



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL
Volume 9 Number 30
August 13, 2014

**The Book of Abraham and The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints
*The Mormon Church Finally Admits Joseph Smith Got Something Wrong
(But He Was Still Right!)***

By Tal Davis

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons) has for 185 years asserted that Joseph Smith, Jr., was an inspired prophet of God and an infallible seer of divine truth. However, the LDS has finally admitted publically that Joseph Smith, Jr., was incorrect about at least one important issue.

The Book of Abraham (BOA) is a short book contained in the Pearl of Great Price, one of the LDS church's official Four Standard Works* (inspired Scriptures). According to church doctrine, the BOA was a book written under divine inspiration by the patriarch Abraham while he was sojourning in Egypt (see Genesis 12:10-20). In the book, Abraham describes how he rejected idolatry, married his wife Sarai, and received special knowledge about the creation of the world. Some of the information found in the BOA is similar to what is found in the biblical texts, but some of it is quite unlike anything found in the Bible.

The remarkable point is that the LDS has conceded (sort of) what church critics have been saying for years: that Joseph Smith grossly erred in his supposedly miraculous translation of the Book of Abraham from ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. To see why that matters, we must first understand the history of that unusual book.

In 1835, while living in Ohio, Joseph Smith, Jr. purchased some ancient Egyptian papyrus scrolls from a peddler named Michael Chandler. Upon

examination, Smith declared that one of the scrolls was actually written by Abraham and was divinely inspired. Smith then, over the following few years, undertook to translate it from hieroglyphics into King James English by a miraculous process he never explained. At the time, very few people in the world were qualified to even attempt to translate Egyptian writings. Smith's version was finally published in full in 1842. The BOA eventually was canonized by the LDS as inspired Scripture in 1880 and placed in the Pearl of Great Price collection.

Joseph Smith was killed by a mob in 1844. Smith's (first) wife and family rejected Brigham Young's claim to succeed Smith as LDS leader and separated themselves from the majority of Mormons (who soon migrated west to Utah). The Smiths, however, kept possession of the papyrus scrolls from which Joseph had supposedly translated the BOA and sold them in 1856. The scrolls were later thought to have been destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. However, in 1967, more than a century after they were sold, the papyri were discovered preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. How they got there is not clear. Nonetheless, knowing their significance to the LDS, the museum graciously turned them over to the church's history department.

This is when the problems for the church began. After the scrolls were recovered, trained Egyptologists in the late 1960s and early 70s examined them to see if Smith had translated the texts correctly. The verdict was not good for Joseph Smith or the LDS. The texts

Permission to Reprint

If you wish to reprint this article in your own print or electronic newsletter, please include the following text:

*Reprinted from **Worldview Made Practical**; a free e-zine produced by **MarketFaith Ministries** featuring practical teaching and life tools to help Christians become more effective in their faith life. Discover **MarketFaith Ministries** at www.marketfaith.org.*

Speaking Schedule

If you are interested in having Freddy Davis or Tal Davis present one of our **Worldview Seminars** or to share about worldview and its practical implications at your church or organization, please contact **MarketFaith Ministries** to schedule your event. All contact information is at the bottom of this e-zine.

Worldview Resources

It is one of the primary purposes of **MarketFaith Ministries** to provide resources to help Christians understand the practical implications of worldview. You can find many free resources that will help you in your quest at <http://www.marketfaith.org>.

which Smith had used showed no similarity to what he had published as the Book of Abraham. In fact, it was determined that they were Egyptian burial manuals written hundreds of years after the time of the Patriarch.

For decades the church refused to acknowledge the inconsistency in Smith's translation and the original texts. The reason why is easy to see. If Joseph Smith got that book wrong, then what about the other books he had translated (most notably the Book of Mormon) and the dozens of revelations he had received directly from God. Could they have been wrong also? Such an admission would shake the foundations of the whole Mormon system. Some Mormon apologists, including the late eminent Brigham Young University scholar Hugh Nibley, tried desperately to explain the disparity.

In any case, on July 12, 2014, the LDS posted an essay on its official website titled "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham" (see it at: <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>). In the essay the writer (who is not named) basically acknowledges that Smith got the translation from the papyri wrong and that it was not written by Abraham. However, the writer then makes the implausible case that possibly the scrolls recovered did not include the actual ones used by Smith for his translation. Researchers long ago settled that question concluding they were undoubtedly the same (see: Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*, Grand Rapids MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992 and Harry Ropp [with Wesley P. Walters and Charles Arthur Crane], *Is Mor-*

monism Christian? Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995).

In any case, the essayist also postulates that even if the texts were the source of Smith's translation and therefore unrelated to Abraham, they nonetheless served as a catalyst for Joseph Smith to receive revelation from God. The theory is that God supernaturally communicated to him through the texts (regardless of what was on them) what he wrote down as the divinely inspired Book of Abraham.

This process is similar, asserts the writer, to the way Smith got other revelations including his corrections of the Bible (The Joseph Translation [JST] or Inspired Version). Parts of the JST are canonized in the Pearl of Great Price as The Book of Moses (Smith's heavily edited version of Genesis 1-7) and Joseph Smith - Matthew (Smith's version of Matthew 23:29- 24). In those cases, as in the BOA, Smith also had absolutely no historic textual bases for his translations. Yet those books are regarded as divinely inspired scripture by the LDS. As the Church's essay reads:

"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." Smith also claimed to receive numerous revelations from God that are recorded and canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants, another of the church's Four Standard

Subscription Information SUBSCRIPTION NOTICE:

A subscription to **Worldview Made Practical** is complementary for anyone interested in receiving it. If you received this email as a forward from a family member or a friend and wish to subscribe for yourself, you may do so at www.marketfaith.org. If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter, simply follow the instructions found at the bottom of each edition.

Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

You can order our products and examine our services at <http://www.marketfaith.org>.

This issue of **Worldview Made Practical** is a production of **MarketFaith Ministries**, © 2014. All rights reserved.

Works. Today that book contains 138 official revelations and two official "Declarations" supposedly given mostly to Smith but also other LDS presidents/prophets. Those revelations were received and recorded directly from God without the need for the intermediary of an ancient written text as were the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham.

The crucial issue here is not just that Joseph erred in translating the Book of Abraham, the Book of Moses, and Joseph Smith - Matthew. More important is that those books contain significant theological content considered essential in the Mormon doctrinal system but incompatible with historic Christian teaching. For example the BOA teaches the unorthodox view that mankind has a pre-existent life in a spirit world before we are born into this world of flesh and bone (Abraham 3:19-28). It also teaches a plurality of gods and that the earth was organized by the Heavenly Father, Jehovah (Jesus), and other divine spirits, out of pre-existing matter and not created "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*) as taught by historic Christianity (Abraham 4:1).

The Book of Moses teaches human preexistence (Moses 3:5) and that Satan's rebellion and fall was because the Heavenly Father rejected his offer to redeem mankind by force and by-passing human free-agency (Moses 4:3). It also teaches that the fall of mankind by Adam and Eve was a positive event because it opened humankind to the possibility of Eternal Progression to godhood (Moses 5:10).

All of the above doctrinal tenets are well beyond the boundaries of historic Christian theology. Nonetheless, they are standard teachings of the LDS church. For the church to decanonize the BOA, the Book of Moses, or the contents of any other of its Four Standard Works would present

it with a major theological and ecclesiastical crisis. The LDS still asserts, though less candidly than in past generations, that is the one true church on the face of the earth. It maintains that it has the "fullness of the everlasting gospel" while other Christian churches are, at best, insufficient or, at worst, totally apostate. Those heretical Mormon doctrines are intrinsic to its claims of ecclesiastical superiority and exclusivity.

So what do we make of all this? Just that the leaders and scholars of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are being forced to come to grips with reality. The historical evidence that has accumulated over the past century has cast a dark cloud over the claims of Joseph Smith, Jr. and the teachings which he promulgated. Consequently, many erudite Mormons have left the church, become inactive, or, for practical reasons, simply chosen to ignore the truth. Tragically, most of those who are disillusioned with the LDS do not become orthodox Christians but fall into Agnosticism or even Atheism.

Ironically, in recent decades, many prominent leaders and members of the LDS have expressed their desires to be regarded as authentic Christians and be welcomed as part of the wider Christian community. If they are serious about those goals, then, at some point, the LDS will need to renounce the prophetic status and unorthodox teachings of Joseph Smith. They will then need publicly to embrace the biblically based doctrines of historic Christianity. Granted, that will be a painful process for them and will likely result in schism. Nonetheless, until it does so, the LDS remains clearly outside of the family of historic Christian churches. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints still can only be regarded as a pseudo-Christian organization and Mormonism rejected as a false belief system.

*The LDS Four Standard Works include: The Bible (King James Version); The Book of Mormon- Another Testament of Jesus Christ; The Doctrine and Covenants; and The Pearl of Great Price.

Would You Consider Supporting Us?

Would you consider financial support for **MarketFaith Ministries**? I feel confident that what we are doing is consistent with your beliefs about spreading the gospel and equipping the saints for ministry. Would you let us be one element of your hands and feet in this process? **MarketFaith Ministries** is a 501 (c) (3) not for profit corporation, so your contributions are tax deductible. If you would consider this we would be very grateful. Also, if you would like to know more about the ministry, it would be my pleasure to share with you personally what we are working on and how you can plug in. I can be reached at 850-383-9756 or by e-mail at Freddy@marketfaith.org. As for any donations, they may be sent directly to **MarketFaith Ministries** at 321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312, or you can contribute through our secure website at www.marketfaith.org. Simply click on the "Donate" button at the bottom of the homepage. We are deeply grateful for your support of this ministry.

And, as always, if you have any thoughts, opinions or suggestions about how **MarketFaith Ministries** can help you, please feel free, at any time, to call (850-383-9756) or e-mail (info@marketfaith.org). We are here to serve you.