

## Joseph Smith—The Early Years

By Sandra Tanner

In the small farming community of Sharon, Vermont, on December 23, 1805, Lucy Smith gave birth to her fifth child, Joseph Smith, Jr. While the proud parents doubtlessly had high hopes for the son who bore his father's name, they could hardly have imagined that he would one day produce new books of scripture and start a church that would eventually grow to over 13 million members.

In the following I will outline three areas of influence that helped to shape Joseph Smith's religious career. The first one is Smith's religious environment, the second is the family's involvement with folk magic and the third is the public interest in the American Indians.

### 1. Joseph Smith's Religious Environment

Many people in the New England area during the late 1700's and early 1800's were turning away from organized religion, believing that most denominations had fallen into apostate practices. It was a time in America of religious upheaval, revivals and new sects. Many Christians were looking for a restoration of the New Testament church. Fawn Brodie described the religious turmoil of the day:

The Methodists split four ways between 1814 and 1830. The Baptists split into Reformed Baptists, Hard-Shell Baptists, Free-Will Baptists, Seventh-Day Baptists,

Footwashers, and other sects. Unfettered religious liberty began spawning a host of new religions.<sup>1</sup>

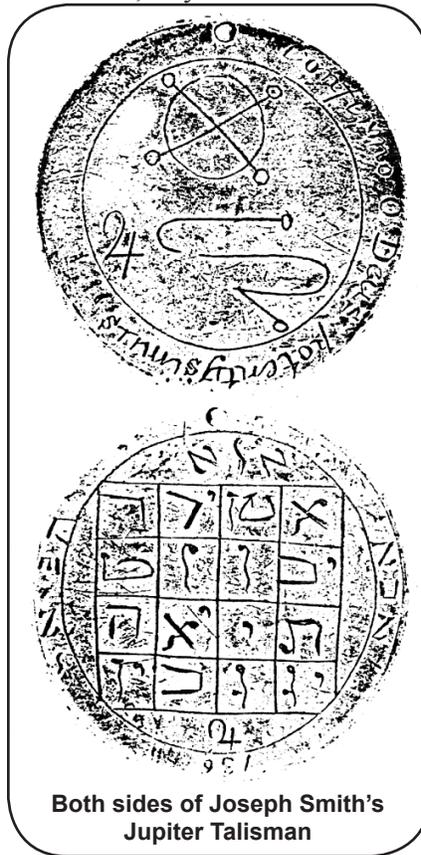
Many in that day were drawn to the "Seeker" movement and its rejection of organized churches. Historian Dan Vogel comments:

The primitive gospel movement emerged first among the "common" folk of New England, the South, and West between the years 1790 and 1830.<sup>2</sup>

Those termed "Seekers" were waiting for a new dispensation of apostolic authority. Vogel further observed:

One independent Seeker, Asa Wild, of Amsterdam, New York, published in 1824 a short work describing his revolt against Puritanism and his conversion to Seekerism. His work, *A Short Sketch of the Religious Experience, and Spiritual Travels, of Asa Wild*, outlines the classic Seeker position and demonstrates his yearning for a restoration and the Millennium.<sup>3</sup>

While both of Joseph Smith's parents professed Christianity, they came from families that were divided over religion.



Both sides of Joseph Smith's Jupiter Talisman

1 Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 12.

2 Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), p. 6.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 15

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Lucy Smith's parents were not united in their faith. Lucy's mother was a staunch Congregationalist while her father, Solomon Mack, advocated Universalism which maintained that God would save all mankind. Then in 1811 Solomon claimed to have a religious conversion and wrote a small book detailing his new faith and return to orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> Later the Book of Mormon, published in 1830, would reflect elements of the Universalist debate.

In the book of Alma we read of a certain man named Nehor whose preaching echoed that of the Universalists. He went about preaching that "all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life."<sup>5</sup> The Book of Mormon goes on to relate that after killing a man of God who tried to call him to repentance, Nehor was sentenced to death. Just before he died he repented of his false teachings.<sup>6</sup>

Those familiar with the revival literature of Joseph Smith's day recognize similar teachings in the Book of Mormon. Fawn Brodie observed:

In the speeches of the Nephite prophets one may find the religious conflicts that were splitting the churches in the 1820's. Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ, wrote in the first able review of the Book of Mormon: "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 decided 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, republican government and the rights of man. . . . But he is better skilled in the controversies in New York than in the geography or history of Judea. He makes John baptize in the village of Bethabara and says Jesus was born in Jerusalem."<sup>7</sup>

Curiously, while the Book of Mormon addresses many of the doctrinal disputes of Smith's day, it does not contain the major doctrines of Mormonism that separate it from standard Christianity. While the Book of Mormon condemned Universalism, by 1832 Smith seems to

have changed his mind. Section 76 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, one of the LDS books of scripture, teaches three levels of heaven, with a place for practically everyone. The Book of Mormon contains no teaching on the need for temple rituals, eternal marriage, plural gods, man's pre-mortal existence, proxy work for the dead, three levels of heaven or eternal progression. In fact, the Book of Mormon declares that death seals one's fate and that there is no opportunity to repent after one dies (see Alma 34:31-35).

Long before his own religious quest, Joseph Smith's uncle Jason, Lucy's oldest brother, "became a 'Seeker' and set up a quasi-communistic society of thirty indigent families whose economic and spiritual welfare he sought to direct."<sup>8</sup> In this environment of competing philosophies, Lucy felt undecided about church membership. She later wrote about this period in her life:

If I remain a member of no church, all religious people will say I am of the world; and if I join some one of the different denominations, all the rest will say I am in error. No church will admit that I am right, except the one with which I am associated. This makes them witness against each other; and how can I decide in such a case as this, seeing they are all unlike the Church of Christ, as it existed in former days!<sup>9</sup>

Joseph Smith's father came from a similar background. Dan Vogel explains:

In 1796 Lucy married a man similarly perplexed about religion, although his Primitivism stemmed from independence more than from uncertainty. Joseph Smith, Sr., was more liberal, apparently agreeing with Lucy's father about universal salvation. Joseph Smith, Sr., had been raised by a father whose curious blend of theological views was legendary in his community of Topsfield, Massachusetts. Joseph's father, Asael, was a rationalist whose beliefs included Universalism and Seekerism. He refused to join any of the churches "because he could not reconcile their teachings with the scriptures and his reason."<sup>10</sup>

According to Lucy Smith, her husband (Joseph Smith, Sr.) had a number of dreams, or visions prior to young Joseph's visions. LDS historian Richard Bushman noted:

In many of the dreams, Joseph Sr. found himself alone, decrepit, or ill, or on a vaguely defined quest. In one, he traveled alone in "the desolate world," on a road "so broad

<sup>4</sup> Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Book of Mormon, Alma 1:4.

<sup>6</sup> Alma 1:15.

<sup>7</sup> Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, England: S.W. Richards, 1853), p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Vogel, *Religious Seekers*, p. 26.

and barren, that I wondered why I should travel in it.” In another he was in a “gloomy desert” amidst “the most death-like silence.” Usually the desolation was followed by redemption, a flower-filled garden or the fruit of an “exceedingly handsome” tree representing the love of God.<sup>11</sup>

One of the father’s visions, in 1811, seems to be the inspiration for a section in the Book of Mormon. As Lucy Smith recounted, Joseph Smith, Sr., described seeing both a broad and a narrow path. Upon entering the narrow path he came to a stream of water, then a tree bearing white fruit. After tasting the fruit he tried to persuade his family to partake as well. He then saw a great building filled with finely dressed people, mocking those who partook of the fruit.<sup>12</sup> This should be compared with 1 Nephi 8:8–11:36, where we read of Lehi and Nephi’s visions of the tree of life. They describe seeing a river, a narrow path, a tree bearing white fruit and a building full of finely dressed people who mock those who partake of the fruit.<sup>13</sup>

By the 1820’s Lucy Smith was longing for some sort of religious affiliation. A family disaster would complicate this search. In 1823 the Smith’s oldest son, Alvin, died from a bowel obstruction and at the funeral the minister inferred that Alvin had gone to hell as he was not a baptized member of a church.<sup>14</sup> This cemented Joseph Smith, Sr., in his rejection of organized religion.

When Lucy Smith attended the 1824 and 1825 Palmyra revival Joseph Smith, Sr., refused to accompany her. As a result of these meetings Lucy Smith, her sons Hyrum and Samuel, and a daughter, joined the Presbyterian Church. This division in the home obviously impacted Joseph Smith, Jr. LDS historian Richard Bushman observed:

If there was a personal motive for Joseph Smith Jr.’s revelations, it was to satisfy his family’s religious want and, above all, to meet the need of his oft-defeated, unmoored father.<sup>15</sup>

During these years young Joseph Smith had been attending various religious meetings, revivals, and even joined the local young people’s debating club. At times he participated in revival meetings as an “exhorter,” one who would speak after the regular sermon and “exhort” the audience to follow the admonitions of the preacher. When writing about these events many years later, Joseph explained:

During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. . . . The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists . . .<sup>16</sup>

Retired LDS Institute Director Grant Palmer has pointed out the similarity between the Methodist camp meetings that Smith would have attended and events spoken of in the Book of Mormon:

We have not taken Joseph Smith seriously enough when he stated that he had an “intimate acquaintance” with evangelical religion and that he was “somewhat partial” to the Methodists. Protestant concepts appear to abound in his discourses and experiences. For example, a Methodist camp meeting was held one mile from Palmyra, New York, on 7 June 1826—a pivotal time in Joseph Smith’s life. Preparations for a camp meeting included leasing and consecrating the ground. Thus the “ground within the circle of the tents is considered sacred to the worship of God, and is our chapel.” The Methodists referred to these “consecrated grounds” as their “house of God” or temple. The Palmyra camp meeting reportedly attracted over 10,000 people. Families came from all parts of the 100-mile conference district and pitched their tents facing the raised “stand” where the preachers were seated, including one named Benjamin G. Paddock . . . This large crowd heard the “valedictory” or farewell speech of their beloved “Bishop M’kendree [who] made his appearance among us for the last time.” . . . In his emaciated and “feeble” condition, he spoke of his love for the people and then delivered a powerful message that covered “the whole process of personal salvation.” Tremendous unity prevailed among the crowd, and “nearly every unconverted person on the ground” committed oneself to Christ. . . .

This is reminiscent of King Benjamin’s speech to the Zarahemlans in the Book of Mormon, whose chronicler describes the setting:

11 Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 36.

12 Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 58-59.

13 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2010), pp. 161-163.

14 Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 28.

15 Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 16-17.

16 *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:8-20.

The people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the [last] words which [their beloved] king Benjamin should speak unto them . . . [T]hey pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family . . . every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple . . . the multitude being so great that king Benjamin . . . caused a tower to be erected . . . [And he said from the platform,] I am about to go down to my grave . . . I can no longer be your teacher . . . For even at this time my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you (Mosiah 2:1, 5-7, 28-30).<sup>17</sup>

Palmer also observed:

Evangelical meetings in western New York in the 1820s were characterized by (1) camp settings; (2) preaching that interlaced paraphrased biblical passages with revival terminology designed to produce a powerful emotional impact; (3) a conversion pattern characterized by a conviction of sin, intense prayer for forgiveness, and a sweet calming assurance of being forgiven, often accompanied by trembling, tears, falling, and other physical manifestations; (4) denunciation of Deists, Unitarians, Universalists, and agnostics; and (5) vivid descriptions of the degenerate state of human beings. While all five of these elements formed a pattern that was typical in Joseph Smith's environment, one would not expect to find them packaged together in the discourses and experiences of ancient Americans. It is more believable that the Protestant Reformation, including its evolving doctrines and practices down to Joseph Smith's era, influenced these sections of the Book of Mormon.<sup>18</sup>

The LDS Church has traditionally emphasized Joseph Smith's lack of education to establish that the Book of Mormon was beyond Smith's writing ability. However, Grant Palmer observed:

Thus we have an image of Joseph Smith as one "not learned" (see Isa. 29:12). While this accurately describes his formal education, it misstates his knowledge of the Bible, of evangelical Protestantism, and of American antiquities within his environment. He wrote in his 1832 history that his parents were thorough in "instructing me in the christian religion" and that, from age twelve on, he became a serious Bible student by "searching the scriptures."<sup>19</sup>

An examination of Joseph Smith's 1832 handwritten account of his early life shows that he was trained in

penmanship and could compose his thoughts. On the next page is a photograph of this account.

The extensive plagiarism of phrases from the King James Bible in the Book of Mormon demonstrates Joseph Smith's familiarity with the text. Jacob, in the Book of Mormon, sounds amazingly like Paul in the New Testament:

2 Nephi 9:39

"to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life"

Romans 8:6

"to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life"

The Book of Mormon quote was supposedly written in approximately 550 B.C., while Paul's letter was probably written about 56 A.D. To add to the problem, Jacob's wording is exactly like the English translation of the King James Bible, published in 1611 A.D. That the same phrases from the King James translation are used throughout the Book of Mormon demonstrates that the author had to have lived after 1611.<sup>20</sup>

Joseph Smith later claimed that it was because of a revival in the neighborhood that he went out into the woods to pray and received his first vision. He placed the date in 1820, however the description of the revival given by family members places the date in the 1824-25 time-frame, after part of the family had joined the Presbyterian Church.<sup>21</sup>

But even his claim of a vision was not an unusual occurrence during the many revivals in New York. Joseph Smith's 1838 account of his first vision, published in the *Pearl of Great Price*, tells how in 1820 he went into a grove to pray to know which church to join. At first a dark power overtook him, then crying out to God, he observed a great light. Two beings appeared and told him he was not to join any of them as they were "all wrong" and that "all their creeds were an abomination in his sight." He concluded, "When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home."<sup>22</sup> These two beings are identified today as God the father and Jesus Christ.

Richard Bushman recounted the vision of Norris Stearns whose 1815 story sounds very much like Joseph Smith's account:

<sup>17</sup> Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), pp. 96-97.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> See *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism*, Jerald and Sandra Tanner.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 2, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> See *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:15-20.

marvily even in the likeness of him who created <sup>them</sup> ~~him~~  
 and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaim-  
 -ed well hath the wise man said <sup>it is a</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>that</sup> fool <sup>that</sup> in  
 his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all all  
 these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent  
 and omnipotent power a being who maketh laws and  
 decreeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who  
 filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all  
 Eternity to Eternity and when I considered all these things  
 and that <sup>that</sup> being ~~that~~ <sup>being</sup> ~~that~~ such to worship him as wor-  
 -ship him in spirit and in truth therefore I cried unto  
 the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and  
 to obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness  
 and while in <sup>the</sup> attitude of calling upon the Lord, a pillar of  
 fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day  
 come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled  
 with the Spirit of God and the <sup>Lord</sup> opened the heavens upon  
 me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying  
 Joseph <sup>my son</sup> thy sins are forgiven thee go thy <sup>way</sup> ~~ways~~ walk in my  
 statutes and keep my commandments Behold I am the  
 Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those  
 who believe on my name may have Eternal life <sup>in</sup> ~~the~~ world  
 lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no-  
 not one they have turned aside from the Gospel and  
 keep not <sup>my</sup> commandments they draw near to me with their  
 lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger  
 is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit  
 them according to their ungodliness and to bring to pass  
 that which <sup>has</sup> been spoken by the mouth of the proph-  
 -ets and of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~books~~ <sup>books</sup> behold and lo I come quickly as it was  
 written of me in the cloud <sup>clothed</sup> in the glory of my Father  
 and my soul was filled with love and for many days I  
 could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me  
 but could find none that would believe the heavenly  
 vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart  
 about ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> ~~time~~ <sup>very</sup> ~~much~~ <sup>much</sup> and ~~but~~ after many days

Joseph Smith's 1832 diary account of his first vision in his own handwriting.

“One was God, my Maker, almost in bodily shape like a man. His face was, as it were a flame of Fire, and his body, as it had been a Pillar and a Cloud. . . . Below him stood Jesus Christ my Redeemer, in perfect shape like a man.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1816 a minister by the name of Elias Smith published a book in which he told of his conversion. Notice the similarity to Joseph Smith’s first account:

I went into the woods . . . a light appeared from heaven . . . My mind seemed to rise in that light to the throne of God and the Lamb. . . . The Lamb once slain appeared to my understanding, and while viewing him, I felt such love to him as I never felt to any thing earthly. . . . It is not possible for me to tell how long I remained in that situation . . .<sup>24</sup>

Alexander Campbell wrote the following on March 1, 1824, concerning a revival in New York: “Enthusiasm flourishes. . . . This man was regenerated when asleep, by a vision of the night. That man heard a voice in the woods, saying, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee.’ A third saw his Savior descending to the tops of the trees at noon day.”<sup>25</sup>

Asa Wild claimed to have a vision which is very similar to the story Joseph Smith later published. It was printed in the *Wayne Sentinel* (the newspaper to which the Smith family apparently subscribed) on October 22, 1823:

It seemed as if my mind . . . was struck motionless, as well as into nothing, before the awful and glorious majesty of the Great Jehovah. He then spake . . . He also told me, that every denomination of professing Christians had become extremely corrupt. . . .<sup>26</sup>

With so many people dissatisfied with the churches of the day, telling of visions and looking for some sort of restoration, it is easy to see why some people would be attracted to Joseph Smith’s claims and the Book of Mormon, which echoed many of the same views.

## 2. The Smith Family and Magic

In the 1820’s many people believed in magical stones that allowed the owner to discern the location of lost treasures. For instance, the *Wayne Sentinel*, published in Joseph Smith’s neighborhood, reprinted the following from the *Windsor (Vermont) Journal*:

*Money digging.*—We are sorry to observe even in this enlightened age, so prevalent a disposition to credit

the accounts of the Marvellous. Even the frightful stories of money being hid under the surface of the earth, and enchanted by the Devil or Robert Kidd, are received by many of our respectable fellow citizens as truths. . . .

A respectable gentleman in Tunbridge, was informed by means of a dream, that a chest of money was buried on a small island. . . . After having been directed by the mineral rod where to search for the money . . . he and his laborers came . . . upon a chest of gold . . . the chest moved off through the mud, and has not been seen or heard of since.<sup>27</sup>

Another similar story was printed on December 27, 1825, in the *Wayne Sentinel*:

Wonderful Discovery.—A few days since was discovered in this town, by the help of a *mineral stone*, (which *becomes transparent when placed in a hat* and the light excluded by the face of him who looks into it, provided he is fortune’s favorite,) a monstrous potash kettle in the bowels of old mother Earth, filled with the purest bullion. . . . His Satanic Majesty, or some other invisible agent, appears to keep it under marching orders; for no sooner is it dug on to in one place, than it moves off like “false delusive hope,” to another still more remote.<sup>28</sup>

In 1822 Joseph Smith found a magic “seer stone” like the one mentioned in the newspaper while digging a well for his neighbor, Willard Chase. In 1833 Mr. Chase gave his account of the event:

In the year 1822, I was engaged in digging a well. I employed Alvin and Joseph Smith to assist me; the latter of whom is now known as the Mormon prophet. After digging about twenty feet below the surface of the earth, we discovered a singularly appearing stone, which excited my curiosity. I brought it to the top of the well, and as we were examining it, Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat. . . . After obtaining the stone, he began to publish abroad what wonders he could discover by looking in it, . . .<sup>29</sup>

A few years later Joseph Smith would use this same stone to produce the Book of Mormon. One of Smith’s followers, David Whitmer described the process:

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the

23 Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 41.

24 Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels, and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Beck & Foster, 1816), pp. 58-59.

25 Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist* (1827) vol. 1, pp. 148-149, as quoted in *The Changing World of Mormonism*, Jerald and Sandra Tanner (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 159-160.

26 *Wayne Sentinel* (Oct. 22, 1823), as quoted in *The Changing World of Mormonism*, p. 160.

27 *Wayne Sentinel* (February 16, 1825).

28 As quoted in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* Jerald and Sandra Tanner (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2008), p. 48.

29 Affidavit of Willard Chase, as quoted in *Mormonism Unveiled*, E. D. Howe (Painesville, Ohio: 1834), pp. 240-241.

darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing.<sup>30</sup>

This process is described in the Book of Mormon:

Now Ammon said unto him: I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.<sup>31</sup>

In 1834 E. D. Howe published his expose titled *Mormonism Unveiled* in which he printed a number of statements by neighbors of the Smiths recounting their involvement with magic and money digging. Willard Stafford wrote:

I first became acquainted with Joseph, Sen., and his family in the year 1820. They lived, at that time, in Palmyra, about one mile and a half from my residence. A great part of their time was devoted to digging for money: . . . I had heard them tell marvelous tales, respecting the discoveries they had made in their peculiar occupation of money digging. They would say, for instance, that in such an place, in such a hill, on a certain man's farm, there were deposited kegs, barrels and hogheads of coined silver and gold—bars of gold, golden images, brass kettles filled with gold and silver—gold candlesticks, swords, &c, &c.<sup>32</sup>

In 1825, after hearing of Smith's powers, a man named Josiah Stowell came to Palmyra to hire the Smiths to help him look for a silver mine in Pennsylvania. At that time Joseph and his father entered into an agreement with those searching for the treasure, to share anything found in the dig. Smith's stone was to be their key to finding the silver. Smith's mother relates that Mr. Stowell specifically sought out Joseph Smith due to his special powers. Lucy Smith wrote:

A short time before the house was completed [1825], a man by the name of Josiah Stoyal came from Chenango county, New York, with the view of getting Joseph to assist him in digging for a silver mine. He came for Joseph on account of having heard that he possessed certain means by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye.<sup>33</sup>

However, a relative of Mr. Stowell became worried that Joseph Smith was defrauding the man and filed charges against him in 1826. H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley Walters commented:

While Joseph Smith was working for Josiah Stowell, he was brought before a court on charges sworn against him by a nephew of Josiah Stowell, Peter G. Bridgman (or Bridgeman). Apparently Bridgman became concerned that his uncle's money was being spent in the pursuit of elusive treasure. Accounts of these charges corroborate Smith's treasure hunting in southern New York and Pennsylvania.<sup>34</sup>

Joseph Smith was arrested and brought before Judge Albert Neeley on March 20, 1826. Judge Neeley's record refers to Smith as "The Glass looker."<sup>35</sup> A photo of Judge Neeley's bill to the county is printed on the next page. At the hearing Josiah Stowell testified

that prisoner had been at his house something like five months; had been employed by him to work on farm part time; that he [Joseph] pretended to have skill of telling where hidden treasures in the earth were by means of looking through a certain stone; that prisoner had looked for him sometimes; once to tell him about money buried in Bend Mountain in Pennsylvania, once for gold on Monument Hill, and once for a salt spring; and that he positively knew that the prisoner could tell, and did possess the art of seeing those valuable treasures through the medium of said stone; . . .<sup>36</sup>

There is a difference of opinion among historians if this was actually the trial or a preliminary hearing. Regardless, it demonstrates Smith's involvement in treasure hunting by means of his stone. Joseph Smith would have been twenty years old at the time and was evidently allowed to leave the county. When he later claimed to have found the gold plates containing the Book of Mormon, the money-diggers came seeking their share of the treasure. Martin Harris wrote:

The money-diggers claimed that they had as much right to the plates as Joseph had, as they were in company together. They claimed that Joseph had been a traitor, and had appropriated to himself that which belonged to them. For this reason Joseph was afraid of them, and continued concealing the plates.<sup>37</sup>

30 David Whitmer, *An Address To All Believers In Christ*, (Richmond, Missouri, 1887), p. 12.

31 Book of Mormon, Mosiah 8:13.

32 Affidavit of William Stafford, as quoted in *Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 237.

33 Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 91-92. Also quoted in *Early Mormon Documents*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), vol. 1, p. 309.

34 Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, p. 70.

35 For more on the 1826 trial, see *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pp. 32-38.

36 *Fraser's Magazine* (February, 1873): pp. 229-230, as quoted in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* p. 32.

37 *Tiffany's Monthly* (August 1859).

Chenango County to Albert Neeley  
 People 3 Apauit & Battery  
 James Braze 3 Trial at G. et Lead hitting  
 Justice  
 James Braze 3 James Humphrey  
 James 3 Leander Parker  
 Sherman 3 Albert Neeley  
 To my fees in trial  
 of above cause 3 3, 68

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People 3 Apauit & Battery  
 Samuel May 3 To my fees in this cause \$2.99  
 March 22 1826

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Sam 3 Middemears  
 Joseph Smith 3  
 The Glass looker  
 March 20 1826 3  
 To my fees in examination  
 of the above cause 3 2, 68

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Sam 3 Champerty  
 Newell Evans 3  
 Sept 20 1826 3  
 To examination of above cause 2, 18

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Sam 3 Apauit & Battery  
 Newell Evans 3 To my fees in above cause — 1.46

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Sam 3 Petit Larceny  
 Robert Sumner 3 To fees in above cause — 1.85  
 Oct 3. 1826

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Sam 3 Apauit and Battery  
 Ira Church 3 To fees in above cause — 2.50  
 Nov 9. 1826  
 Albert Neeley, Judge of Peace \$16.37



Judge Albert Neeley's bill referring to Joseph Smith as "The Glass looker."

While Joseph Smith was in the employ of Mr. Stowell, he met his future bride, Emma Hale, while boarding with her family. However, her father, Isaac Hale, would not give his consent to their marriage due to Smith's magic pursuits and money digging.

Soon after this, in January of 1827, Joseph and Emma eloped and moved to Palmyra, New York. Later Joseph told Mr. Hale that "he had given up what he called 'glass-looking,' and that he expected to work hard for a living."<sup>38</sup> However, instead of settling down as a farmer, Smith was soon engaged in translating the ancient record supposedly found in the Hill Cumorah, a few miles from Smith's home. Smith claimed an angel had earlier shown him the plates, but he wasn't able to acquire them until September of 1827. He then turned his efforts to dictating to various scribes his translation of the Book of Mormon. Finding it hard to work on the manuscript at the Smith home, Joseph and Emma moved back to the Hale's farm. After working on the manuscript through the winter and early spring, Joseph Smith was persuaded by Martin Harris, one of his followers, to loan him the first 116 pages of the manuscript to show his wife. Mrs. Harris, believing the whole enterprise to be a deception, was strongly opposed to Martin's plan to mortgage his farm to finance the publishing of the Book of Mormon.

In the meantime Emma Smith gave birth to their first child in June of 1828. Not only did their son die soon after birth, but Emma became very ill as well. Joseph's mother, Lucy, recounted that Emma "seemed, for some time, more like sinking with her infant into the mansion of the dead, than remaining with her husband among the living. Her situation was such for two weeks, that Joseph slept not an hour in undisturbed quiet."<sup>39</sup>

As Joseph and Emma came to grips with the loss of their son, Joseph began to wonder about Harris and the manuscript. He then traveled to Palmyra to retrieve the pages, only to learn from Harris that they were missing. Upon hearing of the theft of the pages Joseph Smith cried out in despair, "Oh, my God! . . . All is lost! all is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God."<sup>40</sup>

Evidently the death of the Smiths' first child, and the loss of the 116 pages caused Joseph to seriously reconsider his religious views and he sought membership in the Methodist Church. When Joseph Lewis, Emma's

cousin, learned of this act, he felt that "it was a disgrace to the church to have a practicing necromancer, a dealer in enchantments and bleeding ghosts, in it." Mr. Lewis told him either to "publicly ask to have his name stricken from the class book, or stand a disciplinary investigation." Mr. Lewis stated that Joseph Smith immediately requested his name to be taken off the class book.<sup>41</sup>

Joseph Smith soon regained his confidence and returned to his work of dictating the Book of Mormon.

Quoted earlier was an account from the Smiths' local newspaper about cursed treasures that slip further into the ground when someone tries to unearth them. This same type of phenomenon is echoed in the Book of Mormon. In the thirteenth chapter of Helaman we read:

31 And behold, the time cometh that **he curseth your riches**, that they **become slippery**, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them. . . . And then shall ye lament, and say: . . . O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have **become slippery** that we should **lose them**; for behold, our riches are gone from us.

34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is **gone**; and behold, our swords are **taken from us** in the day we have sought them for battle.

35 Yea, we have **hid up our treasures and they have slipped away** from us, because of the **curse** of the land.

36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold **the land is cursed**, and all things are **become slippery**, and we cannot hold them.

Thus we see how Smith's view of treasures hidden in the ground carried over into his book of scripture.

Years later when Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy, wrote her memoirs, she explained that the family always balanced their time between working, magical pursuits, and their faith:

I shall change my theme for the present but let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopt our labor and went <at> **trying to win the faculty of Abrac drawing Magic circles or sooth saying** to the neglect of all kinds of business we never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation but whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remember the service of & the welfare of our souls.<sup>42</sup>

38 Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, pp. 263-264.

39 Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 118.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

41 *The Amboy Journal* (June 11, 1879): p. 1.

42 Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), p. 323.

Lucy Smith mentioned the family's use of Abrac. This was a magical word that when written as a triangle on a piece of paper, and hung around the neck, was supposed to help sick people recover.<sup>43</sup>

A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A - B - R - A  
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A - B - R  
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A - B  
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A  
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D  
 A - B - R - A - C - A  
 A - B - R - A - C  
 A - B - R - A  
 A - B - R  
 A - B  
 A

Joseph Smith also owned a Jupiter talisman, a silver medallion containing magic inscriptions [see photo on page 1]. Joseph's widow later passed the object on to her step-son, Charles Bidaman, who in turn sold it to Mormon collector, Wilford C. Wood, of Woods Cross, Utah. Bidaman gave the following affidavit:

This is to certify that I have sold to Wilford C. Wood of Woods Cross Utah. A silver piece bearing the inscription. "Confirms O Deus Potentissimus" [written around the outer edge of the piece] and numerous hieroglyphical inscriptions.

This piece came to me through the relationship of my father Major L. C. Bidaman who married the Prophet Joseph Smith's widow, Emma Smith.

I certify that I have many times heard her say, when being interviewed, and showing the piece. That it was in the Prophets pocket when he was martyred at Carthage Ill.<sup>44</sup>

The same talisman is reproduced in *The Magus*, by Francis Barrett, published in 1804. Mormon scholar Reed C. Durham explains that a Jupiter talisman is used to guarantee the possessor of such an object "the gain of riches, and favor, and power, and love and peace; and to confirm honors, and dignities."<sup>45</sup>

Besides the use of seer stones and a talisman, the Smiths used divining rods, sticks that were usually forked, to both look for water and to locate treasures. A friend of the family recounted a conversation with Joseph Smith, Sr., in which Smith explained he had "spent both time

and money" searching for buried treasure using "divining rods."<sup>46</sup>

Joseph Smith's principal scribe, Oliver Cowdery, was also involved with folk magic. One important change Joseph Smith made in his revelations was an obvious attempt to cover up the endorsement of Oliver Cowdery's supposed gift from God to work with a divining rod. In the 1833 printing of Smith's revelations, titled *Book of Commandments*, was an 1829 revelation given to Oliver Cowdery that stated:

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

However, in the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants* this revelation was edited to say:

Now this is not all thy gift, for you have another gift, which is the **gift of Aaron**; behold, it has told you many things; Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this **gift of Aaron** to be with you.<sup>47</sup>

Notice that the words "working with the rod" and "rod of nature" have been changed to the more respectable sounding "gift of Aaron."

Those who used divining rods were at times referred to as "rodsmen." Richard P. Howard, RLDS Church historian, observed:

Several writers have established that both in Vermont and in western New York in the early 1800's, one of the many forms which enthusiastic religion took was the adaptation of the witch hazel stick. . . . For example, the "divining rod" was used effectively by one Nathaniel Wood in Rutland County, Vermont, in 1801. Wood, Winchell, William Cowdery, Jr., and his son, Oliver Cowdery, all had some knowledge of and associations with the various uses, both secular and sacred, of the forked witch hazel rod. Winchell and others used such a rod in seeking buried treasure; . . . when Joseph Smith met Oliver Cowdery in April, 1829, he found a man peculiarly adept in the use of the forked rod . . . and against the background of his own experiments with and uses of oracular media, Joseph Smith's April, 1829, affirmations about Cowdery's unnatural powers related to working with the rod are quite understandable. . . .<sup>48</sup>

43 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1988), pp. 20-21, 55. For more information on Abrac, see *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, D Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), pp. 68-70.

44 Affidavit as printed in *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, p. 5.

45 Reed Durham, talk given April 20, 1974, at the 1975 Mormon History Association, as printed in *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, p. 3. Also in *No Help for the Widow's Son*, photocopy available through Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

46 Quinn, *Magic World View*, p. 33.

47 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section XXXIV; 1981 *Doctrine and Covenants* 8:6-7.

48 Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence: Herald House, 1969), pp. 211-14.

Mormon historians now concede the reality of the Smith family's involvement with magic. D. Michael Quinn, in his book, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, observes:

Friendly sources corroborate hostile non-Mormon accounts. As historian Richard L. Bushman has written: "There had always been evidence of it ('money-digging in the Smith family') in the hostile affidavits from the Smith's neighbors, evidence which Mormons dismissed as hopelessly biased. But when I got into the sources, I found evidence from friendly contemporaries as well, Martin Harris, Joseph Knight, Oliver Cowdery, and Lucy Mack Smith. All of these witnesses persuaded me treasure-seeking and vernacular magic were part of the Smith family tradition, and that the hostile witnesses, including the 1826 trial record, had to be taken seriously." BYU historian Marvin S. Hill has likewise observed: "Now, most historians, Mormon or not, who work with the sources, accept as fact Joseph Smith's career as village magician."<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Contemporary Attitudes About the American Indians

In the early 1800's there was high interest in the American Indian culture and artifacts resulting in many books and newspaper articles. The local newspapers occasionally ran stories about the Indians. The *Palmyra Register* for May 26, 1819, reported that one writer

believes (and we think with good reason) that this country was once inhabited by a race of people, at least, partially civilized, & that this race has been exterminated by the forefathers of the present and late tribes of Indians in this country.

Furthermore, the following was published in the Smiths' local newspaper, the *Wayne Sentinel*, in 1825:

Those who are most conversant with the public and private economy of the Indians, are strongly of opinion that they are the lineal descendants of the Israelites, and my own researches go far to confirm me in the same belief.<sup>50</sup>

Dan Vogel gave the following overview of Smith's environment:

By 1830 knowledge of the impressive ruined cities of the Maya of Central America and the Inca of South America was

commonplace in the northeastern United States. In addition, the inhabitants of those states were almost daily reminded of the building acumen of the early Indians: the remnants of fortifications as well as burial mounds dotted the area. Since most nineteenth-century Americans did not make distinctions among the various cultures and lifestyles of the native Americans and instead thought of these disparate groups as belonging to one race—the Indian—they also tended to see all of these ruins as coming from one group. What must this group have been like to have engineered such structures? The Book of Mormon tells the story of such a people and provides possible answers to persistent questions about their history.<sup>51</sup>

There were a number of books printed in Joseph Smith's day to provide such answers. It was a common theory that the American Indians descended from Israel—the very idea put forward in the Book of Mormon.

In 1652 Menasseh Ben Israel's *Hope of Israel* was published in England. This Jewish rabbi was a firm believer that remnants of the ten tribes of Israel had been discovered in the Americas.<sup>52</sup>

In 1775 James Adair published *The History of the American Indians*. He theorized that there were twenty-three parallels between Indian and Jewish customs. For example, he claimed the Indians spoke a corrupt form of Hebrew, honored the Jewish Sabbath, performed circumcision, and offered animal sacrifice. He discussed various theories explaining Indian origins, problems of transoceanic crossing, and the theory that the mound builders were a white group more advanced than the Indians.<sup>53</sup>

A popular book of Smith's day was *View of the Hebrews*, by Rev. Ethan Smith, printed in 1823, with a second edition in 1825. LDS General Authority B. H. Roberts wrote extensively about the parallels between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon.<sup>54</sup> Rev. Robert Hullinger gave the following summary of B. H. Robert's parallels:

According to Roberts's later studies, some features of *View of the Hebrews* are paralleled in the Book of Mormon. (1) Indians buried a book they could no longer read. (2) A Mr. Merrick found some dark yellow parchment leaves in "Indian Hill." (3) Native Americans had inspired prophets and charismatic gifts, as well as (4) their own kind of Urim and Thummim and breastplate. (5) Ethan Smith produced

49 Quinn, *Magic World View*, p. 59.

50 *Wayne Sentinel* (October 11, 1825).

51 Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), p. 21. Online at [www.signaturebookslibrary.org/indian/preface.htm](http://www.signaturebookslibrary.org/indian/preface.htm)

52 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

54 B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

evidence to show that ancient Mexican Indians were no strangers to Egyptian hieroglyphics. (6) An overthrown civilization in America is to be seen from its ruined monuments and forts and mounds. The barbarous tribes—barbarous because they had lost the civilized arts—greeting the Europeans were descendants of the lost civilization. (7) Chapter one of *View of the Hebrews* is a thirty-two page account of the historical destruction of Jerusalem. (8) There are many references to Israel's scattering and being "gathered" in the last days. (9) Isaiah is quoted for twenty chapters to demonstrate the restoration of Israel. In Isaiah 18 a request is made to save Israel in America. (10) The United States is asked to evangelize the native Americans. (11) Ethan Smith cited Humboldt's New Spain to show the characteristics of Central American civilization; the same are in the Book of Mormon. (12) The legends of Quetzalcoatl, the Mexican messiah, are paralleled in the Book of Mormon by Christ's appearing in the western hemisphere. . . . Roberts came to recognize that, at least in the case of Ethan Smith's book, such works were widely available.<sup>55</sup>

Researcher and author Simon Southerton observed:

In spite of its extensive similarities with the Book of Mormon, *View of the Hebrews* should not be regarded as the sole source of inspiration for the book. The basic themes running through both publications merely reflected the most commonly accepted myths surrounding the mounds, the Indians, and the original colonization of America. The principal difference is that Ethan Smith's work was open speculation, whereas the Book of Mormon was a narrative that purported to be a literal, eyewitness account of what happened. . . .

The white man's perceptions of Native Americans and the Mound Builder myth, both of which permeated the New England society of Joseph Smith's day, became embedded in Mormon scripture. In many respects, the characteristics of the Book of Mormon Lamanites mirror the misunderstandings that surfaced in the froth of frontier speculation. The Mound Builder myth receives scriptural confirmation in the closing chapters of the Book of Mormon story where the final destruction of the fair-skinned civilized Nephites occurs at the hand of their brethren, the savage, dark-skinned Lamanites. The story must have appeared plausible to early Americans who, for most of the nineteenth century, believed that Native Americans were responsible for the genocide of the postulated earlier, advanced race. The stereotypes and misunderstandings served to validate the Europeans' theft of native lands as an act of retribution; American Indians were themselves intruders in a land that

had belonged to an earlier race—one that was comfortingly familiar to white colonists.<sup>56</sup>

That Joseph Smith was intrigued with the stories of the earliest inhabitants of the New World can be seen in Lucy Smith's memoirs. She noted Joseph's storytelling ability and interest in the Indians:

During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.<sup>57</sup>

It should be borne in mind that the Book of Mormon parallels the views of Smith's day; it does not parallel archaeology today.<sup>58</sup> This is one of the areas which demonstrate that the Book of Mormon was written in the 1820's, not 600 B.C. to 421 A.D.

In 1996 the Smithsonian Institute stated:

The physical type of the American Indian is basically Mongoloid, being most closely related to that of the peoples of eastern, central, and northeastern Asia. . . .

One of the main lines of evidence supporting the scientific finding that contacts with Old World civilizations if indeed they occurred at all, were of very little significance for the development of American Indian civilizations, is the fact that none of the principal Old World domesticated food plants or animals (except the dog) occurred in the New World in pre-Columbian times. American Indians had no wheat, barley, oats, millet, rice, cattle, pigs, chickens, horses, donkeys, camels before 1492. (Camels and horses were in the Americas, along with the bison, mammoth, and mastodon, but all these animals became extinct around 10,000 B.C. at the time when the early big game hunters spread across the Americas.)

Iron, steel, glass, and silk were not used in the New World before 1492 (except for occasional use of unsmelted meteoric iron). Native copper was worked in various locations in pre-Columbian times, but true metallurgy was limited to southern Mexico and the Andean region, where its occurrence in late prehistoric times involved gold, silver, copper, and their alloys, but not iron. . . .

Reports of findings of ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and other Old World writings in the New World in pre-Columbian

<sup>55</sup> Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), pp. 183-184.

<sup>56</sup> Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), pp. 29-31.

<sup>57</sup> Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> See statements by Mayan scholar Michael D. Coe in *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), pp. 270-273.

contexts have frequently appeared in newspapers, magazines, and sensational books. None of these claims has stood up to examination by reputable scholars. No inscriptions using Old World forms of writing have been shown to have occurred in any part of the Americas before 1492 except for a few Norse rune stones which have been found in Greenland.<sup>59</sup>

**Conclusion**

Thus we see the disputes over religion preceding Joseph Smith’s founding of a church supplied the ideas for his new religion. The Book of Mormon contains many of the same doctrinal debates that were raging in Joseph Smith’s area. His first vision mirrors many others of the day. His new religion supplied the necessary means to unite his family on both doctrine and church affiliation.

His family was also immersed in the magical world view of the day, practicing water-witching, stone gazing and appealing to the “faculty of Abrac.” The same phenomenon of slipping treasures appears in the Book of Mormon as it did in Smith’s money-digging. Joseph’s use of an object to discern the will of God is also reflected in the Book of Mormon.

The regional discussion and curiosity about the origin of the American Indians and their possible descent from Israelites provided a framework for Smith’s new book of scripture.

From this we conclude that Joseph Smith’s environment provided the components necessary to author the Book of Mormon and start his new church.

Just as the Methodist leaders pleaded with Joseph Smith to renounce his unbiblical beliefs and practices, we plead with our LDS friends to come back to Biblical Christianity. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the father but by me” (John 14:6).

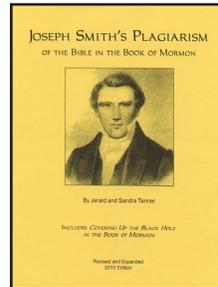


[This is an expanded version of a paper presented at the Capstone Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 13, 2010.]

59 Statement by the Smithsonian Institution, Department of Anthropology, Washington D.C., 1996. Online at <<http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/smithsonianletter.htm>>

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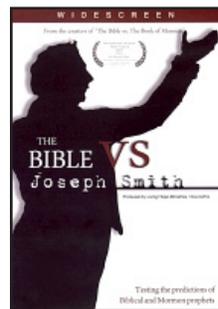
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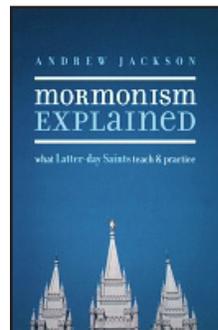
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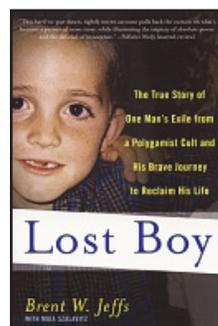
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# SMITHISMS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

## Excerpt from *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*

One of the ongoing issues relating to the Book of Mormon is the question of authorship. In our newly revised book, *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*, we examine many of the possible sources used to create the text. The author of the Book of Mormon obviously borrowed from such works as the King James Bible, the Apocrypha, the Westminster Confession, New York newspapers, etc., but who was the mastermind behind the work? We also look at the issue of authorship in light of the Solomon Spalding manuscript, chiasmus, Freemasonry and problems with the loss of the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript.

Below is an excerpt from the new edition of our book, pp. 39-43.

In this section we are looking at some of the common phrases between the Book of Mormon, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and other LDS writings which point to Joseph Smith as the common author.

### SMITH'S COMMON PHRASES

After noticing that the same phrases of two or more words appear time after time throughout Joseph Smith's scriptures, we did a computer search to identify these groups of words and feel that they provide evidence that the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price* were all the product of one mind.

We searched for certain combinations of words which are strewn throughout the Book of Mormon. The following are just a few of the many word combinations which we found:

- **“it must needs be”**
  - 1 Nephi 15:33
  - Alma 32:28
  - 3 Nephi 5:1
  - D&C 48:3
- **“save it were”**
  - 2 Nephi 11:1
  - Helaman 3:23
  - 4 Nephi 1:5
  - D&C 18:35
- **“sufficeth me”**
  - 2 Nephi 11:1
  - Jarom 1:2
  - Ether 3:17
- **“would that ye should”**
  - Alma 38:5
  - Mosiah 1:3
  - Omni 1:2
  - D&C 46:7

The recurrence of specific word combinations seems to indicate that these patterns are part of the author's own peculiar style rather than words borrowed from somebody else. It is true, of course, that they may have initially appeared in some other writing, but the fact that they are repeated a number of times throughout the Book of Mormon leads us to suspect that they have become part of the author's style.

When we find a number of different Book of Mormon writers—e.g., Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Moroni and Mormon—all using many of the same unusual word combinations, we begin to suspect that all these books were actually written by one person. Our research leads us to believe that, notwithstanding the plagiarism from the Bible and other sources, one author can still be identified throughout the entire Book of Mormon.

While the BYU researchers would have us believe that Joseph Smith had nothing to do with creating the text of the Book of Mormon, our study yielded strong evidence that Smith was indeed the author. Joseph Smith's 1832 account of his early life demonstrates his ability to insert biblical phrases into his narrative the same as was done in

the Book of Mormon.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Mormon opens with this statement: “I, Nephi, having been born **of goodly parents**.” Smith’s own story states: “I was born in the town of Sharon . . . **of goodly parents**.” In Smith’s 1832 account he speaks of “**the inhabitants of the earth**.”<sup>2</sup> This biblical phrase is in Daniel 3:5, among other places: “the inhabitants of the earth.” 2 Nephi 28:16 speaks of “**the inhabitants of the earth**” (see also Ether 3:25). The same phrase is used repeatedly in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.<sup>3</sup>

Along with our studies of the Book of Mormon, we studied Joseph Smith’s early revelations and the preface he wrote for the first edition of the Book of Mormon. This preface, no longer printed in the Book of Mormon, explains how God proposed to handle the loss of the first 116 pages of the manuscript. The style of this document also closely resembles the Book of Mormon and Smith’s other writings. For instance, in the preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon we read “I translated, **by the gift and power of God**.” This same phrase is found in the Book of Mormon, Omni 1:20: “and he did interpret the engravings **by the gift and power of God**.” The preface also contains the phrase: “to tempt the Lord their God.” This is similar to Luke 4:12: “shall not tempt the Lord thy God.” This phrase also appears in the *Doctrine and Covenants* 10:15: “to get thee to tempt the Lord thy God.”

Smith’s writings contain many similar phrases as the Book of Mormon. In 2 Nephi 28:22 we read: “And behold, others **he flattereth** away, and telleth them there is no **hell**; . . .”

Then in the *Doctrine and Covenants* 10:26 we read: “And thus **he flattereth** them, and leadeth them along until he drageth their souls down to **hell**; . . .”

A common phrase in both the Book of Mormon and the *Doctrine and Covenants* is “build up my church.” *Doctrine and Covenants* 10:54 states: “build up my church.” In Mormon 3:20 we read: “build up again my church.” In 4 Nephi 1:26 we read: “build up churches.”

Another common phrase is “more particular.”

#### 1 Nephi 19:2

the things which transpired before I made these plates are, of a truth, **more particularly** made mention upon the first plates.

#### 2 Nephi 5:33

And if my people desire to know the **more particular** part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates.

#### Alma 13:19

Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have **more particularly** made mention.

#### Doctrine and Covenants 10:39-40

Yea, and you remember it was said in those writings that a **more particular** account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi.

And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi is **more particular** concerning the things which, in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account—

“Or, in other words” is another common phrase of Smith’s but it is not found in the Bible. This phrase is in the 1830 Book of Mormon Preface, the Book of Mormon, *Doctrine and Covenants* and Smith’s Inspired Version of the Bible and other writings, such as his 1838 Liberty Jail letter published in the *Times and Seasons*.

#### Preface 1830 Book of Mormon

and if I should bring forth the same words again, **or, in other words**, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts . . .

#### 1 Nephi 8:2

And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; **or, in other words**, I have seen a vision.

#### 1 Nephi 10:4

Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, **or, in other words**, a Savior of the world.

#### Mosiah 7:27

he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; **or in other words**, he said that man was created after the image of God, . . .

#### Alma 32:16

Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; **or rather, in other words**, blessed is he . . .

#### 3 Nephi 6:20

and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, **or in other words**, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings.

<sup>1</sup> See *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, ed. Scott Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), pp. 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> See *Doctrine and Covenants* 43:28; 62:5, 71:4.

Doctrine and Covenants 10:17

And if God giveth him power again, or if he translates again, **or, in other words**, if he bringeth forth the same words, behold, we have the same with us, and we have altered them;

Doctrine and Covenants 61:23

let them come not again upon the waters, save it be upon the canal, while journeying unto their homes; **or in other words** they shall not come upon the waters to journey, save upon the canal.

Doctrine and Covenants 95:17

And let the higher part of the inner court be dedicated unto me for the school of mine apostles, saith Son Ahman; **or, in other words**, Alphus; **or, in other words**, Omegus; even Jesus Christ your Lord.

Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 6:29

And unto him who smiteth thee on the cheek, offer also the other; **or, in other words**, it is better to offer the other, than to revile again.

Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 17:37

And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is gathered; **or, in other words**, whithersoever the saints are gathered, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 9:3

And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses **or in other words**, John the Baptist and Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.

Joseph Smith's 1835 Diary, An American Prophet's Record, p. 51

Information was what I most desired at this time and with a fixed determination to obtain it, I called upon the Lord for the first time in the place above stated. **Or in other words**, I made a fruitless attempt to p[r]ay.

Joseph Smith's 1838 Liberty Jail Letter, Times and Seasons, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 83

I say unto you that those, who have thus vilely treated us, shall like Haman be hanged on their own gallows, **or in other words**, shall fall into their own gin and ditch, which they have prepared for us.

A phrase not found in the Bible but used in the Book of Mormon is "immortal soul."

Mosiah 2:38

the demands of divine justice do awaken his **immortal soul** to a lively sense of his own guilt,

Helaman 3:30

And land their souls, yea, their **immortal souls**, at the right hand of God . . .

Smith used this same phrase in his 1832 account of his life.

An American Prophet's Record, p. 4

The all important concerns for the welfare of my **immortal Soul** which led me to searching the scriptures...

"Exceeding great" or "exceedingly great" is a phrase in the Book of Mormon, *Doctrine and Covenants* and Joseph Smith's 1832 diary.

1 Nephi 8:12, 23

And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with **exceedingly great** joy; . . .

And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an **exceedingly great** mist of darkness . . .

Mosiah 4:11

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such **exceedingly great** joy in your souls, . . .

Ether 11:4

And he lived to a good old age, and begat Shiblom; and Shiblom reigned in his stead. And the brother of Shiblom rebelled against him, and there began to be an **exceedingly great** war in all the land.

Moroni 10:11

And to another, **exceedingly great** faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; . . .

Doctrine and Covenants 108:3

and be more careful henceforth in observing your vows, which you have made and do make, and you shall be blessed with **exceeding great** blessings.

Doctrine and Covenants 109:23

And from this place they may bear **exceedingly great** and glorious tidings, in truth . . .

Doctrine and Covenants 127:10

I will say to all the saints, that I desired, with **exceedingly great** desire, to have addressed them . . .

Joseph Smith's 1832 Diary, An American Prophet's Record, p. 5

whose power and intilgence in governing the things which are so **exceeding great** and marvelous . . .

A phrase that is used to the point of monotony in the Book of Mormon is "and it came to pass."<sup>4</sup> In just four verses of Jacob, we find this phrase used four times.

<sup>4</sup> For a good discussion of the phrase "and it came to pass" and the supposed "Hebraisms" in the Book of Mormon, see Edward Ashment's article in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature books, 1993), pp. 329-393.

Jacob 5:4-7

**And it came to pass** that the master of the vineyard went forth, and he saw that his olive-tree . . .

**And it came to pass** that he pruned it, and digged about it, and nourished it . . .

**And it came to pass** that after many days it began to put forth somewhat a little, young and tender branches; . . .

**And it came to pass** that the master of the vineyard saw it, and he said unto his servant: . . .

Besides the many times the phrase is used in Jacob, it is used repeatedly in 1 Nephi, Alma, Mosiah, Ether, Helaman, 3 Nephi, 4 Nephi and Mormon. It is also used repeatedly in the Book of Moses, which Smith composed shortly after finishing the Book of Mormon. Here are three examples.

Book of Moses 7:19-21, Pearl of Great Price

**And it came to pass** in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion.

**And it came to pass** that Enoch talked with the Lord; and he said unto the Lord: . . .

**And it came to pass** that the Lord showed unto Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; . . .

This phrase also appears in Joseph Smith's 1832 diary.

An American Prophet's Record, p. 6

**And it came to pass** when I was seventeen years of age, I called again upon the Lord. . . .

An American Prophet's Record, p. 7

**And it came to pass** that after we had translated 116 pages that he desired to carry them to read . . .

An American Prophet's Record, p. 8

**And it came to pass** after much humility and affliction of soul, I obtained them again . . .

It appears in the Book of Abraham as well. Here is one example.

Abraham 4:19

**And it came to pass** that it was from evening until morning that it was night; **and it came to pass** that it was from morning until evening that it was day; and it was the fourth time.

That Joseph Smith's writings, his revelations, the preface to the Book of Mormon and the ancient Nephite prophets all sound the same leads us to conclude that Joseph Smith was the author of all these documents.

## DOCTRINES MISSING FROM THE BIBLE?

In order to establish a need for additional scripture, the author of the Book of Mormon introduces a prophecy about teachings that would be taken out of the Bible after the death of Christ's apostles. Nephi, approximately 550 B.C., records his conversation with an angel:

And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld that the book [Bible] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the **plainness of the gospel** of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; . . .

And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the foundation of a great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, **they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious**; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. (1 Nephi 13:24, 26)

Further on the angel explained that the record of the Nephites (Book of Mormon) and the record of the Jews (the Bible) would come together in the last days:

These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and **shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away** from them . . . (1 Nephi 13:40)

In 2 Nephi 29:2-3 the Lord further instructed Nephi that the Nephite record would come forth as "a standard unto my people" but the Gentiles will object, saying "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible." To this the Lord responded: "ye need not suppose that it [the Bible] contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written" (2 Nephi 29:10).

According to Mormon history, this prophecy was fulfilled when the angel appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 and announced that he was called to translate the Book of Mormon. He was informed "that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants."<sup>5</sup>

Even though the Book of Mormon was supposed to restore the lost doctrines and covenants of the Bible, it does not contain the unique doctrines of the LDS faith that set it apart from traditional Christianity. Missing is any mention of the need for a marriage for eternity in an LDS temple, baptism and marriage ceremonies for the dead, man's pre-mortal existence, three degrees of glory in heaven, Aaronic

<sup>5</sup> Introduction to the Book of Mormon.

and Melchizedek Priesthood in the Christian era, eternal progression to godhood and the doctrine of plural gods. These doctrines are found in the *Doctrine and Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price*, which are not usually given to the prospective convert until after he has joined the LDS Church.

The Book of Mormon declares that there is only one God (Alma 11:27-39, 44; 2 Nephi 31:21) yet the *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches there are many gods (*D&C* 121:32; 132:18-20, 37).

The Book of Mormon teaches that God is a Spirit and can dwell in one's heart (Alma 18:26-28; 22:8-11; Alma 34:36) yet the *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches that God has a body and therefore can not dwell in the heart (*D&C* 130:22; 130:3).

The Book of Mormon states that death seals man's fate (Mosiah 2:36-39; Alma 34:32-35) yet the *Doctrine and Covenants* holds out the hope that one's place in heaven can be changed through temple rituals for the dead (*D&C* 76:106-112; 88:99).

The Book of Mormon declares that creation was the work of one God (2 Nephi 2:14; Jacob 4:9) yet the *Pearl of Great Price* speaks of a council of gods.<sup>6</sup>

The Book of Mormon says that those who have never heard the gospel are saved without baptism (Moroni 8:22-23; 2 Nephi 9:25-26; Mosiah 15:24-27) yet the *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches the need to do proxy baptism for the dead (*D&C* 128:5, 17-18).

The Book of Mormon teaches there are only two options for man's future: heaven or hell (2 Nephi 28:22; 1 Nephi 15:35; Mosiah 16:11, 27-31; Alma 41:4-8; Alma 42:16) yet the *Doctrine and Covenants* promises some level of heaven to practically everyone (*D&C* 76:43, 70-112).

While there is mention of a temple in the Book of Mormon it seems to have been used for open assembly, not the restricted access of current temples. Also, there is no mention of the temple being used for marriages or ordinances for the dead. In Alma 16:13 we read:

And Alma and Amulek went forth **preaching repentance to the people in their temples**, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews.

<sup>6</sup> *Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham, chapters 4 and 5.

### LDS CLAIMS EXAMINED

#### *Under the Search Light*

Weekly Recorded Messages (801) 485-4262  
(Message is three to five minutes)

In Jacob 1:17 Nephi's brother, Jacob, went into the temple to preach to those who were rebelling against God:

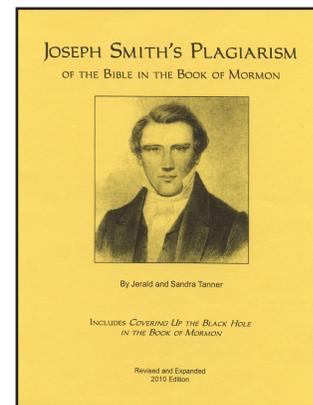
Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words **as I taught them in the temple**, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.

Since the Book of Mormon claims that it is restoring the missing doctrines that were removed from the Bible and that it contains the "fulness of the everlasting Gospel," one is left to wonder why these specific doctrines are not contained in the book? If Lehi and Nephi were God's chosen prophets, why did they not teach these things?

The Book of Mormon is one of the main missionary tools used to introduce people to Mormonism. However, a person investigating the LDS teachings will need to read the other LDS books of scripture to get a complete picture of their actual doctrines.



## JOSEPH SMITH'S PLAGIARISM OF THE BIBLE IN THE BOOK OF MORMON



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## Excerpts from Letters and Emails

**Oct. 2009:** Please keep us on your mailing list for the Salt Lake City Messenger newsletter. Not only does your newsletter contain such great information for my wife and myself, I have been able to share this information with so many others with just a quick visit to a copy machine.

We have lost all respect for the Mormon church, and cutesy little sayings like “You can leave the church, but you can’t leave the church alone” only drive us further. We will leave the church alone when they leave us alone, . . .

**Oct. 2009:** Having been converted to “Mormonism” over four years ago, and having spent countless hours studying the doctrine and history of the Lords only true Church, I am not surprised to hear of your apostasy . . . You have chosen to consecrate your life, time, and talent as an enemy of the Church, the Church which has done more good in this world than all pathetic, heretical ministries, such as your lighthouse ministry . . . could ever do for the cause of Christ. . . .

Although I am very disturbed by the ignorance of people who produce and subscribe to anti-mormon literature, it is my prayer and hope that you may repent and return unto Christ. But I fear that the spirit has ceased to strive with you and you have committed the unpardonable sin, as did your late husband, and you are consumed by that evil spirit who seeks to destroy Gods work. . . . You have brought great shame on the name of Brigham Young, and I know the heavens weep over the loss of one of its daughters, in whom was so much potential. . . . P.S. Don’t look forward to exaltation.

**Nov. 2009:** I wrote to you many months ago from Colorado, and wanted to let you all know how I am doing. I am now starting to overcome some of my anger over all the lies that were told to, by those “fine, upstanding” elders. And I am also so grateful to you for steering me in the direction away from the Mormons. . . . Also, active LDS say we may have left, but we can’t leave it alone, well probably cause we’re really mad that we were lied to for so long, so we feel it is within our right to lash out at em !!

**Nov. 2009:** I retyped my letter [resigning from the LDS Church], notarized it and got it in the mail today. Sent one to my bishop and one to member records in SLC for good measure. My wife and daughter are using the resignation process, they don’t have the same ‘here’s what you can do with your church’ gene that I do. Thank you SO much for your trailblazing and years of hard work and research you and your husband put into UTLM. I owe you a great debt.

**Nov. 2009:** Thank you—Thank you and thank you for your ministry—your courage and dedication to educating us about the truth concerning Mormonism . . . When I was 23 I served a mission to Australia . . . When I was 28 I married a man who had been divorced and had children . . . It was when I was about 40 that I felt like I was not getting spiritually fed by attending Sacrament meetings and so I began my search for something more— . . .

**Nov. 2009:** Do not continue sending your apostate mail to my home. I will be returning it at your expense. It is offensive, untrue, and has cost me more than you can imagine. . . . I’m sure someday you will be sorry for what you have done. By then you will have destroyed many as well as yourself.

**Nov. 2009:** I am a mormon and as a mormon i feel that mormonism must be investigated and understood from both non mormons and mormons and even the ex mormons. Yes a lot of controversy has been written about the TANNERS BOOKS AND WRITINGS. THE TANNERS BOOKS ARE A HISTORY OF MORMONISM OF WHATS HAPPENED IN THE PAST. . . . All religions including mormonism have two sides to history. The good and bad side . . . JERALD AND SANDRA TANNERS MAY BE ANTI MORMONS TO MOST MORMONS BUT FOR ME AS A MORMON THE TANNERS ARE WHAT WE CALL MORMON HISTORIANS.

**Nov. 2009:** In my youth I served a mission in New Zealand and became the special assistant to the mission president. As an adult, however, I long ago stopped believing that angels had ever flown around with metal books in their hands.

I’m basically an agnostic who would like to believe, but down deep I worry that when the old pu[m]p stops it’s all over. Despite having serious religious differences with you, I hope you’ll keep me on your list.

Incidentally, your publication about the Book of Abraham [*Salt Lake City Messenger* # 113] is all that anyone with two brain cells to rub together should need to figure out that Joseph Smith was a con man, an apparently charismatic one, but a con man nevertheless.

**Nov. 2009:** I recently left the LDS Church. I was quite excited to meet you, . . . During our conversation you asked me what percentage of the LDS church I think is active. I didn’t give you a straight answer at the time, but I think there are probably only 3 million to 4 million active believing members [of the approx. 6 million members in the USA]. I also think 5% to 10% of the people on the rolls are actually dead. So, that’s my opinion . . . I wish we knew a straight-forward answer to that question . . . but, of course, some truths are not helpful to the Church.

**Nov. 2009:** A friend recently lent me a copy of the Nov. 2009 Salt Lake City Messenger. WOW!!!!. . .

After several years of living and traveling throughout this great nation of ours a job transfer brough me back to Utah. Since my return I cannot help but feel the constant, daily bombardment of Mormonism. It’s like Chinese water torture.

**Nov. 2009:** Making progress. Sent a copy of my exit letter to friends and family; immediately separated the ‘wheat from the tares’ in my life. Funny, I don’t feel the least inclined to respond in kind, just love my neighbor as myself. I never really knew just how black is white and white is black your thinking can be until I decided to walk away from it.

**Nov. 2009:** I would like to take the time to thank you for all of the further light and knowledge I have recieved from your website. I am now resigned from the Cult. My Wife and I and my four children are out.

**Nov. 2009:** Your reputation precedes you. If you were to read D&C 121 you would see that all this was predicted. I am not yet a great or even good Mormon scholar but I do know this, if you were to use the methods and judgements against the Saviour that you use against Joseph Smith you would have people doubting His (The Saviours) sovereignty. . . . You are obviously very genuine in your desires to help people understand the truth and I respect that, just make sure for your sake it's the whole truth.

**Nov. 2009:** Your work is an excellent expose on how the LDS Church seeks to procure, alter, and control the interpretation of their history. . . . At age 52 I still experience the challenge of overcoming the resonance caused by their ideologies, . . . The final decisive moment was when I realized that the prophets routinely contradict themselves through their doctrines and that it is impossible to discern what is doctrine versus opinion. No amount of praying and good works could resolve the extensive contradictions. We all know why. I found myself required to accept fact, truth, and the light of Christ.

**Dec. 2009:** Please stop criticizing or finding some loop holes in our religion, . . . please, we have our choices in life. you have yours, and we have ours. it has really hurt a lot of people and specially me. so please, if you have something that we don't know regarding about the church, keep it to yourself. . . . I'm not saying that you're wrong and I'm right or vice versa, its just we are not forcing people to believe as [we do]. and we believe in what we teach, I'm just 17, and though my knowledge about life is just not that much but, i know whats wrong and right.

**Dec. 2009:** Please continue your wonderful work. I, too, grew up Mormon and have in the last year parted ways with the church. What a freeing experience but what a disappointment at the same time. Everything I was taught about religion is wrong from what really happened biblically . . . The more I can learn and understand what keeps my family in this trance iof Mormonism the better!

**Dec. 2009:** You was asked to stop . . . posting from your lying trashy web site. You are now included in the investigation of hate crimes and religious hate. Enjoy what you have coming to you. I will not rest until all of you pay for your crimes.

**Dec. 2009:** I would like to start off by saying how much I appreciate all of the hard work and research that has been done by you folks over the years. I was born and raised a mormon, went on a mission, married in the temple you get the idea. I would never have been able to get to the point that I, or my family are now at without your efforts. We have all left Mormonism and are actively pursuing a relationship with the one true god.

**Dec. 2009:** I was born and raise member of the LDS church in Mexico, I even was a missionary, randomly or accide[n]tally i've seen through the internet many of the teachings of Sandra Tanner and others against church doctrines and feel you are right in everything you say, because it does make sense.

**Jan. 2010:** God used your book, Major Problems of Mormonism, back in 1994, to get me out of that cult. This was a necessary step before I came to faith in Christ shortly thereafter.

**Jan. 2010:** Thank you for your faithful ministry through the years. I was a convert to Mormonism that left the church in 1985. Your ministry was one of the first that I came in contact with in those early years that were filled with so much confusion and questions. I now serve the LORD in pastoral ministry . . .

**Jan. 2010:** I know you have no idea who I am, but you had a major impact on my life and my Dads life as well. I was born and raised in the L.D.S Church. Although my parents were very devout Mormons I was more interested in getting into trouble. Finally my life took a turn where I turned to the Lord for help and started attending a Christian Church. A few months later I drove down to visit my parents to tell them the good news. I thought they would be pleased after all of the hardship I put them through in my teenage years. They were not pleased at all! My Dad got mad at me and told me I might as well not go to church at all because I was going to the wrong one. I went home confused and saddened. Not long after this I was introduced to your book "Mormonism Shadow or Reality?" I was skeptical, but I looked up as many references in your book as I could find and found your book to be completely accurate! I am glad to say that I used the material in your book and 10 years later my Dad accepted Jesus as his Lord and had his name removed from the L.D.S records. I am extremely grateful for the effort that you and your husband put into this work of reaching Mormons for Christ.

**Jan. 2010:** I joined the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints without a knowledge much about Joseph Smith at first, has not read the book of Mormon and not seen any lds movies, I joined because I prayed about it and got an answer. . . . Oliver Cowdery did feel away and joined other church but he came back and you did not include that part in your website. I know I'm wasting my time here and I know you are not going to publish this email. My confident is, I know there is more life after this life, I cannot wait to see you up there.

**Feb. 2010:** I want to thank you for helping to bring out Mormon history in it's true light. I had never heard of any Church history other than that which they lead people to believe. I had fallen hook line and sinker. When I invited Christ into my life, the change was truely miraculous.

**Feb. 2010:** Many years ago I asked my good Salt lake friend Jon to pick up some information from Utah Lighthouse. . . . Jon brought the monthly newsletter along with the occassional research by Sandra Tanner to my office so that I wouldn't have to have it delivered to my home. I'll never forget the shock and then the relief as the lies became unraveled before my eyes. My favorite pamphlet was the hieroglyphic translation of ancient funeral texts magically turned into the Book of Abraham. Thanks Gerald and Sandra.

**Feb. 2010:** You complain about being told you are a liar, but you call others liars, perverts, etc. You are a hypocrite. Please repent.

**Feb. 2010:** i joined [the LDS] church in 2003 in france where i'm from, i was baptized in caen, i realize that i don't stand for the doctrines and practices of the church, and i found out recently after many researches and sincere prayers that the book of mormon is fake and the church is an heresy; I believe in the jesus of the holy bible . . .

**Feb. 2010:** I guess i just dont understand why ya'll have a quote that Joseph Smith said on the main page of your website. Is that the motive of your church, to prove the LDS church wrong? Granted your are based in Salt Lake where there are a ton of Mormons but doesnt it seem like a weakness to focus on Mormons and try to discredit them, instead of focusing on how right your church is?

**Feb. 2010:** This is a thank you email that is being sent anonymously . . . I would like to thank the Utah Lighthouse Ministries for doing high-quality scholarship. . . . I am one that works in the physical sciences; good scholarship, reproducibility of results, and the ability to peer review data are high priorities. The vast majority of the works from Utah Lighthouse Ministries have scholarship that is in my opinion par excelance. The book titled "Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?" and the online edition of "The Changing World of Mormonism" are to my liking of other scholarly works such as "Jesus Among Others Gods" by Ravi Zacharias . . .

**Feb. 2010:** I FINALLY got my walking paper, not that I felt I needed it, but it is good to hold in my hands. Looking back, leaving Mormonism looms large in ones mind, even though I had been inactive for 30 years, but now it seems like any sacrifice of family and friends was such a small price to pay. There is a dark as night and noon-day difference in the place Jesus Christ had and now occupies in my life. Read, more like soak up the Bible every single day!! Thanks again, I owe you one Gal!!

**Mar. 2010:** Long story short . . . many years ago while on my mission I read [Mormonism-] Shadow or Reality? and left the LDS church after completing my mission. I followed yours and Jerald's example of asking to be removed from the church rolls. . . . I'm one of that 60% or whomever that don't find another church or follow Christ upon leaving Mormonism. I've not sought a dramatic born-again experience but Shawn's [McCraney, www.bornagainmormon.com] challenge to pray, "Lord, I don't know if you're there or if I even like you, but I want you to enter my heart and guide me to Your Truth" resonates with me so I have done that. Please think of me in your prayers.

**Mar. 2010:** I'm sure you don't remember us, a young LDS couple with four young children in tow. We came to your bookstore looking for answers—and found them! We talked with you a long while, visited your Christian Missionary Alliance Church, . . . It was a hard thing to break with the Mormon church!

Eventually we did, though, and joined the conservative Mennonites. It has been a real blessing. Our eight children are all grown up now—and each one a born-again Christian.

**Mar. 2010:** I have read the changes on the Book of Mormon from the first edition of the 1830 and let me tell you that this changes did not change the doctrine of the everlasting gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Please, read the Book of Mormon and pray about it . . . I know that the Book of Mormon is true, . . . I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that he translated the Book of Mormon by the Gift and Power of the Holy Ghost. I know this and bear record of this in front of Heaven Angels and in Front of God and Jesus Christ that is seeing this email and this is being written upon Heaven.

**Mar. 2010:** Thank you for the DVD you gave me . . . My husband and I resigned our membership from the Mormon church 3/16/10. We are now reading the bible and wanting to know God. We are also watching Heart of The Matter [<http://www.hotm.tv>] and reading your book and articles.

**April 2010:** Although you don't know me, your efforts have been instrumental in my de-conversion from the LDS church and have culminated in my letter of resignation received by the church office building on April 6, 2010. Although I consider myself a non-member, the LDS church will do some internal gymnastics until they send out the final letter.

I sincerely appreciate the efforts that both you and Jerald have undertaken over so many years to expose this situation for what it is. Your persistence has contributed, in part, to my awakening and eventual freedom from a situation that was stifling and unhealthy. I have not yet decided my future path and, in fairness, I have not reconciled certain christian doctrine at this time. I hope this ongoing search allows me arrive at a better place.

**April 2010:** I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for your magnificent video documentaries which can be found on YouTube. My favorite is "The early years of Mormonism" [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmH2CIXRB54>] .

Although I had my name removed from the records of the Mormon church in 1995, I use your video's, pamphlets and books . . . I cannot express to you in words how grateful I am to you (and your deceased husband) for the countless hours that you have spent per leading the very misled Mormon population back to Christ.

**April 2010:** Hello. I am a District Court Judge . . . I write today to thank you for putting *The Changing World of Mormonism* on the web as a research tool for folks like me, non-Mormons, who, as thoughtful Christians (in my case, Episcopalian), want to understand the Mormon faith for a variety of reasons.

**The Salt Lake City Messenger is published twice a year. Please notify us of any address change because the newsletter is not forwarded.**

**April 2010:** I have come to your website through my searches regarding Baptism for the Dead.

I am a member of the United Church of Canada, and my extended family is liberal Protestant with the exception of my Mormon sister, her husband, two daughters . . .

I regard Baptism for the Dead, its related Celestial Kingdom and external polygamous families in heaven as one of the most bizarre beliefs of the Mormon faith. It is so idiotic that I am inclined to ignore it.

However, after my father—a United Church minister—died three years ago, I found out that my sister and her family have baptized my grandparents and other ancestors secretly without notifying the family that this had been done, or requesting their permission as per LDS suggested guidelines. Several of my ancestors were United Church and Methodists ministers and Quaker religious leaders. Their proxy baptism by the Mormon members of our family is highly disrespectful of our ancestors religious traditions and sends the wrong message that the Mormons regard my ancestors religion as being inferior. . . .

I have asked my sister that there be full, plain and true disclosure of the names of the family for whom this temple work had been performed and that the other 100 plus members of my father's family be informed that this practice exists so that they can express their opinion one way or the other about this practice being done to their immediate relatives (my deceased aunts, uncles and cousins) and themselves. So far, my sister has avoided action on this request, constantly referring me to the Mormon prophets which only they recognize as having legitimacy.

I do not accept temple work as having any validity in spiritual terms. I am under no illusion that disclosure will have any material effect on church practice . . . However, I feel that I cannot remain silent about these practices with regard to myself and other family members.



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## MORMON EXPANSION INTO BLACK AFRICA

One year ago, at the April 2009 conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Joseph Sitati became the first black African to be appointed to their top leadership. Sitati, an experienced businessman with a degree in mechanical engineering and a diploma in accounting and finance, was installed in the First Quorum of Seventy, the LDS Church's second most important tier of leaders. Prior to 1978, when the LDS priesthood ban on ordaining blacks was lifted, such an event would have been impossible.

While blacks have always been able to join the LDS Church (and a few blacks were given the priesthood under Joseph Smith<sup>1</sup>), up until June of 1978 the LDS Church would not allow blacks to be ordained to the priesthood, thus barring them from the temple ordinances necessary for one to achieve eternal life—*i.e.*, exaltation.

Brigham Young, second president of the LDS Church, had been very adamant that blacks were not to be given the priesthood until “all the other children of Adam have had the privilege” and they were to be “the last to share the joys of the kingdom of God.”<sup>2</sup> In 1868 an article in the LDS magazine *Juvenile Instructor* declared that “black skin is a mark of the curse of Heaven.”<sup>3</sup> Speaking in 1954, LDS Apostle Mark E. Petersen concluded that due to poor performance in the pre-mortal life some were born black, while the righteous were born white. “These are rewards and punishments,” Petersen declared.<sup>4</sup> In 1963 Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith explained:

According to the doctrine of the church, 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.<sup>5</sup>

1 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Curse of Cain? Racism in the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2004), pp. 37-39.

2 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, p. 143.

3 *Juvenile Instructor* (October 15, 1868): p. 157.

4 Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems as They Affect the Church,” BYU, August 27, 1954. The entire speech is reproduced in Tanners' *Curse of Cain?* pp. 104-113.

5 Photo of Smith's letter is reproduced in Appendix C of *Curse of Cain?*

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After the priesthood ban was lifted, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie advised church employees to

Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation [giving priesthood to blacks]. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world. . . . It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June of this year [1978].<sup>6</sup>

While we applaud the LDS Church's repudiation of their racial teachings, it leaves the question of how much to trust doctrinal statements made by their prophets and apostles. If they were wrong here, where else have they been wrong?

Although the LDS Church is trying to distance itself from its racist past, their scriptures still contain passages equating black or dark skin with a curse from God.<sup>7</sup> While the LDS Church dropped the priesthood ban on blacks, they have never repudiated their underlying concept of why different races and colors exist.

In response to the growing number of converts in Africa, three LDS temples have been opened on that continent: Johannesburg, South Africa; Aba, Nigeria; and Accra, Ghana.

Every April at the general conference of the LDS Church a report is read giving the growth figures for the past year. As of December 2009 Mormonism claimed a world-wide membership of 13,824,854. This included 280,106 convert baptisms, and 119,722 new children of members added to the rolls in 2009.<sup>8</sup> According to the LDS web site, church membership in all of Africa is slightly over 300,000, while the population of Africa is approximately one billion.

The *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 16, 2010, ran an article entitled, "Africa, Caribbean lead way in LDS growth."<sup>9</sup> If one only looks at the percentage of growth it can give a false impression of large numbers. For instance, Uganda was reported to have experienced a 18.7% LDS growth rate. However, the number of members in Uganda at the end of

2009 was only 8,216. Even though Africa was reported to be among the fastest-growing areas of the LDS Church, the numbers are still relatively small compared to the total population. The largest number of Mormons in Africa is in Nigeria, with over 93,000 members.<sup>10</sup> When this number is compared to the estimated total population of Nigeria of 155,000,000, the LDS presence loses its impact.

After the LDS priesthood ban was lifted, missionary efforts in Africa started to bear fruit. However, the growth was not as impressive as they might have expected. There are certain concepts within Mormonism that resonate with Africans (prophets, gifts of the spirit, healings), however this has not lead to wide acceptance. One problem seems to be the LDS Church hierarchal priesthood structure, thus ruling out any local man's ability to claim prophetic utterances. Another problem has been the language barrier. According to *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter, Peggy Stack, "Though many Africans speak 'colonial' languages—English, French, and Portuguese—others speak primarily tribal languages."<sup>11</sup> While many men in the work place speak one of the colonial languages, most women tend to speak their tribal languages. Also, the services in Africa are conducted in the same manner as in America—no drums, dancing, or clapping, and the men are expected to come to church in a white shirt and tie.<sup>12</sup> Philip Jenkins, professor at Pennsylvania State University, commented

Despite what might appear to be vast structural and ideological advantages, Mormonism is doing nothing like as well as Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God, not to mention cases like the Mennonite and Lutheran churches. . . . Based on the standard of many other churches, it simply is not true to describe Mormon growth in Africa as spectacular, amazing, or in any of the other standard superlatives. A balanced comment would place Mormon growth as moderate at best, and limited to some small areas. I see no likelihood that Mormons will account for as much as 1 percent of the continental population, at least in the next century. Quite possible, even as LDS membership in Africa grows in absolute numbers, it will actually decline as a proportion of overall continental population.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in *Black Saints in a White Church*, Jessie Embry (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), pp. 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> See 2 Nephi 5:21; Alma 3:6; Moses 7:8, 22; Abraham 1:21, 27. For a longer list, see "Racial Statements in LDS Scriptures," <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/racialstatements.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/statistical-information> [retrieved April 21, 2010]

<sup>9</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune* (April 16, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/nigeria>

<sup>11</sup> "LDS in Africa: Growing Membership Sees American Church with Unique Vision," *Salt Lake Tribune* (April 4, 1998), as quoted in *Sunstone* (June 1998): p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> "LDS in Africa" *Sunstone* (June 1998): p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Jenkins, "Letting God: Understanding Mormon Growth in Africa," *Journal of Mormon History* (Spring 2009): p. 18.

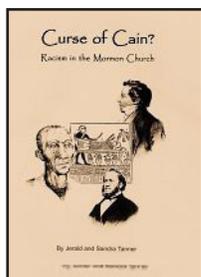
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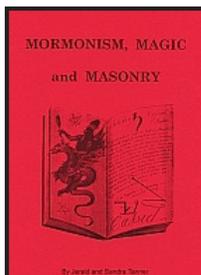
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