

SOME THOUGHTS ON MORMONISM¹

By Ashby L. Camp

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General Background

The Mormon Church, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was organized by Joseph Smith in New York in 1830, the same year he published the *Book of Mormon*. According to Smith, on September 21, 1823 an angel named Moroni appeared to him and stated that gold plates were buried in a hill near Smith's home in Palmyra, New York. Moroni was a resurrected saint who had died around A.D. 428. He was the son of a man named Mormon and the last of the Nephites, a great North American civilization that was wiped out by a rival group called the Lamanites. Moroni told Smith that the gold plates contained "an account of the former inhabitants of this continent" and "the fullness of the everlasting Gospel" and that they had been hidden until the time appointed for their disclosure to the prophet of the Latter-day Church. The next day Smith found the plates, which were written in "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics," but he was not permitted to take them home until September 22, 1827.

At some point after receiving the gold plates, Smith began translating the writing on them by means of a supernatural stone called the Urim and Thummin. He stayed behind a makeshift curtain and dictated the translation to his secretary, Martin Harris. Oliver Cowdery later replaced Harris as the secretary. It is alleged that on May 15, 1829, John the Baptist personally visited Smith and Cowdery, having been sent to them by Peter, James, and John, and conferred on them the "Aaronic Priesthood." The translation was published as the *Book of Mormon* at Palmyra in 1830. This is one of the four sacred writings of the Mormon Church. (Though the Bible is included among the church's sacred writings, it is considered less reliable because there is no divinely-given English translation of it.)

Joseph Smith claimed that he returned the gold plates to the angel after he finished translating them, so they are not available for inspection, but he did have eleven men sign statements claiming that they had seen the plates. The testimonies of these men appear in the forepart of the *Book of Mormon*.

Three of the witnesses, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer claimed to have had a vision in which an angel showed the plates to them. The eight others claimed to have seen the plates but did not maintain that an angel was present.

¹ Sources for this work include: Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Major Problems of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse, 1989); George Mather and Larry Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984); John Gerstner, *Mormonism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960); Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. ed., Hank Hanegraaff general editor (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997); Owen Olbricht, *Studies in Denominational Doctrine, Book Two* (Delight, AK: Gospel Light, 1972); Garland Elkins and Thomas Warren, eds., *Some Modern Cults, Sects, Movements and World Religions* (Jonesboro, AK: National Christian Press, 1981). Others are referenced in the body of the paper.

In 1831, one year after the Mormon Church was organized, its members moved to Kirtland, Ohio. In 1833 revelations given to the church by Joseph Smith were published in a book entitled *Book of Commandments*. In 1835 this compilation of revelations was enlarged and reprinted under the title *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter-day Saints*. This is one of the four sacred writings of the church.

That same year a man came to Kirtland, Ohio exhibiting some mummies and papyrus manuscripts. The Mormon Church bought the items from him, and Joseph Smith soon announced that he had determined that the manuscripts included the writings of Abraham and the writings of Joseph of Egypt.

In 1836 Joseph Smith received a revelation to form a bank at Kirtland. The following year the bank failed, and Smith and Sidney Rigdon were found guilty of illegal banking practices. In 1838 the Mormons moved to Missouri, but by 1839 persecution by the local residents forced them to flee to Illinois, where they founded their own city of Nauvoo.

In 1842, in the Mormon publication *Times and Seasons*, Joseph Smith first published the story of his 1820 visit by God the Father and Jesus Christ. That visit was three years before the angel Moroni appeared to him. In 1842 he also published in *Times and Seasons* his translation of the "Book of Abraham," that part of the papyrus manuscript which he claimed had been written by Abraham. The story of Smith's first vision, his translation of the papyrus manuscripts, the story of how he discovered the *Book of Mormon*, and thirteen articles of faith are contained in the *Pearl of Great Price*. This is one of the four sacred writings of the church.

In 1844 the *Nauvoo Expositor*, a newspaper run by Mormons who opposed Joseph Smith, printed a story about Joseph Smith's teaching on polygamy. The Nauvoo City Council promptly passed an ordinance declaring that the Expositor was a public nuisance, and on that basis, Mayor Joseph Smith ordered that its printing press be destroyed. The people of Illinois were outraged, and Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were arrested for destroying the press and for treason against the State of Illinois. While they were being held, the jail was attacked by a mob, and though both Smiths fired their pistols at their attackers, they were unable to save themselves.

Following the assassination of Joseph Smith, a majority of the Mormons accepted the leadership of Brigham Young. A minority rallied around Joseph's legal wife and family to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints. Under Young's leadership the Mormons headed westward to Utah, where they arrived in 1847. For thirty years Brigham Young ruled the Mormon Church. Since his death, the church has been led by a succession of presidents.

Book of Mormon

I. The Basic Story

The *Book of Mormon*, which is comprised of fifteen smaller books, is a fairly straightforward adventure tale written in the style of biblical history. It claims that, at the time of the

Tower of Babel (around 2250 B.C. in Mormon chronology), a group known as the Jaredites journeyed to North America pursuant to God's instructions. They grew into a great nation but ultimately exterminated themselves through war, which was God's judgment on their wickedness.

Afterward (around 600 B.C.), two groups of righteous Jews from Jerusalem, the family of Lehi (known as Nephites because Lehi's son Nephi became their leader) and followers of Mulek, traveled to North America in accordance with God's directions. (The followers of Mulek later joined with the Nephites.) In the succeeding centuries, the Nephites prospered and built great cities, but many of them turned away from God and ceased to worship him. Those who abandoned God were cursed with dark skin and became known as the Lamanites. Through the years, these inhabitants of North America received various religious instructions and engaged in many wars.

Jesus visited the Nephites after his resurrection, preached the gospel to them, and established a church for them. Around A.D. 421, the Lamanites destroyed the Nephites (all but Moroni) in a great final battle near Palmyra, New York (at Hill Cumorah). The descendants of the Lamanites remained on the continent as native Indians.

II. Some Problems with the *Book of Mormon*

A. An evolving story about the gold plates

As discussed more fully below, in the middle 1820's Joseph Smith was hunting for buried treasure by means of an allegedly supernatural stone. He claimed that by looking into the stone he could see things not discernible to the natural eye. Richard Abanes writes in *One Nation Under Gods* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 47:

[A]t some point in 1826/1827, Smith began telling people about the existence of a golden book he would soon be retrieving from a secret place that had been revealed to him through his seer stone. Smith originally attached no religious significance to the mysterious volume, but instead, touted it as a book that would, according to neighbor Parley Chase (b. 1806), "tell him how to get money that was buried in the ground." In other words, it would compliment his money-digging activities.

This is confirmed by the testimony of Albert Cole, a former justice of the peace who became editor of the *Palmyra Reflector*. Here is Cole's account of what Smith's father (Joseph, Sr.) told him about a hidden book (from Abanes, 47):

[T]he elder Smith declared that his son Jo had seen the spirit, (which he then described as a little old man with a long beard,) and was informed that he (Jo) under certain circumstances, eventually should obtain great treasures, and that in due time he (the spirit) would furnish him (Jo) with a book, which would give an account of the Ancient inhabitants (antideluvians [sic],) of this country, and where they had deposited their substance, consisting of costly furniture, &c. . . . which

had ever since that time remained secure in his (the spirit's) charge, in large and spacious chambers, in sundry places in this vicinity.

The story of how Joseph discovered and retrieved the hidden book evolved over time. Abanes documents several versions of the story and then concludes (p. 52):

No one will probably ever know exactly how these early stories developed and merged. But one thing is certain – all of the *religious* aspects of Smith's adventures came much later. Orasmus Turner wrote: "The primitive designs of Mrs. Smith, her husband, Jo, and Cowdery, was money-making; blended with which perhaps, was a desire for notoriety, to be obtained by cheat and fraud. The idea of being the founders of a new sect, was an after thought, in which they were aided by others." In agreement with Turner, Joseph Smith's cousin-in-law, Hiel Lewis, summarized:

In all this narrative, there was not one word about "visions of God," or of angels or heavenly revelations. All this information was by that dream, and that bleeding ghost. The heavenly visions and messages of angels, etc., contained in Mormon books were after-thoughts, revised to order.

B. Lack of credible witnesses

1. Issue as to the manner of "seeing" alleged

The following is from the Tanners' *Salt Lake City Messenger* #105 (Nov. 2005), which is online at <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no105.htm>:

While some of the statements made by the various witnesses to the Book of Mormon imply that they saw the plates with their natural eyes, other statements indicate that the viewing was actually in a vision. In fact, one Mormon gave up belief in the Book of Mormon when he heard Martin Harris state that the witnesses only saw the plates in a visionary state. Stephen Burnett related this event in a letter to Lyman E. Johnson on April 15, 1838:

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 a public congregation 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 [their statement at the front of the Book of Mormon] for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundations was sapped & the entire superstructure fell a heap of ruins . . . M[artin] 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 through a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight [witnesses] was false, if it had not been picked out of [h]im but should have let it passed as it was . . . (*Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2, pp. 291-292).

It is assumed that Harris was saying that the eight witnesses did not see the plates with the natural eye but in a vision, not that they lied about their experience.

LDS scholar Marvin Hill discussed the issue of the plates and whether the witnesses physically saw the plates or only in a vision:

In the revelation given the three witnesses before they viewed the plates they were told, "it is by your **faith** that you shall view them" and "ye shall testify that you have seen them, even as my servant Joseph Smith Jr. has seen them, for it is **by my power that he has seen them.**" There is testimony from several independent interviewers, all non-Mormon, that Martin Harris and David Whitmer said they saw the plates with their "**spiritual eyes**" only. Among others, A. Metcalf and John Gilbert, as well as Reuben P. Harmon and Jesse Townsend, gave testimonies to this effect. This is contradicted, however, by statements like that of David Whitmer in the *Saints Herald* in 1882, "these hands handled the plates, these eyes saw the angel." But Z. H. Gurley elicited from Whitmer a not so positive response to the question, "did you touch them?" His answer was, "**We did not touch nor handle the plates.**" Asked about the table on which the plates rested, Whitmer replied, "the table had the appearance of literal wood as shown in the **visions** of the glory of God." . . .

So far as the eight witnesses go, **William Smith said his father never saw the plates except under a frock.** And Stephen Burnett quotes Martin Harris that "the **eight witnesses never saw them** & hesitated to sign that instrument [their testimony published in the Book of Mormon] for that reason, but were persuaded to do it." Yet John Whitmer told Wilhelm Poulson of Ovid, Idaho, in 1878 that he saw the plates when they were not covered, and he turned the leaves. Hiram Page, another of the eight witnesses, left his peculiar testimony in a letter in the *Ensign of Liberty* in 1848:

As to the Book of Mormon, it would be doing injustice to myself and to the work of God of the last days, to say that I could know a thing to be true in 1830, and know the same thing to be false in 1847. To say my mind was so treacherous that I have forgotten **what I saw**, to say that a man of Joseph's ability, who at that time did not know how to pronounce the word Nephi, could write a book of six hundred pages, as correct as the Book of Mormon without supernatural power. And to say that those **holy Angels who came**

and showed themselves to me as I was walking through the field, to confirm me in the work of the Lord of the last days—three of whom came to me afterwards and sang an hymn in their own pure language; yes, it would be treating the God of heaven with contempt, to deny these testimonies.

With only a veiled reference to "what I saw," Page does not say he saw the plates but that **angels** confirmed him in his faith. Neither does he say that any coercion was placed upon him to secure his testimony. Despite Page's inconsistencies, it is difficult to know what to make of **Harris' affirmation that the eight saw no plates** in the face of John Whitmer's testimony. The original testimony of these eight men in the Book of Mormon reads **somewhat ambiguously**, not making clear whether they handled the **plates** or the "leaves" of the **translated manuscript**. Thus there are some puzzling aspects to the testimonies of the witnesses ("Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," by Marvin S. Hill, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 83-85).

Further reinforcing the position that the eight witnesses never saw the actual plates, except for a possible vision, is the following statement of Martin Harris:

These plates were usually kept in a cherry box made for that purpose in the possession of Joseph and myself. The plates were kept from the sight of the world, and **no one, save Oliver Cowdery, myself, Joseph Smith, Jr., and David Whitmer, ever saw them** (*Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2, p. 306).

Even though Harris says the three witnesses saw the plates, he obviously is still referring to a vision. In 1840 John A. Clark, pastor of Palmyra's Zion's Episcopal Church in the mid-1820's, gave the following account of Martin Harris seeing the plates:

A gentleman in Palmyra, bred to the law, a professor of religion, and of undoubted veracity told me that on one occasion, he appealed to Harris and asked him directly,—"Did you *see* those plates?" Harris replied, he did. "Did you see the plates, and the engraving on them with your bodily eyes?" Harris replied, "Yes, I saw them with my eyes,—**they were shown unto me by the power of God and not of man.**" "But did you see them with your natural,—your bodily eyes, just as you see this pencil-case in my hand? Now say *no* or *yes* to this." Harris replied,— "Why 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 any thing around me,—**though at the time they were covered over with a cloth**" (*Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2, p. 270).

Thus it appears that only Joseph Smith could claim to see the plates with the natural eye.

2. The "witnesses" are not trustworthy

Whatever the alleged manner of "seeing," the witnesses making the claim are not trustworthy. Consider Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer, the three witnesses who claimed to have had a vision in which they saw the tablets in the hands of an angel. Each of these witnesses eventually was expelled from the Mormon Church.

a. Martin Harris

Martin Harris was religiously unstable, as evidenced by the fact that before becoming a Mormon he had been a Quaker, a Universalist, a Restorationer, a Baptist, and a Presbyterian. "Angelic visitations, ghostly encounters, and meetings with Jesus Christ were commonplace in Harris's life." Abanes, 53. He later, along with most of the other witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*, became a follower of a man named James Strang. Like Joseph Smith, Strang claimed to have found plates and to have translated them with the Urim and Thummin. He had witnesses who claimed they saw the plates, and their testimony was recorded in almost the same way as that of the witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*.

When Harris went to England as a Strangite missionary, Mormon publications described him as "partially deranged," a "wicked man," and one who is accompanied by "a lying and deceptive spirit." Harris accused Joseph Smith of "lying and licentiousness," and Smith described him as a "wicked man." A Mormon publication edited by Smith stated that Harris was guilty of "swearing, lying, cheating, swindling, drinking, and every species of debauchery." Another church publication referred to him as an "evil man." Harris's own wife described him as having "mad-fits" and said he was a liar.

Joseph Smith wrote in his *History of the Church* that Harris told him he had showed Professor Charles Anthon the Egyptian characters that Smith had copied from the gold plates and that Anthon said "the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen from the Egyptian." In a letter dated February 17, 1834, Professor Anthon flatly denied that claim: "The whole story about my pronouncing the Mormon inscriptions to be reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics is perfectly false. . . . [T]he paper contained anything else but Egyptian hieroglyphics."

b. Oliver Cowdery

According to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery believed false revelations which Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*, claimed to have received by means of a supernatural stone. In 1838 Cowdery accused Smith of adultery, lying, and teaching false doctrines. According to a letter written by some Mormons, Cowdery had been "taken by a State warrant for stealing" and had "united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs of the deepest dye."

Joseph Smith testified at a church meeting that he had been informed that a warrant was about to be issued for Cowdery for involvement in counterfeiting, a charge that was later sustained against him when he was expelled from the Mormon Church. During those proceedings, Smith testified that Cowdery had told him that he had decided to acquire property "and if he could not get it one way he would another, God or no God, Devil or no Devil."

After Cowdery left the Mormon Church, he joined the Methodists and announced before the congregation that he was "sorry and ashamed of his connection with Mormonism." In 1841 the Mormons printed a poem in *Times and Seasons* that challenged the claim that the *Book of Mormon* had been proven untrue because Cowdery denied it. This strongly indicates that Cowdery had repudiated his testimony regarding the book's authenticity.

c. David Whitmer

Joseph Smith included David Whitmer among those who had believed the false revelations received by Hiram Page through his peep stone. In 1838 Whitmer claimed that God had spoken to him and told him to "separate [himself] from among the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to undo me, so should it be done to them." If Whitmer is such a trustworthy witness, why do the Mormons refuse to believe him when he said this? Smith thereafter referred to Whitmer as a "dumb ass," and some other Mormons accused him of uniting "with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs of the deepest dye."

Whitmer also was among those who contradicted Joseph Smith's claim that on March 30, 1836 Jesus and a number of angels appeared in the Kirtland temple. Whitmer was present at the time, and in October 1886 he told *The Des Moines Daily News* that the story was "nothing but a trumped up yarn."

d. the eight witnesses

As for the other eight witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*, it has already been mentioned that one of them, Hiram Page, gave false revelations by means of a supernatural stone. According to Joseph Smith, the Whitmer family, which included four of the eight witnesses, believed Page's bogus revelations. The only witnesses who did not believe Page were Smith's family members. In addition, John Whitmer clearly accepted James Strang as a prophet of God, and there are indications that most, if not all, of the witnesses did likewise.

It is important to distinguish Harris, Cowdery, and Whitmer from the other eight witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* because only they claimed to have seen an angel with the gold plates. If the eight witnesses (seven of whom came from two families - the Whitmers and the Smiths) actually saw metal plates, there is no way to know whether those plates had been fabricated as part of a deception. Unfortunately, the angel took them back.

For further details and documentation on the witnesses, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech5a.htm> and Joel Groat's articles at <http://www.irr.org/mit/bomwit1.html> and <http://www.irr.org/mit/bomwit2.html>.

C. "Reformed Egyptian" does not fit

Hebrew inscriptions dating back to the 11th century B.C. have been uncovered by archeologists, and Hebrew writing undoubtedly goes back several centuries beyond that. Why would Israelites who came to America from Jerusalem around 600 B.C. write a history in "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics"? Even if such a language existed and even if some of the Jews who left Jerusalem around 600 B.C. were skilled in it, what ancient Jew would put a sacred writing in any language other than Hebrew? It is totally inconceivable that a Jew would record sacred testimony in the language of his despised former masters.

The fact of the matter is that the "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics" that Smith alleged were on the gold plates is not a recognizable language. Smith claimed to have copied some of the characters from the gold plates, and this fragment is in the possession of the Mormon Church. Experts who have examined this document, including Mormon Egyptologist Edward Ashment, are unanimous in denying that it is any form of ancient Egyptian writing.

Klaus Baer of the University of Chicago felt that Smith's characters were nothing but "doodlings." John Wilson, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, said "there is no such language as reformed Egyptian." Richard Parker of the Department of Egyptology at Brown University agreed: "I do not know of any language such as Reformed Egyptian." The opinion of Professor Charles Anthon has already been mentioned.

In addition, the characters copied by Smith do not match any ancient writing found anywhere in North or Central America. This is particularly odd, given the claim in the *Book of Mormon* that "reformed Egyptian" was the universal language of the people at the time the book was written. As far as can be discovered, Smith's gold plates are the only place this so-called language was ever used.

For further details and documentation, see "The Anthon Transcript" section of the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech5c.htm>.

D. Suspicious translation process

Years before translating the *Book of Mormon*, Joseph Smith possessed a stone that he claimed he could look through and locate hidden treasure. This is clear from the account of the March 20, 1826 court proceedings in Bainbridge, New York in which Smith was convicted on charges of being a disorderly person and an impostor. That record, which was first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1873, has been confirmed as authentic by the discovery in 1971 of Justice Albert Neely's original docket sheet. In the account of the proceedings, Smith is recorded as saying that "he had a certain stone which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were" and that he had "been in the habit of looking through this stone to find lost property for three years." Several other witnesses confirmed that Smith engaged in this practice. For further details and documentation, see the Tanners' article at <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no95.htm>; see also, Abanes, 41-46.

It is hard to believe that God just happened to employ this same method to reveal to Smith the meaning of the writing on the gold plates. Clearly God was not involved in Smith's earlier use of the stone for treasure hunting. It seems more likely that Smith dreamed up this translation process as an extension of what he had already been doing.

The dubious nature of Smith's translation process is well illustrated by his later translation of the "Kinderhook plates." These six brass plates were represented to Smith as having been dug from a mound in Kinderhook, and Smith said he thought he would be able to translate them "by the help of revelation." Smith began translating the plates and claimed that they were a history of the person with whom they had been found and that he had been "a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" and had "received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth." It turned out that the plates were forgeries designed to expose Smith as a fraud; they contained no message at all. The perpetrators confessed their guilt and explained how they did it, all of which was confirmed in 1980 by electronic and chemical analysis of the surviving Kinderhook plate. These tests showed that the plate was not of ancient origin.

Despite acknowledging for 130 years that Smith translated a portion of the Kinderhook plates, since 1980 some Mormon apologists have argued that the report of his having done so is inaccurate. The unreasonableness of this defense is exposed in the article by Glenn Evans and Joel Groat at <http://www.irr.org/mit/kinderhook-plates.html> and in the article by the Tanners at <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/kinderhookplates.htm>.

E. Many passages lifted from the KJV

Since it is claimed that the Nephites, the authors of the *Book of Mormon*, left Jerusalem about 600 B.C., they would not have had access to any Bible books written after that time. Yet, hundreds of passages in the *Book of Mormon* are identical or nearly identical to passages in the King James Version of the New Testament. As an example, compare Moroni 7 with 1 Corinthians 13 and Moroni 10 with 1 Corinthians 12. It is hard to believe that independent authors wrote so many identical things and even harder to believe that Joseph Smith's supernatural translation of "reformed Egyptian" just happened to match the wording of the KJV in so many places. After all, the KJV New Testament is a translation of a Greek text, and it was done in old English, having been completed in 1611. A more reasonable explanation is that the author of the *Book of Mormon* was familiar with the King James Bible, which means that the *Book of Mormon* was written after 1611.

Consider the translation of 3 Nephi 9:18, which is identical to Rev. 21:6 ("I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end"). "Alpha" and "Omega" are the names of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They appear in the KJV of Rev. 21:6 because the Book of Revelation was written in Greek. It makes no sense for these names to appear in 3 Nephi 9:18 because that verse was supposedly written in "reformed Egyptian." In translating "reformed Egyptian" into English, why would God inspire Joseph Smith to refer to letters of the Greek alphabet? The only reasonable explanation is that 3 Nephi 9:18 was not a translation of "reformed Egyptian" but was based on an English translation of Rev. 21:6.

Here is how Joel Groat and Luke Wilson summarize (at <http://www.irr.org/mit/newappr.html>) the comparison of Matthew 5 – 7 with 3 Nephi 12 – 14 presented by Stan Larson in Brent Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993):

In another chapter entitled "The Historicity of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," Stan Larson uses his training in textual criticism (he holds a Ph.D. in New Testament studies) to compare Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 with the almost identical sermon in 3 Nephi 12-14. Larson's thesis: If 3 Nephi is a translation of an ancient account of Jesus appearing in the New World, it wouldn't copy minor errors that occur in the KJV that are the result of the late, inferior Greek manuscripts used by the KJV translators. While these minor errors affect no point of doctrine, they allow us to test the claim that the Book of Mormon is a translation of ancient scripture:

. . . if the Book of Mormon text sides with the later Greek text as seen in the KJV, this dependence would be strong evidence against its historicity. The reason for this is that the Book of Mormon on the American continent should know nothing of changes and additions to the Sermon on the Mount made in the Old World centuries after the original sermon, but should be a direct link to the real words of Jesus (*New Approaches*, p. 117).

For purposes of comparison, Larson takes eight verses from Matthew 5-7 in which scholars have detected minor errors in the Greek text that was used in 1611 to produce the KJV Bible. One example is the KJV rendering of Matthew 5:27, paralleled in 3 Nephi 12:27, where Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery." The earliest Greek manuscripts do not contain the phrase "by them of old time," which indicates that these words were not a part of what Matthew wrote. Thus, the phrase is omitted from all modern scholarly editions of the Greek New Testament, and from modern scholarly translations of the Bible such as the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version.

All the modern scholarly editions of the Greek New Testament have identical readings of these eight verses, thanks to the superior — that is more ancient — Greek manuscripts of the New Testament now available. Larson selected these verses for his study because we can be confident they are identical — or virtually so — with what Matthew originally wrote. However, Larson found that in all eight test cases, 3 Nephi consistently follows the erroneous readings of the KJV, and never agrees with the original text or any known variant from the earliest Greek manuscripts. Larson's verdict: 3 Nephi 12-14 is not an ancient account of a sermon given by Jesus in the Americas, but instead was plagiarized by Joseph Smith from the King James Version:

"The Book of Mormon account of Jesus' sermon in 3 Nephi 12-14 originated in the nineteenth century, derived from unacknowledged plagiarism of the KJV" (*New Approaches*, pp. 131-132).

For more on this subject, see the article by H. Michael Marquardt at <http://www.irr.org/mit/marquardt-bom1a.html> and the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech5b.htm>.

F. "Nephi" likely came from KJV Apocrypha

The name "Nephi" is found in neither the Old nor New Testament of the Bible, but it is one of the most important names in the *Book of Mormon*. At least four men in the *Book of Mormon* are named Nephi, as are several of the chapters, a city, a land, and a people. Mormon scholars have never been able to find the source of this name. There is not any acceptable Hebrew meaning or derivation for it.

"Nephi" does appear, however, in the 1611 edition of the KJV of the Apocrypha at 2 Maccabees 1:36. Since Joseph Smith had a copy of the KJV Apocrypha and since he seemed to have an interest in it, this is a likely source of the name.

G. Addresses 19th-century theological issues

The fact the *Book of Mormon* deals with so many theological controversies from the time of Joseph Smith makes it doubtful that it was written more than a thousand years earlier. It just seems too contemporary. As Alexander Campbell observed in 1831:

This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies; - infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of free masonry [sic], republican government, and the rights of man.

In fact, it appears that the author of the *Book of Mormon* was familiar with the Westminster Confession, a document adopted by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1729. Since Joseph Smith's father was originally a Presbyterian, Joseph was probably familiar with the Confession. For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech5b.htm>.

H. Reflects 19th-century ideas about history of North American inhabitants

There are definite parallels between the story of the *Book of Mormon* and theories about the origin of ancient inhabitants of America that were circulating in New York prior to 1830. In articles and books of that day, one can find the idea that Indians were of Israelite origin, that the

Indians of that day were the descendants of those who had exterminated an ancient civilization in North America, and that different groups of people immigrated to North America via the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

One book in particular, Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*, seems a likely candidate for having influenced the *Book of Mormon*. In the words of Mormon scholar and historian B. H. Roberts, this book, which was first published in 1823, "was a serious analysis of current archeological discoveries and the known cultural studies of Indian tribes in order to prove the theory that the American Indians were of Israelitish descent." Among other things, it suggested that the "American Israelites" divided into two peoples, that they had tremendous wars with each other, and that the savages finally overcame the civilized division. According to Roberts, "many things in [*View of the Hebrews*] might well have suggested major things in the [*Book of Mormon*]." He also felt that it was almost certain that Joseph Smith would have come in contact with Ethan Smith's work.

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/bomodern.html> and the two-part article by Wesley Walters at <http://www.irr.org/mit/ho-bom1.html> and <http://www.irr.org/mit/ho-bom2.html>.

I. Changed since it was first published

Joseph Smith claims to have supernaturally translated the *Book of Mormon*, so one would not expect that translation to be changed. In fact, Smith states in his *History of the Church* that when he and the witnesses were praying about the book, "We heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, 'These plates . . . have been translated by the power of God. The translation which you have seen of them is correct.'" On another occasion Smith said he "told the brethren that the *Book of Mormon* was the most correct of any book on earth." Nevertheless, there have been thousands of changes to the *Book of Mormon* since it was first published in 1830.

In 1965 Jerald and Sandra Tanner documented 3,913 changes that had been made in the *Book of Mormon* since it was first published. Most of these involved corrections of spelling and grammatical errors, but how could grammatical errors exist in a book that had been supernaturally translated by God? After all, was not Joseph Smith simply dictating what God revealed to him through his peep stone?

A frequent grammatical error in the *Book of Mormon* that has been corrected in later editions is the use of "was" instead of "were." For example, one finds "the priests was not to depend" and "the bands which was upon my wrist." A similar thing occurs with "is" and "are." The original edition contains such phrases as "the words which is expedient" and "here is our weapons of war." There are also many instances in which the indefinite article "a" is improperly used in the original edition. One finds "as Ammon and Lamoni was a journeying thither" and "he found Muloki a preaching."

There also have been several changes to the *Book of Mormon* that alter the meaning of the text. The 1830 edition of 1 Nephi 13:40 says that the Nephite records "shall make known to

all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and Savior of the world." Later editions inserted the words "Son of the" in front of Eternal Father, thereby correcting the error as to the nature of the Godhead. Similar changes concerning the Godhead were made in three other places in the book.

At two places in the *Book of Mormon* (Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1) a reference to "king Benjamin" has been changed to "king Mosiah." These changes were necessitated by the fact the chronology found in the *Book of Mormon* indicates that king Benjamin would have been dead at the time of the references.

For further details and documentation, see the Tanners' article at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/3913intro.htm> and Joel Groat's article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/changingscripts.html>.

J. Archaeology does not support it

There is absolutely no archeological verification of any of the cities or cultures referred to in the Book of Mormon. In 1973 Michael Coe, a leading authority on New World archeology, declared:

The bare facts of the matter are that nothing, absolutely nothing, has ever 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.

Twenty years later he reiterated his opinion, saying: "I have seen no archaeological evidence . . . which would convince me that it [*Book of Mormon*] is anything but a fanciful creation." Abanes, 75.

Bradley Lepper, Curator of Archaeology at the Ohio Historical Society and an expert on American Indian history, agrees with Coe: "There is no archaeological evidence for Old World culture in the Americas. Where the *Book of Mormon* makes specific claims around that, it's found wanting." Abanes, 75.

This fact is being admitted by an increasing number of Mormon archeologists. For instance, Dee Green, former editor of the BYU (a Mormon university) *Archaeological Society Newsletter*, has made it clear that there is no archeological confirmation of the *Book of Mormon*. In his words:

no Book of Mormon location is known with reference to modern topography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any other location for that matter) were or are.

In 1975, Thomas Stuart Ferguson, former president of the Mormon New World Archaeological Foundation, wrote:

With all these great efforts, it cannot be established factually that anyone, from Joseph Smith to the present day, has put his finger on a single point of terrain that was a Book-of-Mormon geographical place. And the hemisphere has been pretty well checked out by competent people. Thousands of sites have been excavated.

Recognition of this fact drove both Ferguson and B. H. Roberts, two prominent Mormon scholars, "to abandon their faith in the Book of Mormon." Though church officials deny that these icons of Mormon scholarship rejected the Book of Mormon, "private letters and various other manuscripts written by Roberts and Ferguson indicate otherwise." Abanes, 75.

In 1984, Ray Matheny, Professor of Anthropology at BYU, admitted that "no evidence has been found in the new world for a ferrous metallurgical industry dating to pre-Columbian times. And so this is a king-size kind of problem, it seems to me, for so-called Book of Mormon Archeology." Bruce Warren, also a Professor of Anthropology at BYU, concurred: "today there really is no Book of Mormon archeology."

In fact, archeology directly contradicts the claim in the *Book of Mormon* that for over two-hundred years after Christ a Christian civilization prevailed over both Central and North America. Not only is there no evidence of Christianity during this period of time, but there is clear evidence that the existing civilizations were non-Christian. Much is known of the religion of Central America at this time, and it was thoroughly idolatrous.

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech5c.htm>, their article at <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/testingthebookofmormon.htm>, and Luke Wilson's article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/bomarch1.html>.

K. Contradicts the Bible

Alma 7:10 states that Jesus "shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem." Mat. 2:1-6 and Lk. 2:4-15 make clear that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as prophesied in Micah 5:2. Given that in the Bible the Spirit of God distinguished between Bethlehem and Jerusalem when referring to the birth of Christ, it is not reasonable to think that he would later, in the *Book of Mormon*, lump the cities together when referring to that same event. That would be a sure way to be misunderstood. Bethlehem, the City of David, was about six miles from Jerusalem and was regularly distinguished from Jerusalem by ancient Jewish writers.

Alma 25:15 indicates that the Nephites kept the Mosaic law prior to the coming of Christ. Yet, 2 Nephi 5:26 says that Jacob and Joseph, who were descendants of Manasseh (2 Nephi 5:6 with Alma 10:3), were made priests. According to the Mosaic law, only descendants of Aaron (a descendant of Levi) could be priests (e.g., Num. 3:10). And as the Hebrew writer makes clear, "when there is a change in the priesthood, there necessarily is a change in the law as well" (Heb. 7:12). So it seems that either the Nephites did not keep the law of Moses or descendants of Manasseh were not made priests.

According to Alma 46:15, as early as 73 B.C. those who believed in the Christ to come were called Christians. Acts 11:26, however, says that the first time the disciples were called Christians was in Antioch, over one hundred years later. (Not to mention that it makes no sense for the Jewish believers in America to be called "Christians." "Christian" is a word from the Greek language, the language that was spoken in first-century Antioch, but the Jews in America did not speak Greek. They supposedly left Jerusalem hundreds of years before Greek became established in that region. How and why would they pick a Greek word to describe themselves rather than a word from the language they spoke? This is another example of the *Book of Mormon's* dependence on the KJV.)

Doctrine and Covenants

I. Background of book

As mentioned above, revelations given to the church by Joseph Smith initially were published in 1833 in a book entitled the *Book of Commandments*. As noted by Mormon historian William Berrett, the church accepted this book as scripture and voted to print ten thousand copies. Smith even provided the following revelation as part of the preface: "Search these commandments because they are true and faithful, . . . What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself, and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away."

In 1835 this compilation of revelations was enlarged and reprinted under the title *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter-day Saints*. This is one of the four sacred writings of the church. In fact, Mormon President Joseph Fielding Smith stated: "the book of *Doctrine and Covenants* to us stands in a peculiar position above them all."

II. Problems with *Doctrine and Covenants*

A. Prophecies in *Book of Commandments* were changed when reprinted in *Doctrine and Covenants*

The Tanners have documented that many of the so-called prophecies recorded in the *Book of Commandments* were changed when reprinted in *Doctrine and Covenants*. Thousands of words were changed and entire sections were deleted and added. If these writings were merely the personal writings of Joseph Smith, he would have every right to change them, but they are claimed by Mormons to be the word of God.

For example, *Book of Commandments* 4:2 says of Joseph Smith: ". . . and he has a gift to translate the book, and I have commanded him that he shall pretend to no other gift, for I will grant him no other gift." In *Doctrine and Covenants* 5:4 this was changed to: "And you have a gift to translate the plates; and this is the first gift that I bestowed upon you; and I have commanded that you should pretend to no other gift until my purpose is fulfilled in this; for I will grant unto you no other gift until it is finished."

The significance of this change was explained by David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*:

The way this revelation has been changed, twenty-two words being added to it, it would appear that God had broken His word after giving his word in plainness; commanding Brother Joseph to pretend to no other gift but to translate the Book of Mormon, and then the Lord had changed and concluded to grant Joseph the gift of a Seer to the Church.

Book of Commandments 6:1-3 purports to contain a translation of a parchment written by the Apostle John. Mormons claim that Smith translated this parchment by means of the Urim and Thummin. The original revelation contained 143 words, but when it was reprinted several words were changed and it was expanded to 252 words!

Book of Commandments 7:3 states that witness Oliver Cowdery had been given "the gift of working with the rod" and that "there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God." When reprinted in *Doctrine and Covenants* 8 it was changed to state that Cowdery had been given "the gift of Aaron" and that "there is no power save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you. Therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God." This was an obvious attempt to conceal the fact that Cowdery had been involved in the occultic practice of using divining rods to find buried treasure.

In *Book of Commandments* 44:26, Mormons were commanded "thou shalt consecrate all they properties, that which thou hast unto to me." In *Doctrine and Covenants* 42 this text was changed to "thou wilt remember the poor and consecrate of thy properties that which thou hast to impart unto them." This change was apparently made to conceal the original communistic nature of the church.

Regarding the numerous changes made in *Doctrine and Covenants*, David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses, charged:

You have changed the revelations from the way they were first given and as they are to-day in the Book of Commandments, to support the error of Brother Joseph in taking upon himself the office of Seer to the church. You have changed the revelations to support the error of high priests. You have changed the revelations to support the error of a President of the high priesthood, high counselors, etc. You have altered the revelations to support you in going beyond the plain teachings of Christ in the new covenant part of the Book of Mormon.

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech3.htm#39>.

B. Smith's "vision" was changed when added to *Doctrine and Covenants*

In 1976 the church officially accepted as scripture Joseph Smith's vision of the Celestial Kingdom. It is now printed as section 137 of *Doctrine and Covenants*. The revelation as recorded in Smith's diary reads: "I saw father Adam, and Abraham and Michael and my father and mother, my brother Alvin." In the version that appears in *Doctrine and Covenants*, the words "and Michael" have been deleted.

The words "and Michael" in this prophecy created serious problems because they contradict Smith's other revelations that Adam is Michael (*Doctrine and Covenants* 107:54, 27:11). Manuscripts reveal that the change was made sometime after Smith's death and before 1852.

Interestingly, the church accepted as scripture only the first part of Smith's vision of the Celestial Kingdom. Over two hundred words from that vision as recorded in his diary were excluded. Part of the excluded revelation dealt with Elder McLellin healing a lame man by the power of God, something that would have been embarrassing given that McLellin was later expelled from the church.

C. Text was changed after *Doctrine and Covenants* was published

The first edition of *Doctrine and Covenants* printed in 1835 strongly denounced the practice of plural marriages. Section 101:4 reads:

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.

This rejection of polygamy was printed in every edition of *Doctrine and Covenants* until 1876. At that time, the Mormon leaders inserted section 132 that contained a revelation given by Joseph Smith on July 12, 1843 permitting a plurality of wives. The earlier section condemning polygamy simply was deleted!

From 1843 until 1890, when the church again reversed itself, Mormons practiced polygamy openly. In fact, the church leaders declared polygamy to be essential for one's exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom. The church leaders at that time also proclaimed that the practice of polygamy would never be changed, but when the government increased the pressure against polygamy, President Wilford Woodruff issued a revelation from the Lord, now known as the Manifesto, forbidding the practice. (The record is clear, however, that many Mormon leaders ignored the Manifesto in practice.)

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech9a.htm>, <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech9b.htm>, and <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech9c.htm>.

D. Contradicts the Bible

In *Doctrine and Covenants* 7:3 the Apostle John is told by the Lord, "because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory." John 21:23 is quite explicit, however, that Jesus did not promise John that he would not die. That simply was a saying that circulated among the Christians.

Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 states, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit." According to Jn. 4:23-24, "God [the Father] is spirit." As Jesus said in Lk. 24:39, "a spirit does not have flesh and bones."

Pearl of Great Price

I. The First Vision

A. The account

The story of Joseph Smith's first vision, which supposedly happened in 1820, was first published by him in 1842 in the Mormon publication *Times and Seasons*. That particular account is now published in the *Pearl of Great Price* and is accepted as scripture by the Mormon people. It reads in part:

So in accordance with my determination, to ask God, I retired to the woods. . . . I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spoke to me, calling me by name, and said (pointing to the other) "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

. . . I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, . . . I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong.

B. Problems with the account

1. Inconsistent with Smith's original account

The earliest account of Smith's first vision is in his own handwriting and dates from 1831-32. This account was not made public until 1965 when the Tanners learned of its existence and published it. The church has officially recognized it as authentic.

There are a number of inconsistencies between Smith's original account of his first vision and the church's official version, the most significant of which is that the original account only mentions one personage, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Mormon historian James Allen admitted: "In this story only one personage was mentioned, and this was obviously the Son, for he spoke of

having been crucified." If God the Father actually appeared to Smith in this vision, it is inconceivable that Smith would have omitted that fact from his first account.

2. Inconsistent with Smith's second account

In 1971 another account of Smith's first vision was published from his 1835-36 diary. In this account, one of the two personages appears some time after the other, rather than both appearing at the same time, and there is nothing to indicate that either of the personages was God or Christ. In fact, it is reported that one of the beings "testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This strongly suggests that these beings were neither the Father nor the Son. The Father would have said that Jesus Christ is his Son, and Jesus would have testified that he was the Son of God. Smith also claimed in this account to have seen "many angels," something missing in both of the other accounts.

3. Inconsistent with Smith's *History of the Church*

Early editions of Joseph Smith's *History of the Church* refer to a statement he made on November 15, 1835 in which he claimed that his initial vision was only a visitation of angels: "I received the first visitation of angels, which was when I was about fourteen years old." In recent editions of *History of the Church*, Mormon Church historians changed "the first visitation of angels" to "my first vision." They made this change despite the fact Smith's original handwritten manuscript for that part of *History of the Church* reads "the first visitation of angels" and despite the fact his diary for 1835-36 says the same thing.

For more details and documentation, see Wesley Walters's article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/fvision.html>, the article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/First-Vision-Accounts.html>, Lane Thuet's article at <http://www.mrm.org/multimedia/text/which-vision.html>, and the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech6.htm>.

II. "The Book of Abraham"

A. Background of the book

According to Mormon writers, Abraham wrote the "Book of Abraham" on papyrus about four thousand years ago. Smith acquired the papyrus in 1835, translated it, and published the translation in *Times and Seasons* in 1842 under the title "The Book of Abraham." The publication included copies of three drawings from the papyri, along with Smith's interpretation of the drawings. This book was accepted by the Mormon Church as scripture and is now published as part of the *Pearl of Great Price*.

B. Problems with the book

1. Translation of text proven false

The original papyri from which the "Book of Abraham" was translated were thought to have perished in the Chicago fire of 1871. However, in 1967 the Metropolitan Museum of Art

donated to the Mormon Church a collection of papyri manuscripts, one of which included the drawing copied by Smith as Facsimile 1. Further investigation revealed that the very papyrus from which Smith had translated the "Book of Abraham" was included in the collection.

Identification of the precise fragment used by Smith in translating the "Book of Abraham" was made possible by comparison to a handwritten copy of Smith's translation of Abraham 1:1 - 2:18. This translation contains a list of Egyptian characters that runs down the left hand margin of the page. These characters perfectly match the lines of text from one of the documents (the Small Sen-Sen Papyrus) given to the church by the museum. This not only makes clear that Smith used this particular papyrus but also confirms that the characters in the left hand margin of his translation was actually the text he was translating.

As Mormon scholar Richard Crapo said of his own review of this material:

A more careful examination of these revealed the startling fact that one of the papyri of the Church collection, known as the Small Sen-Sen Papyri, contained the same series of hieratic symbols, which had been copied, in the same order, into the Book of Abraham manuscript next to verses of that book! In other words, there was every indication that the collection of papyri in the hands of the Church contained the source which led to a production of the Book of Abraham.

Once it was clear what Joseph Smith was translating, it was a simple matter to determine whether his translation was correct. In 1968 two Egyptologists from the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, John Wilson and Klaus Baer, and Richard Parker of Brown University concluded that what Joseph Smith claimed was the "Book of Abraham" was actually part of the Egyptian "Book of Breathings," a condensed instruction book for coping with life in the hereafter.

The correct translation bears no resemblance to Smith's. Not only is the subject completely different, but the average number of English words used by Egyptologists to translate the Egyptian characters is only eighty-seven compared to Smith's thousands! As Mormon defender Hugh Nibley had to admit, if Smith was translating the papyri, "it was not in any way known to Egyptology."

For more details and documentation on this and on the erroneous interpretation of the drawing, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech11a.htm> and <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech11b.htm>, Charles Larson's online book at <http://www.irr.org/mit/Books/BHOH/bhohintr.html>, Edward Ashment's two-part article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/ashment1.html> and <http://www.irr.org/mit/ashment2.html>, and Abanes, 451-459.

2. Interpretation of drawing proven false

Egyptologists who have examined the papyrus fragment from which Joseph Smith copied Facsimile no. 1 believe that his interpretation of the drawing is totally wrong. The text that accompanies the drawing makes clear that it is related to the burial rites of the "Book of

Breathings." Rather than Abraham fastened upon an altar, the drawing depicts Osiris, Egyptian god of the dead, lying upon his bier, being ministered to by Anubis, the jackal-headed god. See e.g., Abanes, 454-456.

3. Contradicts the Bible

Abraham 3:3 states that the Lord addressed Abraham as Abraham when he called him to leave his country. According to Gen. 17:5, it was not until after he left his home that God changed his name from Abram to Abraham.

Abraham 3:14 states, "and I, Abraham, was sixty and two years old when I departed out of Haran." Gen. 12:4 states, "Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran."

In Abraham 3:22-25 it is reported that the Lord instructed Abraham to have Sarai lie to the Egyptians by saying she was his sister. According to Num. 23:19 and Heb. 6:18, God does not lie.

III. The account of the *Book of Mormon*

A. The story

The angel Moroni appeared in Joseph Smith's room and told him about the *Book of Mormon* plates.

B. A problem with the story

In addition to the different versions of this story the Smiths began telling in 1826-27 (see above), in the 1851 edition of *Pearl of Great Price* the name of this angel was Nephi. In 1878 Orson Pratt changed the reference to Moroni. The same change was made in Smith's *History of the Church*, and original manuscripts of that work reveal that the change was made after Smith's death.

Some Unbiblical Doctrines of the Mormon Church

I. The "Big Picture" According to Mormonism

According to Mormon doctrine, the consciousness of each individual is eternal, not created. As Smith himself prophesied, "God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. . . . [I]ntelligence exists upon a self-existent principle, it is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it." This pre-existent state is the first state in which each person lived.

The next stage of existence is the spirit world. In this heavenly world, all people are born as spirit children to flesh-and-bone, male and female gods. In other words, through the procreative activities of these physical gods, the eternally-existing intelligences are clothed with spirit bodies. In this realm, multitudes of gods conceive and give birth to multitudes of spirit children.

After the spirit children mature, they are sent to a physical world (in our case, earth). In the words of Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt:

As soon as each God has begotten many millions of male and female spirits, and his Heavenly inheritance becomes too small, to comfortably accommodate his great family, he, in connection with his sons, organizes a new world, after a similar order to the one which we now inhabit, where he sends both the male and female spirits to inhabit tabernacles of flesh. . . . The inhabitants of each world are required to reverence, adore, and worship their own personal father who dwells in the heaven which they formerly inhabited.

Our particular god, named Elohim (a.k.a. Heavenly Father), dwelt for long ages with his wives and his spirit children near a planet named KOLOB (as yet undiscovered). As Abanes states (p. 285):

There they lived and interacted very much like a large family would on planet earth. Earth, by the way, in this Mormon scenario, was fashioned as part of a joint creative project supervised by the most faithful of Heavenly Father's spiritual progeny (e.g., Jesus, Joseph Smith, Noah, Adam, John the Baptist, etc.). Elohim's other spirit children included: Lucifer, who would become the Devil (a.k.a. Satan); Napoleon; George Washington; Joseph Smith; Louis Armstrong, Donny and Marie Osmond, Senator Orrin Hatch, U. S. President George W. Bush, and everyone else who has ever lived on this planet. In other words, all people, before being born on Earth, "pre-existed" with Heavenly Father and Mother near KOLOB. We are their spirit children in human form.

One well may wonder why the children of the gods initially are not gods themselves. The Mormon answer is that gods have bodies but their children do not. For some unexplained reason, physical gods produce babies that are composed only of "spiritual substance." Since one must have a physical body to be a god, the children of the gods must become human to receive a body and have hope of advancement to godhood.

Eventually, the bodies of the incarnate spirit children die, but as a result of Christ's resurrection, they will all be resurrected at the appropriate time. In the final judgment, they will be sent to one of four places, depending on the choices they made while in their mortal bodies.

Those who committed the "unpardonable sin" will be thrown into the lake of fire, the "Second Death," along with Satan and his demons (who were denied physical bodies because of their rebellion in heaven). Those who were lawless and wicked will be sent to the "Telestial Kingdom," which is located on another planet. Those who were honorable but who were not faithful Mormons, including those who accepted the gospel after death but before the final judgment, will go to the "Terrestrial Kingdom," which also is located on another planet. Those who were faithful Mormons, the righteous, will go to different levels in the "Celestial Kingdom."

The highest level of the "Celestial Kingdom" is reserved for those Mormons who married in the Temple. They, in their resurrected bodies, become gods themselves, eternally procreating spirit children who will eventually inhabit other worlds. Marriages that were not conducted in the Temple are dissolved at death, and the husband and wife remain single throughout eternity. Such people only become angels not gods.

Our god, Elohim (Heavenly Father), achieved godhood by the same process. As Mormon authority Milton Hunter has stated:

Mormon Prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man, who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. He became God -- an exalted being -- through obedience to the same eternal Gospel truths that we are given opportunity today to obey.

Jesus Christ was the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. When he was chosen to save the inhabitants of Earth from the consequences of their rebellion, his spirit brother Satan rebelled and took a third of the heavenly family with him. Jesus received his mortal body as a result of a physical union between Mary and Elohim (who, after all, is an exalted man). Whether in his pre-mortal existence or after fulfilling his mission on earth, Jesus was exalted to the status of God. That is something we also can achieve.

According to Mormon theology, the entire cycle repeats throughout eternity. Humans become gods and proceed to have hordes of spirit children. In each spirit family, one of the children becomes a redeemer who makes possible the resurrection of the other children who are sent to live on a planet in mortal bodies. Another of the children becomes a tempter who leads a large number of the children into a rebellion in heaven. The children who show themselves worthy of exaltation while in their mortal bodies themselves become gods and continue the process.

II. Some Specific False Doctrines

A. Claim that there are many gods

The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God. That is why it has been a matter of orthodox faith for Christians, Jews, and Muslims for thousands of years. This truth plainly is declared in the following passages: Deut. 4:32-39, 6:4, 32:39; 1 Ki. 8:60; 2 Ki. 19:9; Ps. 86:10; Isa. 37:20, 44:8, 45:5, 45:14, 45:18, 45:22, 46:9; Joel 2:27; Mk. 12:29-32; Jn. 5:43, 17:3; Rom. 3:30, 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 1:17, 2:5, 6:15-16; Jude 25; Rev. 15:4.

The claim that such statements simply mean that God is the only god *that matters to us* not only reverses the natural meaning of the words without any contextual reason for doing so but is shown false by Isa. 44:8 and Jas. 2:19. In Isa. 44:8 God declares: "Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one," and Jas. 2:19 states that the demons believe there is only one God. If the Mormon's multitude of gods exists, why do these beings not know about it?

This claim also ignores the fact that the God of the Bible is the only uncreated thing that exists (Neh. 9:6; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-16; Rev. 4:11). Since he is the only self-existent being, no other being can rightfully be put in his class as a god. The uniqueness of the God of the Bible is confirmed by Ps. 72:18 ("[God] *alone* does marvelous deeds"), Ps. 89:6 ("Who is *like* the Lord among the heavenly beings?"), Isa. 46:9 ("there is none *like* [God]"), Rom. 16:27 (he is "the *only* wise God"), 1 Tim. 6:16 ("[God] *alone* is immortal"), and Rev. 15:4 ("[God] *alone* [is] holy"). No being is comparable to God.

B. Claim that God is flesh and bone

Jn. 4:23-24 makes clear that God the Father is spirit. That is why Paul refers to him as "invisible" in Col 1:15 and 1 Tim. 1:17. As Jesus stated in Lk. 24:39, "a spirit does not have flesh and bones."

C. Claim that humans existed eternally in a preincarnate state

As noted above, the Bible teaches that God is the only thing that exists that he has not created (Neh. 9:6; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-16; Rev. 4:11; see also, "A View of Creation," pp. 2-5). Therefore, the Mormon belief that all humans have existed eternally in some preincarnate state is false. The fact that God's eternal existence is unique is why the Bible writers repeatedly cite that fact in praise of him (1 Chron. 29:10; Neh. 9:5; Ps. 41:43, 106:48; Jer. 10:10; Hab. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:17). If every being were eternal, that would not be a distinctive quality, and thus would not be an expression of praise. It would be like praising a person by saying he breathes air.

D. Claim that God the Father was once a man

Contrary to the Mormon claim that God is an exalted man, a man who evolved into a god, Ps. 90:2 declares that "from everlasting to everlasting you are God." He not only has existed eternally but he has existed eternally as God. This could not be otherwise because the Bible clearly states that God does not change (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). There is no contextual basis for claiming that these last verses simply mean that God does not *now* change, that he stopped changing after becoming a god, and in any event, Ps. 90:2 disproves that interpretation.

E. Claim that Jesus and God the Father are separate beings

The Bible teaches that the one and only God is a three-person being. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons of the one God, each being co-equal and co-eternal and each being of the same divine essence or nature. Though this is a mystery, it is not a logical contradiction.

A full defense of the orthodox view of the Trinity is beyond the scope of this paper. Let me just say that Scripture is clear that there is only one God (see above) and is equally clear that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Heavenly Father are God. For example, Jesus is called God in Jn. 1:1, 1:18, 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; and 2 Pet. 1:1. The way there are three divine persons and only one God is that "[w]ithin the one Being that is God, there exists three coequal

and coeternal persons." James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998), 26.

Mormon theology denies the essential oneness of Jesus and the Father. It insists that they are independent beings who evolved to godhood at different times. In the Mormon view, Jesus is not divine in any unique sense; he simply was one of a multitude of eternal preincarnate intelligences, one of a multitude of Elohim's spirit children, one of a multitude of human beings, and is now one of a multitude of gods.

G. Claim that Jesus was conceived by a physical union with Mary

The incarnate Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, not by a physical union between Mary and a God of flesh and bone. Mat. 1:18-20 and Lk. 1:26-35 are clear on this. The Mormons seem to get themselves in quite a bind on this point because they believe Mary was the spirit daughter of Elohim. If that is so, how could he have a physical union with her? Would that not be incest? And how could he marry her before doing so, when she was betrothed to Joseph? And how could she marry Joseph after becoming the wife of Elohim?

H. Claim of eternal marriages

Rom. 7:1-3 and 1 Cor. 7:39 make clear that the death of a spouse dissolves the marriage relationship. Jesus plainly taught that there are no marriages after the resurrection (Mat. 22:30). Since there are no marriages, the clear implication is that there will be no procreation. Mormon doctrine contradicts this by claiming that Temple marriages last into eternity.

I. Claim that unbelievers will avoid the lake of fire

The notion that the lawless and wicked will avoid the lake of fire, the second death, is false. By remaining wicked, they demonstrate that they did not have faith in Christ. As Jesus said in Mat. 13:49-50, at the end of the age the wicked will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Rev. 20:14-15 indicates that this is because their names were not written in the book of life, i.e., they were not Christians. Rev. 21:7-8 is quite clear; those who remain faithful to the end will receive a perfect heavenly inheritance. "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practiced magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

J. Claim that Christians will be segregated in heaven

All Christians have been fully reconciled to God through the blood of Christ (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17-19; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:19-22). Since whatever separated them from God has been completely removed, there is nothing to justify eternally separating them from each other. In fact, the unity of the Christian church is so strong in the eyes of God that it is described as being a single body (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:14-16, 4:4-6; Col. 1:18). How can that one body be divided in heaven?

The truth, as shown by Rev. 21:27, is that all Christians, all whose names are in the Lamb's book of life, will be part of the one heavenly kingdom (apocalyptically portrayed as the New Jerusalem). That is the glorious inheritance of the saints (Eph. 1:14, 1:18; Col. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:4).

K. Claim that there is a second chance after death

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) makes clear that death seals one's spiritual fate. That is why Christians must remain faithful to Christ in the face of severe persecution (Rev. 13:5-10, 14:9-12). If one abandons Christ in this life, there is no second chance.

Church President Is Not a Prophet of God

I. The claim

The Mormon Church claims that its President is a prophet. In Article of Faith 7 the church proclaims its belief in the continuing gifts of prophecy, revelation, and visions (not to mention tongues). According to *Doctrine and Covenants* 107:92, the President is "seer, revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows on the head of the church." Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie refers to the President as "the mouthpiece of God on earth."

II. False Doctrines and Prophecies

A. Polygamy

It has already been mentioned how the prophecies of Presidents Joseph Smith and Brigham Young (and other Mormon leaders) that polygamy was the will of God were reversed in 1890 by the prophecy of President Wilford Woodruff. According to Mr. Woodruff, God told him to cease the practice because of opposition to it by the government. One would think that God would have foreseen this problem before giving the earlier revelations.

B. "Blood atonement"

President Brigham Young and a number of others taught the doctrine of "blood atonement," but the Mormon Church now disowns it. According to this doctrine, some sins were so serious that the sinner had to offer his own life to atone for them. In other words, unless he was executed he could not be saved. What kind of prophet is a false teacher?

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech20.htm>.

C. Adam-God doctrine

Brigham Young also claimed to have received a revelation from God that Adam was in some sense God. In Young's words:

When our Father Adam came into the garden of Eden he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is Michael, the Archangel, the Ancient of Days, about whom holy men have written and spoken - He is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.

The church now disowns this doctrine, but it cannot alter the fact that Brigham Young claimed it as divine revelation. What kind of prophet utters false prophecies? In the Old Testament, a lying prophet was to be condemned not exalted.

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech8.htm> and the article by John Farkas at <http://www.bcmmin.org/adamgod.html>.

D. Blacks and the priesthood

A more recent example of a prophetic reversal occurred in 1978 when the church changed its anti-black doctrine by opening the priesthood to blacks. From the beginning of the Mormon Church, blacks were excluded from the priesthood, which prevented them from becoming gods. As stated in a letter written in 1947 by the First Presidency (i.e., the President and two counselors): "From the days of the Prophet Joseph even until now, it has been the doctrine of the Church, never questioned by any of the Church leaders, that Negroes are not entitled to the full blessings of the Gospel."

The reason for this discrimination, according to President Joseph Fielding Smith, was that "the Negro, because of some condition of unfaithfulness in the spirit - or pre-existence, was not valiant and hence was not denied the mortal probation, but was denied the blessings of the priesthood." In other words, blacks were considered to have been less valiant or faithful than whites during their preincarnate state and therefore were cursed with black skin.

Despite the fact President Brigham Young had taught that the curse on blacks would not be removed until after the resurrection, as political pressure mounted in the 1970's, President Spencer Kimball prophesied that blacks would henceforth receive "all of the privileges and blessings which the gospel affords."

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech10a.htm> and <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech10b.htm> and the article at <http://www.irr.org/mit/Skin%20Color%20&%20LDS%20Church.pdf>.

E. "The Book of Abraham" papyri

Another revealing incident involving the Presidency of the Church involved the "Book of Abraham" papyri rediscovered by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1967. As noted above, the Mormon President is believed to be a "seer," and according to Mosiah 8:13, a seer can "translate all records that are of an ancient date." Yet despite the claim of being a seer, when the ancient papyri were donated to the church, they were not translated by the President but were sent to one with some knowledge of Egyptian.

Some Facts About Joseph Smith

I. Involved in the Occult

As previously mentioned, in the middle 1820's Joseph Smith was hunting for buried treasure by means of a supernatural stone. He claimed that by looking into the stone he could see things not discernible to the natural eye. This is very close to the occultic practice of crystal gazing.

In 1834 one of Joseph Smith's neighbors, William Stafford, published an affidavit stating that while he and others dug for treasure that Joseph claimed was buried nearby, Joseph remained in his house "looking in his stone and watching the motions of the evil spirit." Smith reported to his father (who told Stafford) that the spirit had "caused the money to sink," which is why they did not find it.

Stafford further testified that on another occasion Joseph's father came to him and said that Joseph had discovered some buried treasure, but in order to obtain it they needed to sacrifice one of his black sheep to satisfy the evil spirit that was guarding it. Stafford gave them the sheep, he says "to gratify [his] curiosity," but no treasure was retrieved. According to the Smiths, a mistake had been made in the way the sheep had been sacrificed so it did not have the desired effect. William's nephew, C. R. Stafford, later corroborated this testimony.

In 1974 Reed Durham, who was director of the Mormon Institute of Religion at the University of Utah and President of the Mormon History Association, announced his discovery that the medallion Joseph Smith had in his possession at the time of his death was a "Jupiter talisman." It is a medallion containing inscriptions relating to astrology and magic. In fact, Durham found this very talisman in a list of magic seals in an 1801 book about magic (*The Magus*) by Francis Barrett.

One side of the talisman has a "Table of Jupiter," the purpose of which, according to Durham, "was to be able to call upon the celestial intelligences assigned to the particular talisman, to assist one in all endeavors." As Durham noted, "In astrology, Jupiter is always associated with high positions, getting one's way, and all forms of status."

It is no wonder that Mormon Church officials silenced Dr. Durham. In response to a letter dated May 4, 1977 seeking further information on this subject, Durham wrote that "the

Brethren have requested that I do no more with the subject again - I am not to release info. or have any more to say on the subject. . . . I will be obedient to my Brethren and be still."

Items found on Joseph Smith's brother Hyrum at the time of his death include a dagger with the "Seal of Mars" on the handle and several parchments with emblems painted on them. Two of the circular emblems match those in a very old book, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scott. Regarding these emblems, the book states: "Whoso beareth this sign about him, all spirits shall do him homage."

This connection with the occult has been admitted by a number of Mormon scholars. In his manuscript "The Masonic Emblem & Parchments of Joseph & Hyrum Smith," Arturo de Hoyos acknowledges that items on the parchments were associated with "witchcraft, black magic, and the occult." D. Michael Quinn in his monumental work *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (1987) admits that "Joseph Smith evidently participated extensively in magical pursuits and that he shared with others of his contemporaries a magic view of the world."

The Bible strongly condemns participation in all types of magic. Deut. 18:9-14 and Gal. 5:20 are quite clear on the matter. The fact the Smiths were engaging in magic casts grave doubt on their status as prophets of God.

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech4.htm> and Abanes, 27-34, 87-90.

II. Disregarded the "Word of Wisdom"

Doctrine and Covenants 89:4-9 contains a revelation (known as the "Word of Wisdom") given to Joseph Smith in 1833 which strictly forbids the drinking of alcohol and hot drinks (now interpreted to mean just caffeine drinks) and the use of tobacco. Though he contended that this revelation was from the Lord, it is clear that Joseph Smith did not abide by it during his life.

References to Smith's drinking of alcohol are scattered throughout *History of the Church*. For example, on May 2, 1843 it is recorded: "Called at the office and drank a glass of wine with Sister Jenetta Richards." On another occasion, Smith states, "our hearts were made glad with the fruit of the vine." According to *History of the Church*, he even shared a glass of wine on the day of his death.

It is also clear that Smith smoked tobacco and drank tea after the giving of his revelation. According to Mormon Gary Guthrie, on one occasion "he rode through the streets of Nauvoo smoking a cigar." Smith's diary for March 11, 1843 tells of his having "tea with his breakfast," and he told his wife that "if it was a little stronger he should like it better."

In Nauvoo, Smith not only broke the Word of Wisdom but also encouraged others to do the same by selling liquor. His own son reports that in 1842 they moved into a large house and Joseph opened a bar in part of it. Joseph's wife, Emma, asked how it looked "for the spiritual

head of a religious body to be keeping a hotel in which is a room fitted out as a liquor-selling establishment?" She issued an ultimatum, and Joseph removed the bar.

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech18.htm>.

III. Gave False Prophecies and Revelations

David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*, stated that, when they were seeking money to finish printing the *Book of Mormon*, Joseph received a revelation that some of them should go to Toronto because there they would sell the copyright for the book. Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery went on the mission, "but they failed entirely to sell the copyright." When they questioned Joseph about the failed prophecy, he told them (after receiving another revelation) that "some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil."

On September 22 and 23, 1832, Joseph Smith prophesied that the temple of the New Jerusalem would be built in western Missouri during his generation. This is recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants* 84. As late as 1935, Mormon leaders were still claiming that the prophecy would be fulfilled. Since it has now been 170 years since the prophecy was uttered, it is safe to say that Smith's generation has passed and the prophecy has completely failed.

In January 1841 Smith gave a revelation from the Lord commending John Bennett for his love and good works. Yet, on June 24, 1842 Smith said that Bennett's "general character is that of an adulterer of the worst kind." On January 23, 1847, Brigham Young declared that "John C. Bennett and others never had any faith nor interest only to prostitute every female that they could."

For more details and documentation, see the Tanners' book chapter at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/changech14.htm> and Abanes, 461-467.

IV. Disregarded the Polygamy Prophecy

Joseph Smith's revelation authorizing polygamy, which is now enshrined in *Doctrine and Covenants* 132, makes clear (in v. 61) that the first wife must give her consent before the taking of another wife is permissible. Nevertheless, Smith took plural wives without seeking his wife's consent. For instance, Emily Dow Partridge gave the following testimony about how she and her sister had been married to Joseph Smith without Emma Smith's knowledge or consent:

We had been [in the Smith home] 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.