if indeed they occurred at all, were of very little significance for the development of American Indian civilizations, is the fact that none of the principal Old World domesticated food plants or animals (except the dog) occurred in the New World in pre-Columbian times. American Indians had no wheat, barley, oats, millet, rice, cattle, pigs, chickens, horses, donkeys, camels before 1492. (Camels and horses were in the Americas, along with the bison, mammoth, and mastodon, but all these animals became extinct around 10,000 B.C. at the time when the early big game hunters spread across the Americas.)
5. Iron, steel, glass, and silk were not used in the New World before 1492 (except for occasional use of unsmelted meteoric iron). Native copper was worked in various locations in pre-Columbian times, but true metallurgy was limited to southern Mexico and the Andean region, where its occurrence in late prehistoric times involved gold, silver, copper, and their alloys, but not iron.
6. There is a possibility that the spread of cultural traits across the Pacific to Mesoamerica and the northwestern coast of South America began several hundred years before the Christian era. However, any such inter-hemispheric contacts appear to have been the results of accidental voyages originating in eastern and southern Asia. It is by no means certain that even such contacts occurred; certainly there were no contacts with the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, or other peoples of Western Asian and the Near East.
7. No reputable Egyptologist or other specialist on Old World archeology, and no expert on New World prehistory, has discovered or confirmed any relationship between archeological remains in Mexico and archeological remains in Egypt.
8. Reports of findings of ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and other Old World writings in the New World in pre-Columbian contexts have frequently appeared in newspapers, magazines, and sensational books. None of these claims has stood up to examination by reputable scholars. No inscriptions using Old World forms of writing have been shown to have occurred in any part of the Americas before 1492 except for a few Norse rune stones which have been found in Greenland.

4. **Book of Mormon Contains KJV Text:** The Book of Mormon contains numerous errors found in the 1769 KJV edition of the Bible, which Joseph Smith owned. These errors suggest that Joseph copied portions of the Bible and inserted them into the Book of Mormon.

As noted by Jeremy Runnells: “When King James translators were translating the KJV bible into English between 1604 and 1611, they would occasionally insert their own words into the text to make it more readable.” They did so because word meanings and idioms change slightly when translating from one language to another. We know which words they added because they are italicized in the KJV Bible. The problem is that the Book of Mormon, in quoting passages from the Bible, contains the identical italicized words, which could not be unless Joseph copied the KJV text to construct the Book of Mormon. The following are two examples identified by Runnells:

[Isaiah 9:1 \(KJV\)](#)

Nevertheless the dimness *shall not be* such as *was* in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict *her by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.

[2 Nephi 19:1](#)

Nevertheless, the dimness **shall** not **be** such as **was** in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict **by** the way of the **Red** Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.

Runnells: “The above example, 2 Nephi 19:1, dated in the Book of Mormon to be around 550 BC, quotes nearly verbatim from the 1611 AD translation of Isaiah 9:1 KJV – including the translators’ italicized words. Additionally, Joseph qualified the sea as the Red Sea. The problem with this is that (a) Christ quoted Isaiah in Matt. 4:14-15 and did not mention the Red Sea; (b) ‘Red’ sea is not found in any source manuscripts; and (c) the Red Sea is 250 miles away.”

[Malachi 3:10 \(KJV\)](#)

... and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room* enough to receive it.

[3 Nephi 24:10](#)

... and pour you out a blessing that **there shall** not **be room** enough **to receive it**.

Runnells: “In the above example, the KJV translators added seven italicized words not found in the source Hebrew manuscripts to its English translation. Why does the Book of Mormon, completed 1,200 years prior, contain the exact identical seven italicized words of 17th century translators?”

5. **Book of Mormon Contains KJV Translation Errors:** Runnells noted that “the Book of Mormon contains mistranslated biblical passages that were later changed in Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible. These Book of Mormon verses should match the inspired JST version instead of the KJV version that Joseph later fixed.” The following is an example identified by Runnells as to the differences between the KJV, the BOM, and the JST:

[3 Nephi 13:25-27:](#)

25: Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26: Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns;

yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

[Matthew 6:25-27 \(from the King James Version bible – not the JST\):](#)

25: Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
26: Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

Runnells: “The above passages are identical, which is understandable as Christ may have said the same thing to both groups of people in the Old World as well as the New World. Let’s look at the JST version of the above identical passages:”

[Joseph Smith Translation of the same passages in the LDS bible for Matthew 6:25-27:](#)

25: And, again, I say unto you, Go ye into the world, and care not for the world: for the world will hate you, and will persecute you, and will turn you out of their synagogues.
26: Nevertheless, ye shall go forth from house to house, teaching the people; and I will go before you.
27: And your heavenly Father will provide for you, whatsoever things ye need for food, what ye shall eat; and for raiment, what ye shall wear or put on.

Joseph Smith claimed to have corrected the Bible because it had been corrupted. However, according to Joseph, the Book of Mormon is “the most correct book” and did not need to be corrected. Why, then, does the Book of Mormon still contain the same corrupted language as its Biblical counterpart, and why doesn’t the Book of Mormon match the JST?

- 6. Similarities with *View of the Hebrews*:** Runnells noted that in 1825, Reverend [Ethan Smith](#) published a book entitled [View of the Hebrews](#). Ethan Smith was a pastor in Poultney, Vermont when he wrote the book. [Oliver Cowdery](#), also a Poultney resident, was a member of Ethan’s congregation prior to joining his cousin, Joseph Smith, in New York. Cowdery later played an instrumental role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon.

Over the years, numerous scholars have noted striking similarities between the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews*. (The full text of the book can be found [here](#).) LDS General Authority and scholar [Elder B.H. Roberts](#) conducted a thorough examination of *View of the Hebrews* to determine whether there were any links to the Book of Mormon. In so doing, Elder Roberts analyzed information that was available to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and others prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon. Roberts’ work has been documented in [Studies of the Book of Mormon](#). The following are some of the similarities noted by Elder Roberts between the first edition (1823) of the *View of the Hebrews* ([Online Source](#)) and the first edition (1830) of the Book of Mormon ([Online Source](#)):

- The destruction of Jerusalem
- The scattering of Israel
- The restoration of the Ten Tribes
- Hebrews leave the Old World for the New World
- Religion a motivating factor
- Migrations a long journey
- Encounter "seas" of "many waters"
- The Americas an uninhabited land
- Settlers journey northward
- Encounter a valley of a great river
- A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians
- Hebrew the origin of Indian language
- Egyptian hieroglyphics
- Lost Indian records (the View of the Hebrews depicts a set of "yellow leaves" buried in "Indian Hill," whereas Joseph Smith described gold plates buried in Hill Cumorah
- Breastplate, Urim & Thummim
- A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, "Wo, wo to this city...to this people" while subsequently being attacked. For example, [View of Hebrews, p.20](#) describes Jesus, son of Ananus, standing on the wall crying, "Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people." View of the Hebrews also states that Jesus (a) preached for many days; (b) went upon a wall; (c) cried with a loud voice; (d) prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem; and (e) had stones cast at him. Meanwhile, [Helaman 13 - 16](#) of the Book of Mormon describes Samuel the Lamanite standing on the wall crying, "Wo, wo to this city" or "this people." Additionally, the Book of Mormon states that Samuel (a) preached for many days; (b) went upon a wall; (c) cried with a loud voice; (d) prophesied the destruction of the Nephites; and (e) had stones cast at him.
- Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records
- The Gospel preached in the Americas
- Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah
- Good and bad are a necessary opposition
- Pride denounced
- Polygamy denounced
- Sacred towers and high places
- Messiah visits the Americas
- Idolatry and human sacrifice
- Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous
- Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"

- Barbarous exterminate the civilized
- Discusses the United States

Source: B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, p.240-242,324-344

After completing his analysis of the BOM and View of the Hebrews, B.H. Roberts concluded that the two books were strikingly similar. He stated:



Did Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* furnish structural material for Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon*? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon's origin.

B.H. Roberts - Mormon Seventy and LDS church historian
Studies of the Book of Mormon, p.240

7. Similarities with *The Late War*: As noted by Runnells, the Book of Mormon bears striking similarities with [The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain](#). The Late War was an 1819 textbook written in King James Version-style language for New York school children, one of them likely being Joseph Smith. The [first chapter](#) alone is stunning in its resemblance to the Book of Mormon:

1. Now it came to pass, in the one thousand eight hundred and twelfth year of the Christian era, and in the thirty and sixth year after the people of the provinces of Columbia had declared themselves a free and independent nation;
2. That in the sixth month of the same year, on the first day of the month, the chief Governor, whom the people had chosen to rule over the land of Columbia;
3. Even James, whose sir-name was Madison, delivered a written paper to the Great Sannhedrim of the people, who were assembled together.
4. And the name of the city where the people were gathered together was called after the name of the chief captain of the land of Columbia, whose fame extendeth to the uttermost parts of the earth; albeit, he had slept with his fathers

Along with the above KJV-style language used throughout the book, Runnells noticed that *The Late War* (published a mere decade before the Book of Mormon) contains the following Book of Mormon phrases, themes, and storylines:

- Devices of “curious workmanship” in relation to boats and weapons
- A “stripling” soldier “with his “weapon of war in his hand”

- “A certain chief captain . . . was given in trust a band of more than two thousand chosen men, to go forth to battle” and who “all gave their services freely for the good of their country”
- Fortifications: “the people began to fortify themselves and entrench the high Places round about the city”
- Objects made “partly of brass and partly of iron, and were cunningly contrived with curious works, like unto a clock; and as it were a large ball”
- “Their polished steels of fine workmanship”
- “Nevertheless, it was so that the freeman came to the defence of the city, built strong holds and forts and raised up fortifications in abundance”
- Three Indian Prophets
- “Rod of iron”
- War between the wicked and righteous
- Maintaining the standard of liberty with righteousness
- Righteous Indians vs. savage Indians
- False Indian prophets
- Conversion of Indians
- Bands of robbers/pirates marauding the righteous protagonists
- Brass plates
- *Compare* The Late War: “And it came to pass, that a great multitude flocked to the banners of the great Sanhedrim” *with* Alma 62:5: “And it came to pass that thousands did flock unto his standard, and did take up their swords in defense of their freedom . . . ”
- Worthiness of Christopher Columbus
- Ships crossing the ocean
- A battle at a fort where righteous white protagonists are attacked by an army made up of dark-skinned natives driven by a white military leader. The white protagonists are prepared for battle and slaughter their opponents to such an extent that they fill the trenches surrounding the fort with dead bodies. The surviving attackers flee into the wilderness/forest.
- Cataclysmic earthquake followed by great darkness
- Elephants/mammoths in America
- Literary Hebraisms/Chiasmus
- Boats and barges built from trees and fashioned after the ark
- The phrase “it came to pass” is used repeatedly
- [Numerous other parallels](#)

The similarities between The Late War and the Book of Mormon are astounding. This [web page](#) outlines just how devastating The Late War is to the Book of Mormon and its claims. Rick Grunder states in his paper: “The presence of Hebraisms and other striking parallels in a popular children’s textbook (Late War), on the other hand – so close to Joseph Smith in his youth – must sober our perspective.” (Grunder, pg. 770.)

8. **Similarities with *The First Book of Napoleon*:** As noted by Runnells, the Book of Mormon is also strikingly similar to [The First Book of Napoleon](#), which was published in 1809. The [first chapter](#):

1. And behold it came to pass, in these latter days, that an evil spirit arose on the face of the earth, and greatly troubled the sons of men.
2. And this spirit seized upon, and spread amongst the people who dwell in the land of Gaul.
3. Now, in this people the fear of the Lord had not been for many generations, and they had become a corrupt and perverse people; and their chief priests, and the nobles of the land, and the learned men thereof, had become wicked in the imagines of their hearts, and in the practices of their lives.
4. And the evil spirit went abroad amongst the people, and they raged like unto the heathen, and they rose up against their lawful king, and slew him, and his queen also, and the prince their son; yea, verily, with a cruel and bloody death.
5. And they moreover smote, with mighty wrath, the king's guards, and banished the priests, and nobles of the land, and seized upon, and took unto themselves, their inheritances, their gold and silver, corn and oil, and whatsoever belonged unto them.
6. Now it came to pass, that the nation of the Gauls continued to be sorely troubled and vexed, and the evil spirit whispered unto the people, even unto the meanest and vilest thereof . . .

The First Book of Napoleon, published only two decades before Book of Mormon, contains many of thematic similarities to the BOM. The following is a side-by-side comparison of the beginning of The First Book of Napoleon with the beginning of the Book of Mormon as identified by Runnells.

The First Book of Napoleon

Condemn not the (writing) . . . an account . . . the First Book of Napoleon . . . upon the face of the earth . . . it came to pass . . . the land . . . their inheritances their gold and silver and . . . the commandments of the Lord . . . the foolish imaginations of their hearts . . . small in stature . . . Jerusalem . . . because of the perverse wickedness of the people.

Book of Mormon

Condemn not the (writing) . . . an account . . . the First Book of Nephi . . . upon the face of the earth . . . it came to pass . . . the land . . . his inheritance and his gold and his silver and . . . the commandments of the Lord . . . the foolish imaginations of his heart . . . large in stature . . . Jerusalem . . . because of the wickedness of the people.

9. **Early BOM Edition Teaches Trinity:** Early editions of the Book of Mormon taught a Trinitarian view of the Godhead before subsequent revisions altered the text. Joseph Smith's early theology (even after the First Vision) also subscribed to the doctrine of the Trinity. Including minor grammatical changes, the Book of Mormon has undergone over [100,000 changes](#) and at least [3,913 substantive changes](#). However, some of those changes were quite significant and made to reflect Joseph's evolving view of the Godhead. Here are several examples identified by Runnells:

| Original 1830 Edition Text View Online | Current, Altered Text View Online |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Nephi 3 (p.25): And he said unto me, Behold, the virgin whom thou seest, is <u>the mother of God</u>, after the manner of the flesh.</p> | <p>1 Nephi 11:18: And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is <u>the mother of the Son of God</u>, after the manner of the flesh.</p> |
| <p>1 Nephi 3 (p.25): And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even <u>the Eternal Father!</u></p> | <p>1 Nephi 11:21: And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even <u>the Son of the Eternal Father!</u></p> |
| <p>1 Nephi 3 (p.26): And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, <u>the Everlasting God</u>, was judged of the world;</p> | <p>1 Nephi 11:32: And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, <u>the Son of the everlasting God</u> was judged of the world;</p> |
| <p>1 Nephi 3 (p.32): These last records...shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is <u>the Eternal Father and the Savior of the world;</u></p> | <p>1 Nephi 13:40: These last records...shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is <u>the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world;</u></p> |

As noted by Runnells, the following verses are among the many verses *still in* the Book of Mormon that hold a Trinitarian view of the Godhead:

[Alma 11:38-39:](#)

38: Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?

39: And Amulek said unto him: Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last;

[Mosiah 15:1-4:](#)

1: And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.

2: And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son –

3: The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son –

4: And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

[Mosiah 16:15:](#)

15: Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen.”

LDS scholar, Boyd Kirkland, made the following observation:

“The Book of Mormon and early revelations of Joseph Smith do indeed vividly portray a picture of the Father and Son as the same God. . . Why is it that the Book of Mormon not only doesn’t clear up questions about the Godhead which have raged in Christianity for centuries, but on the contrary just adds to the confusion? This seems particularly ironic, since a major avowed purpose of the book was to restore lost truths and end doctrinal controversies caused by the “great and abominable Church’s” corruption of the Bible. . . In later years he [Joseph] reversed his earlier efforts to completely ‘monotheise’ the godhead and instead ‘tritheised’ it.” (LDS scholar, Boyd Kirkland, “An Evolving God”)

- 10. Conflict with First Vision:** The documented changes to the Book of Mormon relating to the Godhead are particularly troubling, as they occurred long after Joseph Smith claimed to have seen God the Father and Jesus Christ. Runnells asks: “Assuming that the official [1838 First Vision account](#) is truthful and accurate, why would Joseph Smith hold a Trinitarian view of the Godhead if he personally saw God and Jesus Christ as separate and embodied beings a few years earlier in the Sacred Grove?” Why did early editions of the Book of Mormon (which, according to Joseph, was the most correct book on earth) perpetuate a Trinitarian doctrine?
- 11. Implausibility of Jaredite Story:** There are many implausible stories contained within the Book of Mormon. For example, Joseph Smith said the first group of Book of Mormon people, the Jaredites, came to America in eight barges that resembled submarines. They were sealed all the way around except for two air holes. One air hole was located at the top and one on the bottom of the barges so as the barges rolled upside down in the water they could occasionally unstop one of the two air holes. These eight, airtight, rolling, rotating barges contained flocks of animals, swarms of bees, and enough provisions to enable them to travel to the New World over a period of 344 days. All eight ships miraculously landed at the same place even though they had no way to steer them.
- 12. Authorship:** Most Church members claim that it would have been impossible for Joseph Smith (or Sydney Rigdon or Oliver Cowdery) to write the Book of Mormon. B.H. Roberts, however, casts doubt on that assumption. Roberts served as the President of the First quorum of the Seventy and the Assistant Church Historian. Though B.H. Roberts remained faithful to the Church and was a Book of Mormon defender, he was honest and bold enough to declare in his writings that Joseph Smith was indeed capable of creating the Book of Mormon. Roberts said:

“In light of this evidence, there can be no doubt as to the possession of a vividly strong, creative imagination by Joseph Smith, the Prophet. An imagination, it could with reason be urged, which, given the suggestions that are to be found in the ‘common knowledge’ of accepted American antiquities of the times, supplemented by such work as Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews*, would make it possible for him to create a book such as the Book of Mormon is.”

There are many amazing mysteries that we cannot explain, but the first response is not to claim that the mysteries must have some supernatural origins. For example, how did Beethoven write symphonies when he was deaf? We still do not know exactly how the Egyptian pyramids were built. How did Einstein come up with the Theory of Relativity? And how did Mozart compose remarkable music as a mere child? Millions of books have been written by millions of authors. It seems that the vast majority outside of the LDS community do not believe the Book of Mormon to be a work of a genius or a literary masterpiece. Accomplished authors like Mark Twain read the Book of Mormon and found nothing in it to be divine. Twain actually referred to it as chloroform in print. If you examine a first edition Book of Mormon written in paragraph form, without the biblical-like chapters and verses, you would discover thousands of grammatical errors.

A fair question to ask is this: exactly what parts of the Book of Mormon could not have been written by Joseph Smith? Is there any phrase so profound, any idea so unique that someone who studied the Bible, attended religious services, exhorted at his local church, and had an excellent imagination could not have written or copied from another source? Church members do not question that the principal ancestors of the American Indians wrote the original Book of Mormon on gold plates, but they reject the idea that a 19th Century man could have done the same.

13. Sources Joseph Smith Likely Used in Composing the Book of Mormon: The majority of the Book of Mormon can be accounted for in various texts that were available in Joseph Smith's time. According to historian and former CES educator [Grant Palmer](#), 75 percent of the book's content is accounted for by Joseph Smith's use of six 19th Century sources of which he was very familiar. Twenty-five percent came from the Bible and another 25 percent came from the Methodist religion. The remaining 25 percent came from three other sources. Most of this evidence is detailed in, [An Insider's View of Mormon Origins](#), chapters 2-4. For example:

- **Outline:** The Book of Mormon's general story line may have come from Ethan Smith's, 1823 New York novel, *View of the Hebrews*. In fact, B. H. Roberts concluded there was "a great probability" that the Smith's read or were familiar with *View of the Hebrews*. The book told of a small colony of Israelites that left a European city about 600 BC, crossed the ocean, and arrived in the Americas. They divided into two classes (an industrious and an idle group) and engaged in many wars. The gospel was preached and a Christ figure was emphasized throughout the book. Finally, the barbaric division exterminated the civilized group.
- **1, 2 Nephi:** Bible passages dominate the text in these two books. Over half of the chapters in 2 Nephi are from the 1769 KJV edition of the Bible. We know this because the Book of Mormon contains the specific errors of that Bible translation. (Additionally, in 1 Nephi, [two 1811 dreams of Joseph Smith Sr.](#) are seen in Lehi's first dream and Lehi's tree of life dream. A number of other family biographical facts were used by Joseph in the Book of Mormon).
- **Jacob, Enos, Mosiah, Alma 1-42:** These books are dominated by evangelical Methodist Camp Meeting, terms, practices, patterns, and doctrines of which Joseph Smith was familiar. The 11 main Book of Mormon preachers between Jacob and Alma reflect, in virtually every way, what one would expect to find when making a study of the Second Great Awakening preachers of Joseph's era.

- **Alma 43-63:** These war chapters reflect the strategies of the American Indian Wars and the War of 1812, especially the British/Indian combat strategies used against the American soldiers in the War of 1812. Joseph heard his relatives and neighbors recount these stories.

For some of this evidence, see Mercy Otis Warren's 1805 book, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*; and David Ramsey's 1789 book, *History of the American Revolution*.

- **Helaman; 3 Nephi 1-7:** The text of these ("Gadianton") chapters reveals strong influences from the anti-Masonic terms/rhetoric/methodology/practice/fears and sentiment reported during the presidential election of 1828-29. They flooded the newspapers (the Smith's subscribed to a newspaper) and the talk of the day. Andrew Jackson was a Mason, and the papers had a field day speculating on what Jackson would do to the Executive and Judicial branches of government if elected. Many of these anti-Masonic terms, concepts and predictions, are seen in this section of the Book of Mormon.
- **3 Nephi 11-28:** Again, Bible passages dominate this section of the Book of Mormon, specifically a 1769 edition or later printing of the KJV, including its errors. Of the 490 verses in these chapters, 246, or 50 percent contain, recognizable KJV quotations or phrases.
- **Ether:** This book appears to be Joseph Smith's essay on the central message of the Book of Mormon. The first half of Ether describes what happens to the Jaredites when they follow Christ and the second half explains what happens when they do not. In many ways, Ether is a miniature Book of Mormon story of the Nephites and Lamanites, including the extreme annihilation of both the Jaredites and Nephites down to the last man.

First Vision

“Our whole strength rests on the validity of that [First] vision. It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then it is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens.”

– Gordon B. Hinckley, [The Marvelous Foundation of Our Faith](#)

1. **Versions:** The Church acknowledges there are at least [nine different First Vision accounts](#) by Joseph Smith, although the following five are the most widely-known accounts:

- [1832 account](#)
- [November 9, 1835 account](#)
- [November 14, 1835 account](#)
- [1838 account \(official version\)](#)
- [1842 account](#)

2. **Summary of First Vision accounts:**

- **1832 Account:** Joseph first hand-wrote the First Vision story in 1832. This version tells the story of a troubled young man who despairs of “the wickedness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind.” Joseph claims that before visiting the grove, he had concluded that the world “had apostatised from the true and living faith” and that “there was no society or denomination built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament.” Based on his reading of the Bible—although without mentioning any particularly inspiring text—Joseph decides to pray to God for guidance and forgiveness. This version of the story climaxes with an encounter with one divine being, identified as “the Lord,” but makes no mention of two separate personages. The Lord tells Joseph that his sins are forgiven and then confirms Joseph’s earlier suspicions about the corruption of Christianity. The vision abruptly closes, and Joseph notes that “none would believe my heavenly vision.”
- **1835 Accounts:** On November 9, 1835, three years after Joseph’s hand-written first version account, Joseph provided another account. Joseph said that as a young man—“about 14”—he’d been perplexed by the diversity of religious views that existed in his neighborhood. Based on two specific biblical passages— Matthew 7:7 and James 1:5—he had sought God’s guidance. When telling the story, Joseph added a dramatic detail that he had not included in the 1830 or 1832 versions—an encounter with an invisible, malevolent force immediately preceding his conversation with God. First, he reported, his tongue became swollen, preventing him from praying aloud, and then he heard footsteps approaching. Hoping to find the source of the footfalls, he turned but saw no one. At precisely that instant, a “pillar of fire” descended, in which a divine being was visible. This being did not speak, but soon another being appeared who told Joseph that his sins were forgiven and “testified that Jesus Christ is the son of God.” Besides the two personages, Joseph claimed that he also saw “many angels” on this occasion.

Notably, Joseph does not identify the personages in the vision or claim that they were God and Jesus. In fact, Joseph seems to indicate that these personages may have been angels, as his November 14, 1835 account states that “I received the first visitation of Angels which was when I was about 14 years old,” but makes no mention of God or Jesus.

- **1838 Account:** Joseph Smith dictated the most detailed variant of the First Vision in 1838. This version eventually became the canonical story included in the Pearl of Great Price.

Joseph’s motive for recounting his story was essentially defensive. He said he was attempting to counter the false rumors being spread about him and his church. This account is quite detailed, particularly in the attention it gives to the religious tensions that permeated Joseph’s environment—especially the atmosphere in the home he shared with his parents and siblings.

Joseph reports that revivals repeatedly swept through his home region prior to his vision. Several members of Joseph’s family, including his mother, had joined the Presbyterian Church. With a father disinterested in organized religion, and facing a rift between his own preferred denomination (Methodism) and that favored by his mother and siblings, young Joseph felt a keen sense of anxiety and even crisis concerning which denomination to join. Joseph recounts in this version that a specific scriptural text, James 1:5, struck his heart with unprecedented force and led him to seek God’s will on the matter.

This version tells of Joseph’s trek to the grove and, like the 1835 account, mentions an overpowering evil presence that binds his tongue. Joseph does not mention shadowy footsteps in this 1838 account, but he describes being violently “seized” by “some actual being from the unseen world” who refuses to relinquish him until the appearance of a pillar of light dispels it. The pillar contains two divine figures, one of whom introduces the other as “My Beloved Son” and enjoins Joseph to “hear him!” The message Jesus delivers in this version of the story conveys disdain for Christendom, its creeds, said to be an “abomination,” and its “professors,” said to be “corrupt.” Joseph is instructed to avoid all existing churches because they have no spiritual authority. Joseph recounts that he was also told “many other things,” which he was forbidden to write. He concludes by recalling that his eager recitation of these events drew the ire of the local “professors” of religion and incited a wave of “persecution” against him.

- **1842 Account:** In 1842, Joseph responded to Chicago newspaper editor John Wentworth’s request for information about the Mormon faith. In most respects, the Wentworth Letter’s version of the First Vision is a faithful abbreviation of the 1838 account. The most significant difference is Joseph’s claim that, in addition to being told to join no existing sect, he was promised that “the fullness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”

3. Differences Among the Accounts: Joseph’s various First Vision accounts contain significant differences. For example:

- Perhaps the biggest problem is Joseph’s description of who actually appeared to him during the vision. His 1832 account states that he was visited by “the Lord” but makes no mention

of two separate personages. Joseph's November 9, 1835 account states that "a personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame" and, thereafter, "another personage appeared like unto the first." Joseph does not identify these personages. However, Joseph suggests that these personages were angels, as his November 14, 1835 accounts states that "I received the first visitation of Angels which was when I was about 14 years old." Joseph's 1838 account, for the first time, explicitly mentions the appearance of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

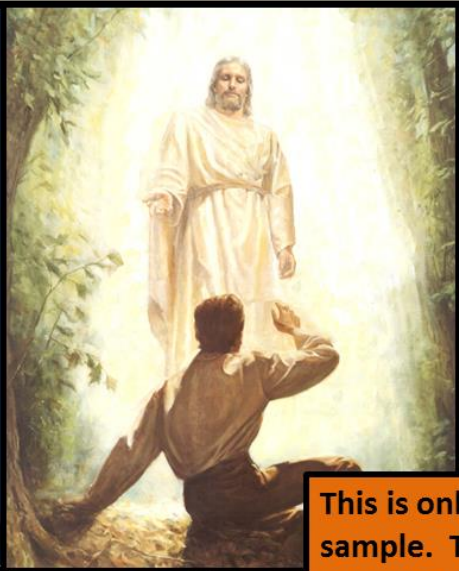

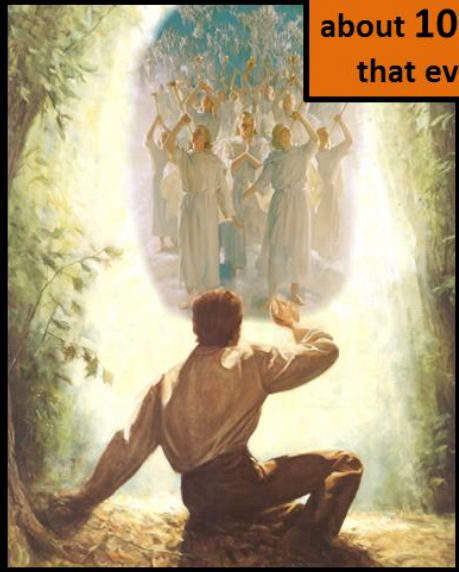
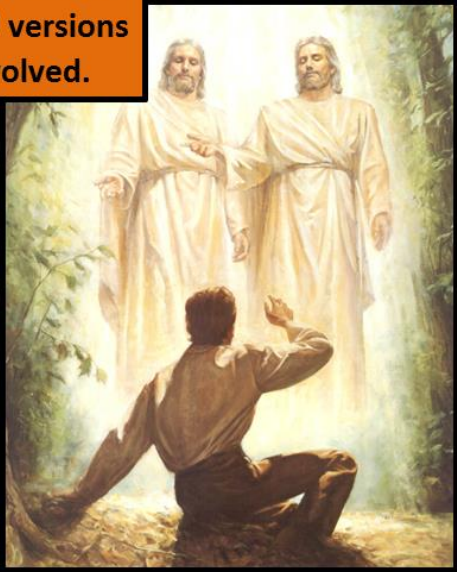
- Joseph's motivation in going to the grove changes among the various accounts. In one account he states he prayed for a forgiveness of his sins and makes no mention of being told that none of the churches on earth were true. In other accounts, he says he prayed due to the rival-like atmosphere, or because he desired to know if God existed. Yet in other accounts, Joseph claims he prayed to know which church to join.

For example, in the 1832 account, Joseph said that before praying he knew that there was no true or living church upon the earth as built by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. His primary purpose in going to pray was to seek forgiveness of his sins. However, in the official 1838 account, Joseph contradicts his 1832 account, stating his "object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join . . . (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)."

- Joseph's brother, William Smith, and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, both stated that the Smith family joined the Presbyterian Church after Alvin's death in November 1823. This is significant, as it seems suspicious that Joseph and his family would join the Presbyterian church three years after Joseph claimed that God and Jesus told him that all of the churches on earth were "an abomination" and untrue.
- The historical record shows there was a revival in Palmyra in 1817 and 1824, but not in 1820.
- Joseph continued to hold and teach a Trinitarian view of the Godhead, as shown previously with the Book of Mormon, even after the First Vision. Why would he hold such a view if he saw that the Father and Son as separate embodied beings?

There are several charts comparing the various first vision accounts. Perhaps the best chart is compiled by [Richard P. Howard](#), an historian emeritus of Community of Christ and pioneering scholar in Mormon history. [Howard's chart compares details from six of the first vision accounts.](#) Another, more simplistic chart (comparing only four of the accounts) can be found below.

Joseph Smith's First Vision

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>1832 "The Lord" Earliest known first hand account</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sins Forgiven ✗ 2 Personages ✗ Pillar of Fire ✗ Host of Angels ✗ God the Father ✓ Jesus Christ ✗ Angelic being ✓ Told All Churches Wrong |  |  | <p>1835 Joseph to Jewish Minister Nov 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sins Forgiven ✓ 2 Personages ✓ Pillar of Fire ✓ Host of Angels ✗ God the Father ✗ Jesus Christ ✓ Angelic being ✗ Told All Churches Wrong |
| <p>This is only a small sample. There are about 10 versions that evolved.</p> | | | |
| <p>1835 Joseph to Erastus Holmes Nov 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Sins Forgiven ✗ 2 Personages ✗ Pillar of Fire ✓ Host of Angels ✗ God the Father ✗ Jesus Christ ✗ Angelic being ✗ Told All Churches Wrong |  |  | <p>1838 Adopted as "Official" version</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sins Forgiven ✓ 2 Personages ✗ Pillar of Fire ✗ Host of Angels ✓ God the Father ✓ Jesus Christ ✗ Angelic being ✓ Told All Churches Wrong |
| <p><small>Circa 1832 - "The Lord" josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-circa-summer-1832 Nov. 14, 1835 - To Erastus Holmes josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-1835-1836?p=38 *All the versions compiled @ LDS owned josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision</small></p> | | <p><small>Nov. 9, 1835 - To Minister josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-1835-1836?p=25 1838 - Adopted as "Official" Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith — History, 1:7-20</small></p> | |

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4. Joseph Never Mentioned Vision Until Years Later: No one, including Joseph Smith's family members, ever heard about the First Vision for over 12 years after it supposedly occurred. There are no accounts in the newspapers, by neighbors, preachers, or even by members of Joseph's own family. The first and earliest written account of the First Vision in Joseph Smith's journal was written in 1832, 12 years after the spring of 1820, and that account did not even mention the presence of God. There is no record of a First Vision prior to that point.

Especially troubling is that the First Vision is not mentioned in either the official history of the church written in 1835 by Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith, or by Joseph's own mother, Lucy Mack

Smith, in the original version of her biographical sketch of Joseph. The First Vision was not taught in church until 22 years after it occurred.

Moreover, most Church members did not know about the First Vision until 1842, and even then it wasn't regarded as very important. It is absent from early, fundamental Church documents like the Book of Commandments, which, at the time of publication, contained nearly every revealed doctrine and major historical account relevant to the Church. One would naturally expect the First Vision, the event that sparked Mormonism, to be included in the Book of Commandments.

James B. Allen, who served as assistant church historian, frankly admitted that the First Vision "was not given general circulation in the 1830's" and indicated that the First Vision either never really happened or occurred very differently than what LDS leaders teach. ([*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*](#), Autumn 1966, p.33). In fact, Dr. Allen made a number of startling concessions in his interview with *Dialogue*, Vol.1, No.3, p. 31 - p.32. For example:

- "[N]one of the available contemporary writings about Joseph Smith in the 1830's, none of the publications of the Church in that decade, and no contemporary journal or correspondence yet discovered mentions the story of the first vision. . . ." Dr. Allen also stated that in the 1830's "the general membership of the Church knew little, if anything, about it." *Dialogue*, Autumn 1966, pages 29-45.
- "As far as Mormon literature is concerned, there was apparently no reference to Joseph Smith's first vision in any published material in the 1830's. Joseph Smith's history, which was begun in 1838, was not published until it ran serially in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842. The famous 'Wentworth Letter,' which contained a much less detailed account of the vision, appeared March 1, 1842, in the same periodical. Introductory material to the Book of Mormon, as well as publicity about it, told of Joseph Smith's obtaining the gold plates and of angelic visitations, but nothing was printed that remotely suggested earlier visitations."
- "In 1833 the Church published the Book of Commandments, forerunner to the present Doctrine and Covenants, and again no reference was made to Joseph's first vision, although several references were made to the Book of Mormon and the circumstances of its origin."
- "The first regular periodical to be published by the Church was *The Evening and Morning Star*, but its pages reveal no effort to tell the story of the first vision to its readers. Nor do the pages of the Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate, printed in Kirtland, Ohio, from October, 1834, to September, 1836. In this newspaper Oliver Cowdery, who was second only to Joseph Smith in the early organization of the Church, published a series of letters dealing with the origin of the Church. These letters were written with the approval of Joseph Smith, but they contained no mention of any vision prior to those connected with the Book of Mormon."
- "In 1835 the Doctrine and Covenants was printed at Kirtland, Ohio, and its preface declared that it contained 'the leading items of religion which we have professed to believe.'

Included in the book were the 'Lectures on Faith,' a series of seven lectures which had been prepared for the School of the Prophets in Kirtland in 1834-35. It is interesting to note that, in demonstrating the doctrine that the Godhead consists of two separate personages, no mention was made of Joseph Smith having seen them, nor was any reference made to the first vision in any part of the publication."

- "The first important missionary pamphlet of the Church was the *Voice of Warning*, published in 1837 by Parley P. Pratt. The book contains long sections on items important to missionaries of the 1830's, such as fulfillment of prophecy, the Book of Mormon, external evidence of the book's authenticity, the resurrection, and the nature of revelation, but nothing, again, on the first vision."
- "The *Times and Seasons* began publication in 1839, but, as indicated above, the story of the vision was not told in its pages until 1842. From all this it would appear that the general church membership did not receive information about the first vision until the 1840's and that the story certainly did not hold the prominent place in Mormon thought that it does today."

5. Joseph Enhanced First Vision Account to Stave Off Leadership Crisis: As documented by Grant Palmer in *AN Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, the historical record suggests that Joseph had important personal considerations in changing and bolstering the various first vision accounts. As previously mentioned, prior to 1838, Joseph was rather vague in his description of the first vision. However, a leadership crisis began in Kirtland on November 7, 1837. Frederick G. Williams, a counselor in the First Presidency, left the church. (Joseph Field Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, p. 204, 689.) During the last week of December 1837, Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses, was excommunicated. On March 10, 1838, John Whitmer, one of the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon, was excommunicated. On March 25, Martin Harris told a public meeting that none of the witnesses had physically seen or handled the plates; they had not seen the plates with their "natural eyes." (Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, April 15, 1838, Joseph Smith Letterbook, 2: 64-66, LDS archives.) His admission (which is discussed in the [Witnesses section](#) of this document) triggered a discussion among church leaders as to future of the Church. Shortly thereafter, Apostles John F. Boynton, Luke Johnson, and other church members "renounced the Book of Mormon." (Burnett to Johnson, April 15, 1838.)

George Albert Smith attended this last discussion or meeting and wrote, on March 30, 1838: "Last Sabbath a division arose among the Parrish party about the Book of Mormon. John Boyington, W. Parrish, Luke Johnson and others, said it was nonsense." (George A. Smith to Josiah Flemming, March 30, 1838, *Journal History of the Church*.) George Albert Smith further recalled that about "thirty . . . prominent Elders" belonging to the Parrish group, including Apostles Lyman Johnson, William McLellin, and others "renounce[d] the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith." (George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:115.) By April 7, 1838, when a church conference was held at Far West under Joseph's direction, five apostles were said to be out of harmony with the church, including William Smith, William E. McLellin, Luke Johnson, Lyman Johnson, and John F. Boynton.

On April 13, 1838, Apostles Luke Johnson, Lyman E. Johnson, and John F. Boynton were excommunicated or left the church. William McLellin followed shortly thereafter. They were the first four apostles to leave, and three of them – Boynton and the Johnson brothers – no longer believed in the divine authority of the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were excommunicated on April 12-13, 1838, and Hiram Page and Jacob Whitmer (also witnesses to the Book of Mormon) left the church as well. By the fall of 1838, Apostles Thomas B. Marsh and Orson Hyde had defected.

According to Dean C. Jessee, “During this time of apostasy, approximately three hundred left the Church, representing about 15 percent of the Kirtland membership.” (Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2: 217 n. 2.) Economic disillusionment over the failure of the Kirtland Anti-Safety Society may have fueled the dissent, but doctrinal disillusionment stemming from Martin Harris’ statements and the subsequent debate over the Book of Mormon smoldered long afterwards.

Within a month after Martin Harris’ admitted that the Book of Mormon witnesses had not physically seen the plates, three apostles no longer believed in the Book of Mormon and two more were out of favor with the church. All three Book of Mormon witnesses and three of the eight witnesses had defected. The entire Whitmer clan had left the church. All of this must have caused considerable anxiety and cognitive dissonance within the LDS community. Fearing the possible unraveling of the church, Joseph Smith took to reestablishing his authority. During the week of April 7-13, 1838, he contemplated re-writing his history. (Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2: 226-27.) On April 26, he renamed the church. The next day, he started dictating a new first vision narrative. *Id.* at 232-33; D&C 115: 3-4.

Joseph began his 1838 account by attacking those who were circulating unsavory “reports” regarding “the rise and progress of the Church,” and then told a revised and more impressive version of his vision. (JS-History 1:1.) He announced that his initial calling had not come from an angel in 1823, as he had claimed for over a decade, but from God the Father and Jesus Christ in 1820. (JS-History 1:28.) This earlier date established his mission independent of the troubling questions and former witnesses associated with the Book of Mormon. Like the 1834-35 priesthood restoration recitals (discussed hereafter), Joseph’s April 1838 first vision account added significant material that bolstered his authority during a time of crisis.

6. Joseph Smith Taught Trinity Following First Vision: The historical record establishes that Joseph Smith held a Trinitarian view of the Godhead long after the First Vision, which doesn’t seem possible if he, in fact, saw God and Jesus. Consider an outline of a lecture Grant Palmer presented on November 6, 2013 discussing [Joseph Smith’s changing view of God](#) as seen in his First Vision accounts. The lecture presents compelling evidence that Joseph Smith believed the following:

- Joseph Smith believed in one God from 1829-1834.
- Joseph Smith believed in two separate Gods from 1835-1839.
- Joseph Smith believed in a plurality of Gods from 1839-1844.

Overall, the lecture persuasively presents evidence of the following:

- Joseph Smith wrote pseudepigrapha, in that he falsely attributed his view of the Godhead to Biblical prophets. In fact, Joseph altered past scripture to reflect his own changing view of God.
- Joseph, by imposing his own view of God (and other beliefs) upon past eras of scripture and upon his own first vision accounts, validates that one cannot trust what Smith altered in the writings of past prophets—or his own.
- Joseph, by materially changing his First Vision story, reveals the pattern of conduct that he applied to all four of his foundational visions, each of which are discussed in this document and include (1) obtaining the gold plates from Moroni; (2) the priesthood restoration, and (3) the First Vision. All follow the embellished pattern of becoming more physical, impressive, unique, and miraculous as time went on.

Priesthood Restoration

- 1. Overview:** Like the First Vision story, Joseph Smith waited many years before claiming to have received the priesthood from John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John. Although the Church teaches that the priesthood was restored in 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery made no such claim until 1834. Not even members of Joseph's family had ever heard the restoration story until five years after it supposedly occurred. Why did it take five years for Joseph or Oliver to tell members of the Church about the priesthood?
- 2. Background:** Prior to 1834, Church theology did not encompass the need for a literal bestowal or restoration of priesthood power by resurrected beings in order for men to be called and ordained to preach the gospel and carry out sacred ordinances. However, Joseph Smith's theology changed substantially in 1834. Only when members began leaving the Church en masse did Joseph Smith first begin speaking of a special, miraculous conferral of authority by apostles of old, which he claimed occurred prior to the church's organization in 1830.

As LDS historian Richard Bushman admits in his landmark biography on Joseph Smith (*Rough Stone Rolling*, 75): "the late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication" – even though he does not draw that conclusion himself.

David Whitmer, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthood restoration: "I never heard that an Angel had ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood until the year 1834[,] [183]5, or [183]6 – in Ohio . . . I do not believe that John the Baptist ever ordained Joseph and Oliver" (Early Mormon Documents, 5:137)

3. Specific Problems with the Priesthood Restoration Account:

- **Joseph Waited Five Years to Discuss Priesthood Conferral:** Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery failed to mention or record anything about the appearances of John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John in any publications prior to 1834 (five years after the events purportedly took place) — nor did they teach that men ordained to offices in the church were receiving priesthood authority. As Grant Palmer noted, "Accounts of angelic ordinations from John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John are in none of the journals, diaries, letters, or printed matter until the mid-1830s." ([Grant Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*](#), pp. 223-224).

With regard to Joseph Smith's evolving theology on the nature of authority in the church, Grant Palmer notes in *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*: "In 1829 Joseph said he was called by the Spirit; in 1832 he mentioned that angels attended these events; in 1834-35 the spiritual manifestations became literal and physical appearances of resurrected beings. Details usually become blurred over time; in this case, they multiplied and sharpened."

- **Inconsistent Details of Priesthood Conferral:** Nobody in or out of the church knows the exact date of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and Oliver Cowdery was inconsistent in describing which heavenly being(s) conferred that authority. B. H. Roberts admitted in 1902: “[T]here is no definite account of the [Melchizedek Priesthood restoration] event in the history of the Prophet Joseph, or, for matter of that, in any of our annals” (*History of the Church, Vol. 1, p. 40 footnote*). Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery never pinpointed the date of the appearance of Peter, James, and John, making instead generalized statements about the locale (by the Susquehanna River) and the timing/circumstances of the event.
- **Joseph’s Account of Priesthood Conferral Evolved and Changed:** Joseph Smith and other early members initially stated that the first conferral of the Melchizedek priesthood happened in June 1831 in Ohio at a conference of Elders, and that Joseph himself was ordained to the high priesthood by church elder Lyman Wight at that time. Joseph later told a far more miraculous story of the priesthood conferral. The following is a timeline of events:

Prior to 1831, specific males in the church were called to “church offices—elders, priests, and teachers—given authority, and licensed without reference to a bestowal of priesthood.” (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 157-158.) Even at the April 1830 meeting in which the Church was formally organized, Joseph Smith ordained Oliver Cowdery as “elder” and then Cowdery ordained Joseph as “elder,” with no mention made of these ordinations being tied to “priesthood” authority.

Many of the elders present at the conference of elders in June 1831 wrote personal accounts of the lengthy meeting, a pentecostal-like event during which Joseph Smith and others laid their hands on one another to confer upon each the “high priesthood” for the “first time”:

“Ezra Booth . . . was present when the Elders first received the ordination of the High Priesthood. They met together in June, 1831. . . While they were there, the manifestation of the power of God being on Joseph, he set apart some of the Elders to the High Priesthood. . . The Priesthood was conferred on a number of the Elders.” ([George A. Smith, Nov. 15, 1864, Journal of Discourses](#))

“On the 3rd of June [1831], the Elders from the various parts of the country where they were laboring, came in. . . [T]he authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested and conferred for the first time upon several of the Elders.” ([History of the Church, vol. 1, pp. 175-176](#))

The fact that *elders* were being ordained to the “high priesthood” for the “first time” indicates that the office of elder as originally conceived/ordained in the Church had nothing to do with “priesthood.” The fact that Joseph received the high priesthood himself from

Lyman Wight (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 158) indicates that he did not believe he had received the high priesthood before that time (1831). What does that say about the alleged visit of Peter, James, and John?

- **Joseph Altered Previous Revelations Regarding Priesthood Conferral:** Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery changed the wording of earlier revelations when they compiled the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, adding verses about the appearances of John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John as if those appearances were mentioned in the earlier revelations, which they were not. The Book of Commandments, which later became the Doctrine and Covenants says nothing about these appearances.

The [Book of Commandments](#) (the forerunner to the Doctrine and Covenants) was first published in 1833. Book of Commandments Chapter 28 (which morphed into the current version of Section 27 of the Doctrine and Covenants) was originally a 193-word revelation explaining what could be consumed for the sacramental wine. The heading to [D&C Section 27](#) states: “In preparation for a religious service at which the sacrament of bread and wine was to be administered, Joseph set out to procure wine for the occasion. He was met by a heavenly messenger and received this revelation, a portion of which was written at the time, and the remainder in the September following.” However, two years later, in 1835, Joseph and Oliver added 456 additional verses to that chapter. Did a heavenly messenger really state all 649 words, which Joseph miraculously remembered several years later, or did Joseph take liberties with the text for his own purposes?

Most notable among the additions is the only canonical reference up to that point (1835) of the elusive visit of Peter, James, and John to Joseph and Oliver. See [A Comparison of Book of Commandments 28 and D&C 27](#). These revisions made it appear as Joseph and Oliver received the priesthood from heavenly messengers years earlier when, in fact, the 1835 revisions were the first recorded statements relating to such a conferral.

David Whitmer later expressed his disgust with Joseph and Oliver’s alterations to the earlier revelations.

The revelations in the Book of Commandments up to June, 1829, were given through the ‘stone,’ through which the Book of Mormon was translated . . . [The] revelations . . . were printed in the Book of Commandments correctly . . . just exactly as they were arranged by Brother Joseph and the others. And when the Book of Commandments was printed, Joseph and the church received it as being printed correctly. . . . When it became generally known that these important changes had been made in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, many of the brethren objected seriously to it, but they did not want to say much for the sake of peace, as it was Brother Joseph and the leaders who did it. The majority of the members – poor weak souls – thought that anything Brother Joseph would do must be all right; so in their blindness of heart, trusting in an arm of flesh, they

looked over it and were led into error. (David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 1887, page [53](#), [56](#), [61](#))

Even church historian and general authority Marlin K. Jensen acknowledges that Joseph Smith revised earlier revelations:

In some instances, when a new revelation changed or updated what had previously been received, the Prophet edited the earlier written revelation to reflect the new understanding. . . The Prophet did not believe that revelations, once recorded, could not be changed by further revelation. (Marlin K. Jensen, "[The Joseph Smith Papers: The Manuscript Revelation Books](#)," *Ensign*, July 2009).

Joseph wanted it all — to be able to claim revelation from God in a trance-like moment, and to later alter such revelations according to “new” theological understanding. As evidenced by his earliest revelations, he began the Church with no understanding of the need for a laying-on-of-hands conferral of authority from ancient prophets. His ideas on priesthood conferral and the two distinct divisions of the priesthood evolved over time, as did his “revelations.” Not until March 1835 did he plainly describe the “Melchizedek Priesthood” and the “Aaronic Priesthood” (D&C 107).

4. Articles discussing the unsupported story of the restoration of the priesthood:

- ["The Fabrication of the Priesthood—By God or By Man?" by John Farkas](#)
- ["Priesthood Restored or Retrofit?" by Lane Thuet](#)
- ["Did Joseph Smith Possess the Proper Priesthood Authority to Restore Christ's Church in 1830?"](#)

[Polygamy/Polyandry](#)

1. **Background:** The LDS Church published an essay, [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#), on October 22, 2014, discussing its polygamist past. The essay admitted the following, which will be discussed in further depth during the remainder of this section: (1) Joseph married girls as young as 14; (2) Joseph married women who were married to other men, including active LDS men; (3) Joseph lied about polygamy to Church members, including his wife, Emma; (4) Joseph had sex with at least some of his plural wives; (5) Joseph failed to practice polygamy in accordance with Doctrine and Covenants 132.

2. **Joseph Smith Practiced Polygamy:** Joseph Smith was married to at least 34 women during his lifetime (and the Church's essay states he may have been married to as many as 40 women). LDS historian, [Todd Compton](#), has written an extensive biography on each of Joseph's 34 documented wives in *In Sacred Loneliness: the Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Compton analyzed the lives of the women listed [here](#), and many of the women listed [here](#). Many of [Joseph's wives can be verified](#) through FamilySearch.org. [Biographies](#) of each wife can be found [here](#).

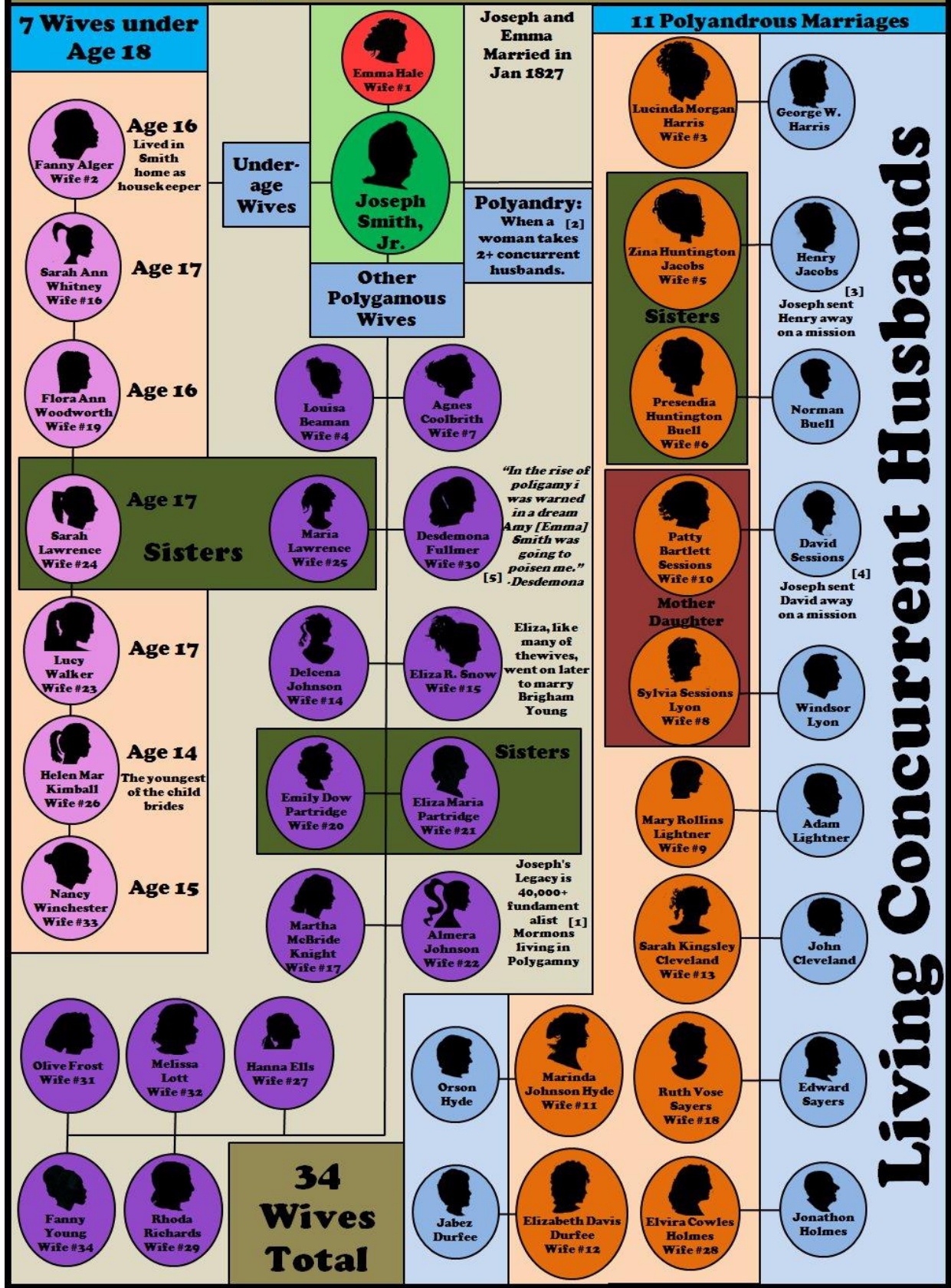
| Wife | Date | Age | Husband* |
|--|-------------|-------|------------------|
| Emma Hale | Jan 1827 | 22 | |
| Fanny Alger | 1833 - 1835 | 16-18 | |
| Lucinda Morgan Harris | 1838 | 37 | George W. Harris |
| Louisa Beaman | Apr 1841 | 26 | |
| Zina Huntington Jacobs | Oct 1841 | 20 | Henry Jacobs |
| Presendia Huntington Buell | Dec 1841 | 31 | Norman Buell |
| Agnes Coolbrith | Jan 1842 | 33 | |
| Sylvia Sessions Lyon | Feb 1842 | 23 | Windsor Lyon |
| Mary Rollins Lightner | Feb 1842 | 23 | Adam Lightner |
| Patty Bartlett Sessions | Mar 1842 | 47 | David Sessions |
| Marinda Johnson Hyde | Apr 1842 | 27 | Orson Hyde |
| Elizabeth Davis Durfee | Jun 1842 | 50 | Jabez Durfee |
| Sarah Kingsley Cleveland | Jun 1842 | 53 | John Cleveland |
| Delcena Johnson | Jul 1842 | 37 | |
| Eliza R. Snow | Jun 1842 | 38 | |
| Sarah Ann Whitney | Jul 1842 | 17 | |
| Martha McBride Knight | Aug 1842 | 37 | |
| Ruth Vose Sayers | Feb 1843 | 33 | Edward Sayers |
| Flora Ann Woodworth | Spring 1843 | 16 | |

| | | | |
|--|----------|----|----------------------------|
| Emily Dow Partridge | Mar 1843 | 19 | Jonathan Holmes |
| Eliza Maria Partridge | Mar 1843 | 22 | |
| Almera Johnson | Apr 1843 | 30 | |
| Lucy Walker | May 1843 | 17 | |
| Sarah Lawrence | May 1843 | 17 | |
| Maria Lawrence | May 1843 | 19 | |
| Helen Mar Kimball | May 1843 | 14 | |
| Hanna Ells | Mid 1843 | 29 | |
| Elvira Cowles Holmes | Jun 1843 | 29 | |
| Rhoda Richards | Jun 1843 | 58 | |
| Desdemona Fullmer | Jul 1843 | 32 | |
| Olive Frost | Mid 1843 | 27 | |
| Melissa Lott | Sep 1843 | 19 | |
| Nancy Winchester | 1843 | 14 | |
| Fanny Young | Nov 1843 | 56 | |
| * Living Husband at the time of Marriage to Joseph Smith | | | References |

As demonstrated above, of Joseph's 34 wives, seven of were teenage girls as young as 14-years-old. Joseph was 37-years-old when he married 14-year-old [Helen Mar Kimball](#), meaning she was 23-years younger than Joseph. Several of these women were Joseph's foster daughters (Lawrence sisters, Partridge sisters, Fanny Alger, Lucy Walker).

- 3. Polyandry:** The Church's polygamy essay acknowledges that "Joseph Smith was sealed to a number of women who were already married," estimating the number of these sealings at 12-14. Compton conservatively estimates that Joseph engaged in at least 11 polyandrous relationships. Thus, of Joseph Smith's 34 wives, at least 11 of were married to other living men at the time they married Joseph. Of those 11 married women, at least eight were married to active LDS men. On several occasions, Joseph called these men on missions shortly before or shortly after marrying their wives (sometimes in secret). For example, Joseph called Apostle Orson Hyde on a mission to dedicate Israel and, while Hyde was away, Joseph secretly married his wife, [Marinda Hyde](#), without Orson's knowledge.
- 4.** The following page contains another chart that categorizes each of Joseph's 34 documented wives:

The Many Wives of Joseph Smith



[1] "Utah Struggles With a Revival of Polygamy", NY Times, 8/23/1998, James Brooke

[2] Polyandry Definition: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyandry>

[3] "Zina and Her Men", FAIR LDS Conference, 2006

[4] David Sessions mission call, wivesofjosephsmith.org, Patty Bartlett Sessions Biography

[5] D. Fullmer quote, wivesofjosephsmith.org, D. Fullmer Bio Marriage Details from: wivesofjosephsmith.org

Panel by:

mormoninfographics.com

- 5. Evidence of Joseph's Adultery:** There is substantial evidence that Joseph engaged in numerous adulterous relationships. In fact, Grant Palmer wrote a credible, well-sourced article on the [sexual allegations against Joseph Smith](#). However, the circumstances surrounding Joseph's first plural wife, Fanny Alger, is especially troublesome. Fanny was a servant in the Smith home and became very close to the Smiths (particularly Emma). Sometime after Fanny turned 16, rumors began circulating that Joseph was engaging in an affair with her. Warren Parrish, Joseph's secretary for a time, told Benjamin Johnson that he and Oliver Cowdery knew the report of an affair between Joseph and Fanny "to be true," for they "were spied upon and found together." (Letter from Benjamin Johnson to George Gibbs, 1903; *Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, pp. 103-104.)

William E. McLellin, who once served as an apostle, told Joseph Smith III: "Again, I told her [Emma] I heard that one night she missed Joseph and Fanny Alger. She went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction! She told me this story too was true." (William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, 10 Jan. 1861; Library-Archives, Community of Christ.) Oliver Cowdery said he learned of this incident directly from Joseph and that Joseph had confided to him that "he had confessed to Emma" of the affair while seeking her forgiveness. (Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), 167.) When Emma found out that Joseph was having sex with Fanny, Emma threw her out of the house. Fanny and her family left Kirtland in September 1836 and moved to Dublin, Indiana, where she married non-Mormon Solomon Custer November 16, 1836.

Cowdery was probably the first to openly speak of the Alger affair. In November 1837, he "insinuate[d] that Joseph Smith Jr. was guilty of adultery" in a conversation with George W. Harris and again with Apostle David W. Patten. (Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 167.) In his correspondence with his brother, Warren Cowdery, Oliver was more direct. In a letter dated January 21, 1838, Oliver wrote: "When he [Joseph Smith] was there we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger's was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth in the matter, and as I supposed was admitted by himself." (Letter written by Oliver Cowdery and recorded by his brother Warren Cowdery; see photograph in *The Mormon Kingdom*, vol. 1, page 27.)

On April 12, 1838, Oliver was excommunicated, in part, for "seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith jr by falsly insinuating that he was guilty of adultery." (Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 162-63.)

- 6. Polygamy Practiced Long Before Alleged Revelation:** Long before the official recording of D&C 132, Joseph Smith had already married multiple wives. His first plural wife was Fanny Alger, whom he married during the time when the Church was in Kirtland. Some historians record the date of Joseph's first marriage as early as 1833, while others believe it was 1835. "Since Fanny moved out of the Smith home soon after the marriage, it evidently took place around 1835, the year when Fanny turned nineteen." (*The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives*, Richard Lloyd Anderson & Scott H. Faulring, FARMS, 1998.) Only after Cowdery discovered Joseph's relationship with Fanny

did Joseph first begin to secretly institute the “doctrine” of plural marriage. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that Joseph discussed plural marriage with a single individual until after his relationship with Fanny Alger was discovered. The fact that Joseph only began discussing plural marriage after his relationship with Fanny was exposed suggests that the subsequent “revelation” was an attempt to justify his adultery.

7. **Early Unions were Not Sanctioned Under God’s Laws:** Whether Joseph's marriage to Fanny Alger occurred in 1833 or 1835, it was illegal both under the laws of the land² and under any theory of divine authority. With respect to divine authority, plural marriages are rooted in the notion of "sealing" for both time and eternity. The "sealing" power was not restored under LDS belief until April 1836 when Elijah appeared to Joseph and conferred the sealing keys upon him. There is no dispute among Latter-day Saints that, prior to 1836, the sealing power had not been on the earth since the time the Lord had removed it during the Great Apostasy. Thus, Joseph's "marriage" to Fanny Alger could not have been performed by anyone with the "sealing power." No one on earth had authority either under the laws of man or under the laws of God as understood and taught by the LDS Church to "marry" Joseph and Fanny. As a result, his marriage to her was a nullity from the beginning both in time and eternity, and any sexual relationship he may have had with her (and to which Cowdery attested) can only be described as adulterous.
8. **Polygamy Condemned by Revelation:** The first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (1835) included a section denying any practice of polygamy:

"Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy, we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife, and one woman but one husband, except in the case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again." ([History of the Church](#), Vol. 2, p. 247)

It is interesting to note that the foregoing provision was contained in every edition of the Doctrine and Covenants until 1876, when the Doctrine and Covenants was revised to include [Section 132](#), which authorizes plural marriage. Obviously, it would have been too contradictory to have one section condemning polygamy and another approving of it in the same book. Therefore, the section condemning polygamy was removed from the Doctrine and Covenants.

Significantly, Joseph Smith was already a polygamist at the time the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants was published (which specifically forbade polygamy). Moreover, Joseph publicly taught monogamy. Joseph, however, continued to secretly marry women as the above referenced revelation remained in force.

² **All Polygamist Unions were Illegal:** Polygamy was illegal in the United States at all times when the Church engaged in the practice. The Illinois anti-bigamy law, enacted February 12, 1833, clearly stated that polygamy was illegal. Polygamy was also illegal in Ohio and Missouri when Joseph took some of his plural wives. Polygamy was also illegal in Utah during the period at issue. Finally, polygamy was illegal under federal law. Believing that the revelations of God took precedence over the laws of men, Mormons ignored federal and state laws. These men including First Presidency counselor, George Q. Cannon, were imprisoned for practicing polygamy. In fact, the federal government published and disseminated wanted posters and offered an \$800 reward to anyone who would arrest the President of the Church, John Taylor, and his first counselor, George Q. Cannon.

9. **Joseph Was Coercive in his Marriage Proposals:** Multiple women testified that Joseph's marriage proposals included a promise that, if they agreed to marry Joseph, their entire family would receive exaltation. More disturbingly, Joseph told at least three women ([Zina Huntington](#), Almera Woodard Johnson, [Mary Lightner](#)) that he would be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if they did not agree to marry him.
10. **[Helen Mar Kimball](#) (Joseph Smith's 14-Year-Old Wife):** Studying the actual practice of polygamy is perhaps even more disturbing when each marriage is specifically analyzed. For example, Joseph seemed to engage in coercive tactics in marrying at least some of his wives, including 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball. The following is an excerpt from her journal:

"Without any preliminaries, my father asked me if I would believe him if he told me that it was right for married men to take other wives.

"The first impulse was anger. . . My sensibilities were painfully touched. I felt such a sense of personal injury and displeasure; for to mention such a thing to me I thought altogether unworthy of my father, and as quick he spoke, I replied to him, short and emphatically, NO I WOULDN'T! This is the first time that I ever openly manifested anger towards him.

. . .

"Having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet, Joseph, he (my father) offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet's own mouth. My father had but one Ewe Lamb, but willingly laid her upon the altar: how cruel this seemed to my mother whose heartstrings were already stretched until they were ready to snap asunder, for she had already taken Sarah Noon to wife [after Heber began practicing polygamy] and she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice but the Lord required more."

Although Helen was initially repulsed by the thought of marrying Joseph Smith, a much older and married man, she reluctantly agreed when Joseph the prophet offered her and her entire family eternal salvation and exaltation if she would become one of his wives.

"[The next morning, Joseph Smith visited Helen and explained] the principle of Celestial marriage. . . After which he said to me, 'If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation & exaltation and that of your father's household & all of your kindred.['] This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward. None but God & his angels could see my mother's bleeding heart-when Joseph asked her if she was willing. . . She had witnessed the sufferings of others, who were older & who better understood the step they were taking, & to see her child, who had scarcely seen her fifteenth summer, following in the same thorny path, in her mind she saw the misery which was as sure to come . . . ; but it was all hidden from me." (*Helen Mar Whitney Journal, Helen Mar Autobiography, Woman's Exponent*, 1880 and recently reprinted in [A Woman's View](#)).

After marrying Joseph Smith, Helen indicated that she was deceived as to what the polygamous relationship would entail. Helen confided to a close friend in Nauvoo: "I would never have been sealed to Joseph had I known it was anything more than ceremony. I was young, and they deceived me, by saying the salvation of our whole family depended on it." (*Mormon Polygamy: A History* by LDS member [Richard S. Van Wagoner](#), p. 53.)

11. Sex: The Church's polygamy essay acknowledges that Joseph likely had sex with his polygamist wives. In fact, the essay states that the primary purpose of plural marriage was "to raise up seed unto God," which obviously requires sexual intercourse. Some church historians, like Richard Bushman, and FAIR, an LDS apologetic organization, admit that Joseph's marriages included marital relations. Consider the following statements from Joseph's polygamist wives and other Church leaders:

- **Sylvia Sessions (Lyon):** Sylvia Sessions (Lyon), on her deathbed, told her daughter, Josephine, that she (Josephine) was the daughter of Joseph Smith. Josephine testified: "She (Sylvia) then told me that I was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith, she having been sealed to the Prophet at the time that her husband Mr. Lyon was out of fellowship with the Church." (Affidavit to Church Historian Andrew Jenson, 24 Feb. 1915)
- **Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner:** In her testimony given at a BYU devotional, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner (and wife of Joseph Smith) stated that she knew of children born to Smith's plural wives: "I know he [Joseph Smith] had six wives and I have known some of them from childhood up. I know he had three children. They told me. I think two are living today but they are not known as his children as they go by other names."
- **Prescindia D. Huntington:** Prescindia D. Huntington, who was Normal Buell's wife and simultaneously a "plural wife" to Joseph Smith, said that she did not know whether her husband Norman "or the Prophet was the father of her son, Oliver." (Mary Ettie V. Smith, *Fifteen Years Among the Mormons*, page 34.)
- **Meliassa Lott:** Melissa Lott (Smith Willes) testified that she had been Joseph's wife 'in very deed.' (Affidavit of Melissa Willes, 3 Aug. 1893, Temple Lot case, 98, 105; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 156.)
- **Louisa Beaman:** In a court affidavit, faithful Mormon Joseph Noble wrote that Joseph told him he had spent the night with Louisa Beaman. (Temple Lot Case, p. 427)
- **Emily D. Partridge:** Emily D. Partridge (Smith Young) said she 'roomed' with Joseph the night following her marriage to him and said that she had 'carnal intercourse' with him. (Temple Lot case, (complete transcript), pp. 364, 367, 384; see Foster, 'Religion and Sexuality,' p. 15.)
- **Eliza Partridge:** William Clayton, Joseph Smith's personal secretary, recorded that on May 22, 1843, Emma found Joseph and Eliza Partridge secluded in an upstairs bedroom at the Smith home. According to the account, Emma was devastated. (William Clayton's journal entry May 23, 1843; see Smith, pp. 105-106.)

- **Almera Johnson:** William Clayton also recorded one of Joseph’s visits to Almera Johnson on May 16, 1843: “Prest. Joseph and I went to B[enjamin] F. Johnson's to sleep.” Johnson himself later noted that on this visit Joseph stayed with Almera “as man and wife” and “occupied the same room and bed with my sister, that the previous month he had occupied with the daughter of the late Bishop Partridge as his wife.” Almera Johnson also confirmed her secret marriage to Joseph Smith: “I lived with the prophet Joseph as his wife and he visited me at the home of my brother Benjamin F.” (Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets*, p. 44; see also *The Origin of Plural Marriage*, Joseph F. Smith, Jr., *Deseret News Press*, pp. 70-71.)
- **Benjamin Winchester:** "It was a subject of common talk among many good people in Nauvoo that many of the elders were sent off on missions merely to get them out of the way, and that Joseph Smith, John C. Bennett and other prominent Church lights had illicit intercourse with the wives of a number of the missionaries, and that the revelation on spiritual marriage, *i.e.* polygamy, was gotten up to protect themselves from scandal." (Benjamin Winchester, Stake President of the early church in the 1830s and 1840s.)
- **Potential Children:** LDS apologist apologist [Brian Hales](#), who is cited to in the footnotes of the [Church’s polygamy essay](#), acknowledges that [Joseph Smith fathered two to three children](#) with his plural wives. He stated that it is highly probable that Josephine Lyon (b. Feb. 8, 1844) was Joseph Smith’s child with Sylvia Lyon, and that Joseph likely fathered a child with Olive Gray Frost.

12. Joseph Repeatedly Lied About Polygamy: The Church’s polygamy essay acknowledges that Joseph Smith and subsequent leaders lied about polygamy, both to Church members and to outsiders. Smith first began lying to his first wife, Emma. Church leaders reportedly believed that the lying was justified because they were “[lying for the Lord](#).” There are scores of documents that support this – from interviews, Church newspaper articles, prophets’ letters, sermons, etc. For example:

- In 1844, Joseph preached a sermon and said, “I had not been married scarcely five minutes and made one proclamation of the gospel before it was reported that I had seven wives. What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery and having seven wives when I can only find one.” (Joseph Smith, [History of the Church, Vol. 6, Chapter 19, p. 410-11](#).) At the time he made this statement, Joseph had over 30 polygamous wives.
- In the July 1838 edition of the Elder’s Journal (“Edited by Joseph Smith”), which was published three-to-five years after he began practicing polygamy, Joseph answered questions including the following:

“Question 7th: Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one?”

“Answer: No, not at the same time. . . .” (*Elders Journal*, Vol 1, No. 3, p. 43; reprinted in *History of the Church* Vol 3, p. 38.)

- On December 16, 1838, Joseph Smith wrote a letter to the Church from Liberty Jail, which stated: “We have heard that it is reported by some, that some of us should have said, that we not only dedicated our property, but our families also to the Lord; and Satan, taking advantage of this, has perverted it into licentiousness, such as a community of wives, which is an abomination in the sight of God.” (*History of the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 23.)
- On February 21, 1843, in a speech before the Ladies' Relief Society – wherein many of his "plural wives" were in attendance – Joseph denounced the practice of polygamy.
- In an attempt to abate rumors of his secret polygamy, Joseph convinced 31 individuals to sign an affidavit published in the [October 1, 1842 Times and Seasons](#) stating that Joseph did *not* practice polygamy. These individuals claimed the following: “[W]e know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants” (which, at the time, forbade polygamy). The problem with this affidavit is that it was signed by several people who were secret polygamists and/or who knew that Joseph was a polygamist at the time they signed the affidavit. In fact, [Eliza R. Snow](#), one of the signers of this affidavit, was one of Joseph Smith’s plural wives. Joseph and Eliza were married three months earlier on June 29, 1842. Two Apostles and future prophets, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, were aware of Joseph’s polygamy behind the scenes when they signed the affidavit. Another signer, Bishop Whitney, had personally married his daughter [Sarah Ann Whitney](#) to Joseph as a plural wife a few months earlier on July 27, 1842; Whitney’s wife and Sarah’s mother Elizabeth (also a signer) witnessed the ceremony.

What does it say about Joseph Smith and his character that he convinced a plural wife and numerous friends (who knew about his secret polygamy/polyandry) to lie and perjure themselves in a sworn public affidavit?

The secrecy of the marriages and Joseph’s private and public denials are not congruent with honest behavior. Emma was unaware of most of these marriages. Most church members did not know what was going on behind the scenes as polygamy did not become common knowledge until 1852 when Brigham Young revealed it in Utah. Joseph Smith did everything he could to keep the practice in the dark. In fact, Joseph’s desire to keep this part of his life a secret is what ultimately contributed to his death when he ordered the destruction of the printing press ([Nauvoo Expositor](#)) that exposed his behavior in June 1844. This event initiated a chain of events that led to Carthage.

13. Joseph Married Many Women without Emma’s Knowledge: [D&C 132: 61](#) (the revelation on polygamy) states that men engaging in polygamy should obtain the consent of their first wife. Joseph Smith, however, did not follow the rules of his own revelation, as he took plural wives without seeking consent. Emily Dow Partridge, for instance, testified that she and her sister were married to Joseph without Emma's consent:

"[T]he Prophet Joseph and his wife Emma offered us a home in their family, . . . We had been there about a year when the principle of plural marriage was made known

to us, and I was married to Joseph Smith on the 4th of March 1843, Elder Heber C. Kimball performing the ceremony. My sister Eliza was also married to Joseph a few days later. This was done without the knowledge of Emma Smith. Two months afterward she consented to give her husband two wives, providing he would give her the privilege of choosing them. She accordingly chose my sister Eliza and myself, and to save family trouble Brother Joseph thought it best to have another ceremony performed. Accordingly on the 11th of May, 1843, we were sealed to Joseph Smith a second time, in Emma's presence, . . . From that very hour, however, Emma was our bitter enemy. We remained in the family several months after this, but things went from bad to worse until we were obligated to leave the house and find another home." (*Historical Record*, vol. 6, page 240)

Notice how Joseph sought to cover up the fact that he was already married to Eliza and Emily Partridge. Joseph had a second, sham marriage performed to the Partridge sisters after his first wife, Emma, agreed that he could marry two women if she got to pick them (and she happened to pick two women that were already married to Joseph).

14. Bogus Justifications: One common justification that many Church members offer for polygamy was that there was a shortage of men at the time polygamy was practiced, and the women needed husbands in the harsh West to survive. Economic pressures on women, however, did not drive polygamy. Population statistics for Utah show that there were actually more men than women.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Male</u> | <u>Female</u> |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1850 | 6,020 | 5,310 |
| 1860 | 20,178 | 19,947 |
| 1870 | 43,451 | 42,503 |
| 1880 | 73,477 | 68,946 |
| 1890 | 108,943 | 96,982 |
| 1900 | 138,923 | 133,542 |

LDS Apostle John A. Widstoe denied that polygamy had anything to do with a “shortage of men.”

"The implied assumption in this theory, that there have been more female than male members in the Church is not supported by existing evidence. On the contrary, there seems always to have been more males than females in the Church. . . The United States census records from 1850 to 1940, and all available Church records, uniformly show a preponderance of males in Utah. . . This theory is not defensible since there was no surplus of women." (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 1960, pages 390-392.)

The Church’s 2014 polygamy essay states that the primary purpose of plural marriage was “to raise up seed unto God.” This seems to be a strange, if not indefensible, explanation. A woman can presumably have far more children (to say nothing of emotional support) if she is married to one husband rather than sharing her husband with many women. Brigham Young, for example, had at

least 55 children by 29 wives; had those wives not all shared Brigham Young as a husband they likely would have produced far more than 55 children. The only conceivable way polygamy could produce more children than through a traditional marriage would be if there was a shortage of men. However, census records show that there were always more men than women in both Kirtland and Utah during the relevant time periods.

Additionally, the Church's 2014 essay suggests that plural marriage was commanded by God in Old Testament times and that Joseph's introduction of polygamy was a "restoration of the biblical practice." The only scriptural reference provided in the essay in support of this assertion is Genesis 16: 1-3. The cited passage, however, never states or even implies that God commanded Abraham (or anyone else for that matter) to practice polygamy. Rather, the scripture states that because Sarah could not bear children, Sarah told Abraham to take her handmaiden, Hagar, so that Hagar would bear him children. Simply stated, there is no biblical evidence suggesting that God has ever commanded or sanctioned polygamist unions.

15. Joseph Violated Revealed Rules Governing Polygamy: [Doctrine & Covenants 132](#) sets forth a number of rules and details governing the practice of polygamy. For example, the D&C 132 only allows polygamy under the following circumstances: plural wives must be virgins at the time of the union and the man must give his first wife the opportunity to consent to the union. If the first wife does not consent, she will be "destroyed." Also, the new wife (who must be a virgin) must be completely monogamous after the marriage or she will be destroyed (D&C 132: [41](#) & [63](#)). Joseph did not follow these rules, as evidenced by the following summary:

- Joseph married 11 women who were already married to other men. Clearly, they were not virgins as required by the Doctrine and Covenants. [D&C 132:63](#) clearly states that the only purpose of polygamy is to "multiply and replenish the earth" and "bear the souls of men." Why did Joseph marry women who were already married? These women were obviously not virgins, which violated D&C 132. Zina Huntington had been married seven-and-a-half months and was six months pregnant with her first husband's baby at the time she married Joseph; clearly she didn't need any more help to "bear the souls of men."
- Joseph's polygamist wives continued to live as husband and wife with their prior husband after marrying Joseph, demonstrating they were not monogamous with Joseph. However, [D&C 132:63](#) states that if the new wives are with another man after the polygamous marriage, they will be destroyed. Eleven of Joseph's wives lived with their prior husbands after marrying Joseph Smith. Why weren't they "destroyed"?
- Joseph did not ask for Emma's consent prior to taking most of his plural wives as required by Doctrine and Covenants.
- In summary, Joseph's polygamy included:
 - Unions with teenagers as young as 14;
 - Unions without Emma's knowledge or consent ;
 - Unions without the knowledge or consent of the husband (in cases of polyandry);

- A union with Apostle Orson Hyde's wife while he was on a mission (Marinda Hyde);
- A union with a newlywed and pregnant woman (Zina Huntington);
- Promises of salvation for the woman's entire family;
- Threats that Joseph would be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if the woman did not marry him (Zina Huntington, Almera Woodard Johnson, Mary Lightner);
- Threats of loss of salvation if the woman did not agree to marry him;
- Dishonesty in public sermons, denials by Joseph that he was a polygamist, Joseph's destruction of the [Nauvoo Expositor](#) that exposed his polygamy;
- Marriages to young women living in Joseph's home as foster daughters (Lawrence sisters, Partridge sisters, Fanny Alger, Lucy Walker);
- Joseph's marriage to [Fanny Alger](#) was described by his cousin, Oliver Cowdery, as a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair" (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p.323);
- Joseph practiced polygamy before the sealing authority was given. LDS historian, Richard Bushman, said "There is evidence that Joseph was a polygamist by 1835." (*Rough Stone Rolling*, p.323.)

16. Evidence of Joseph's Immoral Proposal to Jane Law: Grant Palmer published an essay in 2012 detailing the reasons William and Jane Law left the Church in 1844. At the time of their defection, William Law was second counselor in the First Presidency. The following is a modified and revised excerpt of the article, which depicts a corroborated account of at least one of Joseph Smith's immoral proposals. Here is a link to the [unmodified, fully-sourced article](#).

Excerpt: It is well documented that Joseph Smith took at least 33 plural wives. By 1843, Emma Smith was not happy in her marriage with Joseph. William Clayton, Smith's personal secretary, recorded a conversation in his journal on this date that Joseph Smith had with his wife: "[Joseph Smith] knew [Emma] was disposed to be revenged on him for some things. She thought that if he would indulge himself she would too." Joseph Jackson supported William Clayton's account. Jackson said that Joseph told him: "Emma wanted [William] Law for a spiritual husband, and she urged as a reason that as he had so many spiritual wives, she thought it but fair that she should at least have one man ... and that she wanted Law, because he was such a 'sweet little man.'"

Between June 23 and July 11, 1843, Joseph Smith received a . . . revelation: "A commandment I give unto my handmaiden, Emma Smith ... which I commanded you [Joseph] to offer unto her" ([D&C 132: 51](#)). William Law, Smith's counselor in the first presidency, described the content of this "offer"-revelation that Smith used to appease Emma. Law wrote: "Joseph offered to furnish his wife, Emma, with a substitute for him, by way of compensation for his neglect of her, on condition that she would forever stop her opposition to polygamy and permit him to enjoy his young wives in peace and keep some of them in her [mansion] house and to be well treated, etc."

While Joseph and Emma Smith agreed to this sexual offer, William and Jane Law did not. Jackson, continuing with his narrative said that "He [Joseph] and Emma had both tried to persuade her [Jane Law] of the correctness of the doctrine, but that she would not

believe it to be of God." With the Laws having rejected the offer, Joseph Smith received D&C 132, on July 12, 1843. Verses [51-52, 54](#), now instruct Emma:

That she stay herself and partake not of that which I commanded you to offer unto her; for I did it, saith the Lord, to prove you all, as I did Abraham Let my handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph I command mine handmaid, Emma Smith, to abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph, and to none else. But if she will not abide this commandment, she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord; for I am the Lord thy God, and will destroy her.

William Law recorded Joseph and Emma's comments on these verses: "[Joseph] thought the revelation would cause [Emma] to submit peacefully, as it threatened her removal if she did not." Emma confided to Law that the revelation, which she did not believe, was a "threat against her life," if she did not comply. Law said that Emma, "Spoke repeatedly about that pretended revelation ... [and] says[,] 'I must submit or be destroyed. Well, I guess I have to submit.'" Emma submitted to Joseph's instruction, but Joseph continued his proposals to single and married women until December of 1843, including Jane Law.

Several months later, probably during November-December, Joseph made a play for the "attractive" 30-year-old Jane Law. William wrote in his diary on May 13, 1844, that, "He [Smith] had lately endeavored to seduce my wife, and had found her a virtuous woman." Alexander Neibaur, a close friend of Joseph Smith, recorded: "When Mr[.] Law came home [one evening,] he Inquired who had been in his Absence. She said no one but Br Joseph. He then demanded what had pass[ed.] Mrs[.] L[aw] then told [him] that Joseph wanted her to be Married to him."

Joseph Jackson said much the same when he wrote: "Shortly after the ... (15th of Jan, 1844) that Jo[s]e[ph] informed me in conversation, that he had been endeavoring for some two months, to get Mrs. William Law for a spiritual [polygamist] wife. He said that he had used every argument in his power to convince her of the correctness of his doctrine, but could not succeed." Smith shared this information, according to Jackson, because Smith wanted Law "removed." Jackson said that shortly after January 15th:

One Sunday morning, Jo[s]e[ph] and I had a long talk concerning Law, in which he avowed, not for the first time, however, his determination to put Law out of the way, for he had become dangerous to the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and that it was the will of God that he should be removed. He, however, wished to proceed in such a manner that he would be able to get Law's wife.

By January 1, 1844, it is clear from William's diary that the Laws have rejected Smith's proposal. On January 8th, Law is dropped as a counselor in the First Presidency and on April 18th, the Laws were excommunicated from the church.

[Book of Mormon Witnesses](#)

- 1. Overview:** The testimony of the [three](#) and [eight](#) witnesses to the gold plates is often considered a key component of the Book of Mormon's credibility. However, the witnesses, by their own admission, seemed to have only seen the angel and plates in a visionary state in their minds (as Joseph Smith suggested to them) and not with their natural eyes as members are taught. Additionally, several issues call into question the witnesses' reliability. For example, all the witnesses had close ties to Joseph and his family. Martin Harris had a substantial financial stake in the success of the Book of Mormon. Moreover, in subsequent years, many of the witnesses ended up leaving the Church and following other leaders and religions. By 1847, none of the surviving eleven witnesses were affiliated with the LDS Church. If they believed Joseph Smith's miraculous revelations from God were true, why did they leave the Church?
- 2. Magical Worldview:** In order to understand the Book of Mormon witnesses and the relevant issues, one must understand the magical worldview people held in early 19th Century New England. People of that day believed in folk magic, divining rods, visions, second sight, peep stones, treasure hunting (money digging or glass looking), and so on. (Alan Taylor, *The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830*.) B.H. Roberts stated:

It may be admitted that some of [Smith's ancestors] believed in fortune telling, in warlocks and witches. . . In deed it is scarcely conceivable how one could live in New England in those years and not have shared in such beliefs. To be credulous in such things was to be normal people." (Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 26-27.)

In the years preceding the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, Jr. and his father, Joseph Sr., were referred to as "money diggers," as they had a family treasure hunting business from 1820-27. Joseph was hired by individuals like Josiah Stowell, who Joseph mentions in his [history](#). Joseph Jr. openly shared his alleged supernatural ability to see treasure and other hidden objects through a peep stone. William Stafford, a neighbor and fellow treasure seeker gave the following account:

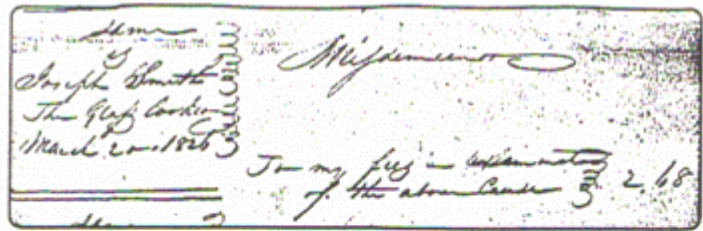
"Joseph, Jr., could see, by placing a stone of singular appearance in his hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light; at which time they pretended he could see all things within and under the earth, — that he could see within the above mentioned caves, large gold bars and silver plates — that he could also discover the spirits in whose charge these treasures were, clothed in ancient dress."

In the same affidavit, Stafford recalled a time when the Smiths made a circle on the ground and put hazel sticks around it to ward off evil spirits. They added a steel rod to the center of the circle, dug a trench, and then "the older Smith consulted his son who had been 'looking in his stone and watching the motions of the evil spirit.'" However, according to Stafford, they "made a mistake in the commencement of the operation; if it had not been for that, we should have got the money." (William Stafford, affidavit, as quoted in *Mormonism Unveiled*, by E.D. Howe, pp. 237-239.)

Stafford’s statements are supported by B.H. Roberts, who stated: “Now, most historians, Mormon or not, who work with the sources, accept as fact Joseph Smith’s career as village magician. Too many of his closest friends and family admitted as much, and some of Joseph’s own revelations support the contention.” (Roberts, *Treasure Seeking Then and Now*, *Sunstone*, v. 11, p. 5.)

Not everyone in that day believed in Joseph’s ability to find buried treasure. In 1826, Joseph was arrested and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York, for trial for fraud. He was arrested after Josiah Stowell’s nephew accused Joseph of being a “disorderly person and an imposter.”

Specifically, Joseph was charged with seeking lost treasure under false pretenses (i.e., that he was guided through supernatural powers and a special peep stone). Joseph was convicted of the crime (which was a misdemeanor). A copy of the judgment, which is included to the right and signed by Joseph, referred to Joseph as “The Glass Looker.” Hugh B. Nibley stated “if this court record is authentic it is the most damning evidence in existence against Joseph Smith.” Recent evidence corroborates the authenticity of the court records.



same [i.e. The People]

vs

Misdemeanor

Joseph Smith
The Glass Looker
March 20, 1826

To my fees in examination
of the above cause 2.68

Joseph’s apparent belief in the supernatural was not unique. For example, Oliver Cowdery often utilized a divining rod or dowsing rod, such as illustrated below, as a source of information:



The above divining rod is mentioned in the scriptures. In Doctrine & Covenants 8, the following heading provides context for the discussion:

“Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. In the course of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Oliver, who continued to serve as scribe, writing at the Prophet’s dictation, desired

to be endowed with the gift of translation. The Lord responded to his supplication by granting this revelation.”

The revelation found in [D&C 8: 6-11](#) states, in relevant part:

6. Now this is not all they gift; for you have another gift, which is the **gift of Aaron**; behold, it has told you many things;
7. Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you.
8. Therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God; and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, for it is the work of God.
9. And, therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that I will grant unto you, and you shall have knowledge concerning it.
10. Remember that without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith. Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not.
11. Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you.

Based on a textual analysis of D&C 8, it is difficult to determine the meaning of the “gift of Aaron” that Oliver Cowdery received. But the text does provide several clues: (1) Oliver has a history of using it, since “it has told [him] many things”; (2) it is “the gift of God”; (3) it is to be held in Oliver’s hands (and kept there, impervious to any power); (4) it allows Oliver to “do marvelous works”; (5) it is “the work of God”; (6) the Lord will speak through it to Oliver and tell him anything he asks while using it; (7) it works through faith; and (8) it enables Oliver to translate ancient sacred documents.

Even with these clues, the “gift of Aaron” remains difficult to identify. The task becomes much easier, however, when analyzing the original revelation contained in the Book of Commandments, a predecessor volume to the Doctrine and Covenants, which was used by the LDS Church before 1835. [Section 7 of the Book of Commandments](#) contains wording that was changed in the [Doctrine & Covenants 8](#). The term “gift of Aaron” was originally referred to as the “gift of working with the rod” and “rod of nature” in the Book of Commandments:

“Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the **gift of working with the rod**: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this **rod of nature**, to work in your hands.” [Book of Commandments 7:3](#)

The historical record demonstrates that the “gift of Aaron” mentioned in D&C 8 is a “rod of nature” (or a divining rod or dowsing rod as illustrated in the above images), which Oliver Cowdery used to hunt for buried treasure. Cowdery’s use of a divining rod to search for buried treasure evokes similar images of Joseph Smith hunting for treasure with a stone in a hat. Oliver also wished to use his divining rod in the same way Joseph Smith used his stone and hat: to translate ancient documents. Doctrine & Covenants 8 indicates that the Lord, through Joseph Smith, granted

Oliver's request to translate using a divining rod. This is only one (of many) examples providing insight into the folk magic and superstition prevalent among the Church at its inception.

3. Analysis of Three Witnesses: The Church often emphasizes that the three witnesses never disavowed their testimonies of the Book of Mormon. To place this claim in its proper context, it is important to analyze each witness and discuss what other statements they made about their experiences. The following is an analysis of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon:

- **Martin Harris**

A compelling analysis of Martin Harris' personality and credibility can be found [here](#). LDS leaders paint Martin Harris as a smart businessman with an unwavering testimony of the Book of Mormon. Harris, however, was known by many of his peers as unstable, gullible, and superstitious. Moreover, Harris acknowledged that he, and the other witnesses, never literally saw the gold plates but only an object said to be the plates covered with a cloth. Harris believed Joseph when told that if he were to look upon the plates God would strike him dead, so he dared not look.

Before discussing his statements with respect to the Book of Mormon, two important factors are worth noting. First, Harris had a direct conflict of interest in being a witness; he was deeply invested financially in the Book of Mormon as he mortgaged his farm to finance the book. Second, Harris was incredibly superstitious. Consider the following accounts:

- "Once while reading scripture, he reportedly mistook a candle's sputtering as a sign that the devil desired him to stop. Another time he excitedly awoke from his sleep believing that a creature as large as a dog had been upon his chest, though a nearby associate could find nothing to confirm his fears. Several hostile and perhaps unreliable accounts told of visionary experiences with Satan and Christ, Harris once reporting that Christ had been poised on a roof beam." (BYU professor Ronald W. Walker, "*Martin Harris: Mormonism's Early Convert*," p.34-35)
- "No matter where he went, he saw visions and supernatural appearances all around him. He told a gentleman in Palmyra, after one of his excursions to Pennsylvania, while the translation of the Book of Mormon was going on, that on the way he met the Lord Jesus Christ, who walked along by the side of him in the shape of a deer for two or three miles, talking with him as familiarly as one man talks with another." (John A. Clark letter, August 31, 1840 in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2: 271)
- According to two Ohio newspapers, after Harris arrived in Kirtland he began claiming to have "seen Jesus Christ and that he is the handsomest man he ever did see. He has also seen the Devil, whom he described as a very sleek haired fellow with four feet, and a head like that of a Jack-ass." (*Early Mormon Documents* 2: 271, note 32)

Before Harris became a Mormon, he had already [changed his religion](#) at least five times. After Joseph's death, Harris continued this earlier pattern by joining and leaving five more

different sects, including James Strang's congregation, other Mormon offshoots, and the Shakers. In fact, Harris even served a mission in England for James Strang's church.

During Harris' lifetime, he claimed to have experienced the following:

- Conversed with Jesus, who took the form of a deer;
- Saw the devil, who had four feet and donkey head;
- Chipped off a chunk of a stone box that mysteriously moved beneath the ground to avoid capture;
- Interpreted simple things like a flickering of a candle as a sign of the devil;
- Experienced a creature jumping on his chest that no one else could see.

Consider, for a moment, if an individual testified of experiencing some miraculous spiritual encounter, but also claimed to have experienced the preceding events. Would you believe these claims? With inconsistency, conflict of interest, magical thinking, and superstition like this, it is difficult to view Harris as a credible witness to the Book of Mormon.

Regardless, Martin Harris' statements make it clear that he never physically saw the gold plates. Specifically, Harris made the following statements:

- In 1838, Harris told an Ohio congregation: "I never saw the gold plates only in a visionary or entranced state." (Early Mormon Documents, 2:346-47, quoted from *Insider's View of Mormon Origin*, p. 198.) This statement, made in the wake of the Kirtland banking scandal, caused a great deal of dissention among Church members and induced five influential members, including three apostles, to leave the church.
- In March 1838, disillusioned church members confirmed that Harris had publicly admitted that none of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon had ever seen or handled the gold plates—although Harris had not been present when Whitmer and Cowdery first claimed to have viewed them. These church members also claimed that Harris's recantation, made during a period of crisis in early Mormonism, induced five influential members, including three apostles, to leave the church.

Specifically, church leader Stephen Burnett wrote in a letter to apostle Lyman E. Johnson in 1838, which stated in pertinent part: "I have reflected long and deliberately upon the history of this church & weighed the evidence for & against it – loth to give it up – but when I came to hear Martin Harris state in public that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver [Cowdery] nor David [Whitmer] & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundations was sapped & the entire structure fell a heap of ruins" (Stephen Burnett to Luke S. Johnson, April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith's Letterbook, Vogel, 2:290-92).

- When questioned whether he (Martin Harris) saw the plates and engravings with his bodily eyes, he said, “I did not see them as I do that pencil case, yet I saw them with the eye of faith. I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me, though at the time they were covered with a cloth.” (Early Mormon Documents, 2:270; see also [Origin and History of the Mormonites](#), p. 406)
- During the printing of the first edition of the Book of Mormon, Harris was in the print shop while the type was being set for the testimony of the three witnesses. The printer, John Gilbert, asked him if he had seen the plates with his naked eye. Harris said, “No, I saw them with the spiritual eye.” (John H. Gilbert, *Memorandum*, September 8, 1892.)
- Harris said he never saw the plates in the traditional sense, rather, he saw them as he saw a “city through a mountain.” (Early Mormon Documents, Vol. 2, pp. 291-92.)
- Near the end of his life, Harris said that he had seen the plates in “a state of entrancement.” (Early Mormon Documents, 2:347.)

- **David Whitmer**

A compelling analysis of David Whitmer’s personality and credibility can be found [here](#). Like Martin Harris, Whitmer could be considered both gullible and superstitious. For example, in early June 1829 (before seeing the gold plates), he claimed that he, Cowdery, and Joseph Smith observed “one of the Nephites” carrying the plates in a knapsack on his way to Cumorah. Several days later this trio perceived “that the Same Person was under the shed” at the Whitmer farm. (Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p.179).

With respect to the gold plates, consider the following:

- In 1880, David Whitmer was asked for a description of the angel who showed him the plates. Whitmer responded that the angel “had no appearance or shape.” When the interviewer asked how he then could bear testimony that he had seen and heard an angel, Whitmer replied, “Have you never had impressions?” To which the interviewer responded, “Then you had impressions as the Quaker when the spirit moves, or as a good Methodist in giving a happy experience, a feeling?” “Just so,” replied Whitmer. (Interview with John Murphy, June 1880, EMD 5:63)
- Whitmer later testified that he did not see the plates literally with his natural eyes, rather, he said he saw the plates “by the eye of faith” handled by an angel. (*Palmyra Reflector*, March 19, 1831)
- A Mormon lawyer, James Henry Moyle, interviewed Whitmer in 1885 and asked if there was any possibility that Whitmer had been deceived. “His answer was unequivocal . . . that he saw the plates and heard the angel with unmistakable

clearness." But Moyle went away "not fully satisfied . . . It was more spiritual than I anticipated." (Moyle diary, June 28, 1885, EMD 5:141)

The fact that the Church touts Whitmer's testimony of the Book of Mormon seems to indicate that it finds him to be a credible individual. If that is the case, how does the Church explain the following statement Whitmer made in 1887: "If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon, if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens and told me to separate myself from among the Latter-day Saints." (Address to all Believers in Christ, p. 27, 1887.)

The Church asks members to believe Whitmer when he claims that Joseph Smith was inspired, but to reject his statements when they depart from a convenient narrative.

- **Oliver Cowdery**

There is no direct evidence that Cowdery denied his testimony of the Book of Mormon. There is, however, a great deal of [circumstantial evidence](#) that he did so. Cowdery's law partner, Judge W. Lang, and former apostle, William McClellan, both said that Cowdery admitted to them that the Book of Mormon was a hoax.

Regardless, like Joseph and most of the Book of Mormon witnesses, Cowdery and his family were treasure hunters. Cowdery's preferred tool of trade was the divining rod. He was known as a "rodsman." Along with the witnesses, Cowdery held a magical mindset. Cowdery was not an objective and independent witness. As scribe for the Book of Mormon and cousin to Joseph Smith, Cowdery had a conflict of interest in serving as a witness.

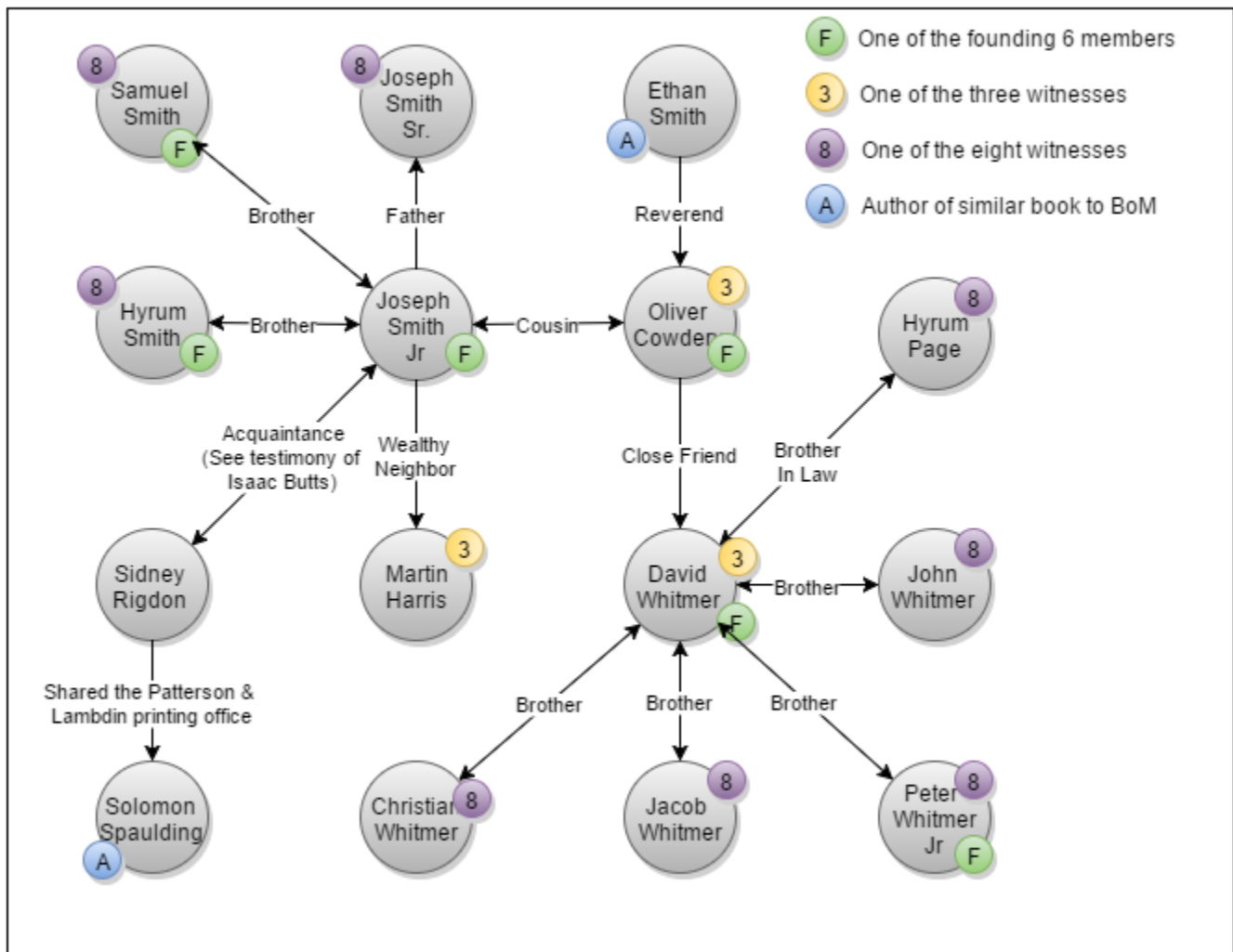
If, in fact, members view Cowdery was a credible witness, other problems arise. Like Harris and Whitmer, Cowdery also left the Church. Moreover, in a letter dated January 21, 1838, Cowdery accused Joseph of having an affair with 16-year-old Fanny Alger, writing: "When he [Joseph Smith] was there we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger's was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth in the matter, and as I supposed was admitted by himself." (Letter written by Oliver Cowdery and recorded by his brother Warren Cowdery; see photograph in *The Mormon Kingdom*, vol. 1, page 27.)

As with Whitmer, the Church asks members to believe Cowdery's statements that bolster Church doctrine but reject those statements that undermine Joseph Smith's credibility.

4. **Analysis of Eight Witnesses:** In view of the totality of the evidence, the testimony of the eight witnesses is also suspect. Three of the eight witnesses were members of Joseph's immediate family (including his father, Joseph Smith Sr., and two brothers, Hyrum Smith and Samuel Smith). The following is a list of the remaining five witnesses:

- **Jacob Whitmer:** Left the Church in 1838.
- **John Whitmer:** Excommunicated in 1838.
- **Hiram Page:** Left the Church in 1838 when members of the Whitmer family were excommunicated.
- **Christian Whitmer:** Died in 1835, three years before his entire family left the church or were excommunicated.
- **Peter Whitmer, Jr.:** Died in 1836, two years before his entire family left the church or were excommunicated.

5. Close Relationship Between BOM Witnesses and Joseph Smith: All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, with the exception of Martin Harris (who was one of the Smith’s neighbors), were related by blood or marriage to either the Smiths or Whitmers. The following graphic shows the close relationship between Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon witnesses as well as authors of books similar to the Book of Mormon:



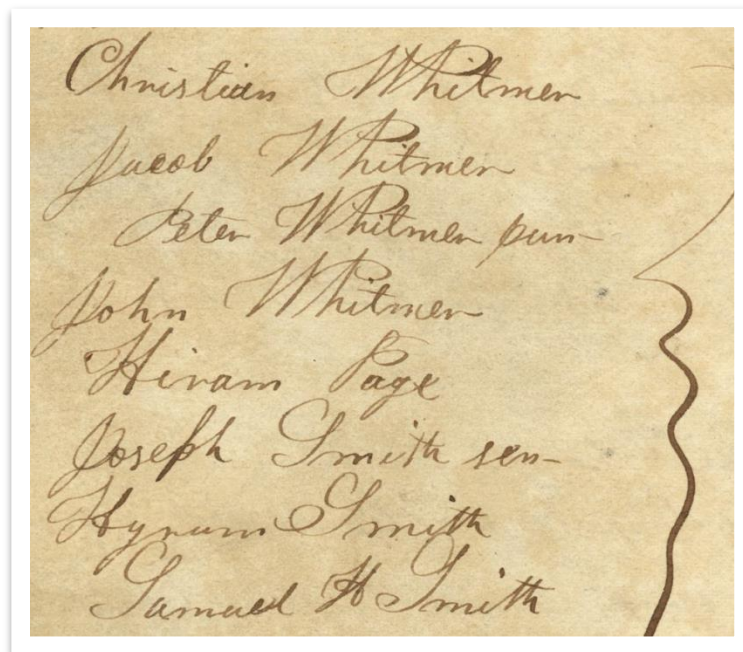
6. Witnesses Saw Gold Plates Via Second Sight: In Joseph’s day, people believed in seeing things as a vision in their mind. They called it “second sight” or viewing objects/events with “spiritual eyes.” Today, we would refer to second sight as using our imagination. In Joseph’s day, it apparently made little difference if they saw things with their natural or spiritual eyes. This supernatural way of seeing the world is also referred in Doctrine and Covenants as “[the eyes of our understanding](#).”

If the golden plates were real and tangible as the Church teaches, why would the witnesses make the following kinds of statements when describing the plates and the experience?

- “While praying I passed into a state of entrancement, and in that state I saw the angel and the plates.” (Martin Harris, (Anthony Metcalf, *Ten Years Before the Mast*, n.d., microfilm copy, p. 70-71))
- “I never saw the gold plates, only in a visionary or entranced state.” (*Early Mormon Documents*, 2:346-47)
- “He only saw the plates with a spiritual eye.” (*Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. 1, 1958)
- “As shown in the vision.” (Zenas H. Gurle, Interview with David Whitmer on Jan 14, 1885)
- “Never saw the plates with his natural eyes but only in vision or imagination” (Letter from Stephen Burnett to "Br. Johnson," April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2.)
- “I did not see them uncovered, but I handled them and hefted them while wrapped in a tow frock.” (*Early Mormon Documents* 1:497)
- “They were shown to me by a supernatural power” ([History of the Church Vol. 3, Ch. 21, p. 307-308](#))
- “. . . when I came to hear Martin Harris state in public that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundation was sapped & the entire superstructure fell in heap of ruins, I therefore three week since in the Stone Chapel...renounced the Book of Mormon...after we were done speaking M Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city throught [sic] a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight was false, if it had not been picked out of—[him/me?] but should have let it passed as it was. . . .” (Letter from Stephen Burnett to "Br. Johnson," April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2)

- The foreman in the Palmyra printing office that produced the first Book of Mormon said that Harris “used to practice a good deal of his characteristic jargon and ‘seeing with the spiritual eye,’ and the like.” ([Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress, p.71](#))
- Two other Palmyra residents said that Harris told them that he had seen the plates with “the eye of faith” or “spiritual eyes.” (*Early Mormon Documents* 2:270 and 3:22)
- John H. Gilbert, the typesetter for most of the Book of Mormon, said that he had asked Harris, “Martin, did you see those plates with your naked eyes?” According to Gilbert, Harris “looked down for an instant, raised his eyes up, and said, ‘No, I saw them with a spiritual eye.’” (*Early Mormon Documents* 2:548.)

7. **No Document of Witnesses’ Signatures:** The closest thing we have in existence to an original document of the Book of Mormon witnesses’ testimonies is a [printer’s manuscript written by Oliver Cowdery](#). None of the witness names on that document are signed, rather, they are written in Cowdery’s handwriting. Further, there is no testimony from any of the witnesses directly attesting to the actual wording and claims contained in the testimony prefacing the Book of Mormon.



[Closest Original to Testimony of Witnesses](#)

While we have “testimonies” from the witnesses recorded in later years through interviews and second eyewitness accounts and affidavits, many of the “testimonies” given by the witnesses do not match the claims and wording of the statements in the Book of Mormon.

8. **James Strang and the Voree Plates Witnesses:** [James Strang](#) is one of three individuals (along with Sydney Rigdon and Brigham Young) who attempted to lead the Church following Joseph Smith’s death. Strang made a number of claims that implicate the Book of Mormon and its supposed witnesses. In fact, Strang claimed to have found the brass plates (that Nephi took from Laban) and translated them. Like Joseph Smith, Strang did the following:

- Claimed he was visited by an angel who reserved the brass plates for him to translate into the word of God. “The record which was sealed from my servant Joseph. Unto thee it is reserved.”
- Received the Urim and Thummim.
- Produced 11 witnesses who testified that they saw and inspected the ancient metal plates.
- Introduced new scripture from the brass plates that are now referred to as the [Voree Plates](#). After unearthing the plates (the same brass plates Nephi took from Laban), Strang translated the plates into scripture called the “[Book of the Law of the Lord](#).”
- Established a new Church: [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints \(Strangite\)](#). Its headquarters is still in Voree, Wisconsin.

Like the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Law of the Lord has the testimony of its Witnesses in its preface, entitled “Testimony,” which reads as follows:

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, to whom this Book of the Law of the Lord shall come, that James J. Strang has the plates of the ancient Book of the Law of the Lord given to Moses, from which he translated this law, and has shown them to us. We examined them with our eyes, and handled them with our hands. The engravings are beautiful antique workmanship, bearing a striking resemblance to the ancient oriental languages; and those from which the laws in this book were translated are eighteen in number, about seven inches and three-eighths wide, by nine inches long, occasionally embellished with beautiful pictures.

And we testify unto you all that the everlasting kingdom of God is established, in which this law shall be kept, till it brings in rest and everlasting righteousness to all the faithful.

The Testimony was then signed by the following seven witnesses: Samuel Graham, Samuel P. Bacon, Warren Post, Phineas Wright, Albert N. Hosmer, Ebenezer Page, and Jehiel Savage.

In addition to the above seven witnesses, four additional witnesses were with Strang when the [Voree Plates](#) were unearthed. The following link contains the “[Testimony of Witnesses to the Voree Plates](#),” which bears a number of striking similarities to the Book of Mormon story.

Like Joseph, Strang had a scribe, Samuel Graham, who wrote as Strang translated. Along with several of the witnesses, Graham was later excommunicated from Strang’s Church. There is no direct evidence that any of the above 11 Strang [witnesses ever denied](#) their testimony of James Strang, the Voree Plates, Strang’s church, or Strang’s divine calling.

- 9. Book of Mormon Witnesses and Joseph Smith’s Family Sustained Strang as Prophet:** Notably, every living Book of Mormon witness except Oliver Cowdery accepted Strang’s prophetic claim of

being Joseph's true successor and joined Strang's church. Additionally, Joseph's brother, William Smith, stated that all members of Joseph's family, except for Hyrum's widow, sustained Strang as "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator." In fact, Lucy Mack Smith wrote a letter to Reuben Hedlock stating: "I am satisfied that Joseph appointed J.J. Strang. It is verily so." (Palmer, *Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, p. 211.) What does this say about the credibility of the Book of Mormon witnesses if they were so easily duped by Strang's fraudulent claims?

10. Problems with Church's Reliance on Witnesses: There are many problems with the testimonies and corresponding arguments in support of the [Three](#) and [Eight](#) Witnesses. For example:

- **"The Witnesses never recanted or denied their testimonies":** Neither did the witnesses to the Voree plates, even after they were excommunicated or estranged from Strang's church. Neither did dozens of Joseph Smith's neighbors and peers who signed affidavits as to Joseph's misconduct and deception. Neither did many of the Shaker witnesses who signed affidavits that they saw an angel on the roof top holding the "Sacred Roll and Book" written by founder Ann Lee (which later turned out to be fraudulent). Same goes with the thousands of people over the centuries who claim to have seen the Virgin Mary and point to this experience as evidence that Catholicism is true. Many people wholeheartedly believe the Book of Mormon witnesses because they have difficulty believing that these witnesses were lying or had been deceived. Using that same logic, one could also make the case for Big Foot. Likewise, thousands of people claim to have been abducted by aliens. In fact, there were seven witnesses to the abduction have [Travis Walton](#). All seven witnesses passed lie detector tests and none of them have ever recanted their story.
- In discussing the witnesses, we should not overlook the primary accounts of the events they testified to. The official statements published in the Book of Mormon are not dated, signed (there is no record with their signatures), and there is no specific location given for where the events occurred. These are not 11 legally sworn affidavits; rather they are simple statements pre-written by Joseph Smith with claims of having been signed by three men and another by eight.
- All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, with the exception of Martin Harris, were related by blood or marriage either to the Smiths or Whitmers. Oliver Cowdery (married to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer and cousin to Joseph Smith), Hiram Page (married to Catherine Whitmer), and the five Whitmers were related by marriage. Of course, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. were Joseph's brothers and father.
- Within eight years after allegedly seeing the gold plates, all of the three witnesses were excommunicated from the Church. This is what Joseph Smith said about them in 1838: "Such characters as . . . John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them." ([History of the Church Vol. 3, Ch. 15, p. 232](#)) What does it say about the witnesses and their character if even the prophet thought they were questionable?

- As mentioned in the above [Polygamy/Polyandry section](#), Joseph was able to influence and convince up to 31 witnesses to lie and perjure themselves in a sworn affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist. Is it outside the realm of possibility that Joseph was also able to influence or manipulate the experiences of his own superstitious family and friends as witnesses (particularly Mormon men who already believed in second sight and who already believed that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God)?
- James Strang's claims and witnesses to the Voree plates are distinctive and more impressive compared to the Book of Mormon Witnesses. For example:
 - None of Strang's witnesses were related to one another through blood or marriage like the Book of Mormon Witnesses.
 - Some of the witnesses were not members of Strang's church.
 - The Voree Plates were displayed in a museum for both members and non-members to view and examine.
 - Four witnesses testified that they dug up the plates for Strang while he waited for them to do so. They confirmed that the ground looked previously undisturbed.

11. Conclusion: It seems as if any unbiased observer would have difficulty placing much, if any, weight in the testimony of the three and eight witnesses in light of the fact that (1) these same witnesses also believed James Strang to be a prophet and the Voree plates to be of divine origin; (2) all of the Book of Mormon witnesses except Martin Harris were related to either Joseph Smith or David Whitmer; (3) all of the witnesses came from a superstitious era and believed in second sight; and (4) virtually all of the 11 witnesses not related to Joseph Smith left the Church.

Regardless, the testimonies of the three and eight witnesses are rendered irrelevant by virtue of one simple fact: Joseph did not use the gold plates in translating the Book of Mormon.

Prophets

- 1. Overview:** Church members are taught that the prophet speaks for the Lord and will never lead the church astray (even when they are wrong). President Heber J. Grant said: “Always keep your eye on the President of the church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, even if it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it but you don't need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray.” (*Conference Report*, October 1960, p. 78.) I don’t expect prophets to be perfect, but I am uncomfortable blindly following modern-day prophets in light of the numerous falsehoods and disavowed doctrines taught by previous Church leaders.
- 2. Adam-God:** President Brigham Young taught a doctrine now known as the “Adam-God theory.” He taught that Adam is “our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.” Young not only taught this doctrine over the pulpit at the [1852](#) and [1854](#) General Conferences, but he also introduced this doctrine at the [Lecture at the Veil](#) in the Temple endowment ceremony. (Journal of [L. John Nuttall](#), personal secretary of Brigham Young, February 7, 1877 in BYU Special Collections). Consider the following statements made by Brigham Young with regard to the Adam-God theology.
 - “How much unbelief exists in the minds of Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me - namely that Adam is our father and God ..Then he said, 'I want my children who are in the spirit world to come and live here. I once dwelt upon an earth something like this, in a mortal state. I was faithful. I received my crown and exaltation...I want my children that were born to me in the spirit world to come here and take tabernacles of flesh that their spirits may have a house, a tabernacle . . .” (Brigham Young, *Deseret Weekly News*, June 18, 1873, page 308; *Deseret Evening News*, June 14, 1873)
 - “Who was the Savior begotten by?... Who did beget him? His Father, and his father is our God, and the Father of our spirits, and he is the framer of the body, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is he? He is Father Adam; Michael; the Ancient of Days.” (President Brigham Young, Feb. 19, 1854, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Archives; ; *Brigham Young Addresses*, 1850-1854, Vol. 2, by Elden J. Watson, sheet 179 (in chronological order), Historical Dept. Church, Ms d 1234, Box 48 Fd. 11; also in Adam Is God???, pp. 9-10; *Adam-God Maze*, p.101)
 - “Some have grumbled because I believe our God to be so near to us as Father Adam. There are many who know that doctrine to be true.” (Brigham Young, October 7, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:331).
 - “Some years ago I advanced a doctrine with regard to Adam being our Father and God...It is one of the most glorious revealments of the economy of heaven. . . .” (President Brigham Young, in the Tabernacle, General Conference, October 8, 1861, 10:30 a.m.; Brigham Young Addresses, 1860-1864, Vol. 4, by Elden J. Watson, sheet 134 (in chronological order), Historical Dept. Church, Ms d 1234, Box 49 fd 8)

Prophets and apostles after Young renounced the Adam-God theology as false doctrine. President Spencer W. Kimball renounced the Adam-God theory in the October 1976 Conference:

“We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations. Such, for instance, is the Adam-God theory. We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine.” (President Spencer W. Kimball, [Our Own Liahona](#))

Along with President Spencer W. Kimball and similar statements from others, Bruce R. McConkie made the following statement:

"The devil keeps this heresy [Adam-God theology] alive as a means of obtaining converts to cultism. It is contrary to the whole plan of salvation set forth in the scriptures, and anyone who has read the Book of Moses, and anyone who has received the temple endowment, has no excuse whatever for being led astray by it. Those who are so ensnared reject the living prophet and close their ears to the apostles of their day." (Bruce R. McConkie, [The Seven Deadly Heresies](#))

Ironically, Elder McConkie's June 1980 condemnation asks church members to trust him and President Kimball as living prophets without commenting on the applicability of this instruction to members living during Brigham Young's day. Further, McConkie points to the endowment ceremony as a source of doctrinal information without mentioning that Brigham Young implemented the Adam-God theory into the endowment ceremony in his day. It is as if yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine and yesterday's prophet is today's heretic. Why should today's Church members trust modern prophets when past church members were taught false doctrine by previous prophets?

- 3. Blood Atonement:** Along with Adam-God, Brigham Young taught a doctrine known as "[Blood Atonement](#)," which was a controversial doctrine indicating that murder was so heinous that the atonement of Christ does not apply to murderers. Thus, to atone for murder, the perpetrator must have his or her blood shed as a sacrificial offering. Brigham Young taught as follows:

“There are sins that men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come, and if they had their eyes open to see their true condition, they would be perfectly willing to have their blood spilt upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascend to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins, whereas, if such is not the case, they will stick to them and remain upon them in the spirit world.

I know, when you hear my brethren telling about cutting people off from the earth, that you consider it is strong doctrine; but it is to save them, not to destroy them . . .

And furthermore, I know that there are transgressors, who, if they knew themselves, and the only condition upon which they can obtain forgiveness, would beg of their brethren to shed their blood, that the smoke thereof might ascend to God as an offering to appease the wrath that is kindled against them, and that the law might have its course. I will say further;

I have had men come to me and offer their lives to atone for their sins.

It is true that the blood of the Son of God was shed for sins through the fall and those committed by men, yet men can commit sins which it can never remit.... There are sins that can be atoned for by an offering upon an altar, as in ancient days; and there are sins that the blood of a lamb, or a calf, or of turtle dove, cannot remit, but they must be atoned for by the blood of the man." (Brigham Young, [Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4, p. 53-54](#))

The doctrine of blood atonement was later declared false by subsequent prophets and apostles. Why should today's Church members trust modern prophets when past church members were taught false doctrine by previous prophets?

4. **Polygamy:** Brigham Young taught that polygamy is required for exaltation: "The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy." (Brigham Young, [Journal of Discourses 11:269](#).) Likewise, several prophets after Young, including John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, and Joseph F. Smith taught that the New and Everlasting Covenant of plural marriage was doctrinal and essential for exaltation. The importance and eternal nature of polygamy is further supported by [Doctrine & Covenants 132:4](#): "For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory." Note that the entire section deals with the practice of polygamy and that the revelation was given to Joseph Smith to answer his inquiries into polygamy ([D&C 132: 1-2](#)).

In a September 1998 Larry King Live [interview](#), Hinckley was asked about polygamy:

- Larry King: You condemn it [polygamy]?
- Hinckley: I condemn it. Yes, as a practice, because I think it is not doctrinal.

Notably, Doctrine and Covenants 132 is canonized scripture. The Church is, in essence, still practicing plural marriage in the Temple. Apostles Elder Oaks and Elder Nelson are modern examples of LDS polygamists in that they are sealed to multiple women.

So, some prophets claim that polygamy is doctrinal. Other prophets apparently claim it is not. Again, why should today's Church members trust modern prophets when past church members were taught false doctrine by previous prophets?

5. **Race and the Priesthood:** For close to 130 years, those of African descent were banned from holding the priesthood and black men and women were prohibited from participating in temple endowment or sealing ordinances. All prophets from Brigham Young through Harold B. Lee kept this ban in place. Joseph Smith, however, permitted at least two black men to receive the priesthood, [Elijah Abel](#) and [Walker Lewis](#). In other words, Joseph Smith gave African Americans the priesthood. Brigham Young banned the practice. All 10 prophets from Brigham Young to Harold B. Lee supported the ban, which Spencer W. Kimball referred to as a "possible error" (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 448-449). Finally, the ban was lifted in 1978.

Today, the Church teaches that no explanation has ever been given as to why the ban remained in place for 130 years. Additionally, the Church recently released an essay, entitled [Race and the Priesthood](#), in which it disavowed "the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form."

The problem with the Church's preceding statement is that it directly contradicts the Church's official declarations on the matter from past prophets. For example, on August 17, 1949, [the First Presidency issued an official statement](#) relating to race and the priesthood. In so doing, the Church made the following declarations:

"The prophets of the Lord have made several statements as to the operation of the principle. President Brigham Young said: 'Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the holy priesthood, and the law of God. They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the holy priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will then come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to.'

....

"The position of the Church regarding the Negro may be understood when another doctrine of the Church is kept in mind, namely, that the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality . . ."

Both LDS scripture and modern-day prophets perpetuate the idea that dark skin is a curse. The Book of Mormon teaches that the Lamanites were "cursed" with dark skin due to their iniquity. [2 Nephi 5:21](#). By contrast, the Book of Mormon teaches that the Lamanites' skin was made white when they repented. [3 Nephi 2:15](#). Likewise, many prophets over many years made incredibly racist comments from the pulpit and presented such comments as doctrine. For example:

- **Brigham Young** uttered numerous racist remarks in his role prophet. "Should I tell you the laws of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed

mixes his blood with the seed of Cain (those with dark skin) the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.” (*Journal of Discourses*, 10:110.)

- **John Taylor** stated: “And after the flood we are told that the curse that had been pronounced upon Cain was continued through Hams wife, as he had married a wife of that seed. And why did it pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God;” (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 22, pg. 304.)
- **Joseph Fielding Smith** stated that Cain was the father “of an inferior race,” (*The Way to Perfection*, p. 101), and that black men could not receive the priesthood because “those who were not faithful [in the pre-mortal life] received less.” (*Doctrines of Salvation* 1:61.)
- Apostle **Mark E. Peterson**, in a 1954 address to BYU students, stated: “If that Negro is faithful all his days, he can and will enter the Celestial Kingdom. He will go there as a servant, but he will get celestial glory.”

The LDS Church professes to be God’s one true Church that is led by prophets that communicate with God. How could nearly every prophet since Brigham Young be so wrong about something so important if they spoke with God? Why would this not be challenged by any of the prophets since Brigham Young if they were real prophets? If the LDS Church was really God's one true church on earth, you would expect the leaders to proclaim racial equality in the 1800s, and not wait until 1978 to change their position on equal rights.

15. **Doctrine Versus Opinion:** It is virtually impossible to determine when prophets are speaking as men versus when they are speaking as prophets. For example, Church members are often told that Brigham Young was a man of his time and that he was acting as a man when he taught the Adam-God doctrine. However, this ignores the fact that he taught the doctrine over the pulpit in two General Conferences and introduced the theology into the endowment ceremony. Additionally, if a prophet (speaking in General Conference) is merely providing opinion and does not represent the Church, what is the point of Conference?

Notably, Brigham Young made it clear that he was always speaking as a prophet during his sermons: “I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture.” ([Journal of Discourses 13:95](#).)

How can we trust modern-day prophets as speaking for the Lord when so many statements and doctrines made by previous prophets have been disavowed by the Church?

Simply stated, the Church claims the benefit of two contradictory positions. On the one hand, the Church proclaims that its leaders are inspired in their teachings, and that the prophets will never lead the Church astray. On the other hand, when prophets’ teachings turn out to be false, embarrassing, or out of vogue, the Church claims that such statements and doctrines were merely personal opinions (even if they were made in General Conference). These conflicting positions cannot both be true.

[Temples & Freemasonry](#)

- 1. Introduction:** Out of respect to believing members, I will not lay out all of my concerns with the LDS temple ceremony. However, there are certain aspects of the temple that are spoken about publically by Church leaders that are worth discussing in more detail.
- 2. Similarities Between LDS Temple Ceremonies and Freemasonry:** The LDS temple ceremony has many parallels to Masonic rites, and for good reason: Joseph Smith introduced the rites into the LDS temple about [two months after becoming a Freemason himself](#).

The undeniable similarities between the LDS temple ceremony (especially prior to 1940) and Masonry Rituals of the 1830s are accurately summarized by both Richard Packham ([Similarities Between the Freemasonry of the 1830s and the Mormon Endowment \(pre-1940\)](#)) and the editors at Mormon Think ([Masonry details in the LDS temple ceremony](#)). For a more thorough and detailed analysis of the similarities between Masonry and Mormonism, you can read Michael W. Homer's article [Similarities of Priesthood in Masonry: The Relationship Between Freemasonry and Mormonism](#). (*Dialogue*, Vol. 27, No. 3.)

Faithful Mormons that are aware of these similarities usually reconcile the issue by echoing what the early prophets proclaimed: Masons originally possessed the true temple ordinances from the original true church that existed in Old Testament times (and at least since Solomon's Temple).

Many members believe this for two primary reasons. First, prophets such as Heber C. Kimball said as much: "We have the true Masonry. The Masonry of today is received from the apostasy which took place in the days of Solomon, and David. They have now and then a thing that is correct, but we have the real thing." (Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball and Family: The Nauvoo Years*, p. 458.) Second, many Masons (particularly the less educated) in the early 1800s believed that Masonry rituals originated during Solomon's time.

Some Latter-day Saints hold to the view that Masonry derived from King Solomon's Temple, because it is theologically less complicated to do so than to accept Masonry's historical roots.

- 3. Masonry Developed During the Dark Ages:** The problem with linking the LDS temple ceremony to Masonry is that Masons could not have had the true temple ordinances from Old Testament times. Solomon's temple was destroyed in 422 B.C.E., and Mason rituals date (at earliest) to 1425 A.D. (although many scholars maintain that the rituals originated in the 1700s). Masonry originated in Britain as a trade guild, though it incorporated symbols dating back to various cults in antiquity. Masonry thus comes from an era that LDS doctrine associates with the great apostasy. For Mormonism to copy its crowning ordinances from rites that emerged during the dark ages presents a problem.

Greg Kearney, who is active LDS and a Master Mason, states as follows on FAIR: "Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence to support a continuous functioning line from Solomon's Temple to

the present. We know what went on in Solomon's Temple; it's a ritualistic slaughter of animals." He also adds that "Masonry, while claiming a root in antiquity, can only be reliably traced to medieval stone tradesmen."

- 4. Temple Changes:** Previous iterations of the endowment (through 1990) included blood oath penalties and the Five Points of Fellowship, both of which were identical to Mason rituals (although neither was rooted in religion). I will not discuss any additional changes in this document, but the changes have been rather substantial over the years. But here is the primary point: why were these type of pagan rituals included in the temple ceremony in the first place?
- 5. Purpose of Temples:** Concerning the purpose at the temple, Brigham Young said: "Let me give you the definition in brief. Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being able to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the holy priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell."

The bulk of the temple ceremony revolves around learning and demonstrating the keywords, signs, and tokens that Brigham Young mentioned. This seems both bizarre and unfair. Does the eternal salvation, eternal happiness, and eternal sealing of families really depend on knowing specific signs and tokens that are virtually identical to those found in Masonic rituals?

- 6. Conclusion:** Perhaps this is a personal issue, but I have always been puzzled with the discomfoting feelings (and lack of spiritual witness) I experienced in the endowment ceremony, which is supposed to be one of the holiest ceremonies in the Church. So much of the ceremony focuses on signs, tokens, and ceremony itself. Initially, I believed that if I attended the temple more frequently, I would receive additional insight into the ceremony and its symbolic nature. However, this has simply not been the case. On my mission, I attended the temple nearly every week on preparation day. I continued to attend the temple throughout college. My attendance slowed down once I started graduate school, but overall, I have attended nearly 200 temple sessions. But even after all of this, I simply have not had the type of enlightening and uplifting temple experience that I had hoped to enjoy.

Miscellaneous Concerns

There are many aspects of Mormon theology that can be scientifically disproven. Moreover, some LDS teachings lack plausibility while others are simply bizarre. The following are several examples.

1. **Death Prior to the Fall:** [2 Nephi 2:22](#) and [Alma 12:23-24](#) state there was no death of any kind (humans, animals, birds, fish, dinosaurs, etc.) on the earth until the “Fall of Adam,” which according to [D&C 77:6-7](#) occurred 6,000 or 7,000 years ago (depending on how you interpret the scripture). And, in case there was any doubt on the Church’s stance, Joseph Fielding Smith stated as follows:

[T]here was no death of any living creature before the fall of Adam! . . . Anything contradictory to this doctrine is diametrically opposed to the doctrines revealed to the Church! If there was any creature increasing by propagation before the fall, then throw away the Book of Mormon, deny your faith, the Book of Abraham and the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants! Our scriptures most emphatically tell us that death came through the fall and has been passed upon all creatures including the earth itself. (President Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Improvement Era*, Abstracted from *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Vol. 5, p.112, 116.)

It is scientifically established there has been life and death on earth for billions of years. How does the Church reconcile this? How do we explain the massive fossil evidence showing not only animal death but also the deaths of at least 14 different Hominin species over the span of 250,000 years prior to Adam?

2. **First Humans:** If Adam and Eve are the first humans, how do we explain the [14 other Hominin species](#) who lived and died 35,000 to 250,000 years before Adam?
3. **Jaredite Story:** Joseph Smith said the first group of Book of Mormon people, the Jaredites, came to America in eight specially-built barges that resembled submarines. They were sealed all the way around except for two air holes. One air hole was located at the top and one on the bottom of the barges so as the barges rolled upside down in the water they could occasionally unstop one of the two air holes. These eight, airtight, rolling, rotating barges contained flocks of animals, swarms of bees, and enough provisions to enable them to travel to the New World over a period of 344 days. All eight ships miraculously landed at the same place even though they had no way to steer them.
4. **Noah’s Ark:** Scientific research proves that there was no worldwide flood 4,500 years ago. Plus, it seems implausible to believe that a 600-year-old Noah built a massive ark with dimensions that equate to about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet deep to avoid a flood that covered the entire earth in water. Moreover, it seems implausible to believe that Noah and his small family took two of each unclean creature and seven of every clean creature and all the food and fresh water that would be needed for these animals for six months. It seems equally implausible to believe that, following the flood, Noah and his family of eight repopulated the entire planet.

Simple mathematics show that there was insufficient room on the ark to house all the animal species found on the planet, let alone the food required to feed all of them.

How did the carnivores survive? There would not have been nearly enough herbivores to sustain the carnivores during the voyage and the months after the ark landed. What would the herbivores eat after the flood subsided?

5. Other Discredited Scriptural Claims: Other events/claims that science has discredited:

- Jonah and the whale;
- Tower of Babel;
- Joshua stopping the sun;
- Joshua destroying the walls of Jericho;
- People living to be over 900-years-old;
- People turning into salt in Sodom & Gomorrah;
- As mentioned in Book of Abraham section, the sun getting its light from Kolob.

6. Bizarre Scriptural Claims and Beliefs: Many LDS (and Christian) beliefs canonized in scripture are just plain bizarre.

- Abraham Lies and Gives Wife to Pharaoh:** Abraham's wife, Sarai, is apparently a beautiful woman and, as a result, Abraham (who, at the time, was named Abram) is worried that the Egyptians will kill him to steal her. Thus, when Abraham and Sarai enter Egypt, Abraham asks her to pretend that she is his sister and Sarai complies. Upon entering Egypt, Pharaoh is informed of Sarai's beauty. Pharaoh then pays Abraham with animals and cattle so that he can take Sarai into his household as a wife or mistress. After doing so, God is apparently displeased with the arrangement and punishes Pharaoh's family with "great plagues." When Pharaoh discovers Sarai is married, Pharaoh demands that she and Abraham immediately leave, and expresses irritation that Abraham did not tell him that Sarai was his wife. ([Genesis 12: 10-20.](#))
- Lot Offers Daughters to Mob; Lot's Wife Turned to Salt:** Two angels visit Lot in Sodom. When word gets out about the angels, a mob of men visit Lot's home demanding that they be allowed to rape the two angels. Lot asks the men if they would rather have sex with his two virgin daughters instead. The mob of men insist on having sex with the angels, so God strikes them all blind and tells Lot and his family to leave the city without looking back because he is going to destroy it. Lot's wife disobeys the instruction, looks back at the city, and is turned into a pillar of salt. ([Genesis 19: 1-26.](#))
- Jacob Wrestles With God:** Jacob is on a long journey when suddenly he begins wrestling with a man. The fight goes on all night. The man knows he's losing, so he somehow wrenches Jacob's hip out of place. Jacob says he won't let go of the man until the man blesses him. The man complies and then admits that he is, in fact, God. He then changes Jacob's name to Israel. Following that event, the Bible indicates that, from that day forward,

Israelites did not eat the tendons attached to the hip because “God touched the hallow of Jacob’s thigh.” ([Genesis 32: 22-31.](#))

- d. **David and 200 Foreskins:** David wants to marry Saul’s daughter, Michal. Saul doesn’t want David to marry his daughter, so he demands that David pay him an absurd and bizarre price: 100 foreskins of his enemies, the Philistines, hoping that David will get killed fighting them. But instead, David kills 200 Philistines, cuts off their foreskins, presents them to Saul, and marries Michal. ([1 Samuel 18-25-27.](#))
- e. **Elijah and the Mocking Children:** Some children mock Elijah for being bald. Elijah curses the children and, after doing so, two female bears kill 42 of the children. ([2 Kings 2: 23-24.](#))
- f. **Ezekiel’s Memorial to Siege of Jerusalem:** God tells Ezekiel that in memorial of the siege of Jerusalem, he needs to build a model of the city, lie down on his left side for 390 days, and then lie his right side for 40 days. During this time, God says Ezekiel is only allowed to eat bread, which he has baked over a fire of human feces. Ezekiel protests at the last requirement, so God lets him use cow feces instead. ([Ezekiel 1: 1-16.](#))
- g. **Jesus and the Possessed Pigs:** Jesus is walking through a demon-infested tomb when two violent heretics begin flailing about in front of him. They sarcastically ask if Jesus has come to torture them for being possessed. Before Jesus can answer, a herd of pigs come thundering over a nearby hill. For some reason, the demons possessing the men plead to be allowed to enter the pigs. Jesus permits this, but soon after, the demon pigs are driven into the sea where they drown. People from the local town are shocked, and they tell Jesus to leave their land immediately. ([Matthew 8: 28-34.](#))
- h. **Ezekiel and the Skeleton Army:** God places Ezekiel in a valley full of dry bones and asks Ezekiel: “can these bones live?” Ezekiel replies that only God knows. God then instructs Ezekiel to, among other things, “prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” Ezekiel complies with the instruction and “an exceeding great army” is brought to life. This army then returns to Israel. ([Ezekiel 37.](#))

Testimony, Truth, and the Holy Ghost

- 1. Background:** Despite my doubts and concerns about various aspects of LDS doctrine and history, I remained in the Church for several years due to the spiritual and uplifting experiences I enjoyed as a member. But those spiritual feelings and emotions have also been a matter of study and inspection.

During my so-called “faith crisis,” I studied numerous LDS sources in hopes of finding answers to a variety of troubling questions about the Church. However, I became increasingly frustrated when most Church members refused to acknowledge, let alone discuss, some of the uncomfortable information I was discovering. Rather, virtually every time I reached out for guidance or support, my Church leaders said virtually the same thing: the facts, evidence, and logical arguments undermining the Church are unimportant because the spirit confirms that the Church is true.

For a while, I accepted, if not embraced, my Church leaders’ guidance. Specifically, I believed the Spirit teaches all truth (based on John 14:26 and John 15:26). I believed I could use the Spirit to decipher truth by doing the following: First, I would do a specific act (John 7:17) or ponder a specific issue (D&C 9:8-9). In doing so, I would then seek confirmation that the act or issue or question was true. I would receive this confirmation through certain feelings and sensations (D&C 9:8-9, Galatians 5:22-23) or, more often, through my mind and heart (D&C 8:2-3). Sometimes these feelings would be strong and immediate. But more often, these feelings and confirmations would arrive line upon line, precept upon precept over a long period of time (2 Nephi 28:30).

At times, this process worked and I believed I could decipher truth with my feelings. I felt positive emotions when I participated in various church activities such as singing hymns, praying, attending baptisms, and performing service. In turn, I believed these feelings served as confirmation from God that the Church was true.

Over time, however, I began to distrust the foregoing process when I determined that my premise (feelings are answers and instructions from God) and the resulting conclusion (therefore the Church is true) was based on unsound and faulty assumptions. Rather, the evidence demonstrates that feelings, emotions, and the “spirit” are unreliable in deciphering truth.

- 2. Similar Experiences in Other Religions:** The Church teaches that we can obtain knowledge and truth through the power of the Holy Ghost, which is typically associated with certain feelings and sensations. However, the feelings typically associated with the Holy Ghost are felt by people of all different backgrounds in daily life. Many religious and non-religious individuals feel “spiritual” feelings (or get goosebumps, a lump in their throat, or teary-eyed, etc.) while watching fictional movies, listening to music, reading novels, or enjoying a hike. Likewise, most atheists would acknowledge feeling “tingling, warm sensations” in many activities.

But if God sends certain feelings and emotions to help individuals decipher truth, Mormons should be the only people who feel the Holy Ghost in determining whether their Church is true. However, this is simply not the case. People from all religions report having the same feelings that witness to them that their particular religion, beliefs, or church is true. In fact, members of other faiths often follow virtually the same method of finding truth as members of the LDS church. Even so, these non-members gain testimonies of their own church based, in large part, on the same spiritual feelings LDS members feel about their church. Obviously, not all religions can be right. And it seems more than a bit far-fetched to believe that only members of the LDS Church, who constitute a miniscule portion of the world's population, are able to accurately use their feelings to decipher truth, spiritual or otherwise.

For example, this [video](#) contains the testimonies of individuals from 16 different religions all of whom believe God has told them through the spirit that they belong to God's one true church. Many of these individuals testify that they know God is speaking to them when they feel emotions that are stronger or different than the typical emotions they feel on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, they know these feelings and insights are from God as opposed to regular feelings or emotions. However, how can all these individuals experience the same feelings and emotions about their respective churches that Mormons feel about the LDS Church?

Moreover, consider the statements and experiences of the three following religious leaders:

- **Marshall Applewhite**, former leader of [Heaven's Gate](#), told his followers that they could know whether his teachings were true by doing the following:
 - ... At least ponder this, that you go into the privacy of your closet. Don't ask your neighbors, your friends what they think of this. You go see if you can connect with the purest, highest source, that you might consider God and say, "What about this? Is it for real?"
- **A.J. Miller**, leader of the [Divine Truth movement](#), tells his followers to decipher truth in the following manner:
 - ... There is a general process that God designed that allows us to discover what is truth and what is not...the process would be: ask this God to receive love and then feel about that particular thing and if that particular thing turns off the flow I know it's not true ... And if that particular thing stays flowing I then, I know it's true.
- **Paul H. Dunn** exemplifies the unreliable nature of deciphering truth through "spiritual" feelings and promptings. Elder Dunn was a General Authority of the Church for many years and told incredible faith-promoting war and baseball stories. Some of his stories told of how God protected him in battle as enemy fire ripped away his clothing, gear, and helmet without ever touching his skin. Members of the Church shared how they really felt the Spirit as they listened to Elder Dunn's testimony and stories. Elder Dunn, however, lied about all his war and baseball

stories and was forced to apologize to Church members. He became the first General Authority to gain “emeritus” status and was removed from public Church life.

Marshall Applewhite, A.J. Miller, and Elder Dunn all exemplify a larger point, namely, that many individuals can (and often do) feel warm, uplifting, and spiritual feelings even when hearing falsehoods, lies, and fabricated stories. But clearly, those spiritual feelings could not have been testifying that the teachings and stories of the foregoing leaders were true.

Likewise, many church members feel positive, spiritual feelings when reading the Book of Mormon or learning about various aspects of the gospel. These feelings, however, do not prove that the Book of Mormon or other aspects of LDS doctrine are true.

- 3. Spiritual Feelings are Inherently Unreliable:** A recent [survey](#) asked people who believe in a God who answers prayers if they had prayed and asked God which religion is the most correct. Notably, 82 percent of the respondents stated they had received an answer from God (and 73 percent indicated they were “very sure” that God gave them an answer). Those respondents who claimed to have received an answer from God identified 22 different religions as God’s true church. As noted by [Carson Calderwood](#), there are a significant number of people that use the same evidence as Mormons (strong, spiritual feelings) to prove that their church is God’s only true church. The fact that people of many different faiths use the same evidence in forming vastly different conclusions suggests that relying primarily on feelings and emotions is a subjective and unreliable method of deciphering truth. After all, how can members of one faith determine that their feelings are correct (or the “most correct”) while members of others faiths are wrong?

Recent research into [DMT \(N,N-Dimethyltryptamine\)](#) provides additional evidence as to the unreliability of religious emotions in deciphering truth. DMT is powerful psychedelic drug and is often referred to as the “spirit molecule” because its effects include many features of religious experience, such as visions, voices, disembodied consciousness, powerful emotions, novel insights, and feelings of overwhelming significance. Dr. Rick Strassman administered 400 doses of DMT to 60 volunteers and their experiences mirror those of Mormons during religious experiences. For examples, those who were administered DMT reported feeling the following:

- A feeling of undeniable certainty that the experience was “more real than real”;
- A sense of wonder or awe and, at times, a separation of spirit from the body;
- Miraculous, long-term, positive changes in a person’s life because of the experience;
- Profound spiritual insights during the experience;
- Extraordinary joy and a sense of timelessness, a feeling of eternity;
- Increased positive emotions, powerfully moved to tears;
- Impressions of bright white lights and encounters with angelic entities;
- Visions of a tree of life (none of the volunteers were Mormon)

The participants that came from a religious background reported that the DMT feelings were either identical to or more real than the spiritual feelings they had felt previously. Based on these findings, Calderwood raised an important question: If individuals can’t tell the difference between

chemically-induced feelings and spiritual feelings, how can they use these same feelings as an indicator of truth? For example, Calderwood asked: “If I gave you an injection of DMT after reading Harry Potter, and you felt powerful spiritual feelings, would that mean the book is God’s one true book? In other words, are these chemically-induced feelings just powerful biological emotions or are they actual spiritual experiences?” Calderwood then poses two additional questions to those who use spiritual feelings and emotions in deciphering truth: (1) Why are your conclusions using emotional reasoning correct and those of other faiths incorrect; and (2) How can you say those spiritual feelings and emotions are from God when those same feelings and emotions can be artificially induced through DMT or in a scientific lab?

- 4. Feelings Change With “New” Information:** Prior to discovering many of the issues outlined above, I often felt positive, uplifting, and inspirational feelings about the Church. But as I exposed myself to new (albeit credible) sources of information about the Church, it became apparent that there are certain aspects of the Church that can, with varying degrees of certainty, be proven false. I began to realize that I built my belief system on a number of inspirational stories that, in many instances, were not based on fact. As these issues added up, I found it increasingly difficult to put my faith in those aspects of the Church that must be taken on faith alone.

For example, Joseph Smith made a largely empirical, testable claim that he could translate ancient documents. Yet, in analyzing the facts surrounding the Book of Abraham and the Kinderhook Plates, it became clear that the papyri and plates at issue were not what Joseph Smith claimed them to be. After discovering this information, I no longer felt spiritual feelings when reading the Book of Abraham and began to have serious questions about the legitimacy of the Book of Mormon (particularly in light of the fact that Joseph did not use the plates during the translation process and instead relied upon a seer stone placed in a hat).

However, these unsettling feelings surrounding my testimony were not completely new, as I occasionally felt them before experiencing my recent religious crisis of faith. Specifically, I have never felt comfortable with the doctrine of polygamy and I doubt most members have had spiritual witnesses as to its truthfulness. However, after reading about how the doctrine was revealed and instituted, I now feel absolutely sick about the practice. Furthermore, I have always felt uneasy during portions of the temple ceremony. I have felt baffled about the priesthood and temple ban relating to those of African lineage. And I emotionally and logically oppose the Church’s teachings as they relate to sexual orientation and homosexuality.

Simply stated, feelings and emotions change based upon circumstances and context. The same feelings I previously felt telling me the Church was true now tell me that the Church is not what it purports to be.

- 5. Truth Versus Utility:** Many individuals gauge the Church’s truthfulness on its “fruits” or its positive impact upon the lives of its members. In that sense, the Church is true for many of its members. From my own experiences, the Church has had an enormously positive impact on my life.

Analyzing the Church primarily from its fruits rather than its history or doctrine is quite compelling. Doing so allows members to avoid difficult questions relating to the historicity of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the credibility of Joseph Smith, or the origins and impetus of polygamy. More importantly, this approach allows members to re-work certain aspects of Mormonism so as to retain the value and guidance it provides to their lives.

Based on some of the troubling things we know about Church history, I think a great deal about the origins of the Church are more persuasive when not taken literally. A literal reading of the scriptures alienates much of our society. Many Church teachings originated in a different age with different views on social justice -- an age in which slavery was legitimate, an age when discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation was the norm. Too often because of this history, the Church's teachings are used to justify intolerance today. In throwing off the shackles of a literalistic belief system, Church members are free to interpret various teachings and stories as a testament to the religious experiences of people from a different age.

Notwithstanding the foregoing discussion, there is an important distinction between truth and value. Just because something is valuable does not mean it is true. For example, I find value in the lessons we can learn from Jonah and the whale. But I do not believe Jonah actually lived in the belly of a whale for three days. I find value in the teachings found in the Book of Mormon, but I do not believe in the book's historicity.

More importantly, the Church does not embrace those whose testimony is based on value rather than on truth. If you want to hold a temple recommend, for example, you need to believe in the "restoration of the gospel in these the latter days." You need to believe that the President of the Church is the "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator and as the only person on the earth who possesses and is authorized to exercise all priesthood keys."

In fact, one of the things I struggle with about the Church is that it leaves so little room for anything other than wholesale acceptance of its truth claims. You can doubt, but you can't vocalize your doubts (at least too loudly). You can disagree with doctrine, but you can't disobey it. In large part, I am hesitant to embrace a less literalistic philosophy when the Church itself unequivocally rejects it.

I agree that Mormonism at its core is largely a beautiful message. I also agree that we should judge the message on its merits rather than on its messengers.

But on a practical level, Joseph Smith too often blocks my view of Mormonism's beauty. I struggle adhering to even the truthful words of someone who I deem to be dishonest.

If members with unconventional belief systems were more mainstream within the Church, perhaps I would still be attending. But the Church offers virtually no theological support for the idea that it has, in certain instances, been wrong and that certain aspects of its doctrine need clarification and reconciliation. In refusing to do so, the Church sustains a culture that, at least in my experience, stifles both intellectualism and unconventional beliefs. This, in turn, often results in unfavorable treatment of those who question and challenge Church history, doctrine, and culture.