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A CES Letter Reply: Faithful Answers For Those Who Doubt

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A Faithful Reply
to the
CES
Letter

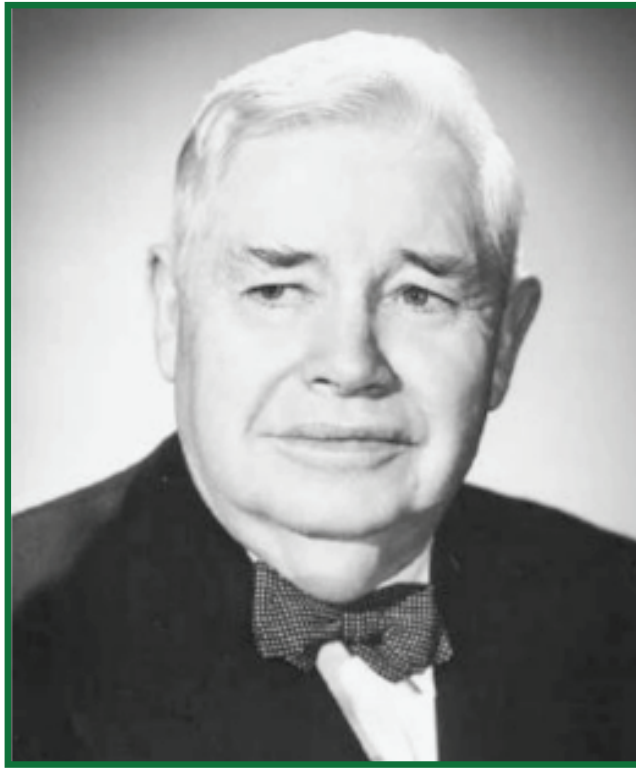
from a Former CES Employee

JIM BENNETT
Writing for
CANONIZER.COM

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*A September, 2018 line-by-line response to the October 2017 edition of
The CES Letter by Jeremy Runnells.*



“If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed.”

PRESIDENT J. REUBEN CLARK



*“The most important decision you can
make right now is what you stand for, Danny.
Goodness... or badness.”*

JUDGE ELIHU SMAILS, “CADDYSHACK”

*To my beautiful young children...
that you may one day understand.*

*To all children - and adults, too -
who need not surrender their faith
in the face of hard questions.*

2018 FOREWORD

Jeremy Runnells does not like me. And, really, can you blame him?



He has called me “suffocatingly conceited” and has made claims that my family shares his loathing. He insists that my lengthy reply to his CES Letter is nothing but jokes and insults, and if you post a link to it on his Facebook page, you will be summarily blocked and banned.

I’m not alone. He has repeatedly mocked BYU professor Daniel Peterson (who he calls “Danny Boy”) at every opportunity, and just recently, he refused to allow Tarik LaCour, a blogger Jeremy derides as a “dishonest Mormon apologist,” to purchase a paperback copy of his letter.

For a man who is furious about a church supposedly filled with insulting apologists that have suppressed opposing points of view, he’s fast and furious with the insults and fiercely intolerant of opposing points of view.

That shouldn’t come as a surprise. Jeremy currently makes his living by promoting and defending his CES Letter, and by all accounts, his CES Letter Foundation was an outstanding career move. There is no way to know for sure how much he is pulling in, as he, like the church he criticizes for lack of transparency, refuses to allow his donors to know how much money he’s making. (Two years ago, my sources told me it was in excess of \$10,000 per

month. Given the upgrades to his site and his whole operation, as well as the continued impact the letter has had in the intervening years, my guess is that figure has probably grown over time.)

One of Jeremy's primary criticisms of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that its defenders have too much invested in their membership to have an open mind. Yet if that's the case, what does that say about Jeremy himself, given that an open mind might result in him having to abandon his current livelihood? As he lashes out at his foes, both real and imaginary, he doesn't seem to realize that by just about every metric he uses to judge the Church he despises, his own CES Letter Foundation fails miserably.

For my part, I have never met Jeremy Runnells, and I have never spoken to him. I would like that to change, because, as my late father used to say, it's pretty hard to hate someone once you get to know them. I do not have any personal animus toward Jeremy, and I went out of my way, in initially crafting my reply, to avoid attacking Jeremy personally, although, in this revision, I must admit I now have considerably less patience for his hypocrisy than I did the first time around. People I love have had their faith destroyed because Jeremy Runnells has passed along arguments he himself hasn't examined and doesn't seem to understand, and this bad information is splitting up families and damaging lives. That does not sit well with me.

Still, I don't know him, and I can't judge his heart. What I do know is that my line-by-line reply has been downloaded and read in excess of 50,000 times since it went online. I also continue to receive kind messages from people who have read it and found it useful.

So, since Jeremy has updated his letter, it's time for me to update my reply.

That's something I've wanted to do for quite some time, as my original PDF is riddled with typos, and there are many things I think I could have said better the first time around. I also want to provide a TL/DR feature that allows for brief summaries that don't require lengthy reading. If you're satisfied with the short reading, you can stop there and skip to the next section.

It will work like this:

SHORT ANSWER:

The CES Letter is bad scholarship making arguments that its own author doesn't seem to understand, citing sources he hasn't bothered to read. Overall, its charges do not stand up to scrutiny, and it is possible to confront each and every one of them head on and come out with a strengthened testimony of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ on the other side.

LONG ANSWER:

Read on...

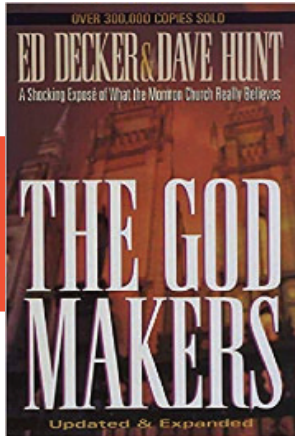
A CES LETTER REPLY

FAITHFUL ANSWERS
FOR THOSE WHO DOUBT

JIM BENNETT

April 2016, Updated September 2018

As a freshman at the University of Southern California, I was first exposed to what is commonly referred to as “anti-Mormon literature.” I read “The Godmakers” from cover to cover, which described a church with a history and doctrines far darker and more sinister than the relatively dull one in which I had spent the entirety of my life. I also ended up listening to a “Christian” radio station which broadcast the rantings of one Walter Martin, who had made a living as an “expert” on “cults” and the “occult,” a world in which Mormons supposedly play a starring role.

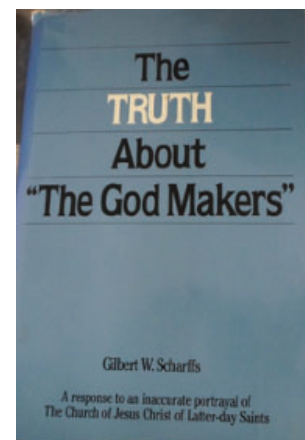


INTRODUCTION

In reviewing the work of these people who had made tearing down my faith their mission, I found myself feeling frustrated, frightened, and powerless – frustrated because I knew that a good chunk of what they were saying was flat-out wrong, frightened because I wasn't sure if the stuff they claimed that I didn't recognize was actually true, and powerless because I was in no position to offer any substantive rebuttal.

I returned home to Salt Lake over Christmas break and, out of the blue, I was given a copy of “The Truth About ‘The Godmakers,’” a book by a man named Gilbert Scharffs that took “The Godmakers” and refuted every charge in it, line by line, with ample documentation. (You can now read the whole book online – no charge.) I later met Mr. Scharffs after I returned home from my missionary service in Scotland, and I thanked him for his thoughtful reply. What struck me, beyond the saliency of his arguments, was the patient, Christlike tone with which he wrote. Where “The Godmakers” had been inflammatory and insulting, Scharffs had been reasonable and kind, with no attempt to attack or defame his supposed enemies personally.

The CES Letter is quite different in tone from “The Godmakers” and my old pal Walter, who were making the case that the Church is a Satanic cult, whereas Jeremy is making a more intellectual case that the Church is little more than a clumsy, obvious, and occasionally well-intended fraud. So while Walter Martin wanted to tear down my faith to make me a Christian, Jeremy Runnells just wants to tear down my faith and leave me comfortless in the theological rubble. It's a far bleaker worldview than the one “The Godmakers” was peddling, and it's also, I think, a far more devastating assault on faith in general.



Runnells insists that he still hasn't received a reply from the CES director to whom his magnum opus was addressed. I'm no CES Director, but I did teach early morning seminary for three years in Westwood, California, in the meetinghouse right behind the Los Angeles Temple. (I did not, however, stay in a Holiday Inn last night.)

I was actually paid to teach seminary, more or less making me a CES employee, although my “salary” was only \$599 per year. Another dollar and I would have had to declare it on my income tax. (As it was, they labeled the check as “reimbursement for expenses,” but, just to be safe, I still paid tithing on it.) This probably means I was more of a CES contractor than a CES employee, but I prefer the title as it is, even if it contains error. That way, my fallibility will not be in question.

There have been many other attempts to respond, most notably from FairMormon, which Runnells dismisses as a group of “unofficial apologists.” I take from this that only a direct response from the Quorum of the Twelve or the First Presidency would satisfy Runnells as an “official apologist” response. Certainly this response is deeply unofficial – I’m the Second Counselor in the Sunday School Presidency, which is the limited extent of my current ecclesiastical authority. So nothing I write here should be interpreted as anything but the extremely fallible opinion of a rank-and-file church member. One wonders, then, why I would bother to write it at all.

To answer that, I would cite the Gilbert Scharffs example, recognizing that he was actually a CES Director, and so his response might rise to the level of a more official response. Regardless of his credentials, I will be forever grateful to Brother Scharffs for offering solid answers to an ignorant college freshman who was looking for them when the “Godmakers” authors were eager to destroy my faith.

Nothing I write here has had any impact on the opinion of Jeremy Runnells – he seems to have made up his mind on this stuff – but if there is a single kid, or adult, who reads this and feels a little less frustrated, frightened, or powerless, then writing this will be worth it.

I’ve tried to avoid contention here. The Book of Mormon quotes Jesus as saying that “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.” (See 3 Nephi 11:29-30)

I’m sad to report that I’ve had my share of contentions on subjects like these, and I have no desire to deliberately reproduce that experience here on anywhere else. I also don’t want this to be interpreted as a personal indictment of Jeremy Runnells. He is a man I have never met and a man I am in no position to judge. I don’t think it’s helpful to demonize those who doubt, or even those who leave. I will therefore attempt to rise to a level of charity, honesty, and compassion in my response, and I will probably, at times, fail miserably, probably because I also have no intention of going easy on that bad arguments that can be found throughout the CES Letter. I hope people do not interpret hostility to bad arguments as personal hostility to the human being who made them.

In fact, I intend to keep things as light and playful as possible, as I don’t see any reason to treat this thing like a funeral. Just because we’re dealing with issues of eternal salvation, damnation, and hellish lakes of fire and brimstone, there’s no reason we can’t have a little fun.

So, some ground rules – Jeremy’s words will be reproduced here in forest green, the color of life. My responses will be in black, the color of darkness.

In addition, much of the info this response has already been on my blog in one form or another. I have freely plagiarized myself without giving myself proper attribution. (In fact, I’ve done it several times already in this foreword, and you probably didn’t even notice!) It saves me the time of rewriting what I’ve already written on a number of these subjects, and I’m nothing if not lazy.

With that inspirational background out of the way, let us begin.

[Name of CES Director Removed],

Thank you for responding to my grandfather's request to answer my concerns and questions and for offering your time with me. I appreciate it.

Well, as is probably clear by this point, I’ve never met you or your grandfather, and I’m not the CES Director who’s name you’ve had removed. (After all these years, we still don’t know who that guy is. Has he come forward? Is he in some kind of witness protection program? Is he hiding in the John Taylor bunker in the Logan Temple?)

I recognize I’m quite presumptuous of me to step into a conversation to which I was not invited, but that’s the kind of guy I am. I thank you for your kind words which I’m pretending are intended for me.

I’m interested in your thoughts and answers as I have been unable to find official answers from the Church for most of these issues. It is my hope that you’re going to have better answers than many of those given by unofficial apologists such as FairMormon and the Neal A . Maxwell Institute (formerly FARMS).

And right here, I want to stop you and challenge some questionable assumptions right at the outset. You label both FAIR and the Maxwell Institute as “unofficial apologists.” This is a charge you repeat several times on your website and in your initial letter. The designation seems appropriate for FAIR, which is an independent organization with no official connection to the Church other than the membership of its researchers, but the Maxwell Institute is funded by BYU, a Church-owned school. Doesn’t that give them any cache of officialdom?

Surely if the official church thought what the Maxwell Institute were saying were nonsense, they’d pull the plug. Are there only 15 “official apologists” whose office gives them the necessary credibility to respond to your questions? Do the Seventies count?

The basic problem here is a fallacious appeal to authority in an attempt to poison the well of anything that FAIR or FARMS may say because it lacks some kind of Church Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. Their arguments, like your arguments, ought to be evaluated solely on their merits rather on the credentials of those making them. Remember, they may be unofficial apologists, but you’re an unofficial critic, too. (If you are official, I’m going to

need to see some paperwork and two forms of ID.)

I'm just going to be straightforward in sharing my concerns. Obviously, I'm a disaffected member who lost his testimony so it's no secret which side I'm on at the moment. All this information is a result of over a year of intense research and an absolute rabid obsession with Joseph Smith and Church history.

Fine by me. I've had my shots.

With this said, I'd be pretty arrogant and ignorant to say that I have all the information and that you don't have answers. Like you, I put my pants on one leg at a time and I see through a glass darkly.

Well, that's nice to know. Pants are good. But if you want to publish the CES Letter in the UK, perhaps you should say "trousers" instead.

You may have new information and/or a new perspective that I may not have heard or considered before. This is why I'm genuinely interested in what your answers and thoughts are to these issues.

I recognize I don't have any new information or/nor a new perspective, which means that you've heard a number of things you've both heard and considered before, many of which come from those unofficial, disqualified sources you previously mentioned. But by the same token, having already read ahead, nothing you've written is anything I hadn't heard or considered before. Yet somehow, the same information that drove you ought of the Church has not damaged, and in many cases has even strengthened, my own personal faith.

That shouldn't come as a surprise to either of us. In the age of the Internet, it's rather foolish to presume that the Church has any capacity to hide any aspect of its practices or history from the world at large, so it always amazes me when people who are disaffected with the Church, as they fixate on something that church does or did that they don't like, act like they've uncovered something nobody else has ever discovered.

This was the case when I had a telephone conversation with a man named Mike Norton, a guy who, by his own admission, has twelve fake temple recommends that he uses to sneak in to temples to film the endowment ceremony and post it on YouTube. He was very friendly at the outset, and he remained friendly even as he launched into a 45-minute diatribe against the church, all of which was stuff that I'd heard before and have talked about on my blog beyond the point of endurance.

Did I know all about the seedy elements of Joseph Smith's polygamy? Well, yes. What about the Kinderhook Plates? Yeah, haven't written about them, but they're no big deal. What about the lack of external evidence for the Book of Mormon? Well, I think there's quite a bit more evidence, both internal and external, than enemies of the church will admit. Didn't get a chance to say any of that, though – he tore through his spiel under the assumption that I'd never heard such things, and I just listened as he recited them as he has likely done dozens, if not hundreds, of times before.

The oddest complaint he had, the only one which I have not, in fact, heard from anyone else, was that Gordon B. Hinckley wasn't a prophet because he didn't act like Moses coming down from Sinai when he went on Larry King's CNN show. I had seen that interview, and I found him pleasant and inspiring, but maybe he should have parted some large body of water or something.



So, to sum up, nothing here is going to be particularly new to either of us. But perhaps it might be helpful to someone else.

I've decided to put down in writing just about all the major concerns that I have. I went through my notes from my past year of research and compiled them together. It doesn't make sense for me to just lay down 5 concerns while also having 20 other concerns that legitimately challenge the truth claims of the LDS Church.

And you have well exceeded 20, although you repeated yourself a number of times. One of the problems with your letter is that you often reframe an accusation against the Church as if it's a new accusation, seemingly in the hopes that the sheer volume of your complaints will bring someone's "shelf" come crashing down. How many times, for instance, do you quote a single hearsay source to discredit the Three Witnesses while ignoring 60+ more that support the claims of the Church? (Spoiler alert: Seven.)

This is also a somewhat disingenuous statement, in that your letter was largely crowdsourced via the [exMormon Forum on Reddit](#). This isn't a compilation of personal notes; it's a large-scale team effort. Perhaps you should give the "scary Internet" a little more credit.

A quick description of my background might help you understand where I'm coming from. I was a very active and fully believing member my entire life up until around the summer of 2012. My grandpa already outlined my life events to you in his email so I think you get the idea that I accepted and embraced Mormonism.

Again, I don't know your grandpa, but I take you at your word. I'll even assume you always had 100% home teaching and that you paid tithing on your gross income and not your net.

In February of 2012, I was reading the news online when I came across the following news article: [Mormonism Besieged by the Modern Age 1](#). In the article was information about a Q&A meeting at Utah State University that LDS Church Historian and General Authority, Elder Marlin K. Jensen, gave in late 2011. He was asked his thoughts regarding the effects of Google on membership and people who are "leaving in droves" over Church history.

That quote from Elder Jensen has infamously made him the most quoted General Authority on anti-Mormon sites and has been the source of much mischief, especially since it's usually cited by people who claim that Elder Jensen himself made the claim that people were "leaving in droves." To cite one example, John Dehlin's website [StayLDS.org](#) links to the article with the following description of Elder Jensen's remarks:

This year, Elder Marlin Jensen, the [Mormon Church's](#) outgoing official historian, acknowledged that members are defecting from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints "in droves" and that the pace is increasing.

The problem is that Elder Jensen said no such thing. The "leaving in droves" premise came from the questioner, not Elder Jensen. Perhaps Elder Jensen should have corrected the questioner in his answer – i.e. "I don't think it's accurate to say people are 'leaving in droves,' buddy. And just how much is a 'drove,' anyway?" – but I'm betting he didn't realize that he would be attributed with the designation of droves from then to forevermore.

It's also dishonest to say, as Dehlin's site does, that Jensen claimed "the pace [of drove leavers] is increasing." He said no such thing. He's later clarified his statement by saying "To say we are experiencing some Titanic-like wave of apostasy is inaccurate." That statement would appear to contradict both the droves and the increasing pace, but it's a statement that's generally given short shrift when critics cite Jensen as proof of the Church's implosion. To your credit, you make the proper attribution of droves to the questioner and not to the General Authority, but since so many others do not, I thought this issue bears mentioning here. It's also worth reading all of Elder Jensen's answer, which, in context, described the great lengths to which the church is now going in order to provide greater access to historical information. You can read the full answer here at this [unofficial apologetic website](#).

Elder Marlin K. Jensen's response:

"Maybe since Kirtland, we've never had a period of – I'll call it apostasy, like we're having now; largely over these issues..."

This truly shocked me. I didn't understand what was going on or why people would leave "over history."

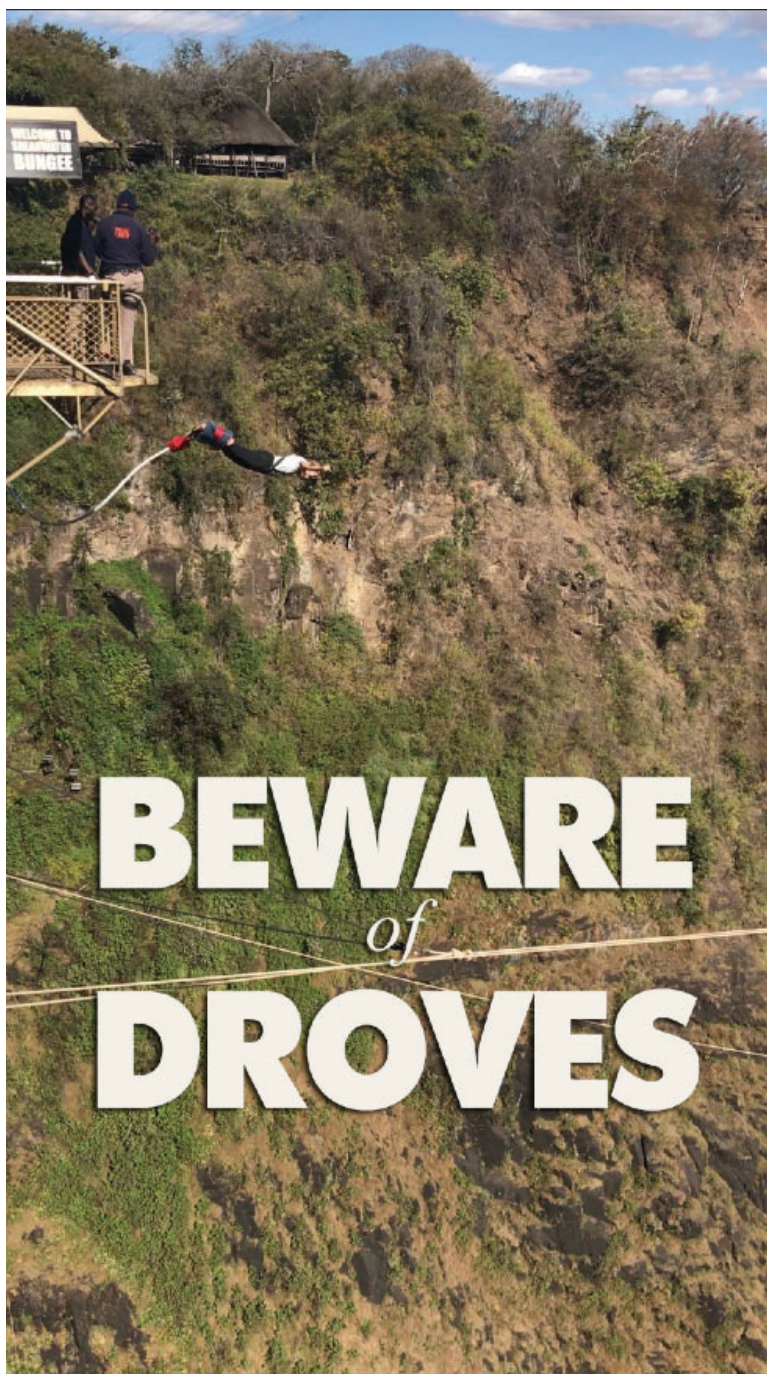
Why is "over history" in quotes? Who are you quoting?

I started doing research and reading books like LDS historian and scholar Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling 2* and many others to try to better understand what was happening.

And good for you! I adore *Rough Stone Rolling* and heartily recommend it to all readers, both LDS and not. A terrific read, thoroughly researched, and one that vastly increased my testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The following issues are among my main concerns.

All right, here we go – incoming droves of stuff on the horizon:



BOOK OF MORMON

Concerns & Questions

“...the Book of Mormon is the keystone of [our] testimony. Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.”

– PRESIDENT EZRA T. BENSON, THE BOOK OF MORMON - KEYSTONE OF OUR RELIGION

“...everything in the Church -everything rises or falls on the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and, by implication, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s account of how it came forth...It sounds like a ‘sudden death’ proposition to me. Either the Book of Mormon is what the Prophet Joseph said it is or this Church and its founder are false, fraudulent, a deception from the first instance onward.”

– ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND, “TRUE OR FALSE”, NEW ERA, JUNE 1995

“The Book of Mormon exists. (Now, that seems fairly fundamental.) That means somebody wrote it... Somebody created it before 1829. You have to explain who wrote it. It’s here. It’s physical. It cannot be waved away.

– SENATOR ROBERT F. BENNETT, FINAL FIRESIDE, APRIL 10, 2016

1. What are 1769 King James Version edition errors doing in the Book of Mormon? A purported ancient text? Errors which are unique to the 1769 edition that Joseph Smith owned?

SHORT ANSWER:

Your premise appears to be incorrect. The sources you cite do not provide evidence of 1769 King James Version edition errors unique to Joseph Smith's copy of the Bible.

LONG ANSWER:

It's amazing to me that this objection is the first on your list, as typically people lead with their strongest argument. I would expect you to come out of the gate with something like polygamy or LDS racism or other things that I, too, find genuinely troubling in many respects. Instead, we begin with consideration of "errors" in a 1769 King James Bible.

But even that requires us to define terms and question assumptions. When you say "errors," for instance, what kind of errors are we talking about? Is this a version of the Bible that claims that the first people on earth really were Adam and Steve? Or that Monty Python's Brian of Nazareth is the true messiah? Or that cannibalism doesn't deserve the bad rap that it gets?

In my previous reply, your question included a link to [this Wikipedia article](#) that referenced "translation errors." Yet an interesting thing has happened in the two years since I first responded to your letter. The article you linked to used to say that the "King James Bible (1769) contains unique translation errors which also occur in the Book of Mormon, implying that the Book of Mormon used the KJV as a source." It's likely that language was the foundation for your question - i.e. Joseph Smith perpetuated errors unique to his copy of the Bible.

The problem is that the old article was incorrect, which means your question was in error, too.

The language in the 2016 version of the Wikipedia article has been replaced by a sentence stating that "[t]he KJV of 1769 contains translation *variations* which also occur in the Book of Mormon." [Emphasis added] The text choices are acceptable variations that adequately represent the meaning of the original, ancient text. Thus they are no longer defined as "errors," and they are certainly not errors unique to the 1769 version of the King James Bible.

That may be why you've abandoned that source and now linked to a lengthy piece by someone named Stan Larson - am I supposed to know who he is? - who is making an argument about Joseph Smith's 3 Nephi account of the Sermon on the Mount. Yet nowhere does Larson ever mention the 1769 edition of the KJV, and he frankly acknowledges that "the Book of Mormon is not a slavish copy of the KJV—there are numerous words deleted,

revised, or added to the text.” Yes, he is making a case critical of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, but it’s quite a different case from the one you reference in your question. So what seems to be happening here is that since your original source was wrong, you have found a different source, but you have not bothered to revise your original charge to reflect the new source.

Right out of the gate, that’s extraordinarily sloppy scholarship. Not a great way to begin.

2. When King James translators were translating the KJV Bible between 1604 and 1611, they would occasionally put in their own words into the text to make the English more readable. We know exactly what these words are because they’re italicized in the KJV Bible. What are these 17th century italicized words doing in the Book of Mormon? Word for word? What does this say about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record?

SHORT ANSWER:

It says absolutely nothing about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record, but it says a great deal about your fundamental misunderstanding of how translation works. Every word a translator uses is “their own words.” Your assumption that there’s some kind of irreducible, one-to-one, singularly correct correlation between words in two different languages makes no sense whatsoever.

LONG ANSWER:

It’s amazing to me The insertions are more than occasional. You see italicized insertions in almost every verse. They’re usually verbs. In many cases, English uses them, and Hebrew does not. Without them, the text isn’t “less readable;” it’s essentially unreadable. Furthermore, without those words, the translation would not reflect the meaning of the original text.

You demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of how the KJV translation was performed to claim that only the italicized words, which are highlighted as an admission that they have no direct Hebrew antecedent, represent a KJV translator’s “own words.” Every word in the KJV represents a translator’s choice for how to best express the original text’s meaning as they understood it. So, really, every single word, italics or no, is a translator “put[ting] in their own words” what they think the original text means.

I saw an interesting example of this in, of all things, the latest Mission Impossible movie, where much of the action takes place in Paris. Tom Cruise ends up injuring an innocent French police officer, and he says to her, in French, “je suis désolée.”

If you put “je suis désolée” into Google Translate, it comes back with “I’m sorry.” But that’s not technically accurate. “Je” means “I,” “suis” means “am,” and “désolée” is the feminine

form of “sorry.” A perfect, word-for-word translation of Tom Cruise’s words would be “I *am* sorry.” But that’s awkward, so Google assumed we’d prefer the contraction instead.

But wait! There’s more!

When the scene was shown in the film, the subtitle came up as “I’m *so* sorry.” If you plug “I’m so sorry” into Google Translate, it offers a translation of “je suis vraiment désolé.” Except “vraiment” translates directly as “truly.” Yet if you stick “je suis vraiment désolé” back into Google translate, it tells you it means “I am *really* sorry,” not “I am *truly* sorry.”

So which is the one true translation?



The answer is all of them. Or none of them. The subtleties of language make perfect translations all but impossible, even in such a simple circumstance as this. So why did the person who wrote the subtitles add a “so” to the English version that wasn’t present in the French?

My guess is that they decided that that’s what Cruise’s character would have said had he been speaking in English, or, more specifically, that’s the best English rendition of how the police officer would have perceived the message. “I’m so sorry” is more intimate and kind than just “I’m sorry,” and it doesn’t have the awkwardness of “I am sorry.” It’s also more sincere than “I am really sorry” and less formal than “I am truly sorry.” It probably comes closest to expressing the communication that took place in that fictional moment.

Although, as a side note, it’s worth mentioning that Tom Cruise’s French pronunciation was atrocious.

Anyway, this is why you can have so many different Bible translations that express similar or close to identical meanings using widely varied vocabulary. That's also why Joseph Smith couldn't have plopped the golden plates into some 19th Century Babelfish to get the results.

This calls for another demonstration.

Here's your Question #2 again:

2. When King James translators were translating the KJV Bible between 1604 and 1611, they would occasionally put in their own words into the text to make the English more readable. We know exactly what these words are because they're italicized in the KJV Bible. What are these 17th century italicized words doing in the Book of Mormon? Word for word? What does this say about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record?

Now here's Question 2 translated into Hebrew via Google Translate:

2. בין 1604 ל KJV כאשר מתרגמים של המלך ג'יימס תרגמו את התנ"ך של 1611- הם היו מכניסים מדי פעם את המילים שלהם לטקסט כדי להפוך את האנגלית לקריא יותר. אנחנו יודעים בדיוק מה המילים האלה כי הם נטויים בתנ"ך מה הם אלה מילים מהמאה ה-17 המופיעה בספר מורמון? מילה במילה? KJV. מה זה אומר על הספר של מורמון להיות שיא עתיק?

Pretty impressive, no? Hey, just for fun, let's take that same text and translate it from Hebrew into Korean. Now it looks like this:

2. k'sr mtrgmym şl hmlk g'yymş trgmw 't htn"k şl KJV byn l 1604 -1611, hm hyw mknysym mdy p'm 't hmylym şlhm ltqst kdy lhpwk 't h'nglyt lqry' ywtr. 'nhnw ywd'ym bdywq mh hmylym h'lh ky hm ntwyym btn"k KJV. mh hm 'lh mylym mh m'h h -17 hmwp'y'h bspr mwrwn? mylh bmylh? migug dalleoe daehan jumun-eun?

Keep in mind that we haven't added any of our own words, so the translation should still be solid. So we can take the Korean version and see how it translates to Bulgarian.

2. K'cp mpprgmim i şmlkg'iyms trgmmt "k" i KJV ot l 1604 -1611, çtttmşmitmtttttatatalatata tatalata KJV. mh hm'lh mylym hm h -17 hmwp'y'h bspr mwrwn? mylh bmylh? мигъг далео дайхан-полунощ?

Here's Bulgarian to Swahili:

2. Mfumo wa upeo na ufuatiliaji wa maagizo ya biashara ya kisheria KJV. Mh hmhh mylym hm h -17 hmwp'y'h bspr

mwrnw? mylh bmylh? Je, ungependa kufanya nini?

And Swahili to Japanese:

2. 法的業務KJVガイドラインの範囲と監視。 Mh hmhh mylym
hnh h -17 hmwp'y'h bspr mwrnw? ミルビー? あなたは何を
したいですか?

And Japanese to French, without adding “je suis désolée” even once:

2. Portée et suivi des lignes directrices de KJV des services
juridiques. Mh hhhh mylym hnh h -17 hmwp'y 'h bspr mwrnw?
Milby? Que veux-tu faire?

Now if the way you have described translation is accurate, we shouldn't have any problem taking this six-time-translated version back into English, because we haven't added any of our own words. Every word should have gone in and out of each of these translations without the addition of italicized nonsense.

Yet when we try to bring it back to its original form, we get this:

2. Scope and Follow-up of KJV Legal Services
Guidelines. Mh hhhh mylym hnh pm -17 hmwp'y 'h bspr
mwrnw? Milby? What do you want to do?

Wow! I knew it would be nonsense, but that exceeded my expectations.(And who's Milby?)



The point is that translation requires judgment and choices on the part of the translator, and it's unlikely that any two translations of any lengths will produce significantly similar, let alone identical, texts.

So when you ask “What does this say about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record?” you’re asking the wrong question. This doesn’t say anything about whether or not the Book of Mormon is an ancient record. The KJV verbiage is considered by most scholars to be a perfectly adequate representation of the original Isaiah text, so if the same original Isaiah text existed on the Small Plates of Nephi, the version in 2 Nephi would also constitute an acceptable rendition of the original author’s intent.

So the better question is the one you never quite ask but which is an unspoken assumption undergirding Questions 1 and 2: – regardless of errors or italics, why is there KJV language in the Book of Mormon at all?

If Joseph Smith’s translation were being performed in the same manner as the KJV translation was performed, then Joseph would have the responsibility to clothe the Hebrew concepts in the English language with his own word choices. And, as I noted above, his choices would not be at all likely to be significantly similar, let alone identical, to a 17th Century translator in Jacobean England. So the logical conclusion is the one your question implies – Joseph was a simple plagiarist.

Except it’s not nearly so simple.

Because the fact is that there are oodles of departures from the King James language in the Book of Mormon. 54 percent of the Isaiah verses in the Book of Mormon are at least slightly different from the KJV and many of them are very difficult to explain if all Joseph was doing was copying from a dusty Bible on the bookshelf. For instance, 2 Nephi 12:16 combines elements from the Septuagint (“upon all the ships of the sea”) and the KJV (“and upon all the ships of Tarshish”) in a way that no other version of Isaiah 2:16 does. Both wouldn’t be there if all Joseph were doing was cutting and pasting.

I don’t know what status you give Hugh Nibley – was he an official or unofficial apologist? He was on the BYU payroll, after all. Regardless of what badge he wore, he clarifies this issue better than I could. I will be quoting from the good Dr. Nibley repeatedly over the course of this reply, so I thought I’d set his words apart in a different color. I chose red, the color of fire, as Nibley’s words are often the crucible in which nonsense goes to die.

And why should anyone quoting the Bible to American readers of 1830 not follow the only version of the Bible known to them?

Actually the Bible passages quoted in the Book of Mormon often differ from the King James Version, but where the latter is correct there is every reason why it should be followed. When Jesus and the Apostles and, for that matter, the Angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in

the New Testament, do they recite from some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century B.C. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament. When "holy men of God" quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing.

We do not claim the King James Version of the Septuagint to be the original scriptures—in fact, nobody on earth today knows where the original scriptures are or what they say. Inspired men have in every age have been content to accept the received version of the people among whom they labored, with the Spirit giving correction where correction was necessary.

We have precious little information about how the process actually worked, but the D&C suggests that it was not a passive exercise on Joseph's part. D&C 9, the only contemporaneous document we have that describes the Book of Mormon translation in any respect, implies that the process required Joseph to "study it out in [his] mind" ([D&C 9:8](#)). This would suggest that it was Joseph's responsibility to clothe the text in language, so his word choices may have influenced the final text in much the same way as any conventional translator's would have.

Yet there is also a growing body of really fascinating research to suggest Joseph was engaged in what some refer to as a "tight" translation that limited his input. Royal Skousen's "[Critical Text Project](#)" demonstrates that what initially seemed like bad grammar turns out to be consistent examples of Early Modern English, which dates from the the century prior to the KJV translation. Certainly Early Modern English would not have been the idiom Joseph Smith or any other 19th Century author would have used in writing an original work, nor is it an idiom that is present in anything else Joseph Smith wrote over the course of his lifetime.

In a tight translation, KJV language becomes far less problematic, as it would suggest that this was the language that the Lord gave Joseph Smith to read aloud to Oliver, and so the Lord, not Joseph, is responsible for the similarities between the two texts. For my part, it makes sense to me that the Lord would provide Joseph language with which he, and most of the Bible-reading world, would be comfortably familiar rather than an entirely different translation of the same material, as the mighty Hugh Nibley has argued.

And again, it's important to note that this material wasn't transcribed by Joseph but by Oliver, and there are plenty of witnesses to the process who insist that Joseph didn't have any manuscript from which to read. There are also sections of the original Book of Mormon manuscript that demonstrate that Oliver was receiving the information from Joseph aurally, not copying out of a book. We'll get to that in a moment.

Back to more of your Question #2, where you quote scriptures to prove your point.

ISAIAH 9:1 (KJV)

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

2 NEPHI 19:1

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

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

We’ve dealt with the italics issue above - all the words are the translators words, Milby, and not just the italicized ones - but there’s absolutely no question that “Red Sea” is a mistake. What’s interesting, though, is that it’s a mistake that severely undermines your first accusation of plagiarism.

After all, this is a mistake that has nothing to do with a 1679 version of the KJV. It is a mistake that is unique to the Book of Mormon. And there’s another mistake in the Book of Mormon with no KJV antecedent that helps to explain what’s going on here.

3 Nephi 25:2 reads, “But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall.” This is identical to Malachi 4:2, except that the word “Son” is used in place of “Sun.” The two words are homophones in English but not similar at all in Hebrew or Egyptian.

Again, it’s a mistake, but it’s also evidence that the Book of Mormon was produced by the very process that Joseph described, with Joseph reading text aloud and Oliver transcribing what he heard. In this instance, Joseph probably said “Sun” and Oliver wrote “Son,” and that was that. (Your favorite “unofficial apologists” at [FAIR](#) describe why this is probably the same reason why the Red Sea makes its erroneous appearance in 2 Nephi 19:1.)

Many who have examined the original Book of Mormon manuscript have concluded from the handwriting that it was written in short bursts, with Oliver transcribing a few sentences, stopping, and then starting again.

From Richard Bushman's Rough Stone Rolling, page 72:

Close scrutiny of the manuscript (by a believing scholar) seems to support transcription. Judging from the way Cowdery wrote down the words, Joseph saw twenty to thirty words at a time, dictated them, and then waited for the next twenty to appear. Difficult names (Zenoch, Amalickiah) were spelled out.

Why would they do this? Nobody else was watching. If this is a fraud, why read out the whole thing in such a painstaking, time-consuming process, especially the words of the King James Bible that they could have been copied using far simpler methods? Isn't this a ridiculously clumsy way to plagiarize? Doesn't it suggest that maybe something else was happening?

Those probably are not the kind of question that interest you, because they don't easily lend themselves to your theory that the Book of Mormon is a transparent fraud. But there is an important question raised by my admission of mistakes in the Book of Mormon text - namely, if this is the word of God brought forth by miraculous means, then why would it have any errors in it at all?

The Book of Mormon itself provides the definitive answer to that question on its very first page. "And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ." Again, that's on the first page. The *first frickin' page*. It's been on the first page since 1830 when the book was originally published. How can anyone claim that the Book of Mormon ought to be inerrant when the Book of Mormon itself has always announced its errancy on its very first page?

Latter-day Saint theology puts the doctrine of agency at the center of our faith. Agency is the one thing God will never interfere with and never deny. Yet agency and infallibility are wholly incompatible, and we live in a fallen, imperfect world. We do not believe in infallible or inerrant prophets; inerrant scripture, or anything produced by mortals that cannot be mistaken. That requires each of us to rely solely on the Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect being to ever walk the earth.

The Book of Mormon draws us closer to God, but it is not God, and we do not worship it. We should not be surprised that human weakness has not been excised from its pages.

MALACHI 3:10 (KJV)

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

3 NEPHI 24:10

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

In the above example, the KJV translators added 7 italicized words to their English translation, which are not found in the source Hebrew manuscripts. Why does the Book of Mormon, which is supposed to have been completed by Moroni over 1,400 years prior, contain the exact identical seven italicized words of 17th century translators?

We've covered this. Just about every verse in Isaiah has these kinds of italicized words, and your citation of them demonstrates a profound ignorance of how conventional translation works. So how does this add to your argument?

But okay, just for funsies, let's take out those seven words. If Joseph had rendered 3 Nephi 24:10 as "... and pour you out a blessing that not enough," which would be the kind of one-to-one, word-for-word translation you seem to be expecting, would you then consider him a prophet? My guess is that you would probably complain that he had offered up a terribly incoherent translation.

And you would be right.

3 . The Book of Mormon includes mistranslated biblical passages that were later changed in Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible. These Book of Mormon verses should match the inspired JST version instead of the incorrect KJV version that Joseph later fixed. A typical example of the differences between the BOM, the KJV, and the JST:

3 NEPHI 13:25-27

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

26: Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

MATTHEW 6:25-27

(From the King James Version Bible – not the JST)

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

26: Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

MATTHEW 6:25-27

(Joseph Smith Translation of the same passages in the LDS Bible)

25: And, again, I say unto you, Go ye into the world, and care not for the world: for the world will hate you, and will persecute you, and will turn you out of their synagogues.

26: Nevertheless, ye shall go forth from house to house, teaching the people; and I will go before you.

27: And your heavenly Father will provide for you, whatsoever things ye need for food, what ye shall eat; and for raiment, what ye shall wear or put on.

Christ's Sermon on the Mount in the Bible and the Book of Mormon are identical. But Joseph Smith later corrected the Bible. In doing so, he also contradicted the same identical Sermon on the Mount passage in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is "the most correct book" and was translated a mere decade before the JST. The Book of Mormon was not corrupted over time and did not need correcting. How is it that the Book of Mormon has the incorrect Sermon on the Mount passage and does not match the correct JST version in the first place?

SHORT ANSWER:

"The most correct book" is a clear admission that the Book of Mormon is not inerrant. In addition, the Book of Mormon account of the Sermon on the Mount is actually significantly different from the King James Version account and entirely consistent with the JST, but you obscure that difference with the ellipsis you use at the beginning of your partial quote of 3 Nephi:25.

LONG ANSWER:

To answer your question, I think we have to define some terms. The first is the idea that the Book of Mormon is "the most correct book." The second is the concept of translation as it specifically relates to the JST. We'll take them both in turn.

The idea of "the most correct book" comes from Joseph Smith's famous statement on the subject, which reads as follows:

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.

Fair enough. But what does that mean, exactly?

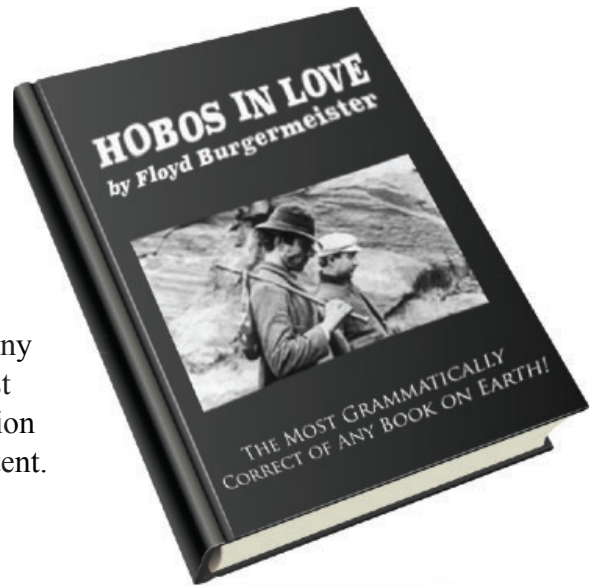
Your question implies that this is somehow a claim of Book of Mormon inerrancy, when, in fact, it's precisely the opposite. If the Book of Mormon is the "most correct" book, that means that all other books, to one extent or another, are less correct, and therefore contain a degree of error. But it also a clear admission that the Book of Mormon itself also contains error. Joseph Smith does not state that the Book of Mormon is "entirely correct," or "always correct," or "the perfectly correct book." He is offering a comparison rather than issuing an ultimatum.

If the Bible and other books were only, say, 2% correct, and the Book of Mormon were 3% correct, it would still be "the most correct" under those circumstances, even if 97% of it were incorrect. (I personally don't think the Bible is only 2% correct or that the Book of Mormon is only 3% correct; I'm pushing this to an extreme to illustrate the point.) The comparison highlights the fact that, while no religious texts are perfect, the Book of Mormon is the best

of the lot.

It's also necessary to define what Joseph Smith, and those who quote him, actually mean when they say the Book of Mormon is "correct" in any respect – least, most, or otherwise. How comprehensively should we interpret that adjective? Is it more correct than, say, Stephen Hawking's "A Brief History of Time" on the subject of black holes? No, the Book of Mormon doesn't even mention black holes, so Hawking's book is demonstrably more scientifically correct than the Book of Mormon. Okay, then is the Book of Mormon the most grammatically correct of any book on earth? It clearly isn't, although I don't know what book would be. ("Hey, Bob, you really ought to read *Hobos in Love* by Floyd Burgermeister. It's a terrible story, but it's the most grammatically correct of any book on earth.")

In the context of the original statement, it's clear Joseph is talking about the "precepts" that the Book of Mormon teaches and nothing else. In other words, if you're looking to learn godly precepts while you're stranded on a desert island, and you're only allowed to have one book with you, then you ought to choose the Book of Mormon, as it's your best bet for drawing closer to God. Science, grammar, spelling, penmanship – the correctness of any of those elements don't come into play at all. To insist that they do is to push a tortured legalistic interpretation of Joseph Smith's simple statement and distort his intent.



Now let's turn our attention to the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible, which is unlike the KJV translation or most other biblical translations in that it was not the transfer of religious text from language to another. Joseph loosely tossed the word "translation" around to describe a number of different processes, some of which were definitionally similar to what the KJV translators did, but many, indeed perhaps most, of which were not. The production of the JST was performed by a "translation" method that was, by all accounts, not that kind of translation at all.

In "translating" the Bible, Joseph read the English KJV text and then recorded revelations that he received in doing so. Large passages of text from the JST have no extant ancient text from which they were derived, nor did Joseph claim to have those ancient texts in his possession, although he did suggest that many such revelations were representations of ancient texts that had been lost. The most obvious example is the Book of Moses, which was revealed to Joseph during his "translation" of Genesis, despite the fact that, as far as we know, he never saw the original ancient text of the Book of Moses. Joseph would refer to this as a translation and insist that what he had written were indeed the words of Moses, but this process did not require him to read ideas in one language and find the proper words for them in English, which is what traditional translators do.

So, equipped with these two freshly-defined premises, let's return to your question. You seem concerned that the JST is "correcting" the KJV and the Book of Mormon, a book Joseph

described as “the most correct.” But there’s absolutely no reason to see the JST language as “correcting” anything in the Book of Mormon. The precepts stated in the B of M version of the Sermon on the Mount are still correct precepts. The JST simply offer additional information that supplements rather than corrects the original information, just as the Book of Moses doesn’t replace Genesis but, rather, adds to it.

Actually, you could make a case that the JST is “correcting” the KJV, since the KJV version offers a general application for the “take no thought what ye shall eat” principle, while the JST suggests that this was advice specific to the apostles, not the general church membership.

But the irony, here, is that this is identical to the precepts put forward in the Book of Mormon.

In your question, you use an ellipsis when you quote 3 Nephi 13:25, which would lead a casual reader to assume that 3 Nephi 13:25 is identical to Matthew 6:25. It isn’t. You left out a very important part.

Here’s 3 Nephi 13:25 in full:

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them: Remember the words which I have spoken. For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

So it turns out the Book of Mormon directs this passage to the apostles and not to the church membership at large and therefore departs from the KJV in precisely the same way the JST does, only it does so using different language. Thus the JST isn’t correcting the Book of Mormon at all; they’re both saying the same thing.

And if you’re going to be intellectually consistent, I don’t think you can complain that the same ideas are being expressed in different language, when your initial objection to the Book of Mormon is its inclusion of identical language to translate the same ancient text.

4. DNA analysis 10 has concluded that Native American Indians do not originate from the Middle East or from Israelites but rather from Asia. Why did the Church change the following section of the introduction page in the 2006 edition 11 Book of Mormon, shortly after the DNA results were released?

“...the Lamanites, and they are the principal ancestors of the American Indians”

to

“...the Lamanites, and they are among the ancestors of the American Indians”

UPDATE: The Church conceded in its January 2014 [Book of Mormon and DNA Studies essay](#) that the majority of Native Americans carry largely Asian DNA . The Church, through

this essay, makes a major shift in narrative from its past dominant narrative and claims of the origins of the Native American Indians.

SHORT ANSWER:

The change in a non-scriptural introduction was made because the new sentence is likely more accurate than the original sentence. If the translated text of the Book of Mormon concedes that it contains errors, surely we shouldn't expect a non-revelatory introduction written well over a century after Joseph Smith's death to be inerrant, should we?

As for DNA, we are both way out of our depth, although it's safe to say that your facile conclusion that all Native Americans are of Asiatic descent is scientifically indefensible.

LONG ANSWER:

I first responded to the CES Letter in 2016, so I presumed the [Church's 2014 DNA essay](#) had been incorporated into that earlier version. I can understand why you ignored it, as it decimates your contention that DNA science has issued a definitive conclusion about Native American ancestry. Anyone who still has questions or concerns about what DNA research has to say about the Book of Mormon ought to read that essay, as it covers topics that neither you nor I have any qualifications to address.

What's important to realize is that science rarely, if ever, reaches a final answer. It is always open to new information, some of which it received in 2013 when a [study determined](#) that some Native Americans do, in fact, have Middle Eastern and European DNA. [Another 2014 study](#) found that "Cherokee Native Americans have Middle Eastern ancestry - ancestry that cannot be accounted for by modern admixture, but which is rooted in the ancient origins of the people."

Indeed, a great deal of scientific information has come out about Native American origins since you first published your letter and the Church published its essay. [The Journal of Nature](#) conducted research which found that the conventional theory about an initial migration across a Bering Strait ice bridge is probably false. As reported in the [LA Times](#), the journal Science discovered evidence of Australian and Micronesian ancestry in Native American DNA and concluded that "that founding migrations occurred in more than one wave."

Certainly none of this proves the Book of Mormon - are Australian Nephites fair dinkum? - but it demonstrates that reaching a sweeping, final



conclusion about Native American origins is, at this point, scientifically impossible.

5. Anachronisms: Horses, cattle, oxen, sheep, swine, goats, elephants, wheels, chariots, wheat, silk, steel, and iron did not exist in pre-Columbian America during Book of Mormon times. Why are these things mentioned in the Book of Mormon as being made available in the Americas between 2200 BC - 421 AD?

Unofficial apologists claim victories in some of these items but closer inspection reveals significant problems. It has been documented that apologists have manipulated wording so that steel is not steel, sheep become never-domesticated bighorn sheep, horses become tapirs, etc.

SHORT ANSWER:

The second paragraph of your question is an acknowledgment that there are fewer Book of Mormon anachronisms now than in the past, which is demonstrably true. That's not how it's supposed to work. Frauds always look clumsier over time, while precisely the opposite has happened with the Book of Mormon.

LONG ANSWER:

You added that second paragraph since the last time I responded, and while it includes a reference to tapirs, I'm glad it doesn't refer to BYU Professor Daniel Peterson as "Tapir Dan," which seems to be the preferred epithet you use when you're not addressing Dr. Peterson as "Danny Boy." For someone who bristles at even the hint of insults and ad hominem attacks, you often seem quite comfortable in slinging them at those with whom you disagree.

Regardless, Paragraph #2 here strikes me as an admission of the weakness of your argument. Because even in the two years since the first version of this reply, evidence has come forward that suggests perhaps these things are not as anachronistic as you claim them to be.

Just this year, carbon dating in Mexico uncovered new evidence for (non-tapir) horses in America at the time of the Nephites. LiDAR technology has uncovered astonishing evidence of massive ancient cities in Guatamala, the area where most believing scholars argue that the Book of Mormon took place. Researchers now insist that these people were far more technologically advanced than previously assumed, which means that many more discoveries likely await.

From my perspective, the value of the LiDAR data cannot be overstated. Modern scientific descriptions of "the ubiquity of defensive walls, ramparts, terraces, and fortresses" almost sound like they were lifted right out of the Book of Alma. LiDAR also has found compelling evidence of animal domestication that could make many more of your charges against Book

of Mormon anachronisms obsolete. Of course, it's impossible to predict the future.

What's remarkable, however, is that the Book of Mormon, as your question's second paragraph concedes, is actually *less* anachronistic than it was when you first wrote your letter.

It's not supposed to work that way.

With the passage of time, frauds look increasingly obvious, and more and more anachronisms pile up. With the Book of Mormon, time has reduced the anachronisms rather than added to them. Long after Joseph Smith and his generation were long gone, scholars have discovered ancient poetic forms and authentic Hebrew and Egyptian names in the Book of Mormon text, and they've even identified specific locations along Lehi's trail. Nahom is a significant problem, indeed, but it's a problem for you, not the "unofficial apologists."



*"And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom."
- 1 Nephi 16:34*

An altar at Nahom, a burial site, discovered after Joseph Smith's death, that is exactly where the Book of Mormon said it would be. A significant problem for unofficial church critics.

My late father tested the waters of unofficial apologetics when he wrote a book a few years ago titled *Leap of Faith: Confronting the Origins of the Book of Mormon*, which was published by Deseret Book. It offers a unique perspective I haven't found from any other source, as it compares and contrasts the Book of Mormon with his firsthand accounts of modern frauds he encountered while working for billionaire Howard Hughes way back in the day.

Dad was the head of PR for Howard Hughes for several years until Hughes died, leaving no will behind. Shortly thereafter, a man named Melvin Dummar plopped a forged Hughes will

onto the front desk of the Church Office Building. It left 1/14th of Hughes's estate to Dummar, a Utah gas station attendant, because Dummar had supposedly picked Hughes up when he was hitchhiking in Las Vegas. (This became the plot of the Oscar-winning movie *Melvin and Howard*.) A lot of people were persuaded at the time that the will was genuine, but two glaring anachronisms doomed Dummar's dreams of inherited wealth.

From *Leap of Faith*, pages 27-28:

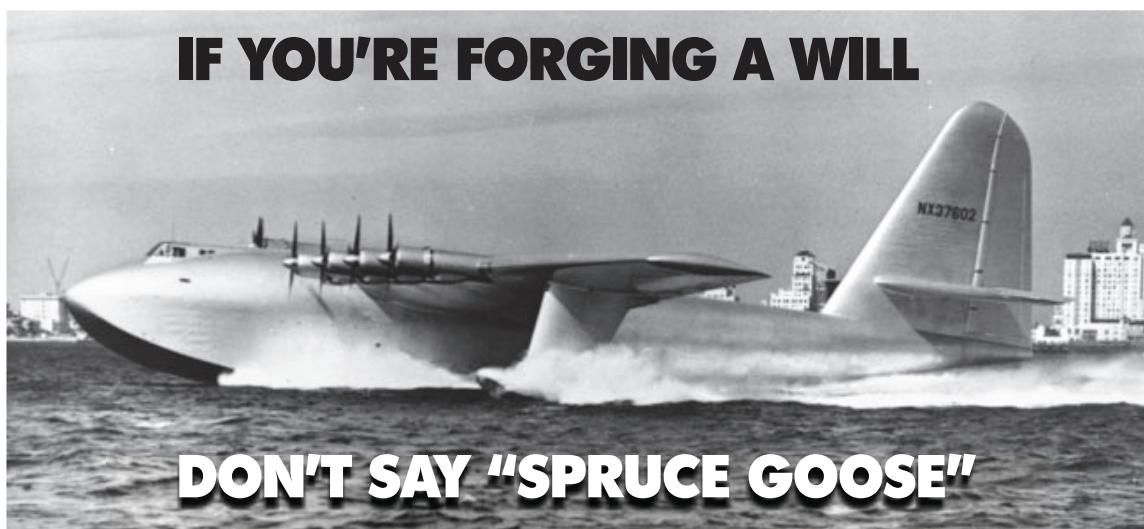
The "will" contained many references to things considered known items of Hughes lore. Two examples:

It named Noah Dietrich as executor of Hughes estate and directed that the "Spruce Goose," Hughes most famous airplane, be given to the City of Long Beach.

Dietrich had been Hughes' Chief Executive for many years and the plane had been housed in a Long Beach hanger for over three decades, so, for many reporters, these two provisions seemed very logical and demonstrated that Hughes had, in fact, written the will. Their stories treated it as genuine.

For those of us who worked for the Hughes companies and knew his history, however, either one of these stipulations demonstrated conclusively that Hughes had not written the will. He and Dietrich had a serious falling out, and Dietrich was fired in a bitter parting. He would have been the last man Hughes would have named to handle his estate.

As for the airplane, neither Hughes nor anyone close to him ever called it the *Spruce Goose*. The title had been made up by the press because the plane was made almost entirely of wood (metal materials were scarce in the Second World War) and Hughes hated the name, considering it a trivializing insult to a serious effort. He would never have written a will referring to the plane as anything but the *Flying Boat* or its formal designation, the HK-1.



These were the biggest mistakes Dummar made, but they were not the only ones. As time passed, the glaring errors in the fraud were transparently obvious. But whereas the Dummar Will is typical of forgeries, the Book of Mormon is anything but.

From Leap of Faith, page 216:

Picture a ledger sheet with the arguments of believers on the right side and of the critics on the left. Label it 1830.

In 1830, all the external evidence was on the left side of the ledger, in favor of the critics. Writing on metal plates? Ridiculous; an obvious invention. Large cities in America, inhabited by the ancestors of the Indians? Nonsense; the Indians are nomadic tribesmen who live in tents...

Think of the same ledger sheet, labeled 2009. Metal plates with writing on them, hidden in the ground for later generations to find? Joseph was right on that one; move it from the left side of the ledger to the right, as a mark in the book's favor. Big cities among the Indians? Whether they were Nephite cities or not, there were clearly big cities with large populations in Meso-America before Columbus... Add to those items the others we have covered in the previous chapters that have come to light in just the last half century, and it is clear that the passage of time has put a good many new items on the right side of the ledger (in favor of the book) and removed some of the old ones on the left (against it).

Such a trend is significant, because truth is the daughter of time. With most forgeries, the farther you get from its date of production, the clumsier it looks. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the farther we get from the date of its production, the better it looks.

Since 2009, when that book was published, there have been more things that have been added to the right side of the ledger. And I'd be willing to bet there will be many more, as well as a decreasing number of anachronisms and an increasing number of "significant problems" for you.

6. Archaeology: There is absolutely no archaeological evidence to directly support the Book of Mormon or the Nephites and Lamanites, who were supposed to have numbered in the millions.

SHORT ANSWER:

Nonsense. There is a great deal of direct Old World archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon, as well as a growing body of archaeological evidence in the New World, too.

LONG ANSWER:

My short answer covers all of your question, but I'm going to need to break the the full text of Question #6 into bite-sized chunks, as your lengthy question raises a host of issues that need to be comprehensively addressed in turn.

One of the biggest canards of critics of the Book of Mormon is that there is “no archaeological evidence” to support it. But the fact of the matter is that's simply not true.

The bulk of the events chronicled in the Book of Mormon take place in the New World, and the debate still rages as to where, specifically, readers ought to place the geographical setting for the Nephite narrative. But there is no debate as to where the book of 1 Nephi takes place. Lehi's family left Jerusalem, traveled on foot across Arabia, stopped at the water, and built a ship to sail across the ocean. These events took place in verifiable locations, and modern discoveries have archaeologically verified the trajectory of Lehi's journey in every respect.

My father wrote about this extensively, and since his passing, I've gotten digital copies of *Leap of Faith*. The following is a lengthy excerpt from the fourth digital draft of his book, so it may vary slightly from the printed edition:

A great deal of new information is now available. The bulk of Nephi's story takes place in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the Red Sea, lands that have not changed appreciably from that time to this, and this area is now more open to Westerners than it has ever been before. That means we can check on the details Nephi mentions, something that [B.H.] Roberts could not do. A few examples:

The presence of water:

Nephi says the family camped in a valley, three days journey from Jerusalem, in which there was a river, flowing continually to the Red Sea. It is from this site that he and his brothers went back to Jerusalem to fetch the Brass Plates from Laban. This statement has raised considerable skepticism because Saudi Arabia, which is presumably where such a camp site would have been, is known as one of the few countries on Earth that has no rivers. For many years, the book's supporters had no answer for this discrepancy. Now, some of them think they have.

Some Western scholars were in Arabia in 1996 on a search for the Biblical Mount Ararat. As they talked with local Arabs about ancient geography, they were referred to an area known as the “Waters of Moses,” a site where water comes out of the ground, reputed to have been the spot where Moses struck a rock with his staff to provide water for the thirsty Israelites in the wilderness. The Americans went there more for curiosity than anything else.

When they arrived in the area, they found, not far from the “Waters of Moses,” a stream running through a valley all the way to the Red Sea. There was every indication that it ran year round, and, like most of the topography of the region, had been there for centuries if not millennia. Those familiar with The Book of Mormon

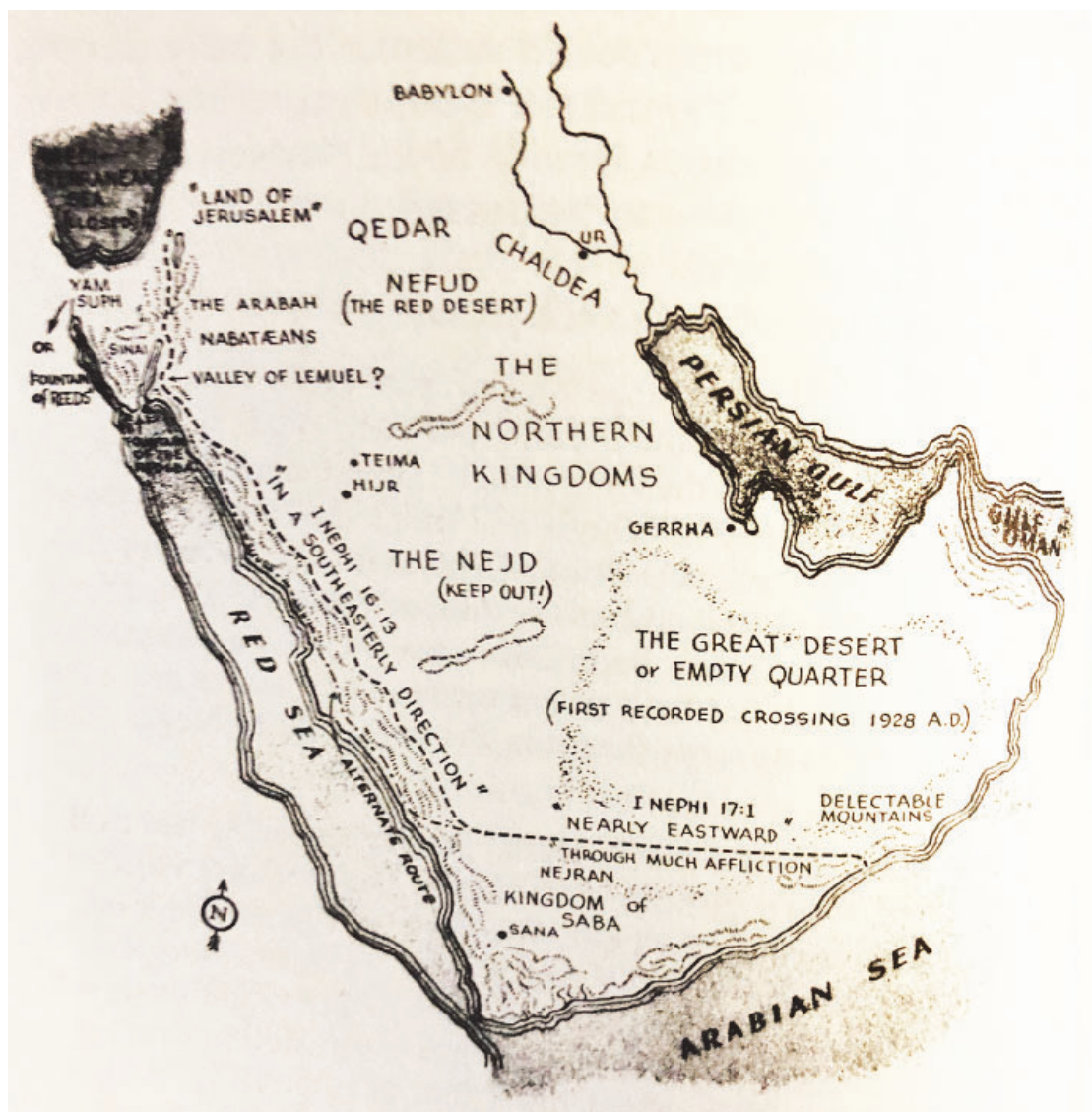
began to wonder if they had, in fact, found the river of which Nephi spoke, even though one would be hard pressed to call this stream a river in terms of the mighty rivers of the world.

The valley through which this river runs is seventy five miles south of Jerusalem, which puts it within the three days journey time that Nephi mentions. It is unknown and unmarked on any Western maps. Whether it is or isn't the place spoken of by Nephi is open to debate, but its discovery demonstrates that Nephi's story is entirely plausible on this point.

And it is in a place that no Westerner knew about before 1996.

Archeology and the route of the march:

Nephi says that the party proceeded in a Southeastern direction. The narrative is specific – very specific – about where they went, in a desert where conditions have not changed over the millennia. Nephi's description is so precise that it is possible to reconstruct a map of the possible wanderings of the family, as follows:



From *Lehi in the Desert* by *Hugh Nibley*, page 112

That means that Nephi's description of the journey can now be tested against current conditions and locations in the area, and it must meet a very rigorous standard with respect to its archeology.

It does.

In just the past few years, believing scholars have traveled along the route suggested by the map and discovered some very interesting things:

The route closely approximates what is known as the "Incense Trail," a route followed in the ancient world by those trading in incense and other goods. One location on that trail was a mining site, from which a great deal of precious metal – primarily gold – was taken. Many archeologists believe that this site was the one known as "King Solomon's Mines."

Nephi said that he made the plates on which his narrative was engraved himself. This stop along the route supposedly followed by Lehi's party is a very logical source from which the gold he used could have come.

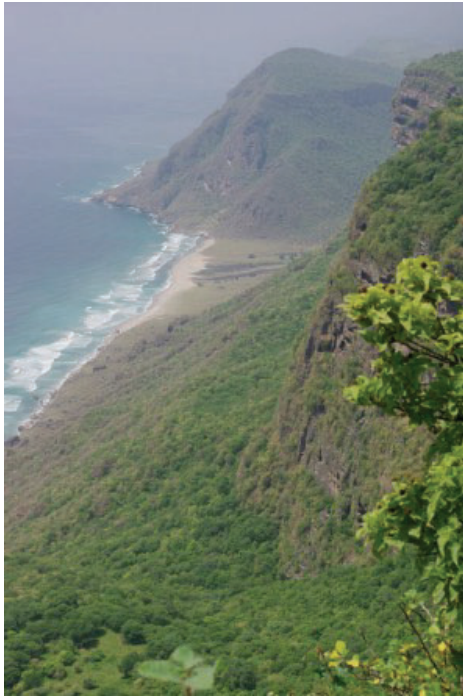
After the mines, the route goes by what was once an important city, one whose ruins have only recently been discovered. Modern archeologists have found that the name of the city, engraved in stone, was NHM, a word written without vowels, as was the Hebrew tradition in the centuries before Christ.

Nephi's narrative records the death of Ishmael and identifies the place where he was buried as "Nahom." Archeologists working in NHM have found a significant burial ground that contained both Egyptian and non-Egyptian graves. Putting name and function together, a believing scholar calls the discovery of NHM/Nahom "an archeological bulls-eye" in support of Nephi's story.

Toward the end of their eight year period in the desert wilderness, the record says that they came to a land so rich with vegetation that they named it "Bountiful." Nephi says that they did this after turning eastward; previously they had been traveling in southeast direction. One Church leader, John A. Widstoe, in a book titled, *Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?* says that the turn eastward occurred at the nineteenth parallel. He quotes Joseph Smith himself as the source of this information.

Turning directly east on the nineteenth parallel would have taken Lehi's family to a geographical location on the Arabian Peninsula that fits Nephi's description of "Bountiful" perfectly, the Qara mountains.

In his book, *Arabia Felix*, Bertram Thomas describes them:



What a glorious place! Mountains three thousand feet high basking above a tropical ocean, their seaward slopes velvety with waving jungle, their roofs fragrant with rolling yellow meadows, beyond which the mountains slope northwards to a red sandstone steppe. . . Great was my delight when in 1928 I suddenly came upon it from out of the arid wastes of the southern borderlands.

Thomas is reported to be one of the first Europeans to see this location, a century after Joseph Smith. I have searched through books on Palestine that were current in the 1820s, to see if Joseph Smith could have had a contemporary source for this knowledge, and I have not been able to find a similar description. The first recorded Western discovery of similar mountains in what is now Oman, on the twenty-fifth parallel, came in 1838, too late to have been available to a forger in 1829.

All of this is important because one of the most persistent criticisms of The Book of Mormon is that it fails the test of archeology; it does not give any recognizable descriptions of landmarks that have been uncovered in pre-Columbian America... A careful reading of it makes it clear that it is never specific enough in its description of places in the Western Hemisphere to justify anyone saying, for certain, “This is a Book of Mormon site.” ... In the Middle East, however, as we have seen, the situation is very different. Whoever wrote the portion of the “book within a book” attributed to Nephi knew the geography of the Arabian Peninsula very well – better than anyone in America in Joseph Smith’s time (or B. H. Roberts’ time, a century later, for that matter.) I have not been able to find any published challenges to believers’ claims regarding the specificity of these locations.

The Old World parallels in 1 Nephi are overwhelming, but in terms of geography, archaeology, and literary references that would have been unavailable in 1829. As Hugh Nibley stated in *Lehi in the Desert*:

“It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith. And whoever would account for the Book of Mormon by any theory suggested so far—save one—must completely rule out the first forty pages.”

It simply will not do to say that there is “absolutely no archaeological evidence” in support of the Book of Mormon. As demonstrated above, in the Old World, there is a great deal of evidence that you never address or even acknowledge in your letter. Why do you ignore it? Don’t the people who donate to your foundation deserve to know all the facts?

I’ll get to the New World evidence as I address the rest of your question.

This is one of the reasons why unofficial apologists have developed the Limited Geography Model (it happened in Central or South America)...

No. The theory that the Book of Mormon took place in Central or South America can be documented to have been around since at least 1842, when the Times and Seasons, the Church paper edited by Joseph Smith at the time, published three unsigned editorials detailing Mesoamerican Book of Mormon theories.

Even earlier, in September of 1841, Joseph Smith received a copy of the book titled *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* from a recent convert named John Bernhisel. The prophet then wrote a letter to Bernhisel that said the following (original spelling and punctuation preserved):

I received your kind present by the hand of Er [Elder] Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & developes many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive.

To say that the idea of the Book of Mormon in a Central American setting is a late product of “unofficial apologists” is to ignore the words of the prophet himself.

... and claim that the Hill Cumorah mentioned as the final battle of the Nephites is not in Palmyra, New York but is elsewhere. This is in direct contradiction to what Joseph Smith and other prophets have taught.

It is not, in fact, in direct contradiction to anything Joseph Smith taught. Joseph never made reference to the hill in New York as Cumorah. No identification of the drumlin in New York as Cumorah can be found in the Doctrine and Covenants or any canonized revelation.

Even a cursory reading of the Book of Mormon makes it clear that the Hill Cumorah isn’t the hill in upstate New York where Joseph got the plates. In Mormon 6:6, Mormon states that he “hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, *save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni.*” [Emphasis added.] So the plates Moroni had after the massive bloody battle at Cumorah were specifically *not* plates that had been buried there. Moroni then spends decades wandering with these plates, presumably getting as far away from Cumorah as possible, and then buries them up for Joseph to find in an area far removed the Cumoran carnage.

It is correct to say that many Church leaders have equated the New York Hill with Cumorah, but the Church's official position on Book of Mormon geography has always been one of neutrality, and they have scrupulously avoided officially jumping in to the long-running debate over where the Book of Mormon took place.

Now is it true that many – but not all – prophets, apostles, and members have long believed, and many still believe, that the New York hill is the BoM Cumorah. We keep coming back to infallibility and the lack thereof, and so many of your objections are rooted in the idea that if even apostles make mistakes like this, the Church can't be true.

That's not just wrong; it's bad doctrine.

Mormons ought to realize that agency trumps infallibility every single time. In the absence of direct revelation, speculation fills the gaps. There is no direct revelation about the specific whereabouts of any Book of Mormon location, so prophets and anyone else are perfectly capable of acting in good faith and still reaching incorrect conclusions, which seems to be precisely what they did in this instance. Like it or not, that's how agency works. That's mortality. That's life, in and out of the Church.

It also makes little sense in light of the Church's visitor's center near the Hill Cumorah in New York and the annual Church-sponsored Hill Cumorah pageants.

It makes a great deal of sense. It's still the hill where Joseph got the plates, so it's quite significant to Book of Mormon history.

We read about two major war battles that took place at the Hill Cumorah (Ramah to the Jaredites) with deaths numbering in the tens of thousands – the last battle between Lamanites and Nephites around 400 AD claimed at least 230,000 deaths on the Nephite side alone. No bones, hair, chariots, swords, armor, or any other evidence of a battle whatsoever has been found at this site.

None in upstate New York, no, which is not at all surprising, as the Book of Mormon itself makes it crystal clear that that's not where either Cumorah or Ramah actually was.

John E. Clark, director of BYU's archaeological organization, wrote in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 17 :

“In accord with these general observations about New York and Pennsylvania, we come to our principal object – the Hill Cumorah. Archaeologically speaking, it is a clean hill. No artifacts, no walls, no trenches, no arrowheads. The area immediately surrounding the hill is similarly clean. Pre-Columbian people did not settle or build here. This is not the place of Mormon's last stand. We must look elsewhere for that hill.”

And I agree with him. As do a growing number of faithful Church members.

Compare this with the archaeological evidence of other hillside battle sites. Caerau Hillfort, in the Wales capital of Cardiff, was found to have abundant archaeological evidence of inhabitants and weapons of war dating as far back as 3600 BC in the form of stone arrowheads, tools, and pottery.

That's because a battle took place there, and no battle took place at the New York drumlin. Given that the most respected Book of Mormon scholars currently writing agree with you that the New York drumlin wasn't the Book of Mormon Cumorah, I don't understand what you accomplish by belaboring this point.

Compare the absent evidence of remains of Book of Mormon civilizations to the archaeological remains of other past civilizations such as the Roman occupation of Britain and other countries. There are abundant evidences of their presence during the first 400 years AD such as villas, mosaic floors, public baths, armor, weapons, writings, art, pottery, and so on. Even the major road systems used today in some of these occupied countries were built by the Romans. Additionally, there is ample evidence of the Mayan and Aztec civilizations as well as a civilization in current day Texas that dates back at least 15,000 years . Another recent discovery has been made of a 14,000-year-old village in Canada .

There is also, as I noted earlier in discussing the LiDAR data, abundant and growing evidence of a Mesoamerican civilization consistent with Book of Mormon descriptions in an area that is the consensus location among scholars as to where the Book of Mormon took place.

Admittedly, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but where are the Nephite or Lamanite buildings, roads, armors, swords, pottery, art, etc.?

Where indeed? What would Nephite buildings, roads, armors, swords, pottery, art, etc. look like?

You do realize that the Mayan and Aztec civilizations didn't label themselves as such, right? Those titles represent transliterations of ancient pronunciation and symbols that, back when these civilizations were flourishing, probably bore no resemblance to how we reference them in modern English.

What would be the difference, for instance, between a Mayan bowl or a Nephite bowl? What would distinguish a Lamanite brick from an Aztec brick? How many Mayan roads, armors, or swords say "Property of the Mayan" on them? Any cultural impact of a Nephite, Lamanite, or Jaredite civilization would be impossible to verify based on examining ancient artifacts, regardless of how many may have survived.

How can these great civilizations just vanish without a trace?

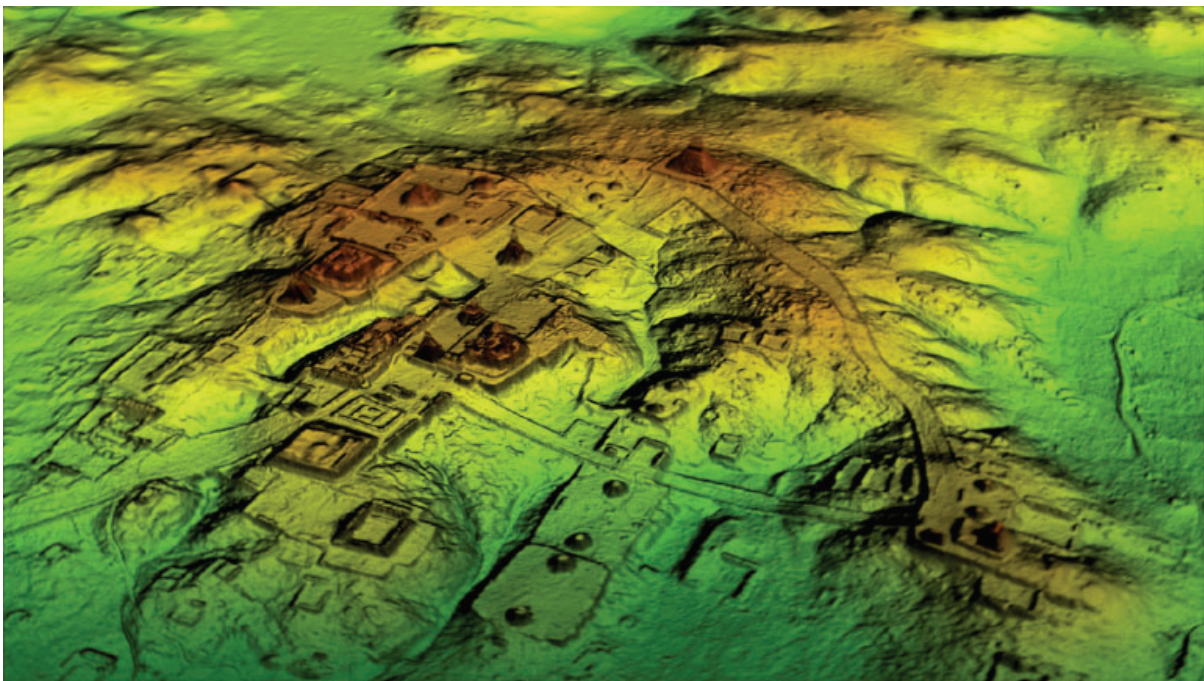
That's a nonsensical question. They left behind far more than a trace. Even since your last CES Letter revision, new evidence has surfaced that has utterly redefined how we understand ancient America.

From National Geographic:

Using a revolutionary technology known as LiDAR (short for “Light Detection And Ranging”), scholars digitally removed the tree canopy from aerial images of the now-unpopulated landscape, revealing the ruins of a sprawling pre-Columbian civilization that was far more complex and interconnected than most Maya specialists had supposed.

“The LiDAR images make it clear that this entire region was a settlement system whose scale and population density had been grossly underestimated,” said Thomas Garrison, an Ithaca College archaeologist and National Geographic Explorer who specializes in using digital technology for archaeological research...

“LiDAR is revolutionizing archaeology the way the Hubble Space Telescope revolutionized astronomy,” said Francisco Estrada-Belli, a Tulane University archaeologist and National Geographic Explorer. “We’ll need 100 years to go through all [the data] and really understand what we’re seeing.”



LiDAR image of the Guatemalan jungle. Vanished without a trace? Please.

Source: <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2018/02/maya-laser-lidar-guatemala-pacunam/>

This is why it's never wise to jump to a final conclusion on scientific matters. The whole field can be rewritten in an instant with a new discovery like this one.

Latter-day Saint Thomas Stuart Ferguson was the founder of BYU's archaeology division (New World Archaeological Foundation). NWAF was financed by the LDS Church. NWAF and Ferguson were tasked by BYU and the Church in the 1950s and 1960s to find archaeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon. After 17 years of diligent effort, this

is what Ferguson wrote in a February 20, 1976 letter about trying to dig up evidence for the Book of Mormon:

“...you can't set Book of Mormon geography down anywhere – because it is fictional and will never meet the requirements of the dirt-archaeology.

I should say – what is in the ground will never conform to what is in the book.”

I had never heard of Thomas Stuart Ferguson before reading your letter, and it's likely that the overwhelming majority of Latter-day Saints have never heard of him, either. He was a lawyer by trade, not a trained archaeologist, anthropologist, or geologist – an amateur, not an academic – and he's at least as “unofficial” in his criticism as the apologists you so readily deride. Your argument is pretty weak if he's the best witness you've got.

Dr. John Sorenson, a man with impeccable academic credentials who worked with Ferguson, had this to say about him:

[Stan] Larson implies that Ferguson was one of the "scholars and intellectuals in the Church" and that "his study" was conducted along the lines of reliable scholarship in the "field of archaeology." Those of us with personal experience with Ferguson and his thinking knew differently. He held an undergraduate law degree but never studied archaeology or related disciplines at a professional level, although he was self-educated in some of the literature of American archaeology. He held a naive view of "proof," perhaps related to his law practice where one either "proved" his case or lost the decision; compare the approach he used in his simplistic lawyerly book *One Fold and One Shepherd*. His associates with scientific training and thus more sophistication in the pitfalls involving intellectual matters could never draw him away from his narrow view of "research." (For example, in April 1953, when he and I did the first archaeological reconnaissance of central Chiapas, which defined the Foundation's work for the next twenty years, his concern was to ask if local people had found any figurines of "horses," rather than to document the scores of sites we discovered and put on record for the first time.) His role in "Mormon scholarship" was largely that of enthusiast and publicist, for which we can be grateful, but he was neither scholar nor analyst.

Ferguson was never an expert on archaeology and the Book of Mormon (let alone on the book of Abraham, about which his knowledge was superficial). He was not one whose careful "study" led him to see greater light, light that would free him from Latter-day Saint dogma, as Larson represents. Instead he was just a layman, initially enthusiastic and hopeful but eventually trapped by his unjustified expectations, flawed logic, limited information, perhaps offended pride, and lack of faith in the tedious research that real scholarship requires. The negative arguments he used against the Latter-day Saint scriptures in his last years display all these weaknesses.

In any case, I'm sorry he lost his faith. Although I wonder if that would have been the case had he lived to see the LiDAR data.

7. Book of Mormon Geography: Many Book of Mormon names and places are strikingly similar to many local names and places of the region where Joseph Smith lived.

SHORT ANSWER:

No, they're not.

LONG ANSWER:

I'm genuinely surprised this section is still in your letter. You have frequently admitted online that this is the weakest of all your arguments, and when you were crowdsourcing the writing of your document on Reddit, you said three years ago that you were "about 90-95% on removing the entire Book of Mormon Geography/Vernal Holley Maps out of the CES Letter."

Looks like the 5% prevailed, which is too bad. Even in a document riddled with sloppy scholarship, what follows is an exceptionally flimsy argument on your part.

But once more unto the breach...

The following two maps show Book of Mormon geography compared to Joseph Smith's geography.



BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY



JOSEPH SMITH'S GEOGRAPHY
(Northeast United States & Southeast Canada)

The first map is the “proposed map,” constructed from internal comparisons in the Book of Mormon.

No, the first map was constructed from comparison with the second map. Or, rather, the first map *is* the second map, only with Book of Mormon names placed in substitution for real-world locations that have similar-sounding names. The problem is that many of the “proposed” first-map Book of Mormon sites directly contradict their actual geographical references in the Book of Mormon, making the first map pretty much worthless.

For example, there’s Jacobsburg down near the southwest corner of the second map. (Everybody wave. Hi, Jacobsburg!) But 3 Nephi 7:12 describes Jacob, a wicked man appointed as the king of a secret combination, as he commands his followers “that they should take their flight into the northernmost part of the land, and there build up unto themselves a kingdom,” a kingdom which is identified as Jacobugath in 3 Nephi 9:9. (“And behold, that great city Jacobugath, which was inhabited by the people of king Jacob, have I caused to be burned with fire because of their sins and their wickedness...”)

In what universe can the lower southwest be considered the “northernmost part of the land?”

Alma 22:28 describes the land of Lehi-Nephi as being “on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore.” Yet there’s Lehigh County, PA, inconveniently on the eastern, not western, seashore, and not really “on the west” of anything.

Perhaps the most brazen error in Map #1 is the proposed location of “Ramah,” which this map equates with a Canadian town using the same name without an H. But Ether 15:11 identifies Ramah as the Jaredite name for “Cumorah,” a location this map pins in Joseph Smith’s hometown of Palmyra. (“Palmyra” sounds very different from “Cumorah,” but we’ll let it slide for now.) How can Ramah/Cumorah be both in Canada and New York at the same time? And weren’t you previously upset about the possibility of two Cumorahs?

Throughout the Book of Mormon we read of such features as “The Narrow Neck of Land” which was a day and a half’s journey (roughly 30 miles) separating two great seas.

Yes, we do. That makes me wonder why your erroneous map doesn’t bother to identify the narrow neck of land. I can see at least two possible candidates for it, but since most members of the Church in the 19th Century believed in a hemispheric model and assumed this had reference to Panama, I’m not quite sure what your point is here.

We also read about the Hill Onidah and the Hill Ramah – all place names in the land of Joseph Smith’s youth.

“All?” You provide only two examples. Don’t you mean “both?” In any case, you can only claim one, as the Rama Indian Reservation didn’t exist until 1836, six years after the Book of Mormon was published. How could that possibly qualify as being in the land of Joseph Smith’s youth?

You grew up in Southern California, and so did I. You were in Whittier; I was in Calabasas. These two cities are separated by a distance of 37 miles. Would you consider Calabasas to be in the land of your youth? Sure, maybe. For my part, I’d probably claim Whittier as one of my youthful lands, as they are both in the SoCal area, although I can’t ever recall spending any time in Whittier as a kid.

But let’s reach out 1,811 miles and see if that description could still apply. See, that’s the distance between Palmyra and the tiny Rama Indian Reservation, and it’s also roughly the distance between Whittier, California and Keokuk, Iowa, which is, apparently, one of the lands of Jeremy Runnells’s youth. And what a youth it must have been! You probably have great memories of all those wonderful Keokuk summers, the joint scout camps with Troop 43 (the Keokuk troop) and maybe kissing a girl for the first time outside Keokuk’s old Iowa Movie Theater at 414 Main Street, Keokuk, IA.

Oh, sorry, that theater was torn down in 1975, years before you were born. But, really, that’s not unlike Joseph Smith stealing the name “Rama” six years before it actually existed.

This gets very silly very quickly.



A picture from the land of Jeremy Runnells’s youth

We read in the Book of Mormon of the city of Teancum named for a warrior named Teancum who helped General Moroni fight in the Land of Desolation. In Joseph's era, an Indian Chief named Tecumseh fought and died near the narrow neck of land in helping the British in the War of 1812. Today, the city Tecumseh (near the narrow neck of land) is named after this Chief.

Today it is, yes. But it wasn't named Tecumseh until 1912, nearly a century after the Book of Mormon was published. Although if you're looking for more information about Teancum, I recommend the highly entertaining and historically accurate film "Javelin Man," written by yours truly and featuring a guest appearance by Former Senator Robert F. Bennett as "Not Gordon B. Hinckley."



We see the Book of Mormon city Kishkumen located near an area named, on modern maps, as Kiskiminetas.

On modern maps, yes. But not any map Joseph Smith could have seen. This area wasn't named Kiskiminetas until a year after the Book of Mormon was published. And, as demonstrated above, the supposed Book of Mormon locations in the map you provided are highly speculative and often demonstrably incorrect.

There are more than a dozen Book of Mormon names that are the same as or nearly the same as modern geographical locations.

Wow. "More than a dozen." Out of 337 total proper names in the text, 188 of which are unique to the Book of Mormon. And given that you consider things like "Jacobsburg" and "Jacobugath" to be "nearly the same," I'm surprised you could only come up with forced parallels for less than 5% of the names in total.

Still, let's take a look at the "more than a dozen."

Actual Place Names	Book of Mormon Place Names
Alma	Alma, Velley of
Antrim	Antum
Antioch	Ani-Anti
Boaz	Boaz
Hellam	Helam
Jacobsburg	Jacobugath
Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Jordan	Jordan
Kishkiminetas	Kishkumen
Lehigh	Lehi
Mantua	Manti
Moraviantown	Morianton
Oneida	Noah, Land of Onidah
Oneida Castle	Onidah, Hill
Rama	Ramah
Ripple Lake	Ripliancum, Waters of Sidom
Shiloh	Shilom
Sherbrooke	Shurr

Source: Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look, Vernal Holley

Yep, that's more than a dozen, all right. 18, to be precise. Although why do you cite "Oneida" twice? Did Joseph really name the "land" of Onidah after the city and the hill after "Oneida Castle?" And since the Book of Mormon never refers to the "Land of Onidah," why do you get to stick that one in there? So really, we're down to 17.

So allow me to reproduce this list with my comments in a third column. (Most of my comments come from information provided by the [unofficial apologists at FAIR you so despise](#), but since the info seems to be accurate on this subject, I see no reason to avoid using it.)

Actual Place Names	Book of Mormon Place Names	Survey Says?
Alma	Alma, Velley of	Bzzzt. Try again. An unincorporated area called Centerville at the time of B of M publication.
Antrim	Antum	Bullseye! Antrim was around in 1830, ripe for the picking for Joseph's plagiarism.
Antioch	Ani-Anti	Bullseye! Although "Antioch" doesn't sound much like "Ani-Anti" to me.
Boaz	Boaz	Hmmm. Boaz is a biblical name. Wouldn't it have been easier for Joseph to find it there?
Hellam	Helam	Bullseye! And a pretty close match, too.
Jacobsburg	Jacobugath	Bzzzt. Try again. Jacobsburg doesn't show up on maps until a year after the Book of Mormon was published.
Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Bzzzt. Try again. Another Biblical name. And this tiny town doesn't show up on many maps then or now, as it's pretty small - just .2 square miles.
Jordan	Jordan	Bzzzt. Try again. Another well-known biblical name. It was also on only a handful of maps in 1830.
Kishkiminetas	Kishkumen	Bzzzt. Try again. Kishkiminetas - no H – got its name after the Book of Mormon was published
Lehigh	Lehi	Hmmm. Lehi is also a biblical name.
Mantua	Manti	Bzzzt. Try again. Mantua Village got its name in 1898.
Moraviantown	Morianton	Bzzzt. Try again. This wasn't a town in 1830.
Oneida	Noah, Land of Onidah	Bullseye! Well done. But you can only use it once.
Oneida Castle	Onidah, Hill	Bzzzt. Try again. Only once, I said!
Rama	Ramah	Bzzzt. Try again. This town didn't exist in 1830.
Ripple Lake	Ripliancum, Waters of Sidom	Hmmm. It existed, yes, but it was and is very tiny and obscure and is usually ignored by most modern maps, let alone those in 1830.
Shiloh	Shilom	Bzzzt. Try again. Shilom is only a "Census Designated Place" used for statistical purposes and is not listed on maps.
Sherbrooke	Shurr	Hmmm. The tiny fishing village of Hyatt's Mill was, indeed, officially renamed "Sherbrooke" in 1819, but most people still called it "Hyatt's Mill" until 1832 when the Brits arrived.

So, to sum up, out of The Book of Mormon's 337 total proper names, you cite 17 that you believe were lifted from locales within a 2,000-mile radius of Joseph's home, yet 9 of those names didn't apply to locations in 1830, and Joseph's knowledge of an additional 3 would have been unlikely, leaving 4 geographical names that are similar, but not identical, to Book of Mormon names.

And thus it is that 1.2% of all Book of Mormon names may or may not have been adapted from precisely four place names out of thousands in a geographical area roughly the size of half of the United States, a tenuous correlation at best that still requires you to think "Ani-Anti" is a clear derivative of "Antioch."

Why are there so many names similar to Book of Mormon names in the region where Joseph Smith lived?

There aren't. A better question might be "why are there so few names that can be rammed into forced parallels?" Because there are only four such names out of 337, and they're taken from an area within a 2,000 mile radius if, applied today, would make Keokuk, Iowa part of "the region where Jeremy Runnells lived" in Whittier, California.

Is this really all just a coincidence?

Pretty much, yeah. That is, if you can call a measly 4 out of 337 anything close to a "coincidence." You really should have dropped this section like you were planning to do.

UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at cesletter.org/maps

Near as I can tell, that's just a collection of videos with the same erroneous info you've provided here. Overall, it's weak sauce and, again, you'd do well to abandon it.

BONUS SECTION: ZOMBIES!

I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to address the issue of Vernal Holley, Daniel Peterson, and Solomon Spaulding. (Also zombies.)

The maps you use in Question #7 come from *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look* by Vernal Holley. In that 1983 treatise, Holley argues that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from a manuscript by Solomon Spaulding. The problem, of course, is that he's wrong.

For any not familiar with the Spaulding Theory, I turn again to my father's *Leap of Faith* book, with words again taken from his digital manuscript:

Sometime prior to 1829, a former Presbyterian Minister named Solomon Spaulding was known to have written a novel called "The Manuscript Found," in which a fictional Indian describes events that took place in America before Columbus.

Joseph's detractors focused on the similarity between this plot line and the story of The Book of Mormon and insisted that Joseph was a simple plagiarist. Somehow, they say, he had come across the Spaulding book and pilfered it for his own purposes.

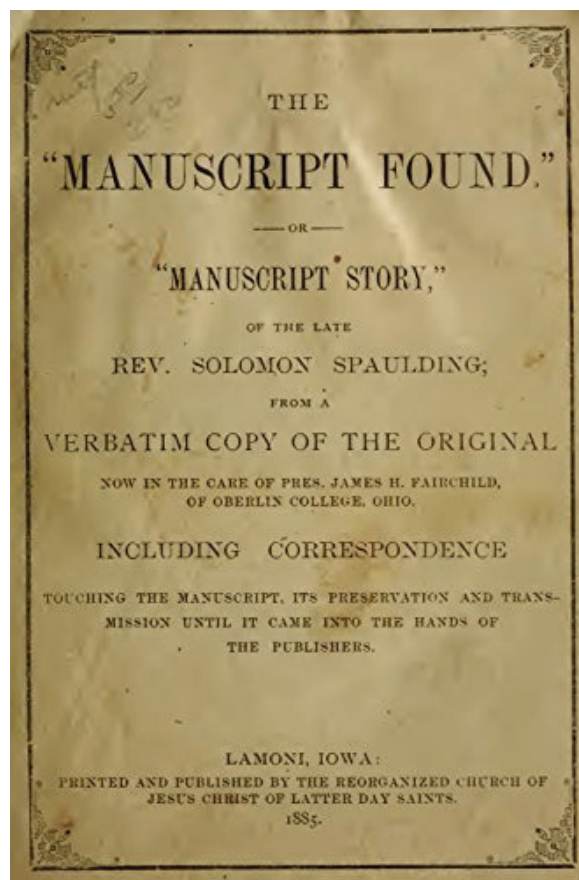
The theory started in 1834 and grew in scope and detail over the years. Its final version was laid out in the book, *New Light on Mormonism*, by Mrs. Ellen E. Dickinson. In the Preface, to establish her credentials, Mrs. Dickinson reports that "the Rev. Solomon Spaulding, the author of the romance called 'The Manuscript Found,' from which the 'Book of Mormon' was formulated, was my mother's uncle by marriage." I assume she is telling her readers that she is a credible source because she is family.

She talks of visiting Spaulding's daughter and only child, who "made a sworn statement as to her father's authorship of the work which has been used with such disastrous effect by crafty men." Her book, she says, "is the only attempt of the Rev. S. Spaulding's relatives to set this matter in its proper light."

In her first chapter she describes Spaulding's novel as "an account of the peopling of America by the lost tribes of Israel, the tribes and their leaders having very singular names; among them Mormon, Moroni, Lamnite and Nephi – names found nowhere else in literature. So much interest was awakened by this romance, and it was such a distinction, at the time, to write a book, that he determined to publish it."

She tells how Spaulding took his novel to a publisher named Patterson. "A young printer, named Sidney Rigdon, was in Mr. Patterson's printing house. . . he had followed Mr. Spaulding from Conneaut . . . and having heard him read 'The Manuscript Found,' . . . devised a treachery toward both author and publisher, which the world has reason to remember. This same Sidney Rigdon figured prominently twenty years later as a preacher among the Mormons."

That's the theory and it has a grain of truth in it - Sidney Rigdon was in fact once employed as a printer. In 1829, he was a minister in another faith, but he converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the first year of its organization and brought a good portion of his congregation with him. He quickly became Joseph's trusted counselor.



If the entire scheme had been pre-arranged between the two of them, it is logical that Sidney would have wanted to wait on the sidelines to see if the book would catch on before associating himself with it. That way, if it failed, it would not embarrass him. However, if it succeeded, he could show up as a convert and then, later on, maybe even supplant the unlearned Joseph as the head of a successful new Church. That he was ambitious for Church position is demonstrated by the fact that he contested the succession issue in the Church after Joseph was killed...It is easy to understand why the Spaulding theory was accepted as the final word on the issue by critics for nearly half a century, appearing as the settled explanation for the book's origin in an article in *Encyclopedia Americana*.

No more. Spaulding's actual manuscript turned up after all, and ruined everything. In 1884 it was found and placed in the library at Oberlin College, Ohio, where it is still available for examination; it has been circulated in printed form and I have gone through it. It bears no resemblance to Book of Mormon at all, with none of the Book of Mormon names in it, as Mrs. Dickenson had claimed, and no religious content whatsoever. The Spaulding theory, once the staple of all commentary on the book offered from outside of the Church, never comes up anymore.

Unfortunately, Dad was incorrect. Almost exactly a century after the Spaulding theory was authoritatively debunked by the appearance of the actual manuscript, it came up again in the form of Vernal Holley's book. The quasi-official apologists at FARMS reviewed the book back in 1989, and they said the following:

When Mormon scholar Lester Bush wrote his historical survey of the Spaulding Theory eleven years ago, he made a comment at the tail end of his paper which bears repeating: "One therefore can reasonably expect that new variants [of the Spaulding theory] will, like the influenza, reemerge every now and then."¹

Vernal Holley's 1983 booklet, *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look*, is one of the more recent strains of this particular virus.

This same viral metaphor may well have colored Daniel Peterson's 2014 presentation about the CES Letter, which has been the main source of ire over on your site in your "debunking" section.

Here's the offending passage from Dr. Peterson's speech:

This is his fourth objection: Book of Mormon Geography, and he uses Vernal Holley, who relied on the Solomon Spaulding theory of the Book of Mormon, which has been exploded, detonated so many times that it's exasperating to see it keep coming back. I've mentioned, I think, here before that Bill Hamblin and I have wanted to do a film that we call tentatively, "Bill and Dan's Excellent Adventure in Anti-Mormon Zombie Hell." The idea is that these just keep coming back. I mean, you shoot them between the eyes and they don't stop because there's no brain in there, right? And, to see the Spaulding manuscript theory just keep coming and coming...

And here's how you characterize these remarks:

Another reference was made about followers of the 'CES Letter' being Zombies or Zombie-like... Peterson compares me and *CES Letter* supporters who support and push information such as the Vernal Holley maps to zombies with no brains... Peterson's ad hominem attack... Unfortunately, Peterson's above ad hominem provides zero substance... I do not welcome outrageous personal ad hominem attacks...

Lest anyone miss what ad hominem attack you're talking about, you titled your piece "A Zombie's Reflections on That Mormon Apologist's Reflections." You also include a goofy picture of the man you derisively call "Tapir Dan" running alongside his favorite non-horse animal away from a horde of the undead, with the caption "CES Letter Zombies."



Ha ha! It's funny because it's wrong. (And aren't those unofficial apologists mean?)

If anyone needed a clear demonstration of how sloppy you are with your scholarship, they need look no further than this insulting post.

Words mean things, and Dr. Peterson's message here is not hard to decipher. The antecedent to "zombie" in Dr. Peterson's speech is the "Solomon Spalding [sic] theory of the Book of Mormon." It's "exasperating to see *it* keep coming back," he says, "it" being the Spaulding theory, not you or your supporters. When he mentions his zombie movie, he talks about it being appropriate because "*these* just keep coming back," with "these" being variations of the Spaulding theory that have been "exploded, detonated so many times," yet, still, all the different permutations of "the Spaulding manuscript theory just keep coming and coming..."

So unless either you or your supporters are the living embodiment of the Solomon Spaulding theory of Book of Mormon authorship, at no point did he call you, or any CES Letter supporters, zombies or zombie-like. Indeed, you do not mention the Spaulding theory in your letter, so there is no possible way this reference could apply to you. Yet your article responding to this supposedly egregious example of name-calling runs almost as long as the entire CES Letter, and its central premise is predicated on a blatant misreading of what Dr. Peterson actually said.

In addition, all your complaints about how viciously we unofficial apologists have treated you ring hollow as you take to message boards to demean and insult everyone who disagrees with you, including ol' "Danny Boy" and, of course, me. (Lest anyone forget, I'm "suffocatingly conceited," and my family hates me.)

You rewrote the CES Letter to get rid of the "tone problems" that included a great deal of insulting language. Perhaps it's time you revisited your "Debunking" section with the same purpose.

HILL CUMORAH

Off the eastern coast of Mozambique in Africa is an island country called "Comoros." Prior to its French occupation in 1841, the islands were known by its Arabic name, "Camora." There is an 1808 map of Africa that refers to the islands as "Camora."



Looks a bit like "Comora" to me, but I'll let it slide. Maybe.

The largest city and capital of Comoros (formerly “Camora”)? Moroni .

Very cool, except Moroni didn’t become the capital of Camora/Comora/Comoros until 1876 and it wasn’t on any of these maps. There’s no contemporaneous source through which Joseph could have found the name Moroni, let alone made a connection between these two names.

“Camora” and settlement “Moroni” were names in pirate and treasure hunting stories involving Captain William Kidd (a pirate and treasure hunter) which many 19th century New Englanders – especially treasure hunters – were familiar with.

No, they weren’t. If they were, those like Grant Palmer and others who lean heavily on the Captain Kidd theory for Moroni and Cumorah’s origins would be able to provide actual references from such stories to back this up, particularly if they were “common names,” which, given the obscurity of the Comora reference and the non-existent pre-1830 references to the Moroni settlement, they clearly were not. Near as I can tell, no such citations exist. (You certainly don’t provide any.) And if these really were common names in popular stories, then why do none of Joseph’s legion of critics notice supposedly obvious Kidd/Cumorah/Moroni connection during Joseph’s lifetime? Why do we have to wait until Grant Palmer comes along in the 21st Century before anyone notices it at all?

In his letters, Kidd himself makes reference to the nearby islands of Madagascar, Johanna, and Mahala, but he says nothing of Camora or Moroni. The best that Palmer can do to tie these names to Kidd and then to Joseph is to point out that Kidd operated “in the vicinity” of these two places, because Kidd makes no direct mention of them. Making the leap from being “in the vicinity” of locations Kidd never mentions to a presumption that the unmentioned locales constituted “common names” in stories about Kidd strains credulity to the breaking point. If Kidd’s exploits truly were the linguistic inspiration for the setting of the last great Nephite/Lamanite battles, we’d be much more likely to be reading about the Hill Mahala than the Hill Cumorah.

Another thought – if we are to presume that Moroni in the Book of Mormon was inspired by the exploits of a glamorous pirate like Captain Kidd, then why is Moroni as un-Kidd-like a figure as it is possible to be? Where’s Moroni’s ship? Where’s his merry band of fellow brigands? Where are all his death-defying scrapes, dashing romances, and fantastical adventures? Moroni is a gloomy loner who wanders the empty landscape for decades without any companions at all and no enemies to face. He’s a great prophet, sure, but he makes for a pretty lousy pirate story.



Moroni: Great Prophet, Lousy Pirate

In fact, the uniform spelling for Hill Cumorah in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon is spelled “Camorah.”

Which, just to nitpick, is different from “Camora,” which is the spelling of the location on the map you provide. Which, to me, still looks like “Comora.”

Pomeroy Tucker was born in Palmyra, New York in 1802, three years before Joseph Smith. He is considered to be a contemporary source. This is what he said about Joseph Smith:

“Joseph ... had learned to read comprehensively ... [reading] works of fiction and records of criminality, such for instance as would be classed with the ‘dime novels’ of the present day. The stories of Stephen Buroughs and Captain Kidd, and the like, presented the highest charms for his expanding mental perceptions.”
– *Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress*, p.17

You feel it necessary to point out that Tucker was born in Palmyra three years before Joseph Smith, but you neglect to mention that “Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress” was published in 1867, twenty-three years after the prophet’s death and roughly fifty years after Joseph was allegedly poring through “works of fiction and records of criminality” with special emphasis on the stories of Buroughs and Kidd. I’m left to wonder how many people from my own childhood about whom I could confidently describe their reading habits with any degree of specificity half a century after the fact.

This would be a challenge for me if I were asked to provide such information about my closest friends, let alone someone like Tucker, who makes it clear that he had nothing but contempt for Joseph. (More on that later.) There’s no plausible reason for Tucker to take such a keen interest in Joseph’s early reading habits.

And, of course, Tucker’s opinion on this subject contradicts the entirety of contemporaneous testimony about Joseph’s literary tastes. His enemies unanimously dismissed him as illiterate and ignorant – as does Tucker elsewhere in his book, despite the obvious contradiction with the tidbit you quote - while even his own mother described him as the one of her children least inclined to reading. If Joseph truly were devouring all the dime novels he could get his hands on in order to accommodate his “expanding mental perceptions,” why did it take nearly five decades for anyone to notice?

Oh, and by the way, why doesn’t *Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress* say a single word about Kidd’s and Joseph’s supposed connection to the Island of Camora and the settlement of Moroni? If these were, indeed, “common names,” you’d think Tucker, of all people, would be the first to cry foul.

Some apologists say that Tucker’s *Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress* is anti-Mormon and thus anything in the book cannot be trusted.

“Some apologists?” Who?

If this is true, why then did LDS scholar and Church History compiler B.H. Roberts quote Tucker for background information on Joseph Smith? Also, FairMormon has an article in which they quote Tucker's book 4 times as support for Joseph, and they even refer to Tucker as an "eyewitness" to Joseph and his family. Is Tucker's peripheral information only useful and accurate when it shows Joseph and the Church in a positive and favorable light?

Given that you haven't provided a link to anyone who insists that nothing in Tucker's book can be trusted, your questions here are problematic. It's a bit like saying, "Some people say Donald Trump eats his own children, but if that's true, then why are so many of them still alive?" No one is under any obligation to respond to such nonsense unless we're told who these "some people" are. Are "some people" the same as "some apologists?" And did Donald Trump eat them?

As for Tucker's credibility, there's no reason to ignore any good information that can be found in his book, but there's every reason to be skeptical of what he says about Joseph Smith.

One more, I invoke the Official Grand Poobah of Quasi-Official Mormon Apologists, none other than the late, great Hugh Nibley himself. I refer you to his penetrating and remarkably funny book *The Myth Makers*, which was reprinted as part of his collection [*Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*](#), available to be read in its entirety online at no charge.

The Myth Makers is written as the transcript of a mock trial, in which a "Chairman" directly questions witnesses against Joseph Smith using their published words as testimony. In the excerpts I quote here, Pomeroy Tucker is coming under withering cross examination. Once again, Nibley's words are in dark red, the color of fire.

Chairman: Now Mr. Tucker, I would like to ask you, first of all, just how well you knew Joseph Smith.

Tucker: Very well indeed: "he is distinctly remembered by me . . . from the age of twelve to twenty years."

Chairman: And Smith was an important figure in Palmyra from the age of twelve to twenty years?

Tucker: Don't make me laugh, sir. "From the age of twelve to twenty years he is distinctly remembered as a dull-eyed, flaxen haired, prevaricating boy—noted only for his indolent and vagabondish character."¹⁰

Chairman: So during all the time you knew him, Smith was noted for one thing only—being a lazy tramp. Was he much of a public figure?

Tucker: On the contrary, "taciturnity was among his characteristic idiosyncrasies, and he seldom spoke to anyone outside of his immediate associates. . . . He nevertheless evidenced the rapid development of a thinking, plodding, evil-brewing mental composition—largely given to inventions of low cunning, schemes of mischief and deception, and false and mysterious pretensions. He . . . was never known to laugh."¹¹

Chairman: From what you say, Mr. Tucker, it is clear that you not only remember Joseph Smith distinctly, but that you knew him very well indeed—perhaps better than anyone else. It is plain that Smith was exceedingly hard to get acquainted with and that he was devilishly secretive, but even if he had been frank and open, the intimate knowledge you profess of his mental composition could only come from the closest association. Now, what was it that induced you, a very hard-working and ambitious young man, to spend your time with a perfectly worthless vagabond four and a half years your junior? You were no child when you first met Smith.

Tucker: You don't have to be a man's close friend to observe his character.

Chairman: According to you, you had to get close to Smith to observe him at all, since he wouldn't even speak to anyone "outside of his associates." And to say immediately what any man "largely" devoted his time and energy to, and what things he "was never known" to do, requires spending a good deal of time with him—unless, of course, your famous firsthand report is only hearsay. Did you think associating with Smith could contribute to your career? Did you perhaps find him an interesting person—even in a bad way?



Nibley: 1, Tucker: 0

Tucker: Of course not. As I told you, he was "noted only for his indolent and vagabondish character." He was "a dull-eyed, flaxen-haired, prevaricating boy" who never spoke to anybody and "was never known to laugh."

Chairman: That answers my question. It would be hard to imagine duller company.

The whole exchange is well worth reading. It also turns out Tucker left Palmyra and lived thirty miles away for nearly four of the eight years during which he supposedly knew Joseph Smith, a fact he conveniently omits from his own dubiously detailed history.

In his book, he invents a great of patently false nonsense, including a massive cave on the outskirts of town in which Joseph hunkered down to translate the Book of Mormon as a cadre of armed guards stood watch, which somehow went unnoticed by anyone else, a fact Tucker attributes to the idea that this bizarre and fascinating spectacle was somehow boring and "scarcely attracted the curiosity of outsiders."

As for your Tucker citations, how can one have an insatiable literary appetite and "expanding mental perceptions" when one is "indolent," "vagabondish," "dull-eyed," and "never known to laugh," as well as taciturn to the point of complete withdrawal from the community at large?

"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 (Captain Kidd), are received by many of our respectable fellow citizens as truths." – Wayne Sentinel, Palmyra, New York, February 16, 1825

I don't understand why you think this quote adds anything to your point. It comes from an unsigned article that makes no reference to Joseph Smith whatsoever. It was not written about him. Rather, it's criticism of an unnamed "respectable gentleman in Tunbridge." What have you got against respectable gentlemen in Tunbridge?

Notice that this is considered "prevalent" and "received by many of our respectable fellow citizens as truths." The above contemporary 1825 Palmyra, New York newspaper quote was not tainted by any desire to damage Joseph Smith.

Of course, because it has nothing to do with Joseph Smith. How could it possibly "damage" him? (Just as relevant: I recently read an article about Sacha Baron Cohen trying to get OJ Simpson to confess to murder. It was not tainted by any desire to damage you or the CES Letter.)

This article provides a snapshot of the worldview of 1825 New England.

If that's true, then it's rather helpful to Joseph Smith. It demonstrates that he wasn't nearly as notorious in 1825 as Tucker and others later claimed. If he were, surely his name would have been all over this, as he would sell far more papers than just another respectable gentleman in Tunbridge. And, curiously, it doesn't seem to mention the supposedly "common names" of Camora or Moroni at all.

The Hill Cumorah and Moroni have absolutely nothing to do with Camora and Moroni from Captain Kidd stories?

Correct, because Camora and Moroni are not in any Captain Kidd stories.

Stories that Joseph and his treasure hunting family and buddies were familiar with?

They were not, because such stories do not exist. There are Captain Kidd stories, but none of them have Camora or Moroni in them. Those names can't be found in any factual accounts about Kidd, either.

The original 1830 Book of Mormon just happens to have the uniform "Camorah" spelling?

Which, again, is different from the spelling on the 1808 map you provide - Camora - and the spelling that actually seems to be on the map - Comora.

This is all just a mere coincidence?

This barely rises to the level of incidence, let alone coincidence.

Maybe that's unfair. Certainly Moroni and Cumorah are far more central to the Book of Mormon narrative than the tiny Canadian town of Rama that didn't yet exist but was still somehow part of the "lands of Joseph's youth." Furthermore, Moroni (the man) and Cumorah are linked together, as are Moroni (the town) and Comoros (the island.) So the possible correlation here is, indeed, stronger and more noteworthy than your youthful adventures in Keokuk.

So I want to take a step back and hypothetically concede your point. That is to say, I want to imagine for a moment that Joseph found a contemporary reference to Comoros and Moroni and then decided to make one a hill and one a warrior/writer/nomad/angel in a fictional magnum religious opus about ancient Americans.

How does that explain anything about how the Book of Mormon came to be?

So much of your criticism of the Book of Mormon strains at gnats and swallows camels. Even if Joseph had lifted all these names, or carelessly copied biblical mistakes, or faked having a bunch of plates and spectacles, there's still the issue of the Book of Mormon itself. It's here. It exists. It had to come from somewhere. To quote my father again:

If we reject the book's own claims, there is no clear indication as to who [wrote the Book of Mormon], but this much is clear - whoever did it had a broad background in ancient cultures and languages, Middle Eastern geography, military strategy and Biblical scholarship, and went to a great deal of painstaking effort. Such a person does not easily come to mind and coming up with a clear explanation of how a forgery this large and this complex might have been done is very difficult.

A handful of plagiarized names and bunch of Old Testament excerpts aren't nearly enough to account for more than 265,000 words of an intergenerational and internally consistent thousand-year history that has endured over a century of scrutiny and still confounds critics and defies easy explanation. You pick two names off a map, and you still have 264,998 words to go.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said it better than I could:

If anyone is foolish enough or misled enough to reject 531 pages of a heretofore unknown text teeming with literary and Semitic complexity without honestly attempting to account for the origin of those pages—especially without accounting for their powerful witness of Jesus Christ and the profound spiritual impact that witness has had on what is now tens of millions of readers—if that is the case, then such a person, elect or otherwise, has been deceived; and if he or she leaves this Church, it must be done by crawling over or under or around the Book of Mormon to make that exit.

UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at cesletter.org/cumorah

Lots more references to Kidd there, and zero links to any stories about Kidd that mention Comoros or Moroni. Kidd without Comoros/Moroni is meaningless.

8. There was a book published in 1823 Vermont entitled *View of the Hebrews* .

SHORT ANSWER:

Yes, I know. I had to read the whole thing in order to respond to your letter. No one should have to read *View of the Hebrews*, because it's an extraordinarily boring and inaccurate book, and it bears only a superficial, cursory resemblance to the Book of Mormon. Anyone who thinks Joseph Smith plagiarized from it has clearly never bothered to read it.

(That includes you, Jeremy.)

LONG ANSWER:

A century after the fact, *View of the Hebrews* was republished by Brigham Young University, which suggests that the Church is not at all concerned if people read *View of the Hebrews* and compare it to the Book of Mormon. (They still have the entire *V of the H* text posted [on the BYU website](#).) Incidentally, Joseph Smith was equally unconcerned, and he even cited *View of the Hebrews* in 1842 as evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It would be a very curious thing, indeed, for a plagiarist to call attention to his source material.

To read a single page of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* is to instantly recognize that the Book of Mormon did not plagiarize from it. In fact, for the benefit of those reading this, let's do precisely that. I'm going to pluck a paragraph at random and reproduce it here and let readers make a determination for themselves.

So here it is: the second paragraph from Chapter Three of *View of the Hebrews*, entitled "The Present State of Judah and Israel." Enjoy:

*The whole present population of the Jews has been calculated at five millions. But the probability is, (as has been thought by good judges,) that they are far more numerous. * One noted character says, that in Poland and part of Turkey, there are at least three millions of this people; and that among them generally, there is an unusual spirit of enquiry relative to Christianity. Mr. Noah says, that in the States of Barbary, their number exceeds seven hundred thousand. Their population in Persia, China, India, and Tartary, is stated (in a report of the London Society for the conversion of the Jews,) to be more than three hundred thousand. In Western Asia the Jews are numerous; and they are found in almost every land.*

In which part of the Book of Mormon can we expect to find Joseph's bastardized version of this?

And lest you think I'm plucking out a section that is unrepresentative of the majority of the *View of the Hebrews* text, feel free to reproduce any other section from *V of the H* and look

for where Joseph adapted it in to his own allegedly derivative work. In addition, *View of the Hebrews* is just over 47,000 words long, compared to over 265,000 words in the Book of Mormon. If Joseph was just ripping off *V of the H*, how is it that Joseph’s version is more than five times longer than his source material? True, Peter Jackson was able to pad out *The Hobbit* into a trilogy of three-hour movies, but this is even more ridiculous than that. (And *The Hobbit* movies were pretty darn ridiculous.)

It’s an apples-to-oranges comparison. *View of the Hebrews* is a polemical essay about Ethan Smith’s theory that the Indians are Israelites. It is not, like the Book of Mormon, a narrative history. It’s a recitation of historical facts and speculation; it has no story at all. In addition, the “evidences” that Ethan Smith provides to link the Indians to Israel are completely ignored in the Book of Mormon. You won’t find chiasmus or much in the way of King James-style English in V of the H. There are no Nephites, Lamanites, Jaredites, or Liahonas, or cureloms or cumoms, or any Book of Mormon proper names or places. Even Captain Kidd is nowhere to be seen.

Below is a chart comparing the *View of the Hebrews* to the Book of Mormon:

Okay, let’s take a look.

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i><u>Online Source</u></i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i><u>Online Source</u></i>
<i>Published</i>	<i>1823, first edition 1825, second edition</i>	<i>1830, first edition</i>
<i>Location</i>	<i>Vermont Poultney, Rutland County</i>	<i>Vermont Sharon, Windsor County</i>
	<i>NOTE: Oliver Cowdery, one of the Book of Mormon witnesses, lived in Poultney when View of the Hebrews was published.</i>	<i>NOTE : Windsor County is adjacent to Rutland County.</i>

NOTE: You are incorrect. The Book of Mormon was first published in Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, not Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont.

Windsor is the county where Joseph Smith was born, 24 years prior to the Book of Mormon’s publication. The fact that Windsor County is adjacent to Rutland County is about as relevant as the fact that Keokuk, Iowa is where the Des Moines River meets the Mississippi.

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i>Online Source</i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
The scattering of Israel	√	√
The restoration of the Ten Tribes	√	√
Hebrews leave the Old World for the New World	√	√
Religion a motivating factor	√	√
Migrations a long journey	√	√
Encounter "seas" of "many waters"	√	√
The Americas an uninhabited land	√	√
Settlers journey northward	√	√
Encounter a valley of a great river	√	√
A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians	√	√
Hebrew the origin of Indian language	√	√
Egyptian hieroglyphics	√	√
Lost Indian records	√ <i>A set of "yellow leaves" buried in Indian hill. Elder B.H. Roberts noted the "leaves" may be gold.</i>	√ <i>Joseph Smith claimed the gold plates were buried in Hill Cumorah</i>
Breastplate, Urim & Thummim	√	√

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i>Online Source</i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.	√ <i>Jesus, son of Ananus, stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people.”</i> <i>- Came to preach for many days</i> <i>- Went upon a wall</i> <i>- Cried with a loud voice</i> <i>- Preached of destruction of Jerusalem</i> <i>- Had stones cast at him</i> <i>(View of Hebrews, p. 20)</i>	√ <i>Samuel the Lamanite stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city” or “this people”.</i> <i>- Came to preach for many days</i> <i>- Went upon a wall</i> <i>- Cried with a loud voice -</i> <i>Preached of destruction of Nephites - Had stones cast at him</i> <i>(Helaman 13-16)</i>
Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records	√	√
The Gospel preached in the Americas	√	√
Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah	√	√
Good and bad are a necessary opposition	√	√
Pride denounced	√	√
Polygamy denounced	√	√
Sacred towers and high places	√	√

	VIEW OF THE HEBREWS <i>Online Source</i>	BOOK OF MORMON <i>Online Source</i>
The destruction of Jerusalem	√	√
Messiah visits the Americas	√ Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded "Mexican Messiah"	√
Idolatry and human sacrifice	√	√
Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous	√	√
Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation	√	√
Government changes from monarchy to republic	√	√
Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person	√	√
Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous	√	√
Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"	√	√
Barbarous exterminate the civilized	√	√
Discusses the United States	√	√
Ethan/Ether	√ Elder B.H. Roberts noted: "Ethan is prominently connected with the recording of the matter in the one case, and Ether in the other."	√

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

Poor B.H. Roberts. You have so woefully misrepresented his work on this subject that it's almost criminal. We'll get to that later.

My initial plan was to make another chart where I add a fourth column describing why these supposed parallels are largely insignificant and, in some cases, ridiculous, but each point requires more text than a small box can allow. So I guess we have to do this the old fashioned way.

A. Both books reference the destruction of Jerusalem

Well, sort of, and one much more than the other. Ethan Smith begins his essay with a discussion of the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, and then proceeds to describe all that immediately followed, lamenting the evils of Thadeus, Felix, Nero, and other Roman notables and quoting all the scripture in which Jesus foretold Jerusalem's sad fate. His entire first chapter is a historical recounting of the fate of Jerusalem after Christ, citing events and figures that play no role in the Book of Mormon whatsoever. More than 1/5th of its entire text is a synopsis and commentary on a slice of Palestinian history completely removed from anything in the Book of Mormon.

In contrast, the Book of Mormon recounts the family of Lehi escaping from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem 670 years earlier and never mentions the Romans at all.

Furthermore, its narrative leaves Jerusalem behind entirely after the 14th of its 531 pages and never goes back. With the exception of Jerusalem and Jesus Himself, none of the people, places, or events referenced in V of H's first 47 pages correlate in any way to the Book of Mormon. In content, length, and literary structure, the treatment of both books of two different historical accounts couldn't be more different.

Again, let's remember what *View of the Hebrews* is. As a treatise postulating an Israeli genealogy for Native Americans, it could not make its case without citing recorded historical events that overlap with events of concern to the Book of Mormon. How many other books have been written about these widely known and researched historical events? Should we assume that all of them have plagiarized each other?

B. Both books reference the Scattering of Israel

This should be considered a subsidiary of the first point, as Ethan Smith describes at great length Israel's scattering in the context of the Roman sacking of Palestine. The Book of Mormon, however, contains no description of any actual scattering and only makes reference to it in passing and in a much different doctrinal context. Ethan Smith focuses exclusively on the Lost Ten Tribes, which get a few passing mentions but don't really figure into the Book of Mormon narrative at all.

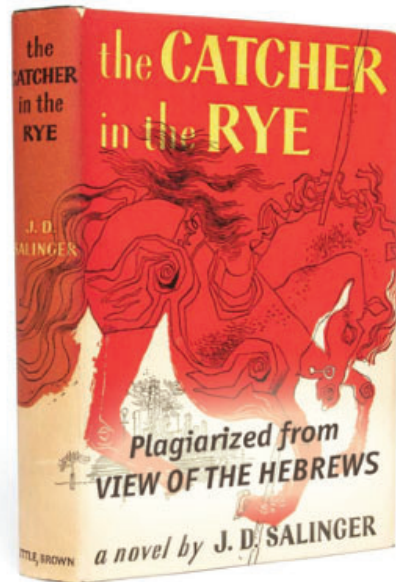
C. Both books reference the Restoration of the Ten Tribes

Well, yes, but with entirely different purposes and focus. In the Book of Mormon, the Ten Tribes are almost an afterthought – Lehi's family descend from Joseph, not the Lost Tribes, which is in direct contrast to Ethan Smith's theory that all Indians come from the Ten Tribes.

D. Both books reference Hebrews leaving the Old World for the New World

Yes, in very different contexts. Ethan Smith postulates that the Lost Tribes wandered into the Americas over the Bering Strait. Furthermore, he doesn't tell us any specific expeditions thing about any specific people in their company- remember, V of H isn't a story; it's an essay. The Book of Mormon introduces us to a group of people with names who leave

Jerusalem, wander in the wilderness, build a ship, and arrive in America – never specifically identified as America in the text itself – by sea, not by land. The events are different, as is the literary approach. It's the difference between reading an academic essay about boys in New England boarding schools and reading *Catcher in the Rye*.



E. Religion a motivating factor

Why, yes, it was. Why is this a separate category? When you're talking about the scattering and gathering of Israel, isn't religion going to be a motivating factor? All of these initial objections are essentially subsets of the main charge repeated with only slight variations.

F. Migrations a long journey

Again, a distinction without a difference, as it's just another element of the original charge. Would it have made a difference here if the migration in one of the books had been a short journey? You could add a category that said "In both books, people ate food in the course of the referenced migrations" and it would be as noteworthy as saying, essentially, "it's a long way from Israel to America," which is all you're saying here.

G. Encounter "seas" of "many waters"

The word "seas" appears in *View of the Hebrews* precisely three times.

"This writer says, "They entered into the Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river." He must mean, they repassed this river in its upper regions, or small streams, away toward Georgia; and hence must have taken their course between the Black and Caspian seas." – p. 76

"We have a prediction relative to the ten tribes, which fully accords with the things exhibited of them, and of the natives of our land... They shall run to and fro, over all the vast regions, the dreary wilds, which lie between those extreme seas." – footnote, p. 107

"Such texts have a special allusion to the lost tribes of the house of Israel. And their being called over mountains, and over seas, from the west, and from afar, receives an emphasis from the consideration of their being gathered from the vast wilds of America." – p. 159

Nobody seems to be actually encountering seas in any of these quotes.

The phrase "many waters" does not appear in *View of the Hebrews*.

H. The Americas an uninhabited land

Contrary to Ethan Smith, the Book of Mormon makes no claim that America was uninhabited when Lehi arrived. In fact, the text argues precisely the opposite conclusion, as they were

preceded by the Jaredites and encounter Coriantumr, who clearly got there before they did. (Perhaps it was uninhabited when the Jaredites got there; I can't find a definitive statement on that subject one way or the other, but I may have missed it.) But if we're arguing for parallels, we probably ought to focus on the proposed Israeli ancestry of the Indians, which has no bearing on the Jaredites, who were not of the House of Israel.

I. Settlers journey northward

Yes, some settlers do tend to do that. How Joseph Smith would have imagined settlers going north without *View of the Hebrews*, I'll never know.

The word "northward" appears only once in *View of the Hebrews* on page 51: "Thence northward, on the shore of the said sea, as far as the point due west of Mount Lebanon." He's talking about the boundaries of Abraham's territory with no mention of settlers.

The word "north" appears 68 times, mostly in reference to the Lost Tribes who, according to the Bible, will come forth "out of the land of the North," which would suggest their journey was or will be in a direction other than north. If there's a direct mention of a specific northward trek by any settlers in *View of the Hebrews*, I couldn't find it. And in the Book of Mormon, settlers travel in every direction. I don't see how this is a parallel of any significance, even if it were accurate, which it doesn't seem to be.

And why does this matter, exactly? Would it help if all settlers referenced in the Book of Mormon only went south?

J. Encounter a valley of a great river

This seems to be the only reference in *View of the Hebrews* that might apply.

"Other tribes assure us that their remote fathers, on their way to this country, 'came to a great river which they could not pass; when God dried up the river that they might pass over.' – page 106

No valleys are mentioned in connection with any rivers, great or otherwise.

Ethan Smith uses the tradition referenced on page 106 to describe his speculation that God must have allowed the Indians to cross the "Beering's Straits" by drying up rivers all over the place. This is markedly different from the Book of Mormon's River of Laman and Valley of Lemuel, as the river was both crossable and un-dried up.

K. A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians

View of the Hebrews and the Book of Mormon differ dramatically on this point. Ethan Smith can't stop yapping about the Ten Tribes, and how they came out of the north countries across the Bering Strait to escape Roman oppression. The Book of Mormon ignores the Ten Tribes as possible ancestors of the Indians, instead focusing on the non-lost tribes of Joseph and Judah in describing the Lehites and the Mulekites, respectively. Then, for good measure, it adds a group – the Jaredites – that are utterly un-Hebrew and dominate the land well before the House of Israel even comes along.

So much of *View of the Hebrews* is devoted to tying the fate of the Lost Tribes to the history of the Indians that Joseph Smith would have had to discard just about everything Ethan Smith wrote when producing the Book of Mormon, including all of the supposed evidences of Hebraism among the Indians that Ethan Smith cites, not a single one of which makes its way into the Book of Mormon. Why plagiarize a text when you ignore its central premise and all supporting evidences? In fact, how can that be said to be plagiarism at all?

L. Hebrew the origin of Indian language

Sort of. The Jaredites didn't speak Hebrew, and the Mulekites had all but forgotten it, and the Nephites kept records in Reformed Egyptian. Again, since Ethan Smith's theories tied the Indians to Israel, this, too, is just another subset of the original charge.

M. Egyptian hieroglyphics

What about them? The word "hieroglyphics" does not appear in either *View of the Hebrews* or the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon claims that the Lehites wrote in "Reformed Egyptian," which are presumed to be hieroglyphics, but *View of the Hebrews* has nothing approaching a comparable reference. It makes no claims that the Indians wrote anything in Egyptian. It does claim, without any supporting material, that there appears to be some Egyptian influence in ancient American art. The Book of Mormon doesn't mention art at all.

N. Lost Indian records

You expand that to say that this has reference to "yellow leaves" buried in a hill that B.H. Roberts supposedly speculated might be made of gold. Yet the phrase "yellow leaves" does not appear in *View of the Hebrews*.

You're likely referencing the four folded pieces of parchment, yellowed with age, dug out of an Indian grave that supposedly had a handful of Bible verses on them written in Hebrew, as mentioned on page 220 of *View of the Hebrews*. No reference to "Lost Indian records" on this parchment, unless you consider Deuteronomy to be a "lost Indian record."

If B.H. Roberts or anyone else believes this old paper, which is described as being wrinkled and getting torn in half, might be made out of gold, that would be truly bizarre, as would presuming that this served as any kind of inspiration for the golden plates. Not only are they wholly dissimilar in form, they are also wholly dissimilar in function. Ethan Smith posits that the scraps of paper were discarded because the Indians could no longer read them and considered them worthless, while the golden plates recorded an intergenerational history and were buried specifically to preserve the history for future generations.



O. Breastplate, Urim & Thummim

Behold the sum total of references to the Breastplate, Urim and Thummim in *View of the Hebrews*:

“Before the Indian Archimagus officiates in making the supposed holy fire for the yearly atonement for sin, the sagan (waiter of the high priest) clothes him with a white ephod, which is a waist coat without sleeves. In resemblance of the Urim and Thum-inim, the American Archimagus wears a breast plate made of a white conch-shell with two holes bored in the middle of it, through which he puts the ends of an otter skin strap, and fastens a buck horn white button to the outside of each, as if in imitation of the precious stones of the Urim.” – page 173

None of this bears any resemblance to how the Urim and Thummim are referenced in the Book of Mormon itself or in its translation process, although I’m betting Joseph Smith could really have used some of those otter skin straps.

P. A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.

The implication is that this was where Joseph lifted dialogue for Samuel the Lamanite, who never said the words you quote. The closest I can find is “Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent” in Helaman 15:3. It’s got “wo,” “people” and some familiar prepositions in it, but it’s not close enough to constitute plagiarism, especially since its part of a much larger speech that has no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*. And it’s obvious that 99.9999% of the dialogue in the Book of Mormon didn’t come from *View of the Hebrews* if this is the best example of supposedly plagiarized dialogue you can find.

The two men crying “wo” are quite different figures, too. Samuel was a prophet in the New World under attack on a wall and miraculously protected, while the *View of the Hebrews* guy was an old, frail dude who wandered the streets of Jerusalem and stayed off the walls for seven years while repeating the quote you provide ad nauseum – unlike in the case of Samuel, this single phrase constituted the entirety of his comments, which is probably why he was largely dismissed as a harmless quack. Yet when Jerusalem was under siege in 70 AD, “he ascended the walls, and in a voice still more tremendous than ever, he exclaimed, ‘Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people!’ And he then added, (for the first time for the seven years,) ‘Wo, wo to myself!’ The words were no sooner uttered, than a stone from a Roman machine without the walls, struck him dead on the spot!”

Looks more like an accident than an attack.

Q. Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records

Not at all, at least in the *View of the Hebrews* case. Ethan Smith doesn’t identify a single person among the Indian population as a prophet, except perhaps Quetzalcoatl, a rather special case that we’ll address when he shows up later in your list. Traditional Christians like Ethan Smith believe that there have been no prophets after Christ, and *View of the Hebrews* explicitly states on page 127 that “We are to expect no new revelation from heaven.” E. Smith’s essay covers a time period solely after 70 AD, so it makes sense that he doesn’t name

any new prophets at all – maybe that’s why you add the qualifier “spiritually gifted men,” which is so broad a label as to be a meaningless distinction. Of course, the Book of Mormon is dripping with prophets before, during, and after the time of Christ.

As for the idea that these V of H dudes with spiritual gifts are “transmit[ting] generational records,” that’s just nonsense. Any records that Ethan Smith imagines being kept are also imagined as being thrown away or left behind in Jerusalem, because he posited that the Indians considered them worthless. Ethan Smith repeatedly laments the fact that no such records survive and that all the information we have about them comes from unwritten and unreliable oral histories.

R. The Gospel preached in the Americas

View of the Hebrews references the preaching of the gospel in the Americas on page 187, which I quote at length here:

It seems the Spanish missionaries found such traces of resemblance between some of the rites of the religion of the natives of Mexico, and the religion which they wished to introduce, that our author says, “They persuaded them that the gospel had in very remote times, been already preached in America. And they investigated its traces in the Aztec ritual, with the same ardour which the learned who in our days engage in the study of Sanscrit, display in discussing the analogy between the Greek mythology and that of the Ganges and the Burrampooter.” It is a noted fact that there is a far greater analogy between much of the religion of the Indians, and Christianity, than between that of any other heathen nation on earth and Christianity.

In the Book of Mormon, the actual preaching of the gospel in the Americas is recorded firsthand by the people preaching it on page after page after page. Yet Ethan Smith never records the actual preaching of the gospel; he merely looks for parallels in Native American history and ritual and explores them at length. Those supposed parallels make up the bulk of Ethan Smith’s text, but the Book of Mormon completely ignores all of them. Many critics of the Book of Mormon claim that it is actually far too Christian, as it entirely lacks the Native American flavor that would have been there had Joseph been trying to manufacture a history of the Indians consistent with Ethan Smith’s premises.

And, again, note the style and subject of the above quoted paragraph. None of it has any corollary in the Book of Mormon.

S. Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah

And yet only 8.3% of the Isaiah verses quoted in *View of the Hebrews* are also included in the Book of Mormon. This is silly, anyway, as Joseph already had a Bible. If he wanted to plagiarize Isaiah, why did he need to use V of H as a middleman?

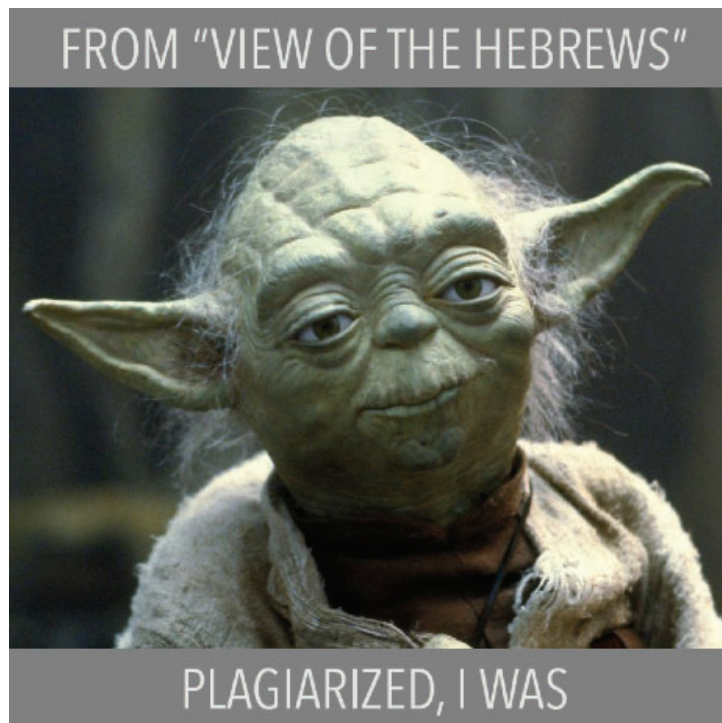
View of the Hebrews quotes a lot of stuff besides Isaiah, too, specifically Deuteronomy 30; Jeremiah 16, 23, 30-31, 35-37; Zephaniah 3; Amos 9; Hosea and Joel. Why didn’t any of those passages make their way into the Book of Mormon?

T. Good and bad are a necessary opposition

That's the message of Star Wars, too. Should we assume George Lucas also lifted it from *View of the Hebrews*?

U. Pride denounced

So did *View of the Hebrews* lift that from Greek mythology? Because the denunciation of pride is a common theme in world literature since the beginning of the written word. In fact, I think even the Bible has a thing or two to say about it.



V. Polygamy denounced

The word “polygamy” does not appear in either text. The Book of Mormon has Jacob Chapter 2, which accurately fits this description, but the nearest I can find to a denunciation of polygamy in *View of the Hebrews* is on page 104, where 19th Century missionaries visit a Delaware Indian chief and record their conversation.

“Long time ago, (he added) it was a good custom among his people to take but one wife, and that for life. But now they had become so foolish, and so wicked, that they would take a number of wives at a time; and turn them away at pleasure!”

This looks to be as much a denunciation of divorce as polygamy, and the context of this is quite different in both texts. This is the expression of one modern Indian chief's personal opinion of ancient history, not a sweeping prophetic declaration of the will of the Lord. This chief's opinion is not cited to define doctrine but rather to illustrate parallels in Indian and Christian traditions.

W. Sacred towers and high places

View of the Hebrews used the word “tower” fifteen times, all in reference to military towers in Jerusalem at the time of the 70 A.D. siege – nothing “sacred” about them. The “sacred towers” in the Book of Mormon – King Benjamin's tower and the Zoramite tower of Rameumptom – have no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*.

However, I must concede that both books, as well as pretty much every book ever written with any geographical information whatsoever, make reference to high places.

X. Messiah visits the Americas

Okay, this one's a little too much fun.



It is impossible to review the history of ancient America without encountering the legend of Quetzalcoatl, who by most accounts was actually a winged serpent and not a white-bearded man. The irony is that the Book of Mormon not only doesn't mention him at all; it makes no attempt at all to tie Christ's visit to any of the Quetzalcoatl legends. Jesus in the Book of Mormon acts pretty much the same way as Jesus of the New Testament and not like any winged serpent. Why would a plagiarizing Joseph Smith leave the Quetzalcoatl legend entirely untouched?

You say *View of the Hebrews* mentions "Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded 'Mexican Messiah.'" Why don't you say "Jesus" instead?

Because Ethan Smith thought Quetzalcoatl was Moses. *Moses*, of all people!

Tying the serpent on a stick to the iconography of Quetzalcoatl, he sees the ancient legends as reference to Moses and not Christ. So should we assume Jesus the Messiah for everyone except Mexicans, because Moses gets "Mexican Messiah" duty?

Y. Idolatry and human sacrifice

There's one reference to human sacrifice in *View of the Hebrews*, found on page 101. Here it is:

This may account for the degeneracy of some Indians far to the west, reported in the journals of Mr. Giddings, in his exploring tour. He informs, "They differ greatly in their ideas of the Great Spirit; one supposes that he dwells in a buffalo, another in a wolf, another in a bear. another in a bird, another in a rattlesnake. On great occasions, such as when they go to war, and when they return, (he adds) they sacrifice a dog, and have a dance. On these occasions they formerly sacrificed a prisoner taken in the war; but through the benevolent exertions of a trader among them, they have abandoned the practice of human sacrifice.

All we know about human sacrifice in *View of the Hebrews* is that one tribe stopped doing it at some point. The Book of Mormon doesn't have a lot to say about human sacrifice, either, but what it does say is entirely dissimilar to the passage here. References to idolatry are also scarce in the Book of Mormon.

The point with this item, and with many others, is that Ethan Smith is commenting and speculating on historical events in ancient America, and the Book of Mormon claims to be recounting historical events in ancient America. By most accounts, idolatry and human sacrifice were historical events in ancient America, so we should not be surprised to find independent references to them in both works.

How many works about World War II have been written? If two of them mentioned Nazi atrocities against Jews, would you accuse one author of plagiarism?

Z. Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous

View of the Hebrews speculates about this and provides no specifics, while the Book of Mormon is far more complex than that. In the initial division between Nephites and Lamanites, the Nephites are civilized and the Lamanites are barbarous. But these adjectives cannot be permanently applied to either group. At times, the Lamanites are more righteous than the Nephites, and for two hundred years there are “no manner of –ites” and everyone lives in peace. The subtleties and details of the Book of Mormon on this subject have no antecedent in *View of the Hebrews*.

AA. Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation

Really? Where does the Book of Mormon mention any art? Why does the *View of the Hebrews* lament the utter loss of written language among the Indians? *View of the Hebrews* mentions navigation with regard to biblical prophecy, but it makes no claims that Indians were capable of it, as Ethan Smith insisted they came to America by land and not by sea. In any case, there's historical evidence of an ancient American civilization that produced art, written language, metallurgy, and – debatably – navigation. What's notable is that the treatment of identified historical facts in both records is so strikingly different.

BB. Government changes from monarchy to republic

Not at all. The government in the Book of Mormon changes from a monarchy to a “reign of the judges,” which bears little or no resemblance to a republic. The judges are only chosen by the voice of the people when one dies or resigns; otherwise, judgeships are passed down hereditarily, making this a modified monarchy more than a republic. There's no senate or congress; judges unilaterally make and enforce laws with no public input and no accountability to voters, although their judgments can be overturned by a group of “lesser judges.” Book of Mormon government is actually quite strange and quite different from American government, and it has no antecedent whatsoever in *View of the Hebrews*.

CC. Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person

Which person? Are we only talking about the monarchy and not the republic, a republic that doesn't exist in the Book of Mormon? Because in monarchies, then and now, ecclesiastical authority often rests with the king. That's not a concept that either Smith would need to invent or plagiarize. Even today, Elizabeth II is the head of the Church of England. What's striking is that in the Book of Mormon, this ecclesiastical authority extends to the judges once

the monarchy is disbanded, as opposed to *View of the Hebrews*, where this is not the case.

DD. Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous

Yes. That's also true in Mel Gibson's Meso-American-based movie "Apocalypto," which he, too, must have plagiarized from *View of the Hebrews*. The historical evidence, then and now, suggested that in ancient America, long wars broke out between the civilized and barbarous. What would be remarkable is if any book dealing with ancient history in this region would fail to mention it.

EE. Extensive military fortifications, observations, "watch towers"

Every watchtower mentioned in *View of the Hebrews* is in Jerusalem of 70 AD, not in ancient America. As for military fortification and observations – yes, both books include observations, as does every book ever written – see item DD, above. Wars tend to have these sorts of things, and the idea of war is not something Joseph Smith would have had to plagiarize from Ethan Smith.

FF. Barbarous exterminate the civilized

Not in the Book of Mormon, they don't. The Nephites who perish at the end are every bit as barbarous as the Lamanites. The complexity of who's civilized and who's barbarous defies easy categorization in the Book of Mormon. Again, no antecedent to this in *View of the Hebrews*.

GG. Discusses the United States

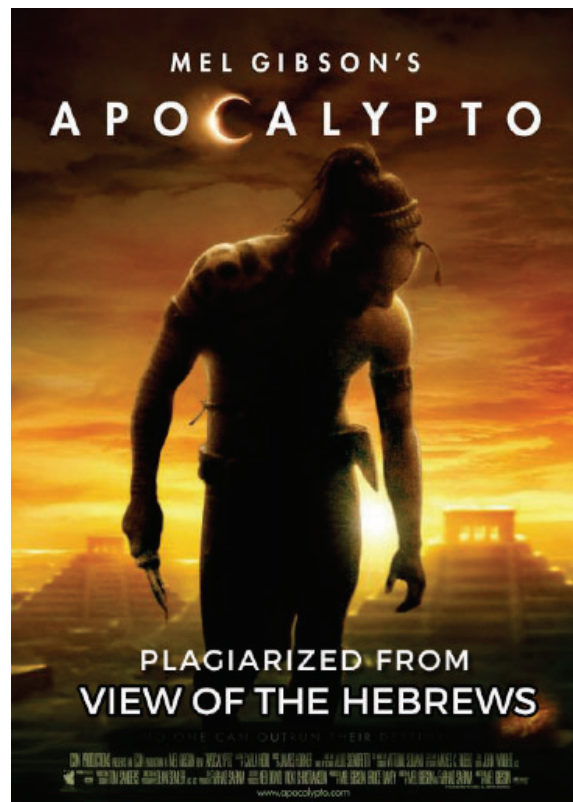
Nope. The Book of Mormon makes no reference to the United States whatsoever. In fact, it doesn't even explicitly identify its geography as being on the American continent. People, including church leaders, have interpreted many of its references to "this land" or "the land of promise" as references to the United States, but the text itself doesn't sustain that interpretation, particularly if you accept a Meso-American limited geography model.

HH. Ethan/Ether

Seriously?

This would be a good time to offer a view on *View of the Hebrews* from my favorite unofficial apologist, Hugh Nibley, once again in fiery red:

"If someone will show me how to draw a circle," cries the youthful Joseph Smith, "I will make you a fine Swiss watch!" So Joachim or Anselm or Ethan Smith or Rabelais or somebody takes a stick and draws a circle in the sand, and forthwith the adroit and wily Joseph turns out a beautiful running mechanism that tells perfect time! This is not an exaggeration. The Book of Mormon in structure and design is



every bit as complicated, involved, and ingenious as the works of a Swiss watch, and withal just as smoothly running. . . . The writer of that book brought together thousands of ideas and events and knit them together in a most marvelous unity. Yet the critics like to think they have explained the Book of Mormon completely if they can just discover where Joseph Smith *might* have got *one* of his ideas or expressions!”

Amen, Hugh! Testify, brother!

Reverend Ethan Smith was the author of *View of the Hebrews*. Ethan Smith was a pastor in Poultney, Vermont when he wrote and published the book. Oliver Cowdery – also a Poultney, Vermont resident – was a member of Ethan’s congregation during this time and before he went to New York to join his distant cousin Joseph Smith. As you know, Oliver Cowdery played an instrumental role in the production of the Book of Mormon.

Which is insignificant. Since the Book of Mormon text bears no resemblance to *View of the Hebrews*, it doesn’t matter at all whether or not Joseph or Oliver had seen it before 1830. Certainly Joseph was at least passingly familiar with the text later in life, as he cites it as evidence for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity – again, an odd thing for a supposed plagiarist of that material to do. Nobody in Joseph’s lifetime thought the two texts were similar enough to merit any accusation of plagiarism, and nobody who spends any significant time with both texts can plausibly claim that one was derived from the other.

This direct link between Joseph and Oliver and *View of the Hebrews* demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book.

The fact that Joseph quoted from the book demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book, at least after the Book of Mormon was published. That still doesn’t mean it was a source for the Book of Mormon, because the books are radically different in every important respect.

It gives weight to all the similarities described in the preceding comparison chart.

Since those aren’t really similarities at all, it would be impossible to add weight to them.

Apologists may point out that the Book of Mormon is not a direct, word-for-word plagiarism of *View of the Hebrews*, and indeed that is not the claim.

Indeed! Because that would be a ridiculous claim. So would a claim that Joseph borrowed anything at all from *View of the Hebrews* beyond the idea that Indians are Israelites, which was an idea that did not originate with either Ethan or Joseph Smith. And the case made by *View of the Hebrews* in support of that idea bears no resemblance whatsoever to the one made in the Book of Mormon.

Rather, the similarities should give any reader pause that two books so similar in theme and content would coincidentally be connected by Oliver Cowdery.

Except they are wildly divergent in theme and not even remotely similar in content. So what should really give your readers pause is that you, personally, have clearly never read *View of the Hebrews*.

I find that remarkable, and not in a good way.

You are no longer “just asking questions.” You have now chosen to devote your entire life to tearing down the faith of Latter-day Saints based on unexamined arguments that you have not bothered to investigate yourself. You have neglected firsthand study of essential primary sources and just taken whatever nasty anti-Mormon accusations come your way and thrown them up against the wall in the hopes that they stick.

That’s not just vicious; it’s lazy.

Given the amount of money you’re pulling in and the number of families you’re splitting apart, you have a profound duty to genuinely know what you’re talking about. If you had actually read *View of the Hebrews*, you would realize just how pathetically weak these arguments are. You would also realize that you are destroying testimonies with bad information and woefully misrepresenting B.H. Roberts’s work.

Speaking of which:

LDS General Authority and scholar Elder B.H. Roberts privately researched the link between the Book of Mormon and the *View of the Hebrews*, Joseph’s father having the same dream in 1811 as Lehi’s dream, and other sources that were available to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and others before the publication of the Book of Mormon. Elder Roberts’ private research was meant only for the eyes of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and was never intended to be available to the public. However, Roberts’ work was later published in 1985 as *Studies of the Book of Mormon*. Based upon his research, Elder B.H. Roberts came to the following conclusion on the *View of the Hebrews*:

No, he didn’t.

I know I haven’t posted what that supposed conclusion is yet, but it’s important to point out that you are ignoring B.H. Roberts’s own direct, firsthand explanation as to how that “conclusion” is to be interpreted. In a letter to his fellow church leaders with reference to the report he prepared, Roberts said, “Let me say once and for all, so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation, that what is herein set forth ***does not represent any conclusions of mine.***” [Emphasis added. Strongly.]

The entire report, including the quote you provide, is written in the voice of a straw man critic he created, and these aren’t arguments he, himself, agreed with in real life. What I’m about to quote from your letter, therefore, is not actually BH Roberts’s conclusion, and you are irresponsible for stating that it is.

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

– B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, p.240

This statement was supposed to be interpreted as a “devil’s advocate” brief to present the best possible argument a critic of the Book of Mormon could make. I’m not sure his heart was in it, as the arguments listed above are really flimsy.

Roberts was a fierce defender of the historicity and divine nature of the Book of Mormon until the end of his life. To cite him without offering that context is to defame a good and faithful man and attribute opinions to him that were often diametrically opposed to what he actually believed.

While this does not prove that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from the View of the Hebrews...

Of course it doesn’t. It doesn’t even assert that. Didn’t you, just a few paragraphs ago, concede that Joseph Smith did not take text from *View of the Hebrews*?

... it does demonstrate that key elements of the story of the Book of Mormon – i.e. Native Americans as Hebrew descendants, ancient records of natives preserved, scattering and gathering of Israel, Hebrew origin of Native American language, etc. pre-dated the Book of Mormon and were already among the ideas circulating among New England protestant Americans.

Where is that in dispute? That’s a widely accepted historical fact. Latter-day Saints have long conceded that the concept of Indians as Israelites was widely discussed prior to the Book of Mormon. What’s remarkable is how little the Book of Mormon coincides with the common theories of the time or with any of the theories advanced in *View of the Hebrews*.

With these ideas already existing and the previously cited issues with KJV plagiarism, errors, anachronisms, geography problems, and more issues to come, is it unreasonable to question Joseph Smith’s story of the Book of Mormon origins as Church Historian B.H. Roberts did?

Again, he didn’t, at least not in the way you’re characterizing it. But no, it is never unreasonable to ask questions. What’s unreasonable is to ignore substantive answers and refuse to listen to all points of view, which is what you have purposely done for half a decade.

Richard Bushman puts this all together. From *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 96-98:

But for readers of Ethan Smith, the *Book of Mormon* was a disappointment. It was not a treatise about the origins of the Indians, regardless of what early Mormons said. The *Book of Mormon* never used the word “Indian.” The book had a different form and purpose than the earlier works on Indian origins. The assembling of anthropological evidence was the central endeavor of *View of the Hebrews* and the books that preceded it. Ethan Smith and his predecessors looked for signs of a deteriorating Jewish culture in Indian society, ticking off instances such as similarities in sacrifices and feasts. The *Book of Mormon* gave almost no attention to Old Testament parallels; its prophets taught pure Christianity. *View of the Hebrews* was an anthropological treatise, combining scripture and empirical evidence to propound a theory. The *Book of Mormon* was a narrative, not a treatise. Anyone

looking for a scientific investigation of Indian origins in its pages would have found ancient American Christianity instead.

And:

When other authors delved into Indian origins, they were explicit about recognizable Indian practices and the location of particular tribes. Solomon Spaulding's romance had characters traveling through a recognizable landscape from the east coast to the "Owaho" river formed by the confluence of two great rivers. There they met a people called "Kentucks" and another called "Delewans." A reader going through Spaulding's pages could readily locate Indian places on a modern map. Mounds in his manuscript reminded readers of modern remains. Readers easily oriented themselves in time and place on an Indian landscape.

The *Book of Mormon* deposited its people on some unknown shore - not even definitely identified as America - and had them live out their history in a remote place in a distant time, using names that had no connections to modern Indians... Once here, the *Book of Mormon* people are not given an Indian character. None of the trademark Indian items appear in the *Book of Mormon*'s pages. In his parody of the Book of Mormon, Cole dressed his characters in blankets and moccasins. They traveled in bark canoes and suffered from smallpox. Spaulding's Indians lived in wigwams and raised corn, beans, and squash. The *Book of Mormon* contains none of the identifying words like squash, pools, wampum, peace pipes, tepees, braids, feathers, and no canoes, moccasins, or corn. Burial mounds, supposedly a stimulus for investigation of the Indians, receive only the slightest mention. Nephites and Lamanites fought with bows and arrows, but also with swords, cimeters, slings, and shields, more like classical warriors than Native Americans... The *Book of Mormon* seems more focused on its own Christian message than on Indian anthropology. The book refuses to argue its own theory.

And:

All the efforts to situate the *Book of Mormon* in the nineteenth century are frustrated by contradictions like these. The book elusively slides off the point on one crucial issue after another. Mormons talked up the *Book of Mormon* as an explanation of Indian origins, but the book does little to identify its peoples with Indian culture. The Lamanites are both a cursed and a chosen people. The Indians, targets of prejudice, are also the true possessors of the lands whom the Gentiles must join or perish. The text repeatedly trespasses standard categories.

Now that's genuine scholarship. In contrast, your shallow criticisms of the Book of Mormon barely scratch the surface of any of this, Jeremy. You're affecting people's lives now. You really, really have to do better than this.

UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at cesletter.org/voh

UPDATE FROM JIM: That link doesn't work.

9. The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain :

SHORT ANSWER:

The supposed parallels between *The Late War* and the Book of Mormon are, as Jeff Lindsay states, “weak, scattered, and not very helpful to a would-be plagiarizer.” And with each additional explanation for the Book of Mormon’s origins, you weaken the case for any of them.

LONG ANSWER:

Once again, I’m breaking up your question into bite-sized chunks.

This book was an 1819 textbook written for New York state school children. The book depicted the events of the War of 1812 and it was specifically written in a Jacobean English style to imitate the King James Bible.

Yes, and that’s its only similarity to the Book of Mormon. The stories, characters, themes, and religious content bear no resemblance to anything in the B of M text.

This affected scriptural style was calculated to elevate the moral themes, characters and events depicted in the narrative to inspire the readers to “patriotism and piety.” Readers already accustomed to revere scriptural sounding texts in the ancient Bible would be predisposed to revere this history book which employs the same linguistic style.

It is not the only book designed to do that. Right after this, you offer up another one - *The First Book of Napoleon*. So which is it - did Joseph Smith rip off *The Late War* or *Napoleon*? Wait, wasn’t it *View of the Hebrews* that he was stealing from? Didn’t this all come from Captain Kidd and Keokuk-like lands of his youth?

Which is it, Jeremy? Pick one.

Because the Book of Mormon production process you’re now suggesting has Joseph poring over all different kinds of manuscripts – from childhood textbooks to Ethan Smith to that trusty, error-filled 1769 version of the KJV, rummaging through Captain Kidd’s letters and stories and maps of every tiny village across a 2,000 mile radius as well as maps of African islands – and lifting a word here, a two-or-three word phrase there, and somehow cobbling them into 265,000 words of an internally consistent, theologically complex, and Semitically-influenced tome that is markedly different from any and all of his supposed source materials.

What kind of plagiarist goes to that much trouble? What kind of writer could possibly work that way?

The first chapter alone is stunning as it reads incredibly like the Book of Mormon:

1: Now it came to pass, in the one thousand eight hundred and twelfth year of the christian era, and in the thirty and sixth year after the people of the provinces of Columbia had declared themselves a free and independent nation;

2: That in the sixth month of the same year, on the first day of the month, the chief Governor, whom the people had chosen to rule over the land of Columbia;

3: Even James, whose sir-name was Madison, delivered a written paper to the Great Sannhedrim of the people, who were assembled together.

4: And the name of the city where the people were gathered together was called after the name of the chief captain of the land of Columbia, whose fame extendeth to the uttermost parts of the earth; albeit, he had slept with his fathers...

You and I have a very different definition of “stunning.” Since this was deliberately written to sound like the King James Bible, the only way it can be said to be “incredibly like the Book of Mormon” is to be surprised that any other book would also choose to mimic the KJV. No one would be stunned to acknowledge that this reads “incredibly like the King James Bible.” In fact, nobody would be likely to say that at all, even though the phrases you later insist were lifted out of this book can all be found in the Bible, too, which is where the Late War authors got them.

In substance, this textbook is absolutely nothing like the Book of Mormon. The story is completely different; the characters are completely different. There’s no mention of the War of 1812 in the Book of Mormon, and there are no lengthy religious sermons in the Late War. It would certainly help your argument if at some point when the Jaredites were fighting, Napoleon were to show up. I guess we have to wait until you talk about the next candidate you propose as a Book of Mormon source.

In addition to the above KJV language style present throughout the book, what are the following Book of Mormon verbatim phrases, themes, and storylines doing in a children’s school textbook that was used in Joseph Smith’s own time and backyard – all of this a mere decade before the publication of the Book of Mormon?

Rubbish. There are some (very) short Biblical phrases that appear in both the Book of Mormon and The Late War, but that’s it. No common themes, and certainly no common storylines. Do you have information to the contrary? If so, you haven’t provided it. Your link to “many, many more parallels” just gives me more snippets of text that the two books have in common. Nowhere on your site can I find any evidence of themes and storylines that are similar in the two books.

You haven't read *View of the Hebrews*, and you clearly haven't read this one, either. Does it embarrass you that you don't even understand your own argument?

But okay, let's get into this. Here are the "stunning" parallels.

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

- Boats and barges built from trees after the fashion of the ark.
- A bunch of “it came to pass.”
- Many, many more parallels .

I’ll bet! The “many, man more parallels" include 75 parallels from the common fill-in-the-blank copyright statement that was used by all books published in the same area. When a computer combs through two different texts without considering context, it’s pretty easy to find all kinds of things that have surface similarities but not much else.

The parallels and similarities to the Book of Mormon are astounding.

Color me unastounded.

I probably should go through each of these one by one, but so many of them are ridiculous on their face that they don’t merit comment. Wow, two books referencing ships crossing the ocean? And both books also have elephants in them? What are the odds?!

As I implied above, these “staggering parallels” were not discovered by means of reading both books and looking for common themes or passages; they were discovered by means of a computer analysis looking for identical words in thousands of different texts. Conceptually, the passages containing these “parallels” are generally referencing starkly different things and events, and they are using similar short phrases to describe stuff with no relationship to each other. Furthermore, none of the identical phrases are longer than five words long – i.e. “and it came to pass,” a Biblical phrase – and almost all are only two or three words long.



Pictured: A 19th Century Persian Book about elephants with “astounding” parallels to the Book of Mormon. (Because elephants.)

So you provide things like the quote “partly of brass and partly of iron, and were cunningly contrived with curious works, like unto a clock; and as it were a large ball” as if that phrase appears in the Book of Mormon, which it doesn’t. Mormons, however, would read that phrase and assume it has reference to the Liahona, which was an item made of brass and of “curious workmanship.” But the Late War is here describing a torpedo, an item as unlike a Liahona as it is possible to be. So for this to be a Book of Mormon source, one has to think Joseph Smith scoured this text to find a phrase – “curious works” – and modify it into “curious workmanship” and add “brass” and “ball” and apply it to a concept that has no corollary whatsoever in Late War. That’s convoluted nonsense, and it’s just not a reasonable explanation for how the Book of Mormon came to be.

Also, take the phrase “rod of iron” in Late War. It’s on page 15, and it reads like this:



Hold to the rod/The Iron Rod/'Tis strong and bright and true...

Then will we rule them with a rod of iron; and they shall be, unto us, hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The phrase “rule them with a rod of iron” is a Biblical phrase used twice in the Book of Revelation – see verses 2:27 and 12:5 – and a variation is in the Old Testament in Psalm 2:9, which says “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron.” In both Late War and the Bible, the rod of iron is a weapon, probably used to smack people over the head. Nowhere in the Book of Mormon do we find a seven-word quote from “Late War,” so the Biblical “rule them with a rod of iron” becomes merely “rod of iron.” And, furthermore, Lehi’s rod of iron is some kind of a long handrail used to guide people through mists of darkness toward the Tree of Life, utterly unlike a rod of iron you rule people with, and with no head-smacking in sight.

Three identical words; two completely unrelated concepts. Yet we’re supposed to presume this where Joseph got the idea for Lehi’s “rod of iron?” That’s just goofy.

There’s also a great deal in this list that’s disingenuous on its face. For instance, in an attempt to beef up the list, you cite “false Indian prophets” and “three Indian prophets” as two separate parallels, likely in the hopes that readers will equate the one with the wicked Korihor or Nehor, and the other with the righteous Three Nephites. But the reality is that the “false Indian prophets” and the “three Indian prophets” are one and the same - three “savages” executed in cold blood after being hunted down on the field of battle. It’s not a story with any clear parallel in the Book of Mormon, and certainly it has nothing to do with the Three Nephites, who, as we all know, are still at large, changing tires.

This web page outlines very clearly and simply just how phenomenally unlikely it is that so many common rare phrases and themes could be found between these books without the *Late War* having had some influence on the Book of Mormon.

Whereas this web page outlines very clearly and simply why your web page is bunk.

Anyone can punt to other webpages to make their arguments for them. What this demonstrates, again, is that you are passing along someone else's work without actually examining it, which, short of plagiarism, is the worst thing any scholar can do.

(At least, the worst thing in terms of scholarship, that is. Killing people would be worse. Probably.)

Former BYU Library Bibliographic Dept. Chairman and antique book specialist Rick Grunder states in his analysis of *The Late War* (p.770)

“The presence of Hebraisms and other striking parallels in a popular children's textbook (*Late War*), on the other hand – so close to Joseph Smith in his youth – must sober our perspective.” – p.770

When you offered this quote from the good Mr. Gruber in your previous version of your reply, you didn't provide his credentials, and it was clear that he was the sole author of this deeply flawed study and the only source for this accusation against the Book of Mormon.

Here, you slather on the BYU cred and imply that “his analysis” is something other than the website and analysis upon which you've based this entire accusation. You seem to be making an attempt to hold up Gruber as a faithful, Church-approved source verifying someone else's conclusions. That's misleading, and it gives the illusion that more people than just this one guy think that these weak *Late War* parallels merit any concern whatsoever. Which, you know, they don't.

10. Another fascinating book published in 1809, [The First Book of Napoleon](#)

SHORT ANSWER:

What's fascinating is that, by the logic you use in this flawed question, you prove that the true author of the CES Letter is none other than Keith Richards, guitarist for the Rolling Stones.

LONG ANSWER:

Again, I'll tackle each part of this question in turn.

Another personal interlude, if I may.

I got an MBA from Brigham Young University in 1999. And in my first year of study, my

finance professor taught us how to calculate the net present value of an asset. He said there are four or five different methods to do just that.

“You know what that means, don’t you?” he asked the class.

We didn’t.

“It means,” he said, “that none of them are any good.”

In other words, if there were one simple, easy, and reliable way to calculate an NPV, there would be no need for another.

Similarly, every time you add a new volume as the supposed smoking gun of where Joseph cribbed the Book of Mormon, you weaken your argument. If there were one verifiable and undeniable source for his plagiarism, there would be no need to come up with half a dozen others. And if Joseph really was combing through such voluminous amounts of maps and literature and memorizing all these disconnected snippets and then reciting them to Oliver without referencing the texts themselves and all doing so unnoticed, he was likely even more of a genius than even most Mormons would imagine.

But okay, let’s see what’s so fascinating.

The first chapter:

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

...and it continues on. It's like reading from the Book of Mormon.

Actually, it's more like reading from *The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain*. Do I smell plagiarism? How else could the Napoleon writers come up with the phrase "it came to pass" in verses 1 and 6? Also, both books include the phrase "for many generations" and "unto the people." Am I supposed to assume this is merely coincidence?

This, too, is clearly written to mimic King James English. It's supposed to be like reading from the Bible. Which it is, as much or more than it's like reading from the Book of Mormon.

When I first read this along with other passages from *The First Book of Napoleon*, I was floored.

Floored, huh? Whereas you were stunned, staggered, and astounded by the *Late War* parallels. Your thesaurus is about to run dry, although you still haven't used "flabbergasted."

Here we have two early 19th century contemporary books written at least a decade before the Book of Mormon that not only read and sound like the Book of Mormon but also contain so many of the Book of Mormon's parallels and themes as well.

Nonsense. In both cases, all you've been able to come up with is some cosmetic similarities and two/three word snippets of similar texts in two books written in King James English. You've cited zero evidence of parallel themes.

The following is a side-by-side comparison of selected phrases the Book of Mormon is known for from the beginning portion of the Book of Mormon with the same order in the beginning portion of *The First Book of Napoleon* (note: these are not direct paragraphs):

They sure aren't! In order to get this supposed parallel, you have to comb through *twenty-five pages* of the First Book of Napoleon and link up unrelated short phrases by means of ellipses, and then perform a similar surgery on the Book of Mormon text. Let's take a look, shall we?

The First Book of Napoleon:

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

Book of Mormon:

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

Keith? Is that you?

When I first saw this goofy sleight of hand as I was first replying to your letter, I reached at random for the nearest book I could find to demonstrate that this sort of exercise is deeply

and profoundly stupid. That book was *Life*, the by Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards. It turns out that your CES Letter directly plagiarizes the work of a rock legend! And what really is odd is that they both start with same word! Am I supposed to just assume this is a coincidence?

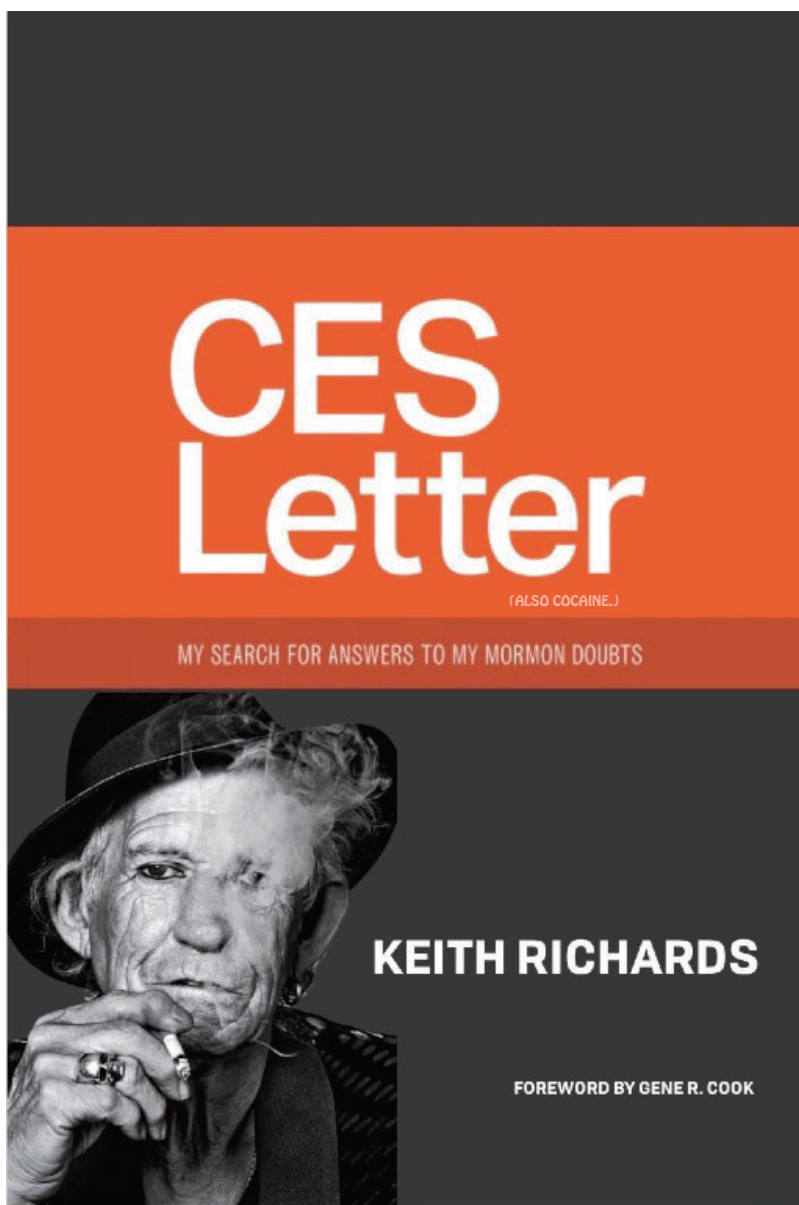
The following are a side-by-side comparison of the beginning of the CES Letter and the beginning of *Life* by Keith Richards. Frankly, I'm flabbergasted.

CES Letter:

Thank you... you're going to have... a real insight... [into] the laws of the land...
There is no direct evidence...I found [cocaine]... in that which is to come...

Life by Keith Richards:

Thanks and praises... you're not going to have... a real education... on this little point of law... there is a problem here about evidence...we found cocaine in that damn car...



...and it continues on. It's like reading from Letter to a CES Director!

Also, both the CES letter and *Life* mention elephants. ("There was a huge business of getting elephants on stage in Memphis." – *Life*, page 12.)

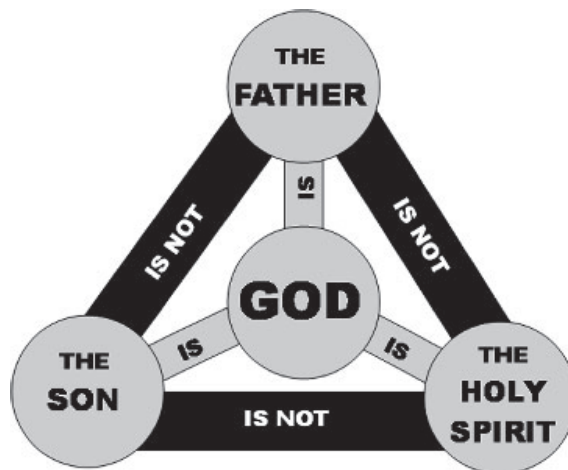
Just one more coincidence, huh? You really expect me to believe that?

11. The Book of Mormon taught and still teaches a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. Joseph Smith's early theology also held this view.

SHORT ANSWER:

Not so. By definition, the Trinitarian view is incomprehensible and requires extra-scriptural creeds to make any sense of it at all. Most people, in and out of the Church, view God in Latter-day Saint terms, and the Church's theology has been consistent over time.

LONG ANSWER:



Clear as mud

People have been trying to explain the Trinity for over a thousand years, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that I need more than two sentences to do likewise.

As part of the over 100,000 changes to the Book of Mormon, there were major changes made to reflect Joseph's evolved view of the Godhead.

100,000 is a pretty big number, but most of those "changes" aren't changes at all. The Book of Mormon was submitted to the printer without any punctuation whatsoever, along with heaven knows how

many spelling errors. (Oliver, why couldn't you have been an infallible speller?)

E.B. Grandin, the Book of Mormon printer who was not a member of the Church and made no claims to inerrancy, went through and added punctuation where he saw fit. So every single item of punctuation added can rightly be considered a change in the original manuscript, and in a document of 265,000 words with no punctuation, those "changes" add up quickly.

Yet you seem to be conflating the procedural process of punctuation additions and spelling corrections with "major changes." That's silly. Out of an estimated 100,000 changes, you identify precisely four that could be termed "major." Yes, those four are "part" of the 100,000 changes, but on the face of it, a .00004% error rate is pretty good.

Let's take a look at the four that are giving you Trinitarian heartburn.

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

Your problem seems to be that the text was originally Trinitarian, while the changes are not. But that demonstrates a misunderstanding of doctrine of the Trinity, because even with the changes, these verses remain perfectly consistent with Trinitarian creeds.

No Trinitarian would object to calling Jesus Christ the Son of God, or the Son of the Eternal Father. They fully believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They also believe that Jesus is his own father, as well as a separate individual from his Father, but that he is also not separate from his Father. They believe there are definitely three Gods, but more importantly, there is definitely only one God.

And if that makes no sense, it's because, by definition, it's not supposed to.



The following explanation comes from that great theological treatise, Eric Idle's movie *Nuns of the Run*:

Eric Idle: Let me try and summarize this: God is his son. And his son is God. But his son moonlights as a holy ghost, a holy spirit, and a dove. And they all send each other, even though they're all one and the same thing.

Robbie Coltrane: You've got it. You really could be a nun!

Eric Idle: Thanks! Wait – what I said – does that make any sense to you?

Robbie Coltrane: Well, no. And it makes no sense to anybody. That's why you have to believe it.

If you want a more authoritative definition, here's the doctrine of the Trinity, as described by the Athanasian Creed:

We worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is all one; the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated; but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Ghost almighty, and yet there are not three Almighty's, but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.

To quote Elder James E. Talmage, "It would be difficult to conceive of a greater number of inconsistencies and contradictions, expressed in words as few."

So the problem with understanding the Trinity is that, by definition, it's "incomprehensible," so the way people comprehend the incomprehensible often tends to be, in practice, fairly consistent with the Mormon view. Pollster Gary Lawrence, who worked with me on my father's unsuccessful 2010 reelection campaign, conducted a series of polls on this subject, and the results were revealing.

The poll asked two questions of Christians across the country. Half were asked, "Do you believe that God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are three separate Beings, or

are they three Beings in one body or substance?”

Twenty-seven percent responded similar to the Mormon belief that they are separate beings. Sixty-six percent answered in line with traditional Christian beliefs that they are “three beings in one body or substance.”

The other half of Christians surveyed were given a different question about the Trinity: “The New Testament says that God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are one. Do you believe that means they are one in purpose or one in body?”

This time the answers went the other direction. Those answering the traditional “one in body” were 31 percent. Those answering “one in purpose” were 58 percent.

Lawrence said that Mormons say the oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the New Testament is an oneness of purpose. The positive response of Christians to this concept in the second question surprised Lawrence. “I was wondering if there was a difference. I wasn’t expecting a flip-flop. But it was. It just shifts from two-to-one one way and almost two-to-one the other way,” Lawrence said.

What caused the shift? Lawrence said it is in the way the questions were asked. The first question focused on contrasting separateness and oneness — “separate beings” versus “three beings in one body or substance.”

The second question focused on the meaning of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’s oneness — a physical (or metaphysical) oneness versus a purpose oneness.

“If it is presented in the way Mormons interpret scripture versus the opposite, they come toward the Mormon view,” Lawrence said. “If you focus on physical characteristics, you get another one.”

– *Courtesy of the Deseret News*

The confusion over how to interpret the creeds is still with us, and it was definitely present in the 1830s. The accepted definition of the Trinity did not arrive until centuries after the Crucifixion, and only then after a great deal of heated – and even on occasion bloody – disagreements. The biblical verses used to support it are in no way self-evident. As my mission president Joseph Fielding McConkie used to say, if you had no additional information, you could easily read the Bible from now until the Millennium and never have it occur to you that Jesus is his own father.

I offer all that to suggest that Joseph’s thinking on the Trinity very likely did evolve, but not in the way you imply. That is to say, he likely didn’t fully understand that believing in the Father and the Son as separate physical beings required you to simultaneously not believe they were separate physical beings. The Trinity is a logical impossibility, and it probably wasn’t until the Church started to attract attention that Joseph grasped the implications of how heretical his position really was.

But as to these verses, why were they changed? My guess is that they sounded too Catholic for Joseph's taste, not necessarily Trinitarian. The phrase "mother of God" is uniquely Catholic and carries doctrinal implications that would likely have made Joseph uncomfortable, Trinitarians notwithstanding. All the other changes are in close textual proximity to that first one, so Joseph probably wanted to make sure this passage remained consistent. The changes really don't change the doctrine – Jesus is both God and Son of God, after all, and Trinitarians fully accept that.

Of course, to accept that Joseph could make such changes is to accept that he could have made an error during the translation process, or that he may have made an error with this change, which, as I've repeatedly pointed out, is not hard for me to accept at all. That may have come as a shock to you, but, again, that introduction that warns about "the mistakes of men" has been in print for almost two hundred years, so it's pretty hard to say the Church has been covering up that possibility.

In addition to these revised passages, the following verses are among many verses still in the Book of Mormon that can be read with a Trinitarian view of the Godhead:

ALMA 11:38-39

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

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

MOSIAH 15:1-4

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

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

3: The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the

Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son –

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

ETHER 3:14-15

14: Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

15: And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

MOSIAH 16:15

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

Yes, and these verses take the bottom out from under your argument. If Joseph’s purpose in altering 1 Nephi was to purge Trinitarianism from the Book of Mormon, why would he leave these untouched? Also, you left out a big one from your list. The same title page that announces the Book of Mormon is not inerrant also says the purpose of the Book of Mormon is “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.” [Caps in original]

Again, there it is, right on the first page. The verses you quote, coupled with the announcement of its purpose, make it clear Christ is God and that he is the Eternal Father as well as the Son, and it does so more explicitly than the verses Joseph changed. Even if he somehow forgot about all these other verses – highly unlikely – surely he wouldn’t let that Trinitarian title page hang out there like a big steaming matso ball, would he? In addition, the Doctrine and Covenants makes no attempt to shy away from these doctrines – several revelations begin by announcing that it is the Father speaking, and they end in the name of Jesus Christ.

What’s going on?

The answer, paradoxically, is that these verses are no more intrinsically Trinitarian than the changes are un-Trinitarian.

The Trinity relies on extra-Biblical creedal language to interpret scripture. In other words, one has to learn from creedal texts outside the Bible that God doesn’t make any sense at all and then graft that interpretation on the scripture after the fact. The plain meaning of the text will not automatically guide you to that bizarre conclusion. So these verses are consistent with Bible verses that make similar pronouncements, and no one, including Joseph Smith, has to apply the external Trinitarian lens to read them correctly.

After all, Jesus stated that “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) If our eternal life depends on us knowing God, how can we do that if he’s incomprehensible?

That verse comes from what I believe to be the most profoundly spiritual chapter in all of scripture. John 17, the Great Intercessory Prayer, offers the solution. It provides the clearest possible understanding of what God means when he says he is the Father and the Son, and it does so in what seems to me to be explicitly Latter-day Saint terms:

JOHN 17: 20-23

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

So we're all supposed to be one, just as Christ and his father are one. Do we imagine that involves all of us becoming the same person? To be saved, does Jeremy Runnells have to become Jim Bennett and become Jesus Christ, too? Are we all to be some giant blobular God together, and yet be somehow also separate at the same time?

As Paul would say, Heaven forbid! This is a unity of purpose Christ is talking about, not an esoteric Trinitarian paradox. These verses in the Book of Mormon, and similar-sounding verses in the Bible, are teaching the essential nature of unity. To paraphrase BYU professor Robert Millet, they're to teach us that the Father and the Son are infinitely more alike than they are separate. I think we often overcorrect in the Church and go out of our way to emphasize their distinct physical forms and lose sight of their innate and magnificent spiritual unity. These verses remain in order to teach us a profound lesson that we overlook at our spiritual peril.

When I teach this doctrine, I liken it to children who try to play one parent off the other. Kids often hold out hope that if Mom says no, maybe they can convince Dad to say yes. A perfectly united marriage wouldn't have this problem, as the mother would be able to perfectly speak for the father, and vice versa.

In the Godhead, Jesus's agenda is identical to the Father's agenda – you can't play one off of the other. So when people read scriptures and ask, "well, is this the Father or the Son speaking," Jesus's answer is – doesn't matter in the least. We speak for each other without the slightest deviation. I am so in line with the Father that I can speak for the Father, in the first person as the Father, as if I were the Father.

That's what Christ expects from us – to become one, to have His agenda be our agenda, for all of to be perfectly united and "knit together in love." It's a beautiful doctrine, and, at its core, astonishingly simple, as opposed to the Trinity, which is ridiculously complex and impossible to understand.

Boyd Kirkland made the following observation :

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

Are we supposed to know who Boyd Kirkland is? In your last edition of the CES Letter, you referred to him as “LDS Scholar Boyd Kirkland,” so I googled him, and all I came up with was a Wikipedia article about “an American television director of animated cartoons. He was best known for his work on X-Men Evolution.” So I googled him again, adding the word “Mormon” to the search, and the same article popped up.

Sure enough, under his biographical information, it points out that he was a Mormon who wrote articles about controversial issues. To reference him as an “LDS Scholar,” however, implies some kind of unique authority or academic status that he didn't have – his educational background is a B.S. in business administration from Weber State, and he was an animator by profession. He's no more an “LDS scholar” than I am – he was an unofficial critic to counter us unofficial apologists. So I'm glad you corrected your own error.

In any case, it's sad to read that he passed away at age 60. Far too young.

Again, he's welcome to his opinion, as are you, but I don't see any need to agree with either, and I don't think his argument necessarily carries any more weight than anyone else's.

Although I'm thrilled that he was, in fact, the “producer for Attack of the Killer Tomatoes: The Animated Series,” which may well be the greatest thing I've ever heard.

Attack of the Killer Tomatoes!
Attack of the Killer Tomatoes!

*They'll beat you, bash you,
Squish you, smash you
Serve you up for brunch
And finish you off...*

For dinner or lunch!



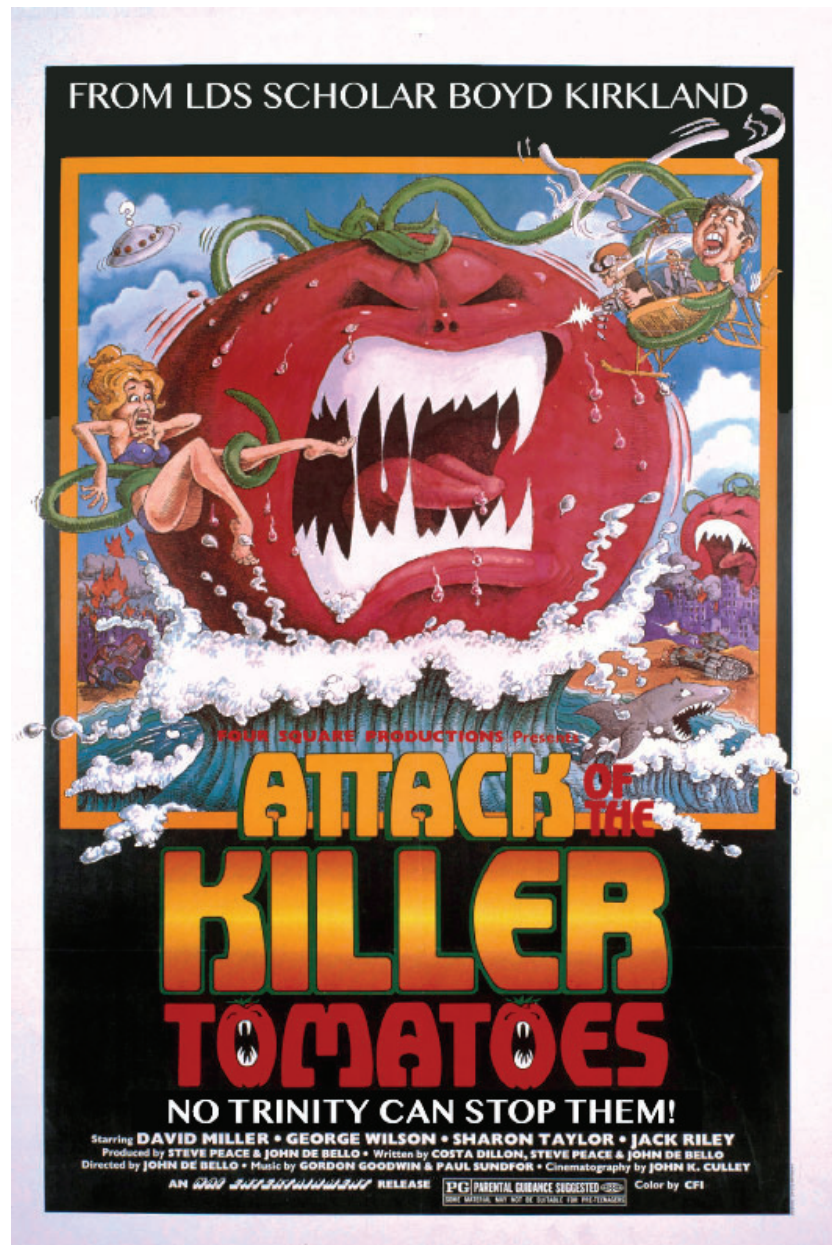
UPDATE: Additional information and analysis can be found at cesletter.org/trinitarian

UPDATE FROM JIM: No, it can't, because that link doesn't work, either. But additional information about killer tomatoes can be found at "10 Saucy Facts about Killer Tomatoes."

Assuming that the official 1838 first vision account is truthful and accurate, why would Joseph Smith hold a Trinitarian view of the Godhead if he personally saw God the Father and Jesus Christ as separate and embodied beings a few years earlier in the Sacred Grove?

Good question. The answer is that he wouldn't and didn't. Certainly you have provided no evidence that he did, although you have provided sufficient evidence that you, yourself, don't understand Trinitarianism. Alas, it's just one more argument you unquestioningly pass along without bothering to actually understand what you're saying.

Boyd Kirkland would have never done that.



BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION

Concerns & Questions

“I will begin by saying that we still have pictures on our Ward bulletin boards of Joseph Smith with the Gold Plates in front of him. That has become an irksome point and I think it is something the church should pay attention to. Because anyone who studies the history knows that is not what happened. There is no church historian who says that is what happened and yet it is being propagated by the church and it feeds into the notion that the church is trying to cover up embarrassing episodes and is sort of prettifying its own history.

*So, I think we ought to just stop that immediately. I am not sure we need a lot of pictures in our chapels of Joseph looking into his hat, but we certainly should tell our children that is how it worked... It's weird. It's a weird picture. It implies it's like darkening a room when we show slides. It implies that there is an image appearing in that stone and the light would make it more difficult to see that image. So, that implies a translation that's a reading and so gives us a little clue about the whole translation process. It also raises the strange question, **‘What in the world are the plates for? Why do we need them on the table if they are just wrapped up into a cloth while he looks into a seer stone?’**”*

– RICHARD BUSHMAN, LDS SCHOLAR, HISTORIAN, PATRIARCH [FAIRMORMON PODCAST, EPISODE 3: RICHARD L. BUSHMAN P.1, 47:25](#)

”People say that the Book of Mormon certainly is an inspired and inspiring book, but the backstory of the plates in the translation is irrelevant to it. What would we gain and lose [if we abandoned the plates]? What we would lose would be a powerful form of evidence that the Lord gave to Joseph Smith and to us of the actuality of all these experiences, and therefore the actuality of the transcendent sphere... That would be gutting some of the most gritty and appealing parts of the Mormon story.”

– RICHARD BUSHMAN, LDS SCHOLAR, HISTORIAN, PATRIARCH, [“THE GOLD PLATES IN MORMON CULTURE AND THOUGHT,” 41:47](#)

Unlike the story I've been taught in Sunday School, Priesthood, General Conferences, Seminary, EFY, *Ensigns*, Church history tour, Missionary Training Center, and BYU... Joseph Smith used a rock in a hat for translating the Book of Mormon.

Ah, yes. The rock in a hat.

SHORT ANSWER:

The Book of Mormon is a bonafide miracle with unmistakable marks of antiquity that could not have been produced by anyone living in 1830. No other explanation other than the one offered by Joseph Smith can account for its existence.

You do not make it disappear by simply repeating a mantra about a rock in a hat.

LONG ANSWER:

In my experience, the translation process wasn't really discussed all that often, if at all. There was some discussion about the Urim and Thummim, which were, in fact, used during the translation, although it's true that the rock in the hat never came up. That's may be in part because it's weird, and the Church doesn't like to talk about weird things that might seem embarrassing. At the same time, I'm not sure why a rock in a hat is any weirder than granny glasses attached to a metal breastplate, which is how I've always envisioned it. I guess it all comes down to expectations.

The first time I heard the rock-in-the hat story was on my mission, when Joseph Fielding McConkie, son of Bruce R. and grandson of Joseph Fielding Smith, quoted David Whitmer on the subject and claimed that Whitmer didn't know what he was talking about. Whitmer's account about the process came decades later, after Joseph Smith's death, and J.F. McConkie, taking a position he attributed to his father and grandfather, insisted it couldn't have been that way, because reading words off a seer stone seemingly contradicts D&C 9, which is the only contemporaneous document on the subject that we have. D&C 9 chastises Oliver Cowdery for his translation attempt because he "took no thought save it was to ask" the Lord rather than trying to "study it out in [his] mind."



So if the rock in the hat idea wasn't widely disseminated, which it wasn't, it may have been because there was significant disagreement among the Brethren as to its veracity, with President Smith and Elder McConkie on the side that (probably incorrectly) maintained it was nonsense. The Church is now discussing the rock in the hat and has even published pictures of the rock - but, curiously, not the hat.

So where's the hat? What are they hiding from us?!

It's worth mentioning that Whitmer was not, in fact, part of the translation process, and it may well be that he was incorrect, as his statements come way, way after the fact when he was disaffected from the Church. Of course, that would force you to consider the possibility of the Church being wrong now in admitting to the rock in the hat as opposed to being wrong then when they tried not to mention it. And in your black-and-white, irreducible theological expectations, the Church is never allowed to be wrong.

Joseph Smith himself dodged questions about specifics of the translation process, saying only that it was accomplished "by the gift and power of God" and that it "was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon." So it seems the uncomfortableness about talking about the process goes way back to the beginning.

Having read through your letter multiple times, I think it's safe to say that this is the one objection that you come back to more than any other. Variations of the phrase "rock in a hat" appear thirteen times throughout this version of your letter, and as you're summing up the entirety of what you've written, you say the following:

At the end of the day? It all doesn't matter. The Book of Mormon Witnesses and their testimonies of the gold plates are irrelevant. It does not matter whether eleven 19th century treasure diggers with magical worldviews saw some gold plates or not. It doesn't matter because of this one simple fact:

JOSEPH DID NOT USE THE GOLD PLATES FOR TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON



Pictured: A tonally problematic graphic from the 2016 CES Letter

In the first version I replied to, this was followed by one final graphical dig at the rock in the hat. (Wonder where that graphic went. Tone problems, I guess.)

The problem with this is that it seems to suggest that process somehow precludes product. I confess I find your obsession with this issue baffling. It's undeniable that the Book of Mormon was produced in a manner you find strange or ridiculous. It's also undeniable that the Book of Mormon is here; it exists, and it must be accounted for. Nowhere in your CES Letter do you provide any explanation for how that could be. Instead, you offer half a dozen contradictory theories about plagiarism that are demonstrably garbage, and you fixate on the rock in the hat, as if it makes it all

265,000 words vanish in a puff of smoke. It

doesn't, which is why millions of people still have testimonies of its truthfulness and divine origin.

In other words, Joseph used the same magic device or “Ouija Board” that he used during his treasure hunting 3 days.

Those are other words, all right. They’re also wrong. Why do you put “Ouija Board” in quotes? Nobody but you is comparing this to a Ouija Board. Have you ever seen a Ouija Board?

They look like this:



Call me crazy, but that doesn’t look like a rock in a hat.

He put a rock – called a “peep stone” – in his hat...

So is it a peep stone or a Ouija Board? Both are in quotes, suggesting someone with some authority gave them both these labels, which they didn’t.

... and put his face in the hat to tell his customers the location of buried treasure on their property. He also used this same method for translating the Book of Mormon, while the gold plates were covered, placed in another room, or even buried in the woods. The gold plates were not used for the Book of Mormon we have today.

That last sentence is a curious one, as it presupposes only a single way in which the gold plates could have been “used for the Book of Mormon.” Given that Joseph Smith didn’t know how to read Reformed Egyptian, any method in which he could have translated the characters on the plates would have required divine intervention. As such, what difference does it make whether that intervention makes use of the physical plates or not?

That does not mean, however, that the plates were useless. They were extraordinarily useful. You began this section with a quote from Richard Bushman to imply that this great scholar and faithful Church member agrees with you on this point. (He does not.)

The Bushman quote I added to your opening of this section points out that the plates are “a powerful form of evidence that the Lord gave to Joseph Smith and to us of the actuality of all these experiences” and provide “some of the most gritty and appealing parts of the Mormon story.” They were used for the testimony of the witnesses and the instruction of the prophet in preparing to obtain them. It is not at all correct to say that they were “not used for the Book of Mormon we have today.”

UPDATE: These facts are now officially confirmed in the Church’s December 2013 *Book of Mormon Translation* essay.

Not sure how this is an update, as you mentioned the essay in the previous version of your letter. What you don’t mention is that the Church also confirms that the rock in the hat was not the only method of translation, and that the plates were, in fact, used for part of the translation process.

From the Church’s essay:

Nevertheless, the scribes and others who observed the translation left numerous accounts that give insight into the process. **Some accounts indicate that Joseph studied the characters on the plates.** Most of the accounts speak of Joseph’s use of the Urim and Thummim (either the interpreters or the seer stone), and many accounts refer to his use of a single stone. [Emphasis added]

The Church later admitted these facts in its October 2015 *Ensign* , where they include a photograph of the actual rock that Joseph Smith used to place in his hat for the Book of Mormon translation. Additional photos of the rock can be viewed on lds.org .

Also above. And how could the Church later “admit” what they’d already admitted in the essay two years earlier? Admissions are statements that reveal new information. Every mention of the rock in the hat by the Church cannot be defined as an admission.

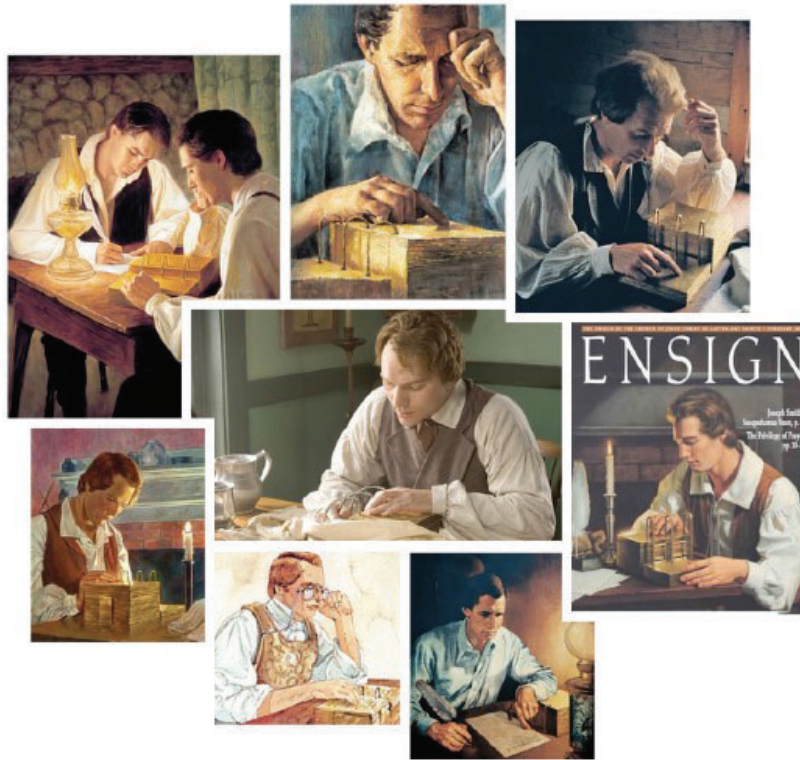
In this version, you took out the reference to then-Elder Nelson’s 1992 talk about the rock in the hat that admissions precedes the essay “admission” by nearly two decades. How many times does the Church have to admit - or “re-admit” - this information before you stop acting like each new mention is the first time?

In June 2016, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf posted on his Facebook page comparing the seer stone in the hat Book of Mormon translation to his iPhone . FairMormon posted new Book of Mormon translation artwork showing Joseph Smith’s face in a hat.

So many admissions! If I didn’t know any better, I’d almost believe that the Church isn’t trying to hide this information. (Except for the hat. Where’s the freakin’ hat?!)



BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION THAT THE CHURCH PORTRAYED AND STILL PORTRAYS TO ITS MEMBERS



“Still portrays” is belied by the fact that these images are all at least a decade old, if not older. (That *Ensign* is dated 2002.) I could be wrong, but I haven’t seen anything like this since the 2013 essay.

Indeed, there is accumulating evidence that the Church is no longer trying to downplay the rock and/or the hat at all. The release of [Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days](#) demonstrates an openness and candor that is likely to serve the Church well in the days ahead.

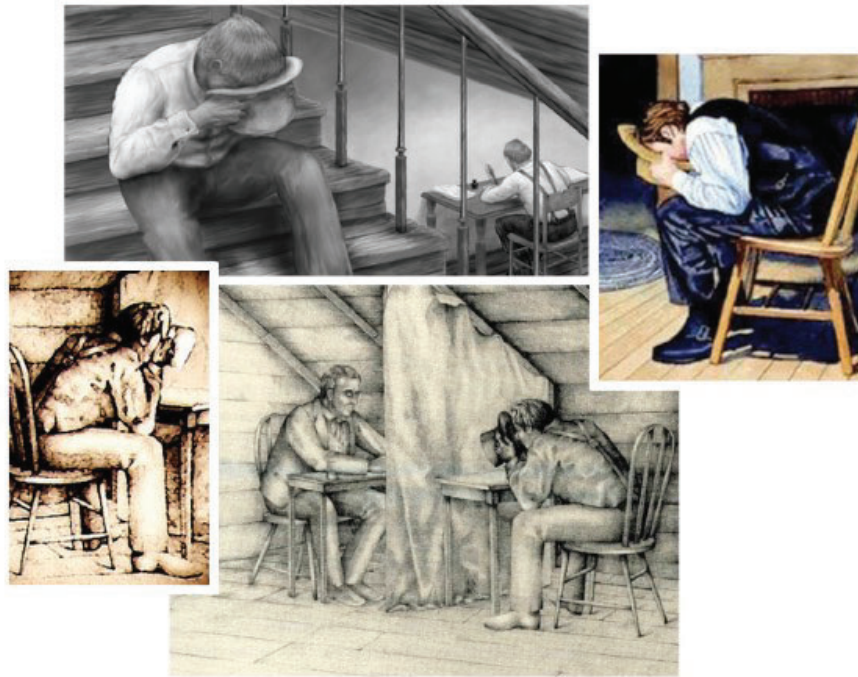
A noteworthy excerpt from Chapter 6 of the first volume:

Meanwhile, Joseph and Oliver started translating. They worked well together, weeks on end, frequently with Emma in the same room going about her daily work. Sometimes Joseph translated by looking through the interpreters and reading in English the characters on the plates.

Often he found a single seer stone to be more convenient. He would put the seer stone in his hat, place his face into the hat to block out the light, and peer at the stone. Light from the stone would shine in the darkness, revealing words that Joseph dictated as Oliver rapidly copied them down.

That account, of course, is more consistent with your next batch of pictures.

BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION AS IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED



Important correction: these pictures only depict *part* of how “it actually happened,” as this was not the only method of translation. Accounts suggest that the first 116 pages were done entirely with the Urim and Thummim, which would make the first batch of pictures much less misleading than your heated reaction allows.

Since learning this disturbing new information and feeling betrayed, I have been attacked and gaslighted by revisionist Mormon apologists claiming that it’s my fault and the fault of anyone else for not knowing this. “The information was there all along,” they say. “You should’ve known this,” they claim.

When you put words in quotes, you are suggesting that these specific words, verbatim, were actually said by another human being, yet you’re obviously paraphrasing. It’s just one more example of sloppy scholarship in a document riddled with them. At this point in your career as a full-time, well-compensated CES Letter apologist, you should probably know better by now.

I also still don’t understand why this information is “disturbing.” There’s nothing morally or ethically problematic about a rock in a hat versus a pair of gray spectacles attached to a breastplate, and the only reason the second isn’t upsetting to you is that it’s what you expect, and the first isn’t. I would think, to someone with no knowledge of these events, that both scenarios would be equally weird. The picture in your first batch with Joseph using the Urim and Thummim looks stranger to me than any picture in the second batch.

And, again, none of this diminishes the reality of the Book of Mormon, its historicity, or its message.

As for you being “attacked” and “gaslighted,” those are certainly dramatic verbs, but the fact remains that, yes, the information was there all along. That’s a statement of fact. Whether or not you should have known about it is a different question, as I don’t think knowledge of the rock in the hat substantively changes anything about the Book of Mormon’s relevance or its place in Latter-day Saint theology.

Respected LDS historian and scholar Richard Bushman, as quoted above, understands the problem.

And yet, as demonstrated by my additional quote above, you fail to understand or accurately represent Richard Bushman’s position on the subject.

Unlike these gaslighting revisionist apologists, he has compassion, understanding, and empathy for those who are shocked to learn this faith challenging information.

He’s also unlike you, a man who frequently calls his opponents names and flings personal insults. (I’m pretty sure that, contrary to your online assault, my family likes me.)

In 2000, two BYU religion professors, Joseph Fielding McConkie (son of Elder Bruce R. McConkie) and Craig J. Ostler, wrote an essay titled, *“The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon .*

Yes! Thank you! I was looking for a link like this when I wrote my previous version of my reply, where I mentioned that this was President McConkie’s position. (He was my mission president, so I can’t think of him with any other title. He was a great man, and I adored him.)

They wrote:

“Thus, everything we have in the Book of Mormon, according to Mr. Whitmer, was translated by placing the chocolate-colored stone in a hat into which Joseph would bury his head so as to close out the light. While doing so he could see ‘an oblong piece of parchment, on which the hieroglyphics would appear,’ and below the ancient writing, the translation would be given in English. Joseph would then read this to Oliver Cowdery, who in turn would write it. If he did so correctly, the characters and the interpretation would disappear and be replaced by other characters with their interpretation.”

After laying the groundwork, the professors continue:

“Finally, the testimony of David Whitmer simply does not accord with the divine pattern. If Joseph Smith translated everything that is now in the Book of Mormon without using the gold plates, we are left to wonder why the plates were necessary in the first place. It will be remembered that possession of the plates placed the Smith family in considerable danger, causing them a host of difficulties. If the plates were not part of the translation process, this would not have been the case. It also leaves us wondering why the Lord directed the writers of the Book of Mormon to take a

duplicate record of the plates of Lehi. This provision which compensate for the loss of the 116 pages would have served no purpose either.



Pictured: Joseph Fielding McConkie.
A master teacher and a disciple of Christ.

be necessary after all. Is this, we would ask, really a credible explanation of the way the heavens operate?”

Further, we would be left to wonder why it was necessary for Moroni to instruct Joseph each year for four years before he was entrusted with the plates. We would also wonder why it was so important for Moroni to show the plates to the three witnesses, including David Whitmer. And why did the Lord have the Prophet show the plates to the eight witnesses? Why all this flap and fuss if the Prophet didn't really have the plates and if they were not used in the process of translation?

What David Whitmer is asking us to believe is that the Lord had Moroni seal up the plates and the means by which they were to be translated hundreds of years before they would come into Joseph Smith's possession and then decided to have the Prophet use a seer stone found while digging a well so that none of these things would

Those are good questions. I was first introduced to the rock in the hat in 1989 when the ideas of this essay were delivered live in a zone conference by Pres. McConkie himself. As I mentioned earlier, this, more than the inherent weirdness of the rock in the hat, is probably why Whitmer's account isn't widely discussed, because the McConkies and the Fielding Smiths didn't think Whitmer, at such a late date and because of his disaffected status, was a reliable source on the subject. And there's the possibility that they may well be right, that the current interpretation of the historical narrative is incorrect, and that the conventional wisdom was right the first time.

I confess that I, personally, lean in that direction based on D&C 9's explanation that translation required study and effort beyond just reading words on a stone. The Book of Mormon also appears to be clothed in Joseph Smith's language and vocabulary, which would suggest the prophet had a part in choosing the words. For my part, I don't see the translation process as critical to a testimony of the Book of Mormon, so I am untroubled that my opinion is, at the moment, out of the mainstream. My opinion on a number of Church subjects is fairly heterodox, actually. I'm grateful the Church has far more room for a variety of points of view than you give it credit for.

In any case, what you're encountering here is the reality that even prophets and apostles have differences of opinion. It's disconcerting that, for you and many active Church members, the possibility of such differences still comes as a great surprise.

How could it have been expected of me and any other member to know about and to embrace the rock in the hat translation when even these two faithful full-time professors of religion at BYU rejected it as a fictitious lie meant to undermine Joseph Smith and the truth claims of the Restoration?

Well, two things.

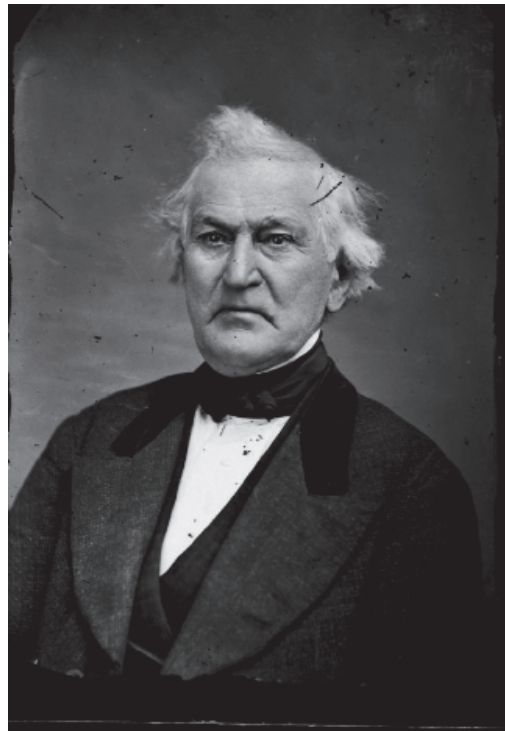
First, I can confidently assert that President McConkie did not think the rock in the hat was a “fictitious lie meant to undermine Joseph Smith and the truth claims of the Restoration.” I have heard him speak about this firsthand. He bases his interpretation of Whitmer’s description on the fact that David Whitmer’s comments were decades removed from a process he did not himself witness, which means he may have gotten his facts wrong for any number of innocent reasons. He thought David Whitmer was mistaken, not that he was deliberately misleading anybody. Certainly Whitmer wasn’t trying to undermine the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. He was true to his testimony of that sacred record throughout his life, even when he was deeply disaffected with Joseph Smith. President McConkie would have been the first to acknowledge that.

A lie requires deliberate intent to deceive. If you were to ask me how to get to my house, and I tell you to turn right instead of left at some point, it may well be that my atrocious sense of direction is to blame rather than dishonesty, and that I have made an honest mistake.

This also cuts to the heart of many of your objections against the Church. Every time you encounter fallibility in Church history, you immediately assume malicious intent when non-malicious human error is a more likely, and certainly more charitable, explanation for missteps.

Bad information often comes from well-intentioned sources. As a word of advice, I would caution you against characterizing all factual errors as lies, as you would be branding yourself a liar for the legions of mistakes that can be found in every version of the CES Letter.

Second, it was not “expected” of you to know about, let alone “embrace,” the rock in the hat. The Church, frankly, doesn’t particularly care what you, me, or anyone thinks about the translation process. To repeat, Joseph Smith himself said it “was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.” It turns out you can be a faithful Latter-day Saint in full fellowship and ultimately be saved in the Celestial Kingdom of God regardless of your views on this particular subject, or even if you remain blissfully unaware of both the rock and the hat for the entirety of your mortal life.



Pictured: David Whitmer
Faithful to the Book of Mormon to the end

BONUS SECTION: A FINAL B of M SERMON

I would hope, at this point, that it's obvious to readers that you haven't managed to lay a glove on the Book of Mormon. You have provided several meager, contradictory, poorly-researched and easily-debunked explanations for its origins; you have completely ignored the significant external and internal evidence as to its authenticity, and you have tried to dismiss it entirely based solely on the weirdness of a rock in a hat. And, of course, your arguments pale in comparison to the nearly two centuries of assaults that book has endured from all sides.

And yet, the Book of Mormon still stands. Why is that?

I'll answer by way of a story and a sermon.

In early 2015, my father, former Utah Senator Robert F. Bennett, discovered that he had pancreatic cancer.

Prior to his diagnosis, Dad had planned to move from his townhouse in Arlington, Virginia to his childhood home in Salt Lake City, which he had purchased more than a decade earlier with the intent of living in Salt Lake City full time. But the cancer changed his plans, and he decided to seek treatment at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, which had a global reputation for being the best place to receive treatment for pancreatic cancer. The cancer had not spread, but the tumor was impinging on an artery, which made it impossible to remove. The goal, then, was to shrink the tumor by means of chemotherapy and then, by means of surgery, slice it out of his body.

It seemed a good plan at the time, but the tumor remained stubborn, and, while the chemo kept it from growing, it wasn't shrinking, either. The goal shifted. The new plan was to kill the tumor and just leave it there. After another round of chemo and a new round of radiation, this was the presumed outcome. Dad came back to Utah for Christmas, and all seemed to be well. He had survived for a year after his diagnosis, and the idea that he had more years to come seemed like a real possibility.

Alas, no. The last day of February, 2016, we learned that the cancer had spread, and spread aggressively. He had only a few months left to live. Maybe weeks. It was time to get his affairs in order.

Since leaving the Senate, Dad had been extraordinarily active, and he had no interest in slowing down. Cancer had caused him to streamline his activities - he resigned from all the corporate boards that he said he "didn't want to be on anyway" - but he still wasn't willing to retire. He only focused on the things that truly mattered to him.

Learning that his days were definitely numbered, even more things fell by the wayside. There were only a handful of projects that remained a high priority, and his scheduled April 10, 2016 fireside on the Book of Mormon was at the top of his list.

It was back in 2009, that Deseret Book published *Leap of Faith: Confronting the Origins of the Book of Mormon*, a book Dad had been working on for the better part of seven years. Its release raised the eyebrows of a number of political pundits who thought it nothing more than a campaign gimmick, as Dad, at the time, was engaged in a very tough race that he eventually lost. But time has been quite kind to the book, and many now recognize it as a sober and valuable work.

“In my own turn, to be perfectly candid, when I first heard that Bennett had written such a manuscript, I doubted that it would be of much value,” [wrote your favorite professor Daniel Peterson](#). “He was, after all, not a specialist, and I was certain that a busy senator had little time to keep up with the explosion of scholarship on the Book of Mormon that has occurred over the past several decades. What, beyond a shallow rehash, could it possibly offer?”

“The answer, I quickly found out, was plenty. ‘Leap of Faith’ ... is a surprisingly good book.” He also said that “[i]t was plainly the product of sustained, careful reflection, not a hasty political ploy.”

President Henry B. Eyring went even further. As the concluding speaker at my father’s funeral in Salt Lake City, President Eyring called Dad’s book “possibly the best defense of the Book of Mormon ever written.” (I think that would make a pretty good blurb on the back of the paperback edition.)

Dad had long been passionate advocate of the Book of Mormon, and he was frustrated with this who refused to take it seriously. Indeed, the catalyst for writing “Leap of Faith” was the book “Mormon America” by Richard and Joan K. Ostling, which essentially dismissed the book as an obvious 19th Century invention and not an ancient record, siding with those who “assume that Joseph Smith wrote it” and that its origins have a “commonsense, naturalistic explanation.” From Dad’s point of view, the Book of Mormon was divinely designed to defy such easy and intellectually lazy dismissals, and he felt it necessary to demonstrate that faith in the Book of Mormon and reason-based arguments in favor of its historicity were not mutually exclusive. This idea animated him even into the waning hours of his life.

The assignment to give a fireside on the subject of the Book of Mormon came from the bishop of the Arlington Ward, and Dad saw this as more than just another speaking opportunity. He felt this was a calling from God, and he prepared accordingly. When he was told the cancer had spread, he almost immediately said, “I’ve got to stay alive for the fireside.” He repeated this over and over again, and the mantra worked. On the night of April 10, 2016, my father sat on a stool in the Arlington Chapel’s cultural hall and delivered a 50-minute sermon on the Book of Mormon. Weakened by cancer, he stayed seated much of the time, but he repeatedly stood to write on a blackboard, diagramming much of the book’s complexity for the gathered congregation. He spoke, as was his custom, without ever referring to notes. He spoke clearly and forcefully, and all who attended knew they were seeing something remarkable. (You can listen to a rough recording of the fireside and read a transcript [here](#).)

That was Sunday. And on Monday morning, he suffered a severe stroke that left him paralyzed and confined to a hospital bed. He died three weeks later.

To his family, this seemed clear evidence that the Lord was sustaining my father specifically to share this one, simple message. After the fireside, Dad's work was done, and he was called home. So whatever this message was seemed likely to be a pretty big deal.



Pictured: Bob Bennett with Sam Bennett on shoulders, Jim Bennett with Jeddy B. on shoulders
I miss this man every day.

So what was the message for which the Lord kept him alive to deliver?

“Well, the time is gone,” he said about forty-five minutes into his presentation, “but I need to end with the main point.” He recognized this was an odd way to structure a sermon. “You say, ‘Gee, you’ve been rambling for forty-five minutes. Get to the main point.’”

Prior to the “main point,” Dad had spent all his time recounting the various compelling evidences for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity. He cited the existence of Nahom and plethora of metal plates that prove that writing sacred records on plates and burying them for future generations was a practice rooted in antiquity. He also highlighted the use of ancient Egyptian names in the Book of Mormon that were unknown at the time of the book’s publication.

“All of this is interesting,” he said, “and it’s fun, and it’s important for us to know as we get attacked by those who are leaving the Church by telling Joseph Smith was a fraud, the Book of Mormon is a forgery, and so on – important for us to have the tools [to address these issues.]” But he insisted that “it’s not the main point.”

“You don’t need to know about the location of Nahom,” he said. “You don’t need to know about the proliferation of plates. You don’t need to understand about ancient names in order to live a more successful and worthwhile life.” Had he thought about it, he could have also said that you don’t need to know about the rock in the hat.

So what is it you need to know? Dad’s answer was simple:

“You need to know about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He recounted an experience from his mission in Scotland more than sixty years earlier, in which he met Bill and Marian Proctor. “When we called on Bill and Marian Proctor for the first meeting, we had left a Book of Mormon with Marian,” he said. “We had gone tracting that morning, came back that night. He was reading it – Bill Proctor was reading the book by the fire, which I took as a good sign. And then he stood up and came to me, and he said, ‘Look, lads, I know why you’re here, and you’re wasting your time. I have no intention of joining your church. But this is an interesting book you have. So I’ll tell you what let’s do. I’ll buy your book, and you go on your way, and we’ll both save time. Agreed?’

“I said, ‘Agreed. Yep. But as long as we’re here...’

“Okay, so as long as we’re here, we sat down, and we gave them the first discussion of the Book of Mormon. And then we asked the magic question – when would be a good time for us to come back? And he gave us an appointment back, and there’s much more to the story, but very powerfully, before I left Scotland...”

Then Dad started to tear up. “Excuse me,” he said. “I get dewy-eyed at the dedication of a parking lot.”

After regaining his composure, he continued. “Before I left Scotland, I said to him, ‘When did you know? Bill, when did it happen [that you knew] the Book of Mormon was true?’ And he said, ‘Oh, that first night.’ He said, ‘The Spirit was there overwhelmingly, telling me it was true.’”

Bill Proctor “didn’t need any internal or external validations, or any intellectual analysis. All he needed was an open heart and the presence of the Holy Ghost, and he knew. The Book of Mormon can survive any attack by any enemy of the Church because the Proctor example has been repeated millions of times, in every culture, in every country, all around the world.”

Dad was absolutely right.

FIRST VISION

Concerns & Questions

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

– PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY, *THE MARVELOUS FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH*

“I am not worried that the Prophet Joseph Smith gave a number of versions of the first vision anymore than I am worried that there are four different writers of the gospels in the New Testament, each with his own perceptions, each telling the events to meet his own purpose for writing at the time. I am more concerned with the fact that God has revealed in this dispensation a great and marvelous and beautiful plan that motivates men and women to love their Creator and their Redeemer; to appreciate and serve one another; to walk in faith on the road that leads to immortality and eternal life.”

– PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY, *“God Hath Not Given Us the Spirit of Fear,”* 11/5/93

1. There are at least 4 different first vision accounts by Joseph Smith, which the Church admits in its November 2013 *First Vision Accounts* essay:

SHORT ANSWER:

There are precisely four, not “at least” four. The accounts are remarkably consistent, and it is unreasonable to expect, as you do, that they ought to be nearly identical. Critics strain credulity in attempts to manufacture contradictions where they do not exist.

LONG ANSWER:

Saying “the Church admits” suggests 2013 was the first time this fact was acknowledged. As demonstrated by the comment from President Hinckley above, that’s not true. I read all four versions in official church sources when I was a missionary from 1987-1989. This four versions were widely acknowledged well before the Church’s essay on the subject.

- 1832 HAND WRITTEN ACCOUNT •
- TWO 1835 ACCOUNTS

No, there is only one 1835 account and a slight, seventeen-word reference to that account in a journal entry a few days later.

- 1838 ACCOUNT (OFFICIAL VERSION) •
- 1842 ACCOUNT •

I can recall being troubled by many allegations against the Church when I first heard them, but for the life of me, I cannot muster any degree of concern about the different accounts of the First Vision. Upon discovery, this information was a complete non-issue for me.

On my mission, we repeatedly showed the movie “The First Vision,” complete with Joseph throwing a handful of seeds in the air, and the narration of the movie drew from both the 1838 account and the 1842 Wentworth Letter, and I wanted to know where the non-1838 language had come from. This was in a pre-Internet world, and I would only have had access to official church stuff. I found an article, probably in the *Ensign*, that compared the accounts, and my reaction was along the lines of, “Oh, okay. So that’s where that stuff came from.” It didn’t occur to me that I should be the least bit disturbed by this.



Joseph Smith in the 1976 First Vision video as he's about to throw away some perfectly good seeds.

But all right, in 1832, Joseph says he “saw the Lord,” and that’s it. Does this contradict the later accounts? As much as you’re eager to imply that it does, the fact is undeniable: it does not.

A contradiction would require two irreconcilable facts in two different accounts. This account, for instance, says Joseph was 15, and the 1838 account says he was 14. That’s a contradiction. (Joseph’s incorrect age was later written in by Frederick G. Williams as a marginal note above Joseph’s handwriting in the 1832 account. There’s no reason to assume it’s anything other than an honest mistake. If you’re expecting infallibility in the 1832 account, you’re in serious trouble. The grammar alone in that thing is truly awful.)

A person who visits his parents and later tells a friend, “I saw Mom yesterday” would not be contradicting themselves if they later told someone else, “I saw Dad yesterday.” Both things are true. Mom’s presence does not preclude Dad’s, and the Son’s presence does not preclude the presence of the Father.

- 12 years after the vision happened.

Yeah, why didn’t Joseph write something down about it at a time closer to his experience? Where’s the 1821 or 1822 account?

When the question is asked that way, it become clear how shaky your objection is. The First Vision doesn’t appear in any 1821 or 1822 writings of Joseph Smith because *there are no 1821 or 1822 writings of Joseph Smith*. Joseph was 15 and 16 in 1821 and 1822, respectively, and he was, by his own description, “an obscure boy... of no consequence in the world” who was “doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor.” He was uneducated and essentially illiterate. He didn’t write anything down because he wasn’t capable of writing.



**The Collected Writings of Joseph Smith
1820-1827**

From 1820 until 1827, when Joseph started making rumblings about golden plates, nobody anticipated that this worthless kid was going to found a major religious movement, so records about him vary between scarce and nonexistent. And prior to 1830, the only written items we have from Joseph are the revelations he received in connection to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. In 1830, he receives a revelation, now D&C Section 20, that there is to be a “record kept,” so that’s probably the first time he gets a sense that maybe he ought to be writing more stuff down.

So with an 1830 commandment to start keeping a record, Joseph begins the process of recording revelations, but he still doesn’t begin keeping a personal journal until 1832. And what’s one of the first things he writes about when he begins his personal history? The First Vision. That seems like an entirely reasonable timeline for discussion of the event.

- Age is 15-years-old (“16th year of my age”), not 14-years-old.

An error by Frederick G. Williams, yes, as noted above. There’s no reason to think the error was anything but an honest mistake.

- No reference to asking the question about which church he should join.

Actually, there’s no reference to any specific question at all. All he says is that he was “calling upon the Lord,” which I think we can safely assume involved sentences with question marks at the end of them. As he begins the account by expressing his eagerness to find a “society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament,” it seems likely that “Which church should I join?” was a question that readily came up.

- No description of being attacked by Satan.

Satan isn’t mentioned in any of the accounts. In 1835 and 1838, there are references to darkness and to his feeling of doom, but the devil’s presence is drawn by inference, not by any explicit identification. What’s curious is that the 1842 account omits any reference to the satanic part of the vision, either. You’d have thought that if this were all fiction, he’d have gotten his story straight by then, yes?

See, to me, the fact that Joseph doesn’t feel it necessary to recount every detail of the vision every time he tells it is evidence of authenticity, not fraud. A con man gets his story straight at the outset and never varies from it. They also get nervous when the questions go to details they hadn’t thought of yet. Joseph obviously felt no need to remember anything by rote - he could recount all or part of the story without fear that he’d got caught in a contradiction. I think that if this version read precisely like the more familiar 1838 version, it would be more suspicious, not less. That’s not how human beings recount events.

As I’m writing this, I’m fresh off a vacation to England and France. I’ve talked about my travels with a whole host of people, and I’ve emphasized different elements of the trip at different times, leaving out some details in one version and adding them to others. That’s how people talk to each other and share memories. Why shouldn’t Joseph be allowed to do that with the First Vision?

What you're citing aren't contradictions; they're excerpts from the whole. If I tell you about my trip to Normandy but not my trip to Paris, does that mean I'm contradicting myself when I tell you, later, that I went to Paris, too?



This Paris vacation selfie contradicts my Normandy vacation selfies.

Likewise, Joseph is telling part of the story in each account, although the 1838 account - the "official version" - is the one that clearly seems to be designed to be the most comprehensive. That's why the details that appear in the other three are all found in the 1838 version.

2. Contradictions: In the 1832 account 7, Joseph wrote that before praying he knew there was no true or living faith or denomination upon the earth as built by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. His primary purpose in going to prayer was to seek forgiveness for his sins.

"...by searching the scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatized from the true and living faith, and there was no society or denomination that was built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ..."

In the official 1838 account, however, Joseph wrote:

"My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join"...(for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)."

This is in direct contradiction to his 1832 first vision account.

If it is, it's also in direct contradiction to what he wrote in the canonized 1838 account - *just eight versus earlier*:

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; **or, are they all wrong together?** If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?
[Emphasis added]

How could he ask if they were all wrong in verse 10 and then say in verse 18 that it had “never entered into his heart” that they were all wrong? Remember, this was the definitive version that Joseph was writing for the History of the Church, and it undoubtedly had more than a few proofreading eyes on it before it was published to the world at large. So either Joseph and his scribes were just too lazy to notice he directly contradicts himself in the course of a few paragraphs, or there's something else going on here.

The key phrase is “entered into my heart.”

We can have confidence in what Joseph means by this because it is not the only time he uses variations of this phrase. Here's what he [says](#) about his experience reading James 1:5.

Never did any passage of scripture come with more power **to the heart of man** than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to **enter** with great force **into every feeling of my heart**. [JSH 1:12, emphasis added]

This is a phrase Joseph uses to describe something more powerful than mere intellectual assent. He's describing a spiritual experience, where the feelings of the heart complement and contribute to clarity of mind. It's a concept that shows up in the [Doctrine and Covenants](#), too:

Yea, behold, I will tell you **in your mind and in your heart**, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

Now, behold, **this is the spirit of revelation**; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. [D&C 8:2-3, emphasis added]

Joseph had clearly considered the possibility all churches were in error in verse 10 (and in the 1832 account,) but the idea hadn't really sunk in – i.e. entered into his heart – until after verse 18.

I think all of us have had this experience – things happen that we choose not to believe. Even when we have solid information, we don't allow our intellectual knowledge to become wisdom and “enter into our hearts.” He's describing the very human process of denial, much like Amulek from the Book of Mormon, who once said of his own testimony, “I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know.” (Alma 10:6)

Make up your mind, Amulek! Did you know or didn't you know?! That's a direct contradiction!

In the case of “Forgiveness of Sins v. Which Church is True,” you’re hung up on a false dichotomy. Joseph was preoccupied with what he needed to do to prepare to meet God. You see that in all of Joseph’s firsthand accounts.

“[M]y mind become seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns of for the welfare of my immortal Soul,” he wrote in 1832. “I considered it of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involve eternal consequ[e]nces;” he wrote in 1835. “My mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness... my feelings were deep and often poignant... What is to be done?” he wrote in 1838. “I began to reflect upon the importance of being prepared for a future [i.e. eternal] state,” he wrote in 1842.

These are different words, to be sure, but there’s no mistaking the commonality of their underlying meaning. I believe that all these accounts show that Joseph’s deepest desire was to know what he had to do to be saved. That was the one and only item on his agenda in the Sacred Grove.

The question he asked, then, about which church he should join tells us about young Joseph’s theological assumptions. It’s clear in all accounts that salvation and church membership were inextricably linked in his mind. Even in 1832, where he doesn’t specify what question he asked the Lord before his sins were forgiven, he goes on at great length about his concern for the error he sees in all the churches. The possibility that a church might not be necessary doesn’t seem to occur to Joseph, nor would it have been likely to occur to anyone in the early 19th Century. Christ without a church in 1820? Who could imagine such heresy? Certainly not an illiterate farmboy who, at that point, had no inkling what the Lord had in store for him.

In Joseph’s mind, “which church is the right one” and “how can I get my sins forgiven” were variations on the same theme, and only minor variations at that. Rather than show inconsistency, the two accounts are remarkably united in their depiction of Joseph’s concern for his soul and his assumptions about what was necessary to save it.

So with that understanding, the apparent contradiction about whether or not he had decided that all the churches were wrong prior to praying becomes far less problematic. The 1832 account spends more time detailing the specific problems with all the churches than the 1838 account, indicating that Joseph still believed in the importance of joining a church to gain access to the Atonement. True, he doesn’t explicitly say that any church membership is necessary, but he didn’t have to – those reading his account in the 19th Century would have had the same assumptions, and neither Joseph nor his audience would have even considered the modern/post-modern idea of an effectual Christian life outside the boundaries of organized religion. Even if all the churches were wrong to one degree or another, surely Joseph would still have felt it necessary to join the best one – or the “most correct” one, to borrow a phrase from earlier in your letter and later in his life.

3. Late appearance of claims: No one - including Joseph Smith’s family members and the Saints – had ever heard about the first vision from twelve to twenty-two years after it supposedly occurred.

You're offering a fallacious argument from silence here. Since you can't find written statements about the First Vision, you assume this proves that nobody talked about it. But other than a handful of revelations with regard to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, Joseph didn't really write anything down until 1832, twelve years after the First Vision occurred. Since nothing he said during that time was recorded for posterity, are we to assume that was because he never spoke about anything prior to 1832, let alone the First Vision?

Still, Joseph provided some clear clues as to why the First Vision may not have been one of his favorite subjects to discuss openly. Beginning with JS-H: Verse 20

When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home. And as I leaned up to the fireplace, mother inquired what the matter was.

Here it is – the first opportunity for Joseph to unburden himself of this great secret, and to the person to whom he was closer than anyone else in the world, the one person more likely than any other to believe his astonishing tale – and what does Joseph do?

I replied, “Never mind, all is well—I am well enough off.” I then said to my mother, “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.”

Reticence to share was his initial reaction, which is not at all surprising when we remember that we're talking about a 14-year-old kid here, one who has just experienced something overwhelmingly difficult to process. And events shortly thereafter would make him even more gun-shy about spreading the word.

He finally gets up the courage to tell a Methodist minister about the vision, and the minister blows him off “with great contempt” and makes him feel foolish for sharing it. He soon discovers that talking about the vision brings him nothing but trouble.

Verses 21 and 22:

I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me.

It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself.

So when bullies are mocking you for talking about seeing God, what do you do? You stop talking about it. Certainly your family stops talking about it. But that doesn't stop others for making fun of you for it, which, according to Joseph, they did – and some of it even leaked over into records of the time.

The Reflector, a Palmyra newspaper, ridiculed the Mormons in February of 1831 for claiming that “Smith (they affirmed), had seen God frequently and personally.” A number of critics use similar language, suggesting this was a part of the local gossip scene for quite some time.

There's also D&C 20: 5, which chastises Joseph as follows:

After it was truly manifested unto this first elder[i.e Joseph Smith] that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world;

And when was it “truly manifested unto” Joseph that he had received a remission of his sins? In the 1832 account, Joseph says this happened when the Lord appeared to him.

Quoting Joseph from his 1832 account:

“I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee.”

That would make verse 5 an 1830 direct reference to the First Vision, which negates your contention that there are no references to the First Vision until 1832. The 1838 account actually corroborates the idea in verse 5 that after the vision, Joseph was “entangled again in the vanities of the world.” Rather than contradicting each other, the references and accounts of the First Vision are actually quite consistent, even as they interweave with other revelations and events.

The first and earliest written account of the first vision in Joseph Smith's journal was 12 years after the spring of 1820.

As both his critics and his family repeatedly confirmed, Joseph was functionally illiterate in the spring of 1820. He wrote down nothing. And as I noted above, 1832 is pretty much when the earliest account of anything in Joseph Smith's life was written on paper. For example, it's the earliest written account where Joseph Smith records his own birthday. Should we assume that until 1832, nobody in his family knew when his birthday was? Or, better yet, that he made up his birthday, too?

There is absolutely no record of any claimed “first vision” prior to this 1832 account.

There is absolutely no record of any claimed quote/unquote first vision in the 1832 account, either. Or the 1835 account, the 1838 account, or in 1842. The phrase “first vision” appears to be a modern invention to describe Joseph's experience.

Despite the emphasis placed on it now, the first vision does not appear to have been widely taught to members of the Church until the 1840s, more than a decade after the Church was founded, and 20 years after it allegedly occurred.

It appears Joseph Smith's biography wasn't often addressed in church sermons or missionary work, whether it be the First Vision, the translation process of the Book of Mormon, or anything else. Richard Bushman, in *Rough Stone Rolling* p. 80, said that "Joseph Smith was never a topic" of early missionary discussions. This is not to say that nobody discussed him, but that they seemed to think the message was far more important than the messenger.

The idea that Joseph Smith's biography ought to be a core element of the Restored Gospel appears to be a relatively recent development in Church history. You clearly expect the Church to have functioned in the early days the same way it functions now, but that's just presentism more than anything else.



Why is there no mention of early missionary black name tags?

In any case, if the First Vision was a late 1842 invention two years before Joseph's death, it seems likely that someone would have made a note of surprise regarding such a radical retcon of his personal history. If somebody did, we have no record of it.

James B. Allen, former BYU Professor and Assistant Church Historian explains :

"There is little if any evidence, however, that by the early 1830's Joseph Smith was telling the story in public. At least if he were telling it, no one seemed to consider it important enough to have recorded it at the time, and no one was criticizing him for it. Not even in his own history did Joseph Smith mention being criticized in this period for telling the story of the first vision... The fact that none of the available

contemporary writings about Joseph Smith in the 1830's, none of the publications of the Church in that decade, and no contemporary journal or correspondence yet discovered mentions the story of the first vision is convincing evidence that at best it received only limited circulation in those early days."

In that same article, Allen also provides examples of those who recall hearing the story from Joseph himself during the 1830s. "In 1835 he was willing to tell the story to a visitor. There is further evidence, based on reminiscences, to suggest that the story was known on a limited basis in the 1830's." It would be likely that if he's willing to tell non-Mormon visitors the whole story, it's pretty hard to claim that "[n]o one - including Joseph Smith's family members and the Saints - had ever heard about the first vision from twelve to twenty-two years after it supposedly occurred." Your own source makes your initial statement absurd on its face.

This article, wherein the official Assistant Church Historian reviews the four versions of Joseph's First Vision accounts in great detail, was also published in 1965, nearly sixty years prior to when you claim the Church finally "admitted" to multiple First Vision accounts.

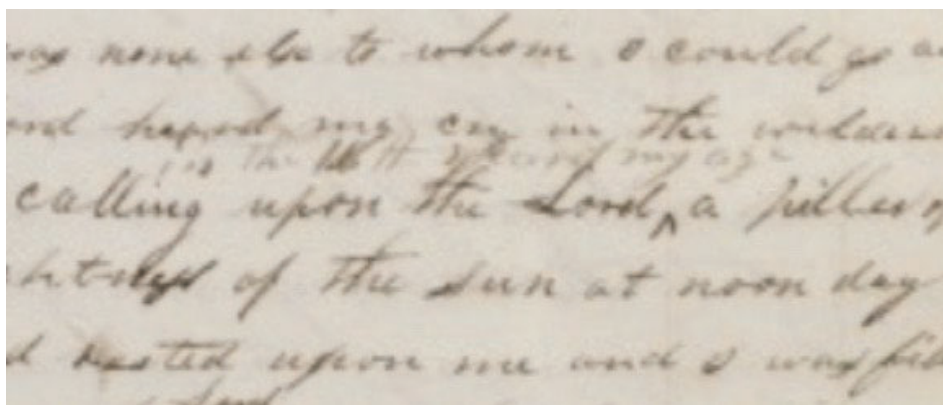
4. Other problems:

- Who appears to him? Depending on the account, a spirit, an angel, two angels, Jesus, many angels or the Father and the Son appear to him - are all over the place.

Nonsense. None of the accounts say that "a spirit" or "an angel" were the only ones present. One account explicitly mentions only one personage, and another mentions as an afterthought that angels were there, too. That's the sum total of any differences. Hardly all over the place.

- The dates/his ages: The 1832 account states Joseph was 15-years-old while the other accounts state he was 14-years-old when he had the vision.

Frederick G. Williams goofed. We've already addressed this. Twice. Perhaps you need photographic evidence to prevent you from bringing it up a third time.



Frederick Williams's errant handwriting in the margins of the 1832 account

- The reason or motive for seeking divine help – Bible reading and conviction of sins, a revival, a desire to know if God exists, wanting to know which church to join – are not reported the same in each account.

This is a truly bizarre complaint with some very strange assumptions. In which account, for instance, does Joseph claim that he went into the woods to pray solely because of a revival, especially since none of his accounts mention revivals? He also mentions his birthplace in both the 1832 and 1838 versions. Because he left out his birthplace in the 1835 and 1842 versions, should we then presume that he couldn't really have been born in Vermont because this was not "reported the same in each account?"

You act as if these elements, all of which come into play at different times in the overall story, are all completely unrelated non sequiturs – in a previous version of your letter, you said they were "all over the map." No, "all over the map" would be one version where Joseph prayed because he was dared to by Hyrum, and another where he prayed because he thought that it would help him find buried treasure, and yet another where he thought prayer was the only way to ward off elephants. (Another mention of elephants! Could it be mere coincidence?)

Your elements aren't all over the map; they're all part of the same map, or at least different maps covering the same territory. Religious excitement leads to Bible reading, which leads to a desire to know more about God, which leads to a conviction of sins, which leads to a desire to know which church to join to be forgiven. All steps on the same journey; all plot points on the same map. Some accounts/maps don't have all the same plots pointed in the other accounts/maps, but all the points are consistent across the accounts.

The fact that different maps drawn at different times don't look like photocopies of each other shouldn't be surprising at all. Your map of the "lands of Joseph Smith's youth" don't have all the same points on them that other maps of the same territory do. Does that make either of those maps contradictory or fraudulent? Does it mean that Keokuk, Iowa doesn't really exist?

- Contrary to Joseph's account, the historical record shows that there was no revival in Palmyra, New York in 1820. FairMormon concedes :

"While these revivals did not occur in Palmyra itself, their mention in the local newspaper would have given Joseph Smith the sense that there was substantial revival activity in the region."

There was one in 1817 and there was another in 1824.

But you know what there isn't? A single mention of a revival in any of Joseph's First Vision accounts.

There are records from his brother, William Smith, and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, both stating that the family joined Presbyterianism after Alvin's death in November 1823 despite Joseph Smith claiming in the official 1838 account that they joined in 1820 (3 years before Alvin Smith's death).

You provide no records from Lucy Mack Smith. Your single source here is article about an 1893 interview with Joseph's brother William. I don't understand why second-hand recollections by a very old man offered 73 years after the First Vision should be given more credence than Joseph's firsthand and far more contemporaneous accounts.

I also don't understand the overall significance of this objection or why it matters when the Smiths became Presbyterians.

Why did Joseph hold a Trinitarian view of the Godhead, as shown previously with the Book of Mormon, if he clearly saw that the Father and Son were separate embodied beings in the official First Vision?



In faith!



That's the answer!



To ask of God with real faith!



And I will!



I WILL!!!

He didn't. As shown previously in my reply, the Book of Mormon does not demonstrate that Joseph Smith held a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. If what I learned in the mission field is accurate, he couldn't even hold on to handful of seeds.

(Sorry. I've seen that video far too many times.)

As with the rock in the hat story, I did not know there are multiple first vision accounts.

And as with the rock in the hat story, that's because you didn't bother to study, not because the Church was actively withholding this information from you. It was readily available for anyone interested in the subject. If I could find it on my mission from an Ensign in the late 1980s, it wasn't hard to find.

I did not know of their contradictions...

And you still don't, because the only contradiction is Frederick G. Williams's marginal error, which you mention three times.

... or that the Church members did not know about a first vision until 12-22 years after it supposedly happened.

An argument from silence on your part, and probably not true.

I was unaware of these omissions in the mission field, as I was never taught or trained in the Missionary Training Center to teach investigators these facts.

Facts aren't the issue; your assumptions are. The facts as you taught them in the mission field are consistently represented in all four of these accounts. Yet you assume that all four accounts need to be identical, or near identical, to be accurate. If you had to apply that standard to the various versions of your CES Letter, you'd be in serious trouble.

BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Concerns & Questions

“None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.

– LDS CHURCH’S *TRANSLATION AND HISTORICITY OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM* ESSAY

Of course, the fragments do not have to be as old as Abraham for the book of Abraham and its illustrations to be authentic. Ancient records are often transmitted as copies or as copies of copies... Evidence suggests that elements of the book of Abraham fit comfortably in the ancient world and supports the claim that the book of Abraham is an authentic record.

– SAME ESSAY

SHORT ANSWER:

Once again, you are simply passing along arguments that you, yourself, do not understand. Most of them have been borrowed, unexamined, from a musical theatre pianist with no Egyptological training, and many of them are factually incorrect.

LONG ANSWER:

I'll let you ask your long questions first.

1. Originally, Joseph claimed that this record was written by Abraham “by his own hand, upon papyrus” – a claim still prominent in the heading of the Book of Abraham. This claim could not be evaluated for decades as many thought the papyri were lost in a fire.

Why not? As the official essay you selectively quote from says, “The phrase can be understood to mean that Abraham is the author and not the literal copyist.” The claim is that Abraham originally wrote this by his own hand, not that he wrote every copy by his own hand. When I first read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling, I did not assume that the good Ms. Rowling had personally typed my copy herself.

The original papyrus Joseph translated has since been found...

No, most of it hasn't. Nearly all of the papyri Joseph had in his possession was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, but a handful of scraps survived the flames and surfaced in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City nearly a century later. When the Church was given these fragments in 1967, they immediately published pictures of them in *The Improvement Era*, along with an article stating that the relatively small amount of extant text was clearly not the source material for the Book of Abraham.

Everything else you write on this subject is tainted by the assumption that this meager amount of surviving material is, in fact, the entirety of “the original papyrus Joseph translated” for the Book of Abraham. It is not, and the Church has never once claimed that it is.



Cover story from *The Improvement Era*, January 1968

... and, as stated in the Church's July 2014 *Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham* essay, "scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts...[that] date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived."

This was first "admitted," of course, in a cover story of a 1968 *Improvement Era*, the Church's official magazine at the time, published shortly after the scraps were discovered. A pretty lousy cover-up, yes?

We know this is the papyrus that Joseph used for translation because the hieroglyphics match in chronological order to the hieroglyphics in Joseph's *Kirtland Egyptian Papers*, which contains his *Grammar & Alphabet of the Egyptian Language* (GAEL).

You keep referring to this as "the papyrus." These were scraps of papyri, likely no more than 10% of the whole of what Joseph Smith had in his possession. And we know it was part of Joseph's collection because it contains a segment of Facsimile 1, which is remarkably unique among Egyptian couch scenes. The Church has never tried to argue that these papyri were not owned by Joseph Smith.

Additionally, the papyrus were pasted onto paper which have drawings of a temple and maps of the Kirtland, Ohio area on the back and they were accompanied by an affidavit by Emma Smith verifying they had been in the possession of Joseph Smith.

It's a good thing, then, that the Church has never disputed that these papyri scraps were part of the collection owned by Joseph Smith. And by the same token, no credible critic has tried to argue that this comprised the totality of the Book of Abraham source materials, as you seem to be doing.

2 . Egyptologists have also since translated the source material for the Book of Abraham...

No, they haven't. Nobody, in or out of the Church, has ever tried to argue that the text on these fragments are the source material for the Book of Abraham. It is foolish to discuss the Book of Abraham when you have gotten that basic premise so completely wrong. Yet, dutifully, I have no choice but to rush in where angels fear to tread.

Let's frame the issue in terms that are helpful to the discussion. The underlying problem is this: why don't the scraps we have match the text of the Book of Abraham? You see only one possible answer, which is that the Book of Abraham is a fraud. But as I see it, there are three other possible answers.

1. Surprise! The text matches!



Actually, the text matches after all! Sorry for the confusion. Egyptologists are unanimously wrong, and the Book of the Dead as it appears in all other papyri is, in fact, the Book of Abraham.

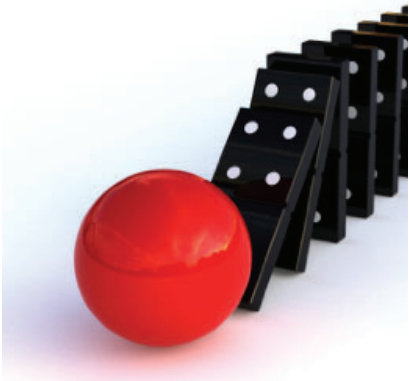
2. The text was burned

The material we have represents a small fragment – roughly 10% by most estimates – of all the papyri Joseph Smith had in his possession, and it does not match the description of the “long scroll” that included red as well as black ink that Joseph suggested was the source of the Book of Abraham. So the funerary texts were intermingled with the Book of Abraham, and the true source text used for the translation is lost to us.



3. The text is a catalyst

The entirety of what Joseph had was, indeed, nothing more than common Egyptian funerary texts, yet these texts started the ball rolling for a series of revelations that constitute the Book of Abraham, much in the same way the Book of Moses was received by revelation as Joseph read Genesis in the Old Testament.



So which of these positions is right? I don't think it's that cut and dried. My personal position has more in common with possibility #2 than any of the other two, but there are elements from #3, and even

#1, that cannot be entirely dismissed.

There is a fourth alternative, too, one that probably represents the majority opinion of members of the Church. That opinion is as follows:

4. It's scripture, so who cares?.

I do not share the second part of that opinion, but I emphatically share the first part. The Book of Abraham is arguably the most profound book of scripture we have in our possession, and the doctrines found therein define the relationship between God and his children in a way radically at odds with orthodox Christian thought and in a way that is wholly, uniquely Mormon. The importance of the idea that each of us, at our core, is co-eternal with God, cannot be overstated. The concept of pre-existence, the eternal nature of matter and the rejection of Ex Nihilo creation – all of that comes from the Book of Abraham, and, while hints of it can be found in the other standard works, nothing approaching the clarity and beauty of these magnificent truths can be found anywhere else.

The doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo, or Creation Out of Nothing, is central to much of the Christian world. As I understand it, the idea is that there was nothing in the universe, or even no universe itself. There was only God. And at one point, God decided He wanted there to be

Something instead of Nothing. And so, out of Nothing, he made Something, and voila! Here we are!

This idea is also the source of much mischief.



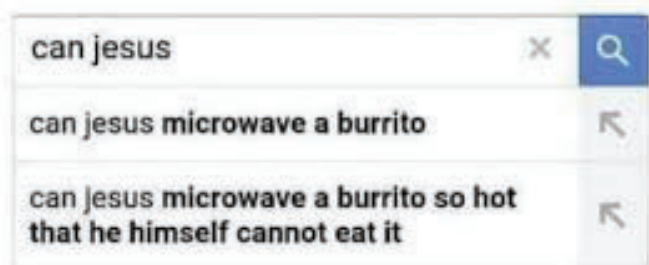
Michelangelo's Ex Nihilo God

Those who propose it think that any other explanation diminishes God's omnipotence. In contrast, the Book of Abraham insists that to create is to "organize" that which already exists. It rests on the premise that elements are eternal, and that intelligence is

eternal, too. In some form or another, each of us is a unique, eternal Intelligence, co-existent with God, and God has designed the universe and organized matter and intelligence to create a circumstance by which we can become more like Him. Ex Nihilists insist that the Mormon God, therefore, is not omnipotent, because he can't create matter or intelligence out of nothing.

It's because of this tension that there are some very pointless arguments to be had as to what the definition of omnipotence is. The most famous is the question, "Can God create a rock so large that He can't move it?" Or, in the words of Homer Simpson, "Can Jesus microwave a burrito so hot that he, himself, could not eat it?"

Because of the Book of Abraham, we can define omnipotence, as the capability to do everything that can be done. Ex Nihilists reject this. They say there is nothing that cannot be done, because God can do everything. OK, fine. Then you have to answer questions that don't make God look like a very pleasant guy.



For example: You, Mr. Ex Nihilist, you believe God can do anything? Then why didn't he create a universe free of evil, pain, and suffering? Why did he make us capable of sin? Why did he create a circumstance where a great deal of his supreme creations are doomed to spend an eternity in a lake of fire? What's the point?

The famous literary figure Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide* concludes that since this is the only world we've got, and God is perfect, then this is, by definition, the best of all possible worlds, so stop complaining. The problem, of course, is that this places certain limits on God, too. If this is the best he could do, and even us flawed humans can see there are significant problems, then he isn't as omnipotent as Ex Nihilists think he is, is he?

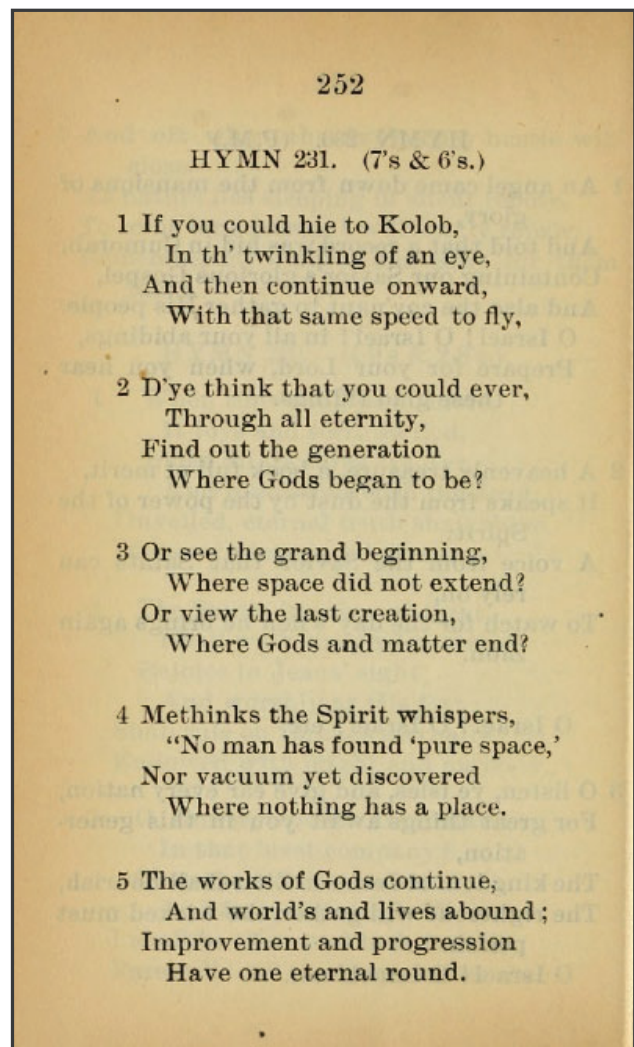
Mormons don't have all the answers about suffering and evil, but, thanks in large part to the Book of Abraham, they do have a context for it that the rest of the world doesn't have. What's happening in this life was colored by what happened in the eternity before it, and it will be mitigated by what happens in the eternity after.

Many people use this truth to make rash assumptions about this life's inequities. Clearly, if I'm stronger, happier, richer, or better looking than you, then I must have been a better guy before I got here, no? Well, no. We don't know that. Maybe you were too big a wimp to be able to handle the rough life of someone else. We haven't been given the information, but just knowing that there is more to the story helps us understand why some things don't seem to gibe with what we ought to expect.

The point is that Ex Nihilo creation makes good squarely responsible for all the rotgut in the universe, and it's no use saying otherwise. My understanding of a merciful and omnipotent deity doesn't allow for that kind of nonsense. And that understanding is firmly rooted in the precepts found in the Book of Abraham.

All that is context for why it is so difficult to simply write off the Book of Abraham because of the evidence you cite against it, which is both weak and circumstantial. There is too much substance in the book itself to simply write it off at the first sign of trouble.

(I also love the Book of Abraham because "If You Could Hie to Kolob" is my favorite hymn. It's the only hymn that ends in a minor key.)



Hands down, my favorite hymn

Back to your objections, which I will let you state without interruption this time:

2 . Egyptologists have also since translated the source material for the Book of Abraham and have found it to be nothing more than a common pagan Egyptian funerary text for a deceased man named “Hor” around first century C.E. In other words, it was a common Breathing Permit that the Egyptians buried with their dead. It has nothing to do with Abraham or anything Joseph claimed in his translation for the Book of Abraham.

Yeah, not so fast.

First of all, the Joseph Smith Papyri contain excerpts from both the Book of Breathing and the Book of the Dead, which, while both are associated with Egyptian burials, are not, in fact, the same texts. This suggests that these fragments were not a single “common Breathing Permit” but, rather, part of a collection that could well include the Book of Abraham, too.

More importantly, it is incorrect to say that the Book of the Dead has “absolutely nothing to do with Abraham.” The discovery of the Testament of Abraham in 1892 and the Apocalypse of Abraham in 1898 show remarkable parallels with the Book of Abraham, but also tie Abraham to Egyptian afterlife traditions. Hugh Nibley’s seminal work *Abraham in Egypt* shows the extent to which Abrahamic traditions are tied to the Book of the Dead. Quoting from Nibley, once again in red:

The evidence that has led the experts in the past ten years to recognize the closest ties between the old Abraham apocrypha and the Egyptian Book of the Dead, especially with references to the pictures in the latter, effectively eliminates the one argument against serious reading of the Book of Abraham.

The whole thing is [available online for free](#) and is well worth reading and is chock full of specifics connections between the two documents and makes it impossible to blithely assert that Abraham and the Book of the Dead have “absolutely nothing to do with” each other.

3. The Church admits this in its essay :

No, they don’t. You quote selectively from the essay when a snippet out of context suits your purposes, but you ignore the parts that are inconvenient to your predetermined argument. For example, here is what you claim is the Church’s admission that these fragments have nothing to do with Abraham:

“None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.

And here is a section later in the same essay that Abraham has extensive Egyptian connections:

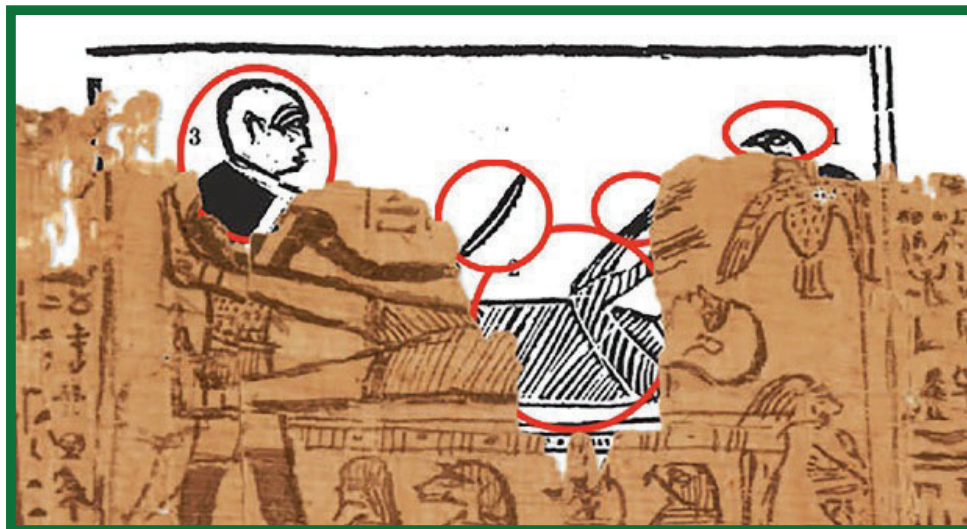
The book of Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham that circulated in the ancient world around the time the papyri were likely created. In the book of Abraham, God teaches Abraham about the sun, the moon, and the stars. “I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt,” the Lord says, “that ye may declare all these words.” Ancient texts repeatedly refer to Abraham instructing the Egyptians in knowledge of the heavens. For example, Eupolemus, who lived under Egyptian rule in the second century B.C.E., wrote that Abraham taught astronomy and other sciences to the Egyptian priests. A third-century papyrus from an Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 1 in the book of Abraham. A later Egyptian text, discovered in the 20th century, tells how the Pharaoh tried to sacrifice Abraham, only to be foiled when Abraham was delivered by an angel. Later, according to this text, Abraham taught members of the Pharaoh’s court through astronomy. All these details are found in the book of Abraham.

It is therefore incorrect to say that the Church “admits” these fragments “have nothing to do with Abraham,” particularly since Facsimile 1, which is linked to Abraham by these other ancient texts, is included in the fragments. And as Nibley noted, the other Egyptian traditions mentioned in this essay make a correlation between the two texts far more plausible.

You repeatedly cite this essay as if it’s a smoking gun proving your accusations, when, taken as a whole, it’s devastating to your argument. This strongly suggests that beyond the proof texts you cite, you haven’t actually bothered to read it.

FACSIMILE 1

The graphic below shows the rediscovered papyri placed on top of Facsimile 1. The red circles denote the filled-in sections of facsimile 1 that respected modern Egyptologists say is nonsense.



No, the red circles denote the filled-in sections of facsimile 1 that Kevin Mathie says is nonsense. He's not an Egyptologist at all, respected or otherwise. We'll get to that shortly.

In contrast with the canonized version of Facsimile 1, the following image is what Facsimile 1 is really supposed to look like, based on Egyptology and the same scene discovered elsewhere in Egypt:



Where is this scene discovered elsewhere in Egypt? (Spoiler: It isn't.) If it were, why not provide a picture of the real thing instead of this modern creation, which is merely an uneducated guess created by a non-Egyptologist?

I think the answer is that the vast majority of couch scenes look something like this:



And this:



And this:



And while I know this wasn't your intent, I would be remiss if I didn't personally thank you for resolving one of my main concerns about Book of Abraham with your flawed objection here.

I was first introduced to the idea you mention here by an architect who had done a great deal of work for the Church and was on his way out of full fellowship because of his concerns

about the Book of Abraham. He told me that Facsimile 1, as found in the Joseph Smith Papyri, had been altered from what it was “really supposed to look like,” as you say, and that every time this scene appeared in other settings, the guy with the knife had a jackal’s head, and so of course this was just Joseph Smith messing around. I took the architect’s word on this, and I found it troubling. From those conversations, I assumed that the scene in Facsimile 1 must be so common as that it could be found in papyri from the same period.

But what’s you’ve shown me here is that there is *no other scene in any existing papyri that matches Facsimile 1.*

The picture that shows what Facsimile 1 is “supposed to look like” is wildly misleading. You didn’t pull it from off of papyri; someone drew in the missing pieces thousands of years later in order to match your assumptions. If there really were a scene that matched Facsimile 1, you wouldn’t have to rely on someone to whip one up. If it’s “supposed to look like” this, then ***why can’t you show me a scene from actual papyri that actually looks like this?***

In the common funerary scenes, what’s striking is how little they look like Facsimile 1, either the original or your modern “corrected version.” Yes, there’s a guy lying on a couch, but that guy looks like King Tut’s sarcophagus in most of them, and, really, nothing at all like the guy in Facsimile 1. Where’s the crocodile? Where’s the bird? Why is this the only one with a live body instead of a coffin?

As you pat yourself on the back for assuming that you know what this is “supposed to look like,” you skip over a number of very significant differences which make Facsimile 1 unique.

Hugh Nibley again:

The instant reaction of most professing Egyptologists to the sight of Facsimile No. 1 is to announce that it is the most-routine and commonplace object imaginable, that countless drawings identical with this one are to be found on tomb and coffin walls and papyri. Some of the better scholars were given pause, however, and right from the beginning T. Deveria insisted that the Mormons must have made drastic alterations in the sketches, because they were decidedly not as they should be. The main effort of the learned since the discovery of the original in a damaged condition in 1967 has been to reconstruct the missing parts in a way to show that they were really nothing out of the ordinary, while quietly ignoring the really impressive uniqueness of the parts that are not missing.

For instance, an eminent Egyptologist maintained that the fingers of the reclining man’s upper hand are really the feathers of a bird. In time, however, he yielded enough to declare that even if they were fingers it would make no difference to the interpretation. Wouldn’t it? If this turns out to be the only instance known of the man on the couch lifting two hands, that would indeed make a great deal of difference. But forget about the fingers and the feathers; in what other “embalming scene” does a priest with or without an Anubis headdress, lean over a corpse that is waving both an arm and a leg? That gesture, as a number of special studies have pointed out, indicates a stirring to life and a rising from the couch, not the utter quiescence of a corpse about to be laid away. And what about the big crocodial under the couch? Or the lotus stand? You will not find them in any of the other Lion-couch vignettes.

One other place you can find it, however, is on the back wall of the apartment I lived in as a missionary in Glasgow. Our landlord was not a member of the Church, but he was fascinated by it, and he thought Facsimile 1 would make a great mural. Behold:



Full color, even!

And here he is with all the elders in our district posing in front of his masterpiece:



I digress. Carry on.

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

No, it really isn't. It's you faithfully reproducing, in a new format, this hoary graphic from MormonInfographics.com that was in your last version of the CES Letter.

The Book of Abraham		
A common funerary document		
Joseph Smith's Interpretation	Translated Correctly? Facsimile #1, Book of Abraham	Modern Egyptological Interpretation
The Angel of the Lord.		1 The spirit or "ba" of Hôr (The deceased fellow)
Abraham fastened upon an altar		2 The deceased: His name was "Hôr"
The idolatrous priest of Elkenah		3 (see original image, this figure was originally portrayed with the head of a Jackal)
The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh.		4 A common funereal bier or "lion couch"
The idolatrous god of Elkenah.		5
The idolatrous god of Libnah.		6 Canopic jars containing the deceased's internal organs.
The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah.		7
The idolatrous god of Korash.		8
The idolatrous god of Pharaoh.		9 This is the god "Horus"
Abraham in Egypt		10 A libation table bearing wines, oils, etc. Common in Egypt.
Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians.		11 A palace façade, called a "serekh"
Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be hig, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word, Shaumahyeen.		12 This is just the water that the crocodile swims in.

Joseph Smith's Interpretation available @ lds.org/scriptures/pgp/abr/fac-1
 Modern Egyptological Interpretation compiled @ bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA_6.html
 LDS apologist explanation @ en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Abraham/Joseph_Smith_Papyri/Facsimiles/Facsimile_1

MormonInfographics.com

I can only guess as to the reasons behind the official absence of MormonInfographics this time around. (Is this another "tone problem?") In the case of your First Vision section, it removed one of the most egregiously embarrassing errors in your last step, as it provided a graphic that ignored the vital 1842 Wentworth Letter account and added in the 15-word reference to the 1835 account as if it were its own thing. Back then, I had more patience with you than I do now, but even then I still labeled that graphic as "irredeemably stupid." Which it was. (And is.)

Perhaps you think removing these amateurish, tacky graphics gives you more credibility, except while you have removed the attribution, you have not removed the argument. In this case, you simply steal all this information, word for word, and put it into a new table, without telling your readers where it came from.

Like so:



JOSEPH SMITH'S INTERPRETATION MODERN EGYPTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

1.	<i>The Angel of the Lord</i>	<i>The spirit or "ba" of Hôr (The deceased fellow)</i>
2.	<i>Abraham fastened upon an altar</i>	<i>The deceased: His name was "Hôr"</i>
3.	<i>The idolatrous priest of Elkenah</i>	<i>Anubis. (see original image, this figure was originally portrayed with the head of a Jackal)</i>
4.	<i>The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh</i>	<i>A common funeral bier or "lion couch"</i>
5.	<i>The idolatrous god of Elknah</i>	<i>Canopic jars containing the deceased's internal organs. They represent the four sons of the god Horus, who are: #5: Qebehseuef #6: Duamutef #7: Hapy #8: Imsety</i>
6.	<i>The idolatrous god of Libnah</i>	
7.	<i>The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah</i>	
8.	<i>The idolatrous god of Korash</i>	
9.	<i>The idolatrous god of Pharaoh</i>	<i>This is the god "Horus"</i>
10.	<i>Abraham in Egypt</i>	<i>A libation table bearing wines, oils, etc. Common in Egypt</i>
11.	<i>Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by Egyptians</i>	<i>A palace facade, called a "verekh"</i>
12.	<i>Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be hig, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word Shaumahyeen</i>	<i>This is just the water that the crocodile swims in</i>

Sources:

Joseph Smith's Translations: Facsimile 1 in Book of Abraham ⁸

Modern Egyptological Translations ⁹

FairMormon Facsimile 1 Apologetics ¹⁰ (notice FairMormon attempts to distract away from line by line translations and instead goes off in irrelevant tangents about sacrifice and other nonsense.)

There's a word for citing sources without giving proper attribution: **plagiarism**.

Perhaps you've heard of it.

I'm not an Egyptologist, and neither are you. So from whence cometh your authoritative "Modern Egyptological Interpretation" that makes its way into the graphic that provides the foundation of your argument?

The answer can be found in the link in the bottom left-hand corner of the original graphic. There we find this link – http://bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA_6.html.

Except that website is pulled down, so in your updated CES Letter, you provide [this link](#) to the web archive where it's preserved in digital amber. What's telling is that the link description represents the only removal of information from the old graphic in the new one. The first graphic mentioned "boamathie" to give readers a clue as to who it is that's providing the "Modern Egyptological Translations."

Yet you don't credit "boamathie" at all. You just tell your readers this is the "Modern Egyptological Translation" but don't bother to tell us where it's coming from.

One might think you don't want people to know who your source is. (And I can understand why.)

Turns out that link leads to a piece on the subject by someone named Kevin Mathie.

Who is Kevin Mathie? Is he an Egyptological authority upon whom we can readily rely?

I visited his website the first time around, and I did it again this time. Unlike you, as of September 2018, he hasn't updated anything. Here's what I found:



Kevin Mathie is a professional composer, music director, and pianist who has more than 25 years' experience working in the music industry. He specializes in orchestral and hybrid orchestral music (i.e., orchestral music combined with electronic instruments such as synths and guitar).

His compositions have been featured on the television network SHOWTIME®, and have also been used in film, television, radio, and live theater.

During his career, he has also led more than 100+ musical productions, and received numerous awards for his work, including:

- ***Best Behind-the-Scenes Musical Theater MVPs (i.e., Most Valuable Player, 2013) – Salt Lake City Weekly's 2013 Arty Award***
- ***Best Musical Score (2014) – Las Vegas 48-Hour Film Project, for the film *Enthusiasm****
- ***Best Musical Score (2009) – Salt Lake City 48-Hour Film Project, for the film, *S.H.A.T.****

Kevin is currently the music director and arranger for Salt Lake Acting Company's popular annual production of Saturday's Voyeur, and also regularly composes for and performs at several other theaters. He is a member of both ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild of America.

Unlike your previous impeccable scholarly source Brad Kirkland, however, Kevin Mathie has apparently spent no time involved in productions that feature killer tomatoes.

So what on earth makes Kevin Mathie's opinion on this subject any more valuable than my own? After all, I have a prestigious Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre from the University of Southern California. I have been active in the theatre for over four decades. I have at least as much musical theatre experience as Mr. Mathie does. I've even played Harold Hill in *The Music Man* – twice! By your standards, that makes me at least as authoritative an Egyptologist as Mathie, yes?



Jim Bennett as The Music Man, Tuacahn, Summer of 2000
"Well, you got trouble, my friend. Right here with Egyptology."

So, having burnished my Egyptological credentials, let me tell demonstrate why even a cursory review of the so-called "Modern Egyptological Interpretation" reveals it to be useless.

The problem is that you're conflating art with text, as if both impart information in the same manner and with the same restraints. They don't. The reason they say that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is that it takes at least a thousand words to textually describe an image, and even then, words are inadequate to the task.

For instance, take Kevin Mathie's splash page, pictured above. Without actually providing the image, I can tell you that it features a large fellow with a beard seated at a grand piano on top of a mountain, with a host of other mountains in the background. He is surrounded by flying musical instruments, including a violin with wings, as well as sheet music that appears to be blown around by the high mountain air.

Now is that an accurate description? I think so. Is it a comprehensive description? By no means. There are a lot of elements left out – the musical score that seems to be following one of the violins, for example. And my description of the sheet music, while technically accurate, is obviously not how Mathie intended it to be interpreted. The music looks like it's just blowing everywhere, but I get the sense that this is a visual representation of how music is supposed to sound. Like the historically inaccurate church art we reviewed earlier, he's

using iconography to emotionally convey a number of different ideas and feelings, and each element in the picture is fraught with symbolism that is subject to multiple interpretations.

Now suppose I were to ask you to “translate” Mathie’s picture into ancient Egyptian. Does the flying violin represent the beauty of music, or its ability to transcend space and time, or Mathie’s personal talent, or music’s innate spirituality? I think a case can be made for all those things. Does each image within the larger image have a single, static interpretation the way words do? Of course not.

So back to non-Egyptologist/Saturday’s Voyeur songwriter Kevin’s Mathie’s official “Modern Egyptological Interpretation.”

Take a look at Item #12 in Facsimile 1:



Joseph Smith’s explanation of Item #12 is lengthy and involved, but Mathie assures us that “This is just the water that the crocodile swims in.”

Um, okay. Why is there a crocodile in the first place? Why did the artist put water with a crocodile under a picture of a human sacrifice? This would be like looking at the winged violin in the Mathie splash page and interpreting the wings as “just the wings the violin uses to fly.” Well, yes. But why is the violin flying? Violins don’t generally fly – shouldn’t we assume some deeper symbolism there?

It’s also true that crocodiles swimming in bodies of water can’t usually be found underneath people lying on couches. Insisting that there is one, and only one, interpretation of any of these images is something a real, non-musical theatre Egyptologist would likely reject.

We have a similar problem with items 5-8, shown here:



Joseph provides detailed explanations for the jars under the couch, but Mathie insists these are only “Canopic jars containing the deceased’s internal organs.”

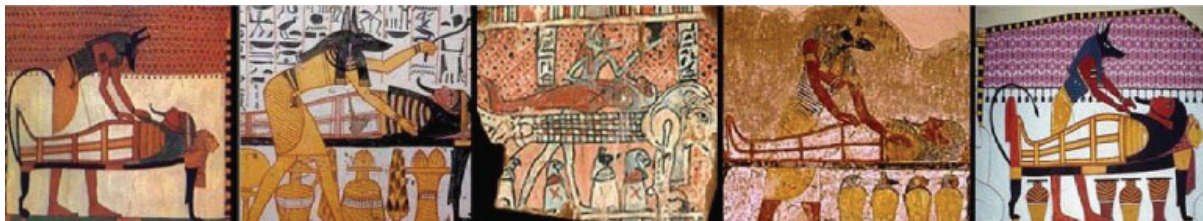
That’s simply wrong on its face, because the guy on the couch clearly isn’t deceased. He’s raising his leg and waving his arm, which, as Nibley points out, indicates that this dude ain’t dead yet.

So the lazy Mathie-plagiarized-by-Runnells interpretation is predicated on the false premise that this is a corpse like all the other corpses in other pictures, while Facsimile 1 is unmistakably showing us a live body.

Also, why do these canopic jars have animal heads? What’s the significance of one being an eagle and one being a jackal, etc.? Are we to presume that there’s no way they could represent false gods, the way Joseph says they do? (Isn’t Anubis a false god? Doesn’t he have a jackal’s head?) Are we simply to assume this is just like the crocodile water, which is only crocodile water? Is there no other way to interpret a flying violin with wings as anything other than an actual flying violin?

This is what happens when you argue from authority, especially when the authority you’re invoking for an Egyptological discussion comes from the Salt Lake City Weekly’s 2013 Arty Award.

The following images show similar funerary scenes which have been discovered elsewhere in Egypt. Notice that the jackal-headed Egyptian god of death and afterlife Anubis is consistent in every funerary scene.



Yes! Also notice that the sarcophagus is consistent in every funerary scene, too - but not at all consistent with Facsimile 1. The extant version of this scene found in the Joseph Smith Papyrus repudiates your contention that this is just a commonplace image, as all of the comparisons you provide confirm Facsimile #1’s uniqueness.

FACSIMILE 2

The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile 2 versus what it actually says according to Egyptologists and modern Egyptology:

No, the following is another Runnells plagiarism from MormonInfographics.com based on the musings of a non-Egyptologist who won the 2009 Best Musical Score award for the film *S.H.A.T.*, a man whose name has been conveniently removed from your recent version.

Perhaps it would be best if I put them side by side to allow your readers to see the theft.

Old Version with Tone Problems
Kevin Mathie gets a mention at the bottom

New, Plagiarized Version
No mention of Kevin Mathie

The Book of Abraham

Hypocephalus; a funerary amulet

Joseph Smith's Interpretation	Translated Correctly? Facsimile #2, Book of Abraham	Modern Egyptological Interpretation
1. Koltb, The residence of God		1. The god Khnum.
2. Stands next to Koltb		2. "Amun-Ra", god with two faces representing sun & setting sun.
3. God sitting on his throne, clothed with power and authority		3. "Horus-Ra" riding in his boat
4. Rauekyang, also the number 1000. The measuring of time of Olbilsh		4. Represents Sokar, not a number
5. Enish go on-dash; a governing planet		5. Cow of Hathor, behind which stands a uazet-headed goddess holding a sacred tree.
6. Represents this earth in it's four quarters		6. The four (4) sons of Horus, they can represent the four cardinal points of earth.
7. God sitting on his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood		7. The god "Min", an ithyphallic god, that is, a sexually aroused male deity.
8. Contains writings that can only be revealed in the temple		8. "grant that the soul of Osiris Sheehook may live."
9. Ought not to be revealed at the present time.		9. "the netherworld (below the earth) and its great waters."
10. Will be given in the own due time of the Lord		10. "O might god, lord of heaven and earth"
11. No Annotation Given		11. "O god of the sleeping ones from the times of creation" (Read in order 11, 10, 9, 8)
		12. "see" and "saw"
		13. "which made be"
		14. "breathings"
		15. "his book"
		16. "and may this soul and its possessor never be discovered in the netherworld"
		17. "may this tomb never be discovered"
		18. "I am Osiris in the house of Baneben in Heliopolis, so exalted and glorious. I am) copulating with without equal. I am) that mighty god in the house of Baneben of Heliopolis... that might god..."
		19. "You shall be as that god, the Bastian"
		20. Writing: "The name of this mighty god"
		21. Figures 22,23. Baboons are adoring souls of that realm
		22. "The name of this mighty god"
		23. Baboons are adoring the souls of that realm

MormonInfographics.com

	JOSEPH SMITH'S INTERPRETATION	MODERN EGYPTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION
1.	Koltb, The residence of God	The god Khnum
2.	Stands next to Koltb, called by the Egyptians (R)AUBAL	"Amun-Ra", god with two faces representing rising & setting sun
3.	God sitting on his throne, clothed with power and authority	"Horus-Ra" riding in his boat
4.	Reuekyang, also the number 1000. The measuring of time of (R)AUBAL	Represents Sokar, not a number
5.	Enish go-on-dash; a governing planet	Cow of Hathor behind which stand a uazet-headed goddess holding a sacred tree
6.	Represents this earth in its four quarters	The four sons of Horus, they can represent the four cardinal points of earth
7.	God sitting on his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the priesthood	The god "Min", an ithyphallic god that is, a sexually aroused male deity
8.	Contains writings that can only be revealed in the temple	"grant that the soul of Osiris Sheehook may live"
9.	Ought not to be revealed at the present time	"the netherworld (below the earth) and its great waters"
10.	Will be given in the own due time of the Lord	"O might god, lord of heaven and earth"
11.	No Annotation Given	"O god of the sleeping ones from the times of creation" (Read in order 11, 10, 9, 8)
12.		"see" and "saw"
13.		"which made be"
14.		"breathings"
15.		"his book"
16.		"and may this soul and its possessor never be discovered in the netherworld"
17.		"may this tomb never be discovered"
18.		"I am Osiris in the house of Baneben in Heliopolis, so exalted and glorious. I am) copulating with without equal. I am) that mighty god in the house of Baneben of Heliopolis... that might god..."
19.		"You shall be as that God, the Bastian"
20.		Writing: "The name of this mighty god"
21.		Figures 22,23. Baboons are adoring souls of that realm
22.		"The name of this mighty god"
23.		Baboons are adoring the souls of that realm

Source: Joseph Smith's Translations: Facsimile The Book of Abraham¹⁰ Modern Egyptological Translations¹¹ Facsimile Facsimile 2: Apologetics¹² (Joseph was here given 1 out of 21 translations correct?)

Kevin Mathie strikes again. All the problems I referenced with regard to our musical non-Egyptologist's interpretation of Facsimile #1 apply here, too, as does the error of equating art with text as having a single, conclusive, and exclusive interpretation. There is no reason readers should feel an obligation to accept Mr. Mathie's interpretation above yours, mine, or anyone else's, including Joseph Smith's.

The other key difference between the MormonInfographics version and the one you stole from them is you concede that "Joseph may have gotten 1 out of 21 translations correct." Presumably, you're referring to Figure #6, where the music director and arranger for Salt Lake Acting Company's popular annual production of Saturday's Voyeur agrees with Joseph Smith that these represent the four quarters of the Earth.

I certainly think that's more impressive than you do, as the likelihood of wild guesses about ancient figures getting anywhere close to the target is miniscule. Yet here we have a bullseye which you can blithely dismiss because of your confidence in the Egyptological wisdom of a man who's authority comes from being a member of both ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild of America.

You're in way over your head, Jeremy. Not even someone who has led more than 100+ musical productions and received numerous awards for his work can bail you out.

One of the most disturbing facts I discovered in my research of Facsimile 2 is figure #7. Joseph Smith said that this is “God sitting on his throne...” It’s actually Min, the pagan Egyptian god of fertility or sex. Min is sitting on a throne with an erect penis (which can be seen in the figure). In other words, Joseph interpreted that this figure with an erect penis is Heavenly Father sitting on His throne.

How is this “disturbing?” Sorry to crack a smile, but I don’t think this is a “disturbing fact;” I think it’s a delightful one. An aversion to acknowledging the existence of genitalia is more puritanical than doctrinal, and Mormons who believe in an anthropomorphic deity ought not be surprised to learn that such a god would be anatomically correct. Egyptian mores were clearly different from the Victorian ones that still linger in LDS Church culture, and I see this as nothing more than an (admittedly crude by today’s standards) acknowledgement that God has a body. (Although there’s also some debate over whether or not that’s a penis or an arm. Actually, I’m not sure which part is supposed to be the arm/penis. As far as pornography goes, this is pretty tame stuff.)

Regardless, Egyptologists and Joseph Smith both acknowledge here we have an anthropomorphic god on a throne. Joseph Smith says it’s God the Father; flying violinist Kevin Mathie cribs from Egyptologists and announces that it’s Min. Understanding that art can have multiple interpretations, it could easily be both. In any case, it’s pretty uncanny that both would see it as a god on a throne, because to my untrained eye, it looks like a goose running with a wooden crate on its back.

I think the great deal of the problems you have with the Book of Abraham originate from a false dichotomy – either everything Joseph Smith had to say about the facsimiles and the extant papyrus text can be objectively verified by modern academics, or the Book of Abraham is a complete fraud. But reality doesn’t fit into either of those categories very well. If Joseph is a complete fraud, why does he rightly recognize a god on a throne in an image that looks like a goose with a wooden crate?



A Possible Reference to a Pornographic Egyptian God
If only he had a crate on his back...

Why does he identify images that represent “the four corners of the earth” that Egyptologists agree is correct? How is it that his Abraham is consistent with apocryphal Abrahamic writings that weren’t published until after Joseph’s death? Yet, on the flip side, why would he make so

many other interpretations of the material that no Egyptologist recognizes?

Personally, my answer is one rooted in a broader context – the idea of myths and symbols being appropriated and modified by different cultures for different purposes, especially over vast periods of time. Prior to World War II, the gammadion cross appeared on American military airplanes, and it was also a common symbol of peace and industry in Japan and among Native Americans. But since Hitler got ahold of it and made it the icon of the Third Reich, the gammadion cross, aka the swastika, now has an entirely different meaning and association that has swallowed up all non-fascistic interpretations forever.

If one assumes that Abraham wrote “on papyrus, by his own hand” the material Joseph used to translate the book that bears his name, one also has to assume that the handwriting took place at least two thousand years before the copyist who put on the Joseph Smith Papyri got ahold of it. Two thousand years is a very, very long time. What kind of additional or extraneous meanings would cultures have attached to those symbols in the interim, symbols which were ancient even in the time of the Pharaohs? It would be the most natural thing in the world for a culture to appropriate the inherent power of an ancient symbol to graft an icon of a false god onto the icon of a true one.

If Abraham wrote his account “by his own hand” several millennia ago, and that account were to be passed down among Egyptian scribes for thousands of years, it would be unavoidable that scribes would borrow themes and symbols from the original story as they fashioned their own myths and legends. What seems likely to me is that whatever text and artwork was on the papyrus contained some kind of mixture of both truth and embellishment, and Joseph, via revelation, was able to extract the divine gold buried under the man-made dross. That would also mean that both Joseph and the Egyptologists are correct at the same time – the figure with the phallus represented Min, but thousands of years earlier, it represented God the Father, yet that interpretation was later modified and lost until Joseph the Seer was able to find it again.

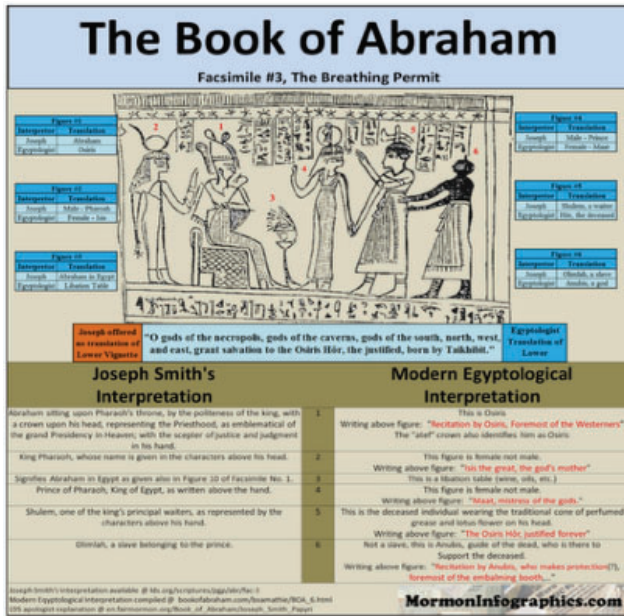
That explanation, which does not tidily fit into the box of one of the three possible explanations I previously offered for the Book of Abraham, is the one that best matches the existing evidence. It’s why the Book of Abraham contains correct information and interpretations that Joseph couldn’t possibly have guessed by accident, but it also contains material that doesn’t jibe with a Saturday’s Voyeur’s “Modern Egyptological Interpretation.” I know the ambiguity troubles you, but honest academics are forced to acknowledge and accept that kind of uncertainty. No responsible scholar would ever claim that modern scholarship allows us to perfectly and definitively understand the ancient world.



A young Jackie Bouvier in Native American garb
It didn't mean then what it means now

That doesn't seem to have stopped you and/or Kevin Mathie, though. Moving on to Facsimile 3, which you've once again plagiarized from MormonInfographics, as shown below:

Another Old Version with Tone Problems
Kevin Mathie gets his due



Haven't we beaten this dead horse long enough? All the Kevin Mathie stuff I said about Facsimiles 1 and 2 applies here, too.

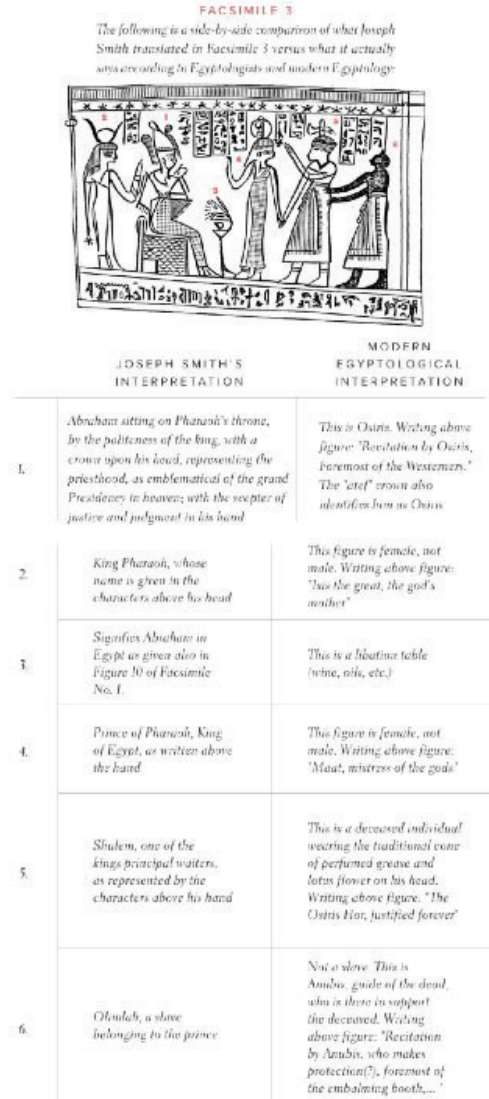
I'll add this comment about Facsimile 3 from a Mormon Egyptologist John Gee, who has degrees from Berkeley and a doctorate in Egyptology from Yale.

Here's what Dr. Gee had to say:

"Facsimile 3 has always been the most neglected of the three facsimiles in the Book of Abraham. Unfortunately, most of what has been said about this facsimile is seriously wanting at best and highly erroneous at worst. This lamentable state of affairs exists because the basic Egyptological work on Facsimile 3 has not been done, and much of the evidence lies neglected and unpublished in museums. Furthermore, what an ancient Egyptian understood by a vignette and what a modern Egyptologist understands by the same vignette are by no means the same thing. Until we understand what the Egyptians understood by this scene, we have no hope of telling whether what Joseph Smith said about them matches what the Egyptians thought about them."

Why should I presume John Gee is wrong and Kevin Mathie is right?

Another New, Plagiarized Version
Still no mention of Kevin Mathie



Sources:
Joseph Smith's *Translations: Facsimile 3* in *Book of Abraham* *
Modern Egyptological Interpretations *
Facsimile 3: Apologetics * ("There are LDS experts who believe the Book of Abraham is a genuine artifact, and that it testifies of Joseph Smith's status as a prophet. Non-LDS experts obviously do not agree with that.")

3. Egyptologists state that Joseph Smith's translation of the papyri and facsimiles are gibberish and have absolutely nothing to do with what the papyri and facsimiles actually are and what they actually say. Nothing in each and every facsimile is correct to what Joseph Smith claimed they said.

By "they," you really mean Kevin Mathie. That's it. One guy who is a musician, not a scholar, who comprises the entirety of your whole crack Egyptological research squad - a single, utterly unqualified source to uphold your entire case against the Book of Abraham. There is no reason why anyone should take a single thing Kevin Mathie has to say on this subject with any degree of seriousness, and there is every reason to ignore it. You have not made an argument; you've essentially passed along gossip.

Non-Mormon Egyptologists essentially ignore the facsimiles, and you provide no links to anyone with any credentials or authority who understands them or can offer an informed opinion on them. Once again, you have passed on an accusation you don't understand yourself which is much, much weaker than you pretend it is. This is pathetic scholarship that collapses under the slightest examination.

FACSIMILE 1

1. The names are wrong.

Says Kevin Mathie.

2. The Abraham scene is wrong.

According to Kevin Mathie, who created a fake drawing that contradicts the authentic drawings you compare to Facsimile 1, which all have sarcophagi, not Facsimile 1's live body.

3. He names gods that are not part of the Egyptian belief system; of any known mythology or belief system.

At least, that's what Kevin Mathie says. A host of highly trained scholars say otherwise, but since they're faithful Latter-day Saints, you rely on a musician who agrees with you.

FACSIMILE 2

1. Joseph translated 11 figures on this facsimile.

What on earth do you mean he "translated" 11 figures?
How do you "translate" art? Can you translate the Mona Lisa into Spanish?

None of the names are correct and none of the gods exist in Egyptian religion or any recorded mythology.

Single source: Kevin Mathie

2. Joseph misidentifies every god in this facsimile.

"I know this, because I can play the piano."

- Kevin Mathie



Mona Lisa
The Spanish Translation

FACSIMILE 3

1. Joseph misidentifies the Egyptian god Osiris 19 as Abraham.

Like how you misidentify Kevin Mathie as an Egyptological expert?

My theory, which is just as valid as Kevin Mathie's because, you know, show biz and stuff, is that this figure was originally Abraham, and that he was later misidentified by Egyptians as one of their own gods much in the same way *View of the Hebrews* mistakes Quetzalcoatl for Moses. (See? Misappropriation of symbols. It happens even with non-Mormons, too!)

2. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Isis 20 as the Pharaoh.

Ibid. (Plus Kevin Mathie.)

3. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Maat 21 as the Prince of the Pharaoh.

More Ibid, and more Mathie.

4. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Anubis 11 as a slave.

Wait a minute. That guy's Anubis? Isn't Anubis the one with the jackal's head in all your non-Facsimile 1-resembling couch scenes? Why does this Anubis look nothing like the other Anubises? He looks like an ancient Ed Grimley with that weird spurt of hair sticking out of his head. Fact is, this interpretation, like all of the interpretations you offer, are far from definitive, Kevin Mathie notwithstanding.

5. Misidentifies the dead Hor as a waiter.

I identify him as Kevin Mathie.
And I'm probably just as right.

6. Joseph misidentifies – twice – a female as a male.

You've misidentified Kevin Mathie as an Egyptological expert twenty times more than that, so you might want to consider cutting Joseph some slack.



PICTURED: ANUBIS
Or maybe Kevin Mathie

You're presuming definitive interpretations of these figures where none exist. (See the quote from John Gee, above.) If they did, you'd have a more credible source for them than Kevin Mathie.

4. The Book of Abraham teaches an incorrect Newtonian view of the universe .

Not only is this false, but the link you've provided above to prove your point doesn't say this at all. And this is the same link you used in your last version of the CES Letter, which means you've had at least two years to read your own source, and you still haven't bothered to do so. Why should your readers take you seriously when you don't even read your own sources, let alone understand them?

Keith Norman, the single source for this assertion, holds no special academic or ecclesiastical authority that requires us to view this as nothing more than one man's opinion. Your A-Team of LDS scholars consists of a lawyer who did some fundraising for a archeological group (Thomas Ferguson), the guy in charge of the animated Killer Tomatoes series (Boyd Kirkland), the musical director for the Salt Lake Acting Company (Kevin Mathie), and now this Keith Norman guy, whose entire contribution to LDS scholarship seems to consist of a couple of articles written for Dialogue and Sunstone almost thirty years ago. The idea that his opinion represents a definitive deconstruction or even an accurate representation of LDS cosmology is more than a little silly.



SIR ISAAC NEWTON

A man who, unlike Jeremy Runnells, actually read his sources

In the piece, Norman himself is quite self-effacing and readily concedes that his academic credentials and skills are not up to the task of providing anything more than his personal speculation on this subject. "Astronomy has always held a fascination for me, but my mathematical abilities are awaiting the Millennium for development," he says. (Norman's degree is in early Christian studies, not any hard sciences.) Later, he admits he only has "a superficial knowledge of what has been going on in theoretical physics in this [the 20th] century. I can presume to offer no more than that, as I am still struggling with books on the subject written for the layman."

What's telling is that the focus of the article is on how Latter-day Saint theology is Newtonian, but he never cites the Book of Abraham as the source for his theory, and he certainly offers no evidence that the Book of Abraham teaches a Newtonian view of the universe. He cites the B of A only once. Here's the reference in its entirety:

The astronomical assertions in the Pearl of Great Price may indicate that God rules within our own galaxy, the Milky Way: "Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest" (Abr. 3:9; cf. facsimile 2, esp. fig. 5). Does each God have his and her own galaxy or cluster of galaxies?

A good question, and one that in no way undermines the cosmology of the Book of Abraham. Your proof-texting of Norman's article is inexcusably lazy. I recommend you go to whatever Redditor sold you this bill of goods and ask for your money back.

These Newtonian astronomical concepts, mechanics, and models of the universe have since been succeeded and substantially modified by 20th century Einsteinian physics.

All concepts you, personally, know nothing about and are in no position to discuss.

What we find in Abraham 3 and the official scriptures of the LDS Church regarding science reflects a Newtonian world concept. Just as the Catholic Church's Ptolemaic cosmology was displaced by the new Copernican and Newtonian world model, however, the nineteenth-century, canonized, Newtonian world view has since been displaced by Einstein's twentieth-century science.

We don't find any such thing; your source doesn't say this, and you're asserting something you don't understand and can't possibly defend. This is question-begging gone mad.

Keith E. Norman, an LDS scholar ...

He's no more an LDS scholar than you or I are.

... has written that for the LDS Church:

"It is no longer possible to pretend there is no conflict."

Conflict between what? Because he's not talking about the Book of Abraham and a Newtonian concert of the universe. You are ripping Keith Norman out of context and misusing his words.

Norman is taking an overarching view of Latter-day Saint cosmology here, and he admits in the article that no such Latter-day Saint cosmological framework has "ever [been] systematized," which means that any conflicts he observes are only with his own personal theories of what that cosmology is. And right after he writes the sentence you quote above re: the conflict between cosmology and doctrine, he writes this sentence:

"Given the dynamic nature of Mormon theology, and the mechanism of progressive revelation in accordance with our capacity to receive, such a reconciliation [between cosmology and doctrine] is by no means far-fetched."

Last time, I gave you the benefit of the doubt and presumed that it was ignorance, not malice, that led you to mislead your readers on this point. But since it's been roughly five years since you first published the CES Letter, the fact that you still haven't read through your own sources suggests a malicious level of ignorance on your part.

Norman continues:

“Scientific cosmology began its leap forward just when Mormon doctrine was becoming stabilized. The revolution in twentieth-century physics precipitated by Einstein dethroned Newtonian physics as the ultimate explanation of the way the universe works. Relativity theory and quantum mechanics, combined with advances in astronomy, have established a vastly different picture of how the universe began, how it is structured and operates, and the nature of matter and energy. This new scientific cosmology poses a serious challenge to the Mormon version of the universe.”

And do you know what that serious challenge is, according to Mr. Norman? (That would require reading your own article, so I'm confident your answer is no.) It's the idea that Ex Nihilo creation - matter coming into existence from nothing - is more scientifically defensible than the idea that matter is eternal. That is utter and complete nonsense that requires tortured semantic distinctions with which Einstein would never have agreed.

Since you have clearly not read the article, allow me to summarize Norman's thesis here - one which, again, does not rely on the Book of Abraham at all.

Scientists are incapable of measuring time and space prior to the Big Bang, so some essentially describe the pre-Big Bang universe as “nothing.”

What scientists mean when they say “nothing,” however, is that there is nothing that can be defined within the current confines of space and time. We have no way of measuring or observing the pre-Big Bang universe, so there's no point in trying to describe something we do not have the resources to understand.

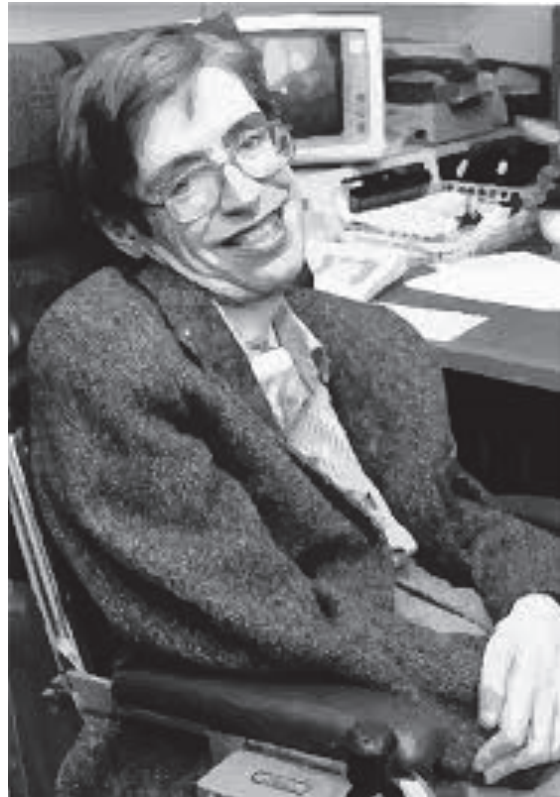
This is how Stephen Hawking put it:

Since events before the Big Bang have no observational consequences, one may as well cut them out of the theory, and say that time began at the Big Bang. Events before the Big Bang, are simply not defined, because there's no way one could measure what happened at them.

That is not to say they were “nothing.” Quite the opposite, according to Dr. Hawking:

At this time, the Big Bang, all the matter in the universe, would have been on top of itself. The density would have been infinite.

Norman, with a “pre-Hawking” understanding of the universe, seizes on semantic wordplay to



DR. STEPHEN HAWKING
He, too, read his own sources

say that the Ex Nihilo creationists are scientifically accurate, because matter came into existence with no antecedent. Yet he also undermines his own argument later in the piece when he speculates that “our universe may have begun as an enormous black hole in a different universe.” That’s not the same thing as “nothing,” and Ex Nihilo is nonsense under both Newtonian and Einsteinian models. What is “nothing” is the bearing Keith Norman’s highly speculative article has on your uninformed argument.

Grant Palmer, a Mormon historian and CES teacher for 34 years, wrote ...

This is misleading. It suggests that Palmer was working professionally both as a historian and a CES teacher for that same 34-year period of time, which he wasn’t. He had a Master’s Degree in American history, not a doctorate, and he published no academically peer-reviewed papers on Mormon history during his lifetime, unless you count the master’s thesis on the Godbeites that he wrote as a student. Palmer is beloved by dissidents because they agree with him, but his academic credentials would not qualify him as a professional historian, and his scholarship, while perhaps not as shoddy as your own, still leaves a great deal to be desired.

So what did Mr. Palmer have to add to this discussion?

“Many of the astronomical and cosmological ideas found in both Joseph Smith’s environment and in the Book of Abraham have become out of vogue, and some of these Newtonian concepts are scientific relics. The evidence suggests that the Book of Abraham reflects concepts of Joseph Smith’s time and place rather than those of an ancient world.

– *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p.25

This, again, is question-begging. This is not evidence; it’s an assertion of evidence that you don’t bother to provide. Citing specific examples of any supposed “scientific relics” from the book would be helpful.

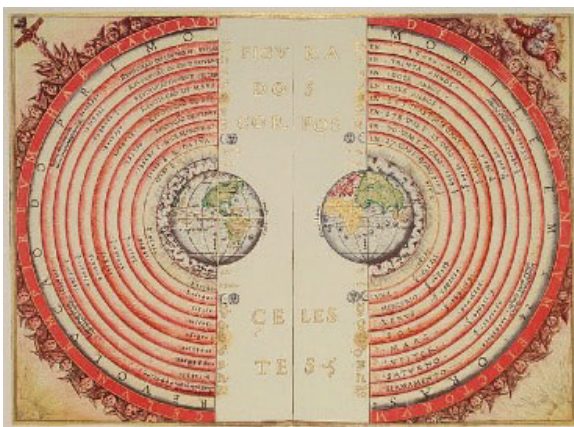


Figure of the heavenly bodies – An illustration of the Ptolemaic geocentric system, 1568
Way before Joseph Smith

It’s also a bizarre criticism because one would expect “scientific relics” that were typical of Abraham’s time, not Joseph Smith’s. And - surprise! - that’s exactly what we find as the Book of Abraham presents a largely geocentric worldview. Geocentrism, or the idea that the earth is the center of the universe, was certainly a scientific relic by the time Joseph Smith came on the scene, but it’s entirely appropriate for Abraham, and it’s actually evidence for the Book of Abraham’s ancient origins.

5. 86% of Book of Abraham chapters 2, 4, and 5 are King James Version Genesis chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12. Sixty-six out of seventy-seven verses are quotations or close paraphrases of King James Version wording. (See *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p.19)

If the Book of Abraham is an ancient text written thousands of years ago “by his own hand upon papyrus,” then what are 17th century King James Version text doing in there? What does this say about the book being anciently written by Abraham?

This is just a reprise of the same issue you raised in your issues with Book of Mormon translation, and, once again, you demonstrate a fundamental ignorance of the relationship between an original text and its translated version.

A modern translator’s word choices say nothing about the antiquity of a given text, and, absent copyright issues, there is nothing sinister about translators relying on existing translations of similar material to guide them in their translation.

When the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he quoted from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, which was the most modern version then available. What does this say about the Old Testament as an ancient document? Nothing whatsoever.



6. Why are there anachronisms in the Book of Abraham? For example, the terms Chaldeans, Egyptus, and Pharaoh are all anachronistic.

These look more like legitimate translation choices than actual anachronisms.

Re: Chaldeans: Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees, and so it’s not surprising that he also refers to his land as “Chaldea” and its inhabitants as “Chaldeans.” It’s clear from the text that the use of the term “Chaldeans” has reference to people from Ur, not people from the nation of Chaldea that came along much later. How else should Abraham have described the people from Ur of the Chaldees? Chaldeesians? Ur-ites?

Re: Egyptus: Prepublication versions of the B of A manuscript refer to Egyptus as “Zeptah,” which is similar to the chronologically appropriate and non-anachronistic “S3t-Pth,” which can be rendered in a Latinized version as “Egyptus.” This independent etymology actually strengthens the case for the Book of Abraham’s ancient origins.

Re: Pharoah: The fact that Egyptians didn’t use the word Pharoah to describe their kings until later than Abraham would have written his book doesn’t – and shouldn’t – preclude a translator from using the commonly understood word in a modern translation.

Additionally, Abraham refers to the facsimiles in 1:12 and 1:14 . However, as noted and conceded above in the Church’s essay, these facsimiles did not even exist in Abraham’s time as they are standard first century C.E. pagan Egyptian funerary documents.

This was neither noted nor conceded in the Church’s essay. What was noted and conceded was that the text, not the Facsimiles, did not match the Book of Abraham text, and that one need not assume that the text next to Facsimile 1 demonstrated that the two were connected. In fact that’s part of your next quote, like so:

“Some have assumed that the hieroglyphs adjacent to and surrounding facsimile 1 must be a source for the text of the book of Abraham.”
– Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham essay, lds.org

And the next sentence from the essay, which you exclude from your quote even though it answers your question:

“But this claim rests on the assumption that a vignette and its adjacent text must be associated in meaning. In fact, it was not uncommon for ancient Egyptian vignettes to be placed some distance from their associated commentary.”

You don’t get to cite the beginning of the paragraph and ignore the end of it. The assertion in the essay is directly contrary to your claim.

WHY WOULD ANYONE ASSUME THAT?

“And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; and that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record.”
– Abraham 1:12

You’re also assuming this is the original version of Abraham’s record, when, in fact, it’s a copy of a copy of a copy two thousand years or so from the original record. Your assumptions are incorrect.

7. Facsimile 2, Figure #5 states the sun receives its “light from the revolutions of Kolob.” We now know that the process of nuclear fusion is what makes the stars and suns shine. With the discovery of quantum mechanics, scientists learned that the sun’s source of energy is internal, and not external. The sun shines because of thermonuclear fusion. The sun does not shine because it gets its light from any other star or any other external source.

This one inspired me to set up a class action lawsuit against Stevie Wonder for his song “You Are the Sunshine of my Life” because, contrary to his scientifically inaccurate lyrics, the sunshine of his life actually shines because of thermonuclear fusion.

The comment on Figure #5 reads as follows:

Is called in Egyptian Enish-go-on-dosh;
this is one of the governing planets also,
and is said by the Egyptians to be the Sun,
and to borrow its light from Kolob
through the medium of Kae-e-vanrash,
which is the grand Key, or, in other words,
the governing power, which governs
fifteen other fixed planets or stars, as also
Floese or the Moon, the Earth and the
Sun in their annual revolutions. This
planet receives its power through the
medium of Kli-flos-is-es, or Hah-ko-kau-
beam, the stars represented by numbers 22
and 23, receiving light from the
revolutions of Kolob.



*Stevie Wonder singing about
the medium of Kae-e-vanrash*

The phrase “is said by the Egyptians” ought to be a clue that this is a description of an Egyptian metaphor, not a literal scientific treatise. In other words, when we say “the sun rises in the East,” those words convey a valuable metaphorical meaning, even though they’re not at all scientifically accurate. The sun, of course, is well beyond the boundaries of the four cardinal directions, and it is the earth’s relative movement, not the sun’s, that accounts for this scientifically indefensible concept of “sunrise.”

On the other hand, I don’t see any reason why thermonuclear fusion couldn’t be a key component of “the medium of Kae-e-vanrash.”

8. There is a book published in 1829 by Thomas Dick entitled *The Philosophy of a Future State* .

1829. A very good year, indeed. It’s the year the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph was already pretty far down the road with Mormon theology by this point, so this book couldn’t have been included in all the stuff he supposedly plagiarized to write the Book of Mormon. Maybe this made for a bit of light reading after he was poring through *View of the Hebrews*, *The Late War between the United States and Great Britain*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, oodles of Captain Kidd stories, and dozens of obscure local and African maps.

But, okay, here we go. One more accusation of plagiarism. Excuse me for not being staggered, floored, or astounded. You can only cry wolf so many times.

Joseph Smith owned a copy of the book and Oliver Cowdery quoted some lengthy excerpts from the book in the December 1836 *Messenger and Advocate*.

Indeed! And Oliver participated in the Book of Abraham translation process. Why would a plagiarist call attention to his source? A source which, just by reading the excerpt to which you link which you clearly haven't read yourself, clearly bears no textual resemblance to the Book of Abraham at all?

Klaus Hansen, an LDS scholar, stated:

Klaus Hansen? Am I supposed to know who he is? Should I add him to the team of killer tomatoes and Saturday's Voyeur? And why is it that the only LDS "scholars" you respect are those who agree with you, while those who disagree are just "unofficial apologists?" But OK. What did the good Mr. Hansen state?

"The progressive aspect of Joseph's theology, as well as its cosmology, while in a general way compatible with antebellum thought, bears some remarkable resemblances to Thomas Dick's 'Philosophy of a Future State'."

That may be why Oliver chose to quote from him. I quote from C.S. Lewis on my blog all the time, because I'm thrilled to find a non-Mormon writer advancing what seems, to me, to be some very remarkable resemblances to Mormon ideas. To my knowledge, no one has accused me of plagiarism as a result, nor should it surprise us when people from different backgrounds arrive at similar philosophical conclusions.

Because that's what we're talking about here – ideas that Thomas Dick had that bear some similarity to ideas in the Book of Abraham. Clearly none of Dick's text can be found in the B of A, so insinuations of plagiarism are pretty silly.

Hansen continues:

"Some very striking parallels to Smith's theology suggest that the similarities between the two may be more than coincidental. Dick's lengthy book, an ambitious treatise on astronomy and metaphysics, proposed the idea that matter is eternal and indestructible..."

Correct.

and rejected the notion of a creation ex nihilo.

Incorrect.

"None but that Eternal Mind which counts the number of the stars, **which called them from nothing into existence**, and arranged them in the respective stations they occupy, and whose eyes run to and fro through the unlimited extent of creation, can form a clear and comprehensive conception of the number, the order, and the economy of this vast portion of the system of nature." [Emphasis added]

– Thomas Dick, Philosophy of a Future State, pp. 206-207.

Calling things from "nothing into existence" is the very definition of Ex Nihilo creation, which Dick clearly accepts and the Book of Abraham explicitly rejects. Mr. Dick has a bunch

of other ideas that fly in the face of Mormon theology. His God is “a spiritual uncompounded substance, having no visible form, nor sensible quantities, ‘inhabiting eternity,’ and filling immensity with his presence, his essential glory cannot form an object for the direct contemplation of any finite intelligence.” (p.202) This deity also “existed alone, independent of every other being” for “[i]nnumerable ages before the universe was created.” (p. 56)

That’s about as un-Latter-day Saint – and un-Book of Abraham – as a God can possibly be.

Much of the book dealt with the infinity of the universe, made up of innumerable stars spread out over immeasurable distances. Dick speculated that many of these stars were peopled by ‘various orders of intelligences’ and that these intelligences were ‘progressive beings’ in various stages of evolution toward perfection.

Those, apparently, are the parts of the book that Oliver liked, which is why he quoted from them in the Messenger and Advocate. Like you, he apparently prefers to quote scholars when they agree with him.

In the Book of Abraham, part of which consists of a treatise on astronomy and cosmology, eternal beings of various orders and stages of development likewise populate numerous stars. They, too, are called ‘intelligences.’

Same name, but with entirely different functions. Dick’s divine intelligence is completely and forever removed from every other intelligence, all of which is far too limited and weak to ever understand the Eternal Mind. Abraham 3, where God steps into the midst of intelligences and proclaims “These I shall make my rulers” is antithetical to Dick’s conception of deity.

Dick speculated that ‘the systems of the universe revolve around a common centre...the throne of God.’ In the Book of Abraham, one star named Kolob ‘was nearest unto the throne of God.’

“Therefore are they before the **throne of God**, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” – Revelation 7:15

“And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the **throne of God**, and by him that sitteth thereon.” – Matthew 23:22

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the **throne of God**.” – Hebrews 12:2

Emphasis added in all above biblical passages. There are plenty more. The “throne of God” even makes several appearances in the Book of Mormon, which was completed before Joseph got his hands on Philosophy of a Future State. Incredible as it may seem, this is proof that Joseph could have thought of using this three-word phrase without Thomas Dick’s help.

Other stars, in ever diminishing order, were placed in increasing distances from this center.”

– Mormonism and the American Experience, p.79-80, 110

I'd very much like to read the rest of this passage from Klaus Hansen, as the few articles I can find of his suggest that he's a faithful Latter-day Saint. I don't have a copy of his book, and, apparently, neither does anyone else - it has no reviews on Amazon. The text is unavailable online. It would be interesting to see if these observations are tempered by a broader context that you neglect to cite, as I suspect they probably are.

9. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland was directly asked about the papyri not matching the Book of Abraham in a March 2012 BBC interview:

Sweeney: Mr. Smith got this papyri and he translated them and subsequently as the Egyptologists cracked the code something completely different...

Holland: (Interrupts) All I'm saying...all I'm saying is that what got translated got translated into the word of God. The vehicle for that, I do not understand and don't claim to know and know no Egyptian.

Is "I don't know and I don't understand but it's the word of God" really the best answer that a "prophet, seer, and revelator" can come up with to such a profound problem that is driving many members out of the Church?

Is paraphrasing Elder Holland to torture his words into sounding more ignorant than they actually were really the best way to make your argument?

Elder Holland didn't say "I don't know and I don't understand but it's the word of God." What he said was that he didn't understand "the vehicle for that," meaning the means of translation, and that he didn't know Egyptian. If you actually watched the documentary, which I did at the time, you'd recognize that Sweeney was about as obnoxious to Elder Holland as he could have possibly been. Elder Holland's patience and grace under hostile fire was impressive by any objective standard.



*"Mitt Romney was a bishop here."
- John Sweeney, BBC*

This may be a tangent, but that documentary merits additional comment. Throughout the piece John Sweeney gets all the simple details wrong. For example, he constantly refers to chapels as temples; yet when he stands outside the Boston Temple, he claims Mitt Romney was "a bishop here." Well, no. As any Latter-day Saint knows, regular meetinghouses and temples serve very

different purposes. If someone's going to warn the world about Mitt's scary cult, which was the purpose of the piece, maybe they should get the little things right if they want us to trust them on the big things.

It's clear who Sweeney trusts, though – dissidents. He spends about twenty minutes interviewing modern polygamists who have zero connection to the church to which Mitt Romney belongs, and then another twenty or so interviewing unstable people who've left the church, one of whom claims to have been “followed,” although whether or not it was the church that was following him, he can't be sure. Sweeney makes one offhand comment that the vast majority of the people who knew Mitt as a bishop really liked and respected him, but that comment comes before a lengthy interview with the one woman who didn't. That's the approach. If you hate the Mormons, then you're honest and credible. If you like them, then you're hiding something. (Sound familiar, Jeremy? It should.)

At one point in Sweeney's piece, some wackadoodle, random hairy dude claims that Mormon spies are trained by the CIA to learn how to snoop on church members' private lives. Sweeney then cuts to a spooky shot of the Church Office Building and scarily intones that he has contacted a CIA agent “who refuses to reveal his name.” This CIA wannabe Deep Throat confirms... that the CIA does, in fact, employ Mormons. That's it. That's the smoking gun evidence of some secret Mormon spy network. No word if Lutherans who work for the CIA are also being trained to spy on parishioners.

After giving full hearing to reports by the angriest people imaginable about all the horrors of Mormonism, he then ambushes Elder Holland and asks him to deny these horrors, which he does, after which Sweeney presents some variation of “Oh, sure, Elder Holland. You may claim that you don't follow people and shun people and cut them out of their families, but I've found thirty people” – Sweeney's own, admitted number – “who beg to differ.” That's the tone of this piece – thirty loopy, ex-Mormon cranks vs. the entire faithful membership of the LDS Church, the whole of which gets about a fifth of the total screen time.

But you're right – as he was being badgered by a hostile interviewer who was unwilling to give him time to respond, Elder Holland did not provide a comprehensive understanding of the Book of Abraham in the few seconds he was allotted before the next question. Or perhaps he did go on at length, and Sweeney left it on the cutting room floor. Making Elder Holland look good was not on John Sweeney's agenda.

The following are respected Egyptian scholars/Egyptologists statements regarding Joseph Smith and the Book of Abraham:

“...these three facsimiles of Egyptian documents in the Pearl of Great Price depict the most common objects in the Mortuary religion of Egypt. Joseph Smith's interpretations of them as part of a unique revelation through Abraham, therefore, very clearly demonstrates that he was totally unacquainted with the significance of these documents and absolutely ignorant of the simplest facts of Egyptian writing and civilization.”

– Dr. James H. Breasted, University of Chicago, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*, p.26-27

“It may be safely said that there is not one single word that is true in these explanations.”

– Dr. W.M. Flinders Petrie, London University, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*, p.24

“It is difficult to deal seriously with Joseph Smith’s impudent fraud... Smith has turned the goddess [Isis in Facsimile #3] into a king and Osiris into Abraham.”

– Dr. A. H. Sayce, Oxford professor of Egyptology, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*, p.23

Man. You left all the big guns for the end, didn’t you? If you had all these respected Egyptian scholars in your back pocket, why did you keep trotting out the guy who wrote Saturday’s *Voyeur* to make your case?

I’d like to see what else Dr. James H. Breasted has to say on the subject. Is he still teaching at the University of Chicago? No, he isn’t, probably because he’s been dead for over eighty years. Same with A.H. Sayce. Flinders Petrie is the kid of the group – he died in 1942. All these statements were made over a hundred years ago in the service of an anti-Mormon tract published by Franklin Spalding, an Episcopal bishop. All of them would have believed Egyptological ideas that modern scholars would now reject, based on the most current research available. Certainly all of them precede the flood of Book of Abraham scholarship that has taken place since the Joseph Smith Papyri were discovered in 1967, papyri that none of them saw.

Hugh Nibley, who I quote in fire red again, absolutely destroys these guys.



At that time it was claimed that the pronouncements of five of the greatest scholars of all time had “completely demolished” all grounds for belief in the divine inspiration or historic authenticity of the Book of Abraham and, through it, the Book of Mormon. It turned out, however, that Bishop Franklin S. Spalding, in gathering and manipulating the necessary evidence for his determined and devious campaign, had (1) disqualified the Mormons from all participation in the discussion on the grounds that they were not professional Egyptologists; (2) sent special warnings and instructions to his experts that made it impossible for any of them to decide for Joseph Smith; (3) concealed all correspondence that did not support the verdict he desired; (4) given the learned jury to

understand that the original Egyptian manuscripts were available, which they were not; (5) said that Mormons claimed them to be the unique autobiographic writings and sketching of Abraham, which they did not; (6) announced to the world that Joseph Smith was being tested on linguistic grounds alone, specifically as a translator, though none of his experts ventured to translate a single word of the documents submitted; and (7) rested his case on the “complete agreement” of the scholars, who agreed on nothing save that the Book of Abraham was a hoax.

The experts (1) did not agree among themselves at all when they spoke without collusion; (2) with the exception of James H. Breasted, they wrote only brief and contemptuous notes, though it was claimed that they had given the documents “careful consideration”; (3) they admitted that they were hasty and ill-tempered, since they at no time considered anything of Joseph Smith’s worth any serious attention at all; (4) they translated nothing and produced none of the “identical” documents, which, according to them, were available in countless numbers and proved Joseph Smith’s interpretations a fraud. They should have done much better than they did since they had everything their own way, being free to choose for interpretation and comment whatever was easiest and most obvious, and to pass by in complete silence the many formidable problems presented by the three facsimiles. Those Mormons who ventured a few polite and diffident questions about the consistency of the criticisms or the completeness of the evidence instantly called down upon their heads the Jovian bolts of the New York Times, accusing them of “reviling scholars and scholarship.” A safer setup for the critics of Joseph Smith could not be imagined. And yet it was they and not the Mormons who insisted on calling off the whole show just when it was getting interesting. It was not a very edifying performance.

– From “A New Look at the History of the Pearl of Great Price” published in The Improvement Era, May, 1970.

Yeah, maybe the flying violin dude was your best bet after all. At least, he was the first time you published your letter.

In addition to the above, world renowned and respected University of Chicago professor of Egyptology, Dr. Robert Ritner, provided a detailed response and rebuttal to the LDS Church’s *Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham* essay that is sobering and devastating. Dr. Ritner’s rebuttal to the Church’s essay can be read [here](#).

Congratulations on finding a rare non-Latter-day Saint Egyptologist who has bothered to look at the Book of Abraham with any degree of academic qualification. If you were actually writing a credible piece of scholarship, you would have scrubbed Kevin Mathie out of your letter completely and revised it based on Dr. Ritner’s work. The fact that you didn’t do that suggests, again, you haven’t read Dr. Ritner’s work. Or that you don’t care about the strength of your arguments as long they drive people out of the Church. (Probably both.)

Dr. Ritner is an exception to the rule that the Book of Abraham is all but ignored by non-Mormon Egyptologists, because, frankly, they don’t care enough about the issue to pay any attention to it, which is why you’re left with Kevin Mathie.

There is no denying, however, that Ritner's assessment is devastating to anyone who believes that the text of the Breathing Permit of Hor corresponds to the text of the Book of Abraham according to modern Egyptological understanding. Now I don't know anyone who believes that, necessarily - certainly the Church doesn't, and they never have - but if there's somebody out there who is operating under that misperception, they ought to read Ritner and get their facts straight.

I have neither the knowledge or the credentials to repudiate Ritner in any respect, although he overplays his hand when he insists that not only is the Breathing Permit of Hor not the text of the Book of Abraham, but that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, along with secret documents that only that Tanners had, prove that the entirety of the Book of Abraham comes from this relative handful of scraps.

Kerry Muhlestein explains:

If Joseph had originally written an Egyptian character in the margin and then either puzzled out or had the translation revealed to him, there would have been no need to continue to write down the original characters when making third or fourth copies of the scriptural text. [36] We can document that Joseph Smith was not in Kirtland when many of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were created. [37] Both the fact that the hieratic text was apparently overwritten onto the English Book of Abraham verses and evidence of specific scribal practices suggest that the hieratic was a late addition. [38] This indicates that they were written after the text had been completed, not copied beforehand and then translated.

Unfortunately, Ritner refuses to concede that anything Latter-day Saint academics have written about the Book of Abraham is worthy of his time, despite the extensive and serious work they have done that is not easily dismissed. Here's Hugh Nibley, for instance, writing a rebuttal to Ritner's pat dismissal of Joseph Smith's descriptions of the facsimiles, likely written before Ritner was born.

...it is important to emphasize what many Egyptologists are insisting on today as never before, namely, the folly of giving just one interpretation and one only to any Egyptian representation. This is the pit into which Joseph Smith's critics have always fallen: "This cannot possibly represent 'A' because it represents 'B'!" "The value of an Egyptian presentation," Eberhard Otto reminds us, "depended on seeing the greatest possible number of meanings in the briefest possible formulation."³ Heretofore, critics of the Joseph Smith explanations have insisted on the least possible number of meanings, namely one, to every item, and as a result have not only disagreed widely among themselves, but also exposed their efforts to drastic future revision. The Egyptians "considered it a particular nicety that symbols should possess multiple significance," wrote Henri Frankfort, "that one single interpretation should not be the only possible one."

It's also interesting that Ritner labels his piece as a response to the Church's essay, as he essentially only responds to the subjects that he feels he can easily discredit - he only goes

after the low-hanging fruit, as it were. The following quotes from the Church's essay are completely ignored by Robert Ritner:

The book speaks of "the plain of Olishem," a name not mentioned in the Bible. An ancient inscription, not discovered and translated until the 20th century, mentions a town called "Ulisum," located in northwestern Syria.

Ritner's response: Silence.

Further, Abraham 3:22–23 is written in a poetic structure more characteristic of Near Eastern languages than early American writing style.

No response from Ritner.

Facsimile 1 and Abraham 1:17 mention the idolatrous god Elkenah. This deity is not mentioned in the Bible, yet modern scholars have identified it as being among the gods worshipped by ancient Mesopotamians.

Ritner doesn't address this at all.

In the book of Abraham, God teaches Abraham about the sun, the moon, and the stars. "I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt," the Lord says, "that ye may declare all these words." Ancient texts repeatedly refer to Abraham instructing the Egyptians in knowledge of the heavens. For example, Eupolemus, who lived under Egyptian rule in the second century B.C.E., wrote that Abraham taught astronomy and other sciences to the Egyptian priests.

Ritner doesn't mention this.

A later Egyptian text, discovered in the 20th century, tells how the Pharaoh tried to sacrifice Abraham, only to be foiled when Abraham was delivered by an angel. Later, according to this text, Abraham taught members of the Pharaoh's court through astronomy. All these details are found in the book of Abraham.

Shouldn't this be included in a comprehensive response? But Ritner doesn't bother.

Other details in the book of Abraham are found in ancient traditions located across the Near East. These include Terah, Abraham's father, being an idolator; a famine striking Abraham's homeland; Abraham's familiarity with Egyptian idols; and Abraham's being younger than 75 years old when he left Haran, as the biblical account states. Some of these extrabiblical elements were available in apocryphal books or biblical commentaries in Joseph Smith's lifetime, but others were confined to nonbiblical traditions inaccessible or unknown to 19th-century Americans.

They're accessible to Ritner, but you wouldn't know that from his response, which fails to address them.

Look, again, I'm not qualified to argue Egyptological details, and Ritner is. But it ought to be disturbing, Jeremy, that, like you, he only engages arguments that he thinks he can win. You may not realize that's not how it works, but as a genuine scholar, Ritner knows better, which makes his decision to only engage part of the essay a telling admission of more uncertainty on his part than he's willing to publicly concede.

The following video offers a thorough, complete, and unbiased overview of the Book of Abraham issues as well as the apologetic responses to them:

CESLETTER.ORG/PAPYRI

Nonsense. There is no such thing as an unbiased overview of the Book of Abraham. You claim lack of bias only when people's biases agree with your own. In any case, that video came out before the Church's essay was published, so it's outdated and largely useless.

An online contributor created an [easy-to-understand document](#) very clearly outlining the Book of Abraham issues.

It's easy to understand because it's simplistic and wrong, relying on the same faulty assumptions found in the main body of your letter. Why do you refuse to identify your "online contributor?" Could it be because they have no more qualifications than you do to draw educated conclusions about the Book of Abraham?

Of all the issues, the Book of Abraham is the issue that has both fascinated and disturbed me the most. It is the issue that I've spent the most time researching because it offers a real insight into Joseph's modus operandi as well as Joseph's claim of being a translator. It is the smoking gun that has completely obliterated my testimony of Joseph Smith and his claims.

It is always a tragedy when someone loses their faith, but I consider it especially tragic when someone's testimony is obliterated because of misunderstandings, bad information, and logically fallacious assumptions like the kind you present here. The gun is smoking because you have unwittingly shot yourself in the foot. And now you've made it your life's mission to shoot as many other people's feet as you possibly can. Perhaps it's time to find something less destructive to do with your time.



***Don't point your smoking gun at my foot.
(PICTURED: My foot)***

POLYGAMY/POLYANDRY

Concerns & Questions

“So, the question of Polyandry. Polygamy is when a man has multiple wives. Polyandry is when a man marries another man’s wife. Joseph did both.”

– ELDER MARLIN K. JENSEN, LDS CHURCH HISTORIAN SWEDISH RESCUE FIRESIDE | AUDIO

Polyandry, the marriage of one woman to more than one man, typically involves shared financial, residential, and sexual resources, and children are often raised communally. There is no evidence that Joseph Smith’s sealings functioned in this way, and much evidence works against that view.

– “PLURAL MARRIAGE IN KIRTLAND AND NAUVOO, [OFFICIAL CHURCH ESSAY](#)

One of the things that also truly disturbed me in my research was discovering the real origins of polygamy and how Joseph Smith really practiced it.

SHORT ANSWER:

Most of Joseph's sealings to other women were sealings only, not marriages, and they did not have a sexual component. That's especially true of the false charges of polyandry and pedophilia you raise, which, as salacious as they are, fail to hold up to scrutiny.

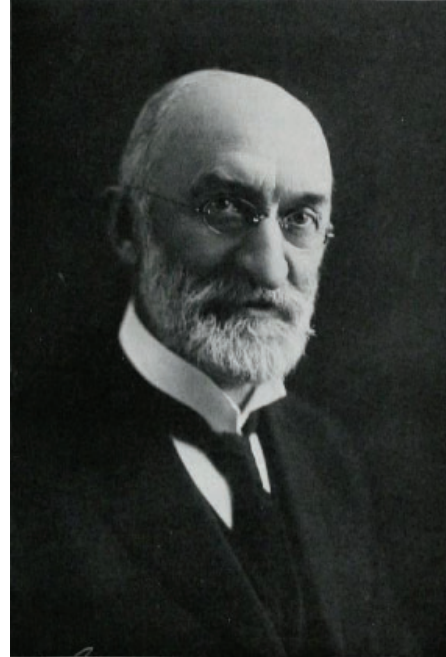
There's no doubt that polygamy is a difficult reality in Church history, but it becomes far more difficult when its depiction is as distorted as it is in the CES Letter.

LONG ANSWER:

This is an interesting way to describe your objections to polygamy. It implies that you're not, in the abstract, upset that polygamy was practiced, but its "real origins" and Joseph Smith's personal polygamy was uniquely and egregiously wicked in and of itself.

Seems like we're going to be talking about plural marriage for quite awhile, so I thought I'd begin with my personal overview on the subject. My great-grandfather was Heber J. Grant, who had three wives. My grandmother was his youngest daughter, and she lived in hiding for twelve years, raised by her sister and unable to use her real name. It's undeniable that the whole history of polygamy in the LDS Church is fraught with difficulty, and everyone would just as soon forget that it ever happened. That's pretty hard to do, though, especially since it was the defining doctrine of the church for about half a century. So where there ought to be frank discussion, too often there's awkward silence.

That's mainly because modern Mormons find the practice abhorrent, including me. I had never met an actual polygamist until I moved to St. George and saw polygamous women crowding into the local Wal-Mart and Costco, their dowdy homespun dresses and strange, braided, non-bangs hair making them stick out like sore thumbs. I had been operating under the illusion that my ancestors weren't nearly this weird, but that's much harder to do when confronted with actual polygamists.



Heber J. Grant
*Prophet, Polygamist,
and my Great-Grandfather*

Where does that leave me?

Still in denial, at least to a degree. Because, first off, my grandmother wasn't weird. She was an accomplished woman who, to my knowledge, was never forced to wear an ugly burlap dress or yank her hair back in a strange, swooshy coiffure. And in the second place, I've seen no evidence that the systemic physical and sexual abuse that is rampant in these polygamous subcultures was part of polygamy back in the day.



The FLDS Dress Code
This wasn't always the case

Yet the modern practice of polygamy invites everyone to imagine the worst.

Every young Mormon missionary is deluged with questions about polygamy, and few of them give substantive or satisfying answers. Some talk about the glut of single ladies on the frontier who needed the protection of a land-owning husband, so Mormon men dutifully obliged them in a historical anomaly that vanished when conditions changed.

I've never used that line, because, frankly, it's not true. Polygamy was always a religious principle, and to minimize its importance in the early history of the church is the height of disingenuity. But it's a principle that repulses me in practice, so how do I reconcile its previous sanction by my church with my present faith?

I do it the same way the Book of Mormon does.

Many anti-Mormons take delight in pointing out that the Book of Mormon rails on polygamy with more ferocity than anything in the Bible. The Lord condemns the unauthorized practice of polygamy as an "abomination" and refers to the taking of multiple wives as "whoredoms," and then says the following:

"Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none." (Jacob 2:27)

That seems to be a pretty clear-cut standard, which makes you wonder how Joseph Smith could possibly lead the church to go contrary to the plain language of the scripture he himself translated.

Until you read on to verse 30:

"For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things."

In other words, monogamy is the norm, unless commanded otherwise by the Lord to “raise up seed” unto Him. That’s exactly what happened when the Church practiced polygamy in the 19th century. The doctrine bound the church together through a torturous time and raised up a large second generation to carry the gospel forward. And now, when it is no longer necessary, the Lord has commanded us to revert back to the norm.

Still, while the doctrine seems clear, the practice remains disturbing, to me and to most other Mormons I know. I appreciate the essays on this subject, and I view them as solid first steps towards coming to terms with our past.

- [Joseph Smith was married to at least 34 women , as now verified in the Church’s 2014 polygamy essays.](#)

Yes, no, and sort of. The article you link says “up to 40” and includes several disputed names, but, more importantly, it makes no distinction between marriages and sealings. That distinction is essential, because Joseph was married – i.e. sealed – to dozens of other women, most of them after his death. Heber J. Grant’s father Jedidiah M. Grant stood proxy as his wife was sealed to Joseph Smith. Much of the confusion over polyandry is explained by the fact that Joseph was sealed to other men’s wives but not married to them. We’ll no doubt discuss that crucial distinction going forward, because it’s one you repeatedly ignore.

- [Polyandry : Of those 34 women, 11 of them were married women of other living men.](#)

Yep. There it is.

Joseph was sealed to lots of women, and some of them were, in fact, already married at the time. Yet in plural marriages where Joseph supposedly married other men’s wives, many of the supposed cuckolds knew about this arrangement, sanctioned it, and, what’s more, went on to live with their wives as they had before Joseph Smith came on the scene. Never mind Joseph Smith – what husband would allow such a thing? What on earth was going on?

The answer comes from an understanding of the difference between a marriage and a sealing. Because there is a crucial difference, especially in the early years of the Church. And, not to put too fine a point on it, that difference is sex. (More on that later.)

The word “seal” comes from D&C 132:45, where the Lord says to Joseph Smith:

“[W]hatsoever you [i.e. Joseph Smith] seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens.”

This “sealing power” is thought by Mormons to be identical to the authority given to the apostle Peter in the New Testament as written in Matthew 18:18 – “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Binding/sealing a couple with this authority perpetuates family bonds beyond the grave.

Today, the word “sealing” is often synonymous with “marriage,” but not always. Children, for instance, are “sealed” in temple ceremonies to their parents. Joseph saw all of this as part of his role in the “restitution of all things” mentioned in Acts 3:21. That included restoring both the sealing, or binding, power mentioned earlier, along with the ancient practice of plural marriage.

Evidence suggests that what happened in the so-called “polyandry” was that Joseph drew a distinction between sealing and regular marriage. Some married women were sealed to Joseph, but, in this life, they stayed faithful to their husbands, who were aware of the sealing and consented to it. Many more women, including my own great-great grandmother, were sealed to Joseph after his death.

Back to the sexual question, the record indicates that Joseph had sex with women to whom he was both married and sealed. When Joseph was sealed to a woman but not married to her, sexual relations would have constituted adultery, and they were absent from the relationship. There is no solid evidence to suggest that Joseph slept with the women who remained married to other men, and not much in the way of flimsy evidence, either.

Those who claim that the doctrine of plural marriage was a convenient outlet for Joseph’s libido overlook the reality of how Joseph actually conducted himself in living this principle. There were no orgies or harems. A large number of his plural wives got a wedding ceremony and nothing else. Offshoots of the mainstream LDS Church, notably the Community of Christ, insist Joseph couldn’t possibly have been a polygamist. After all, how could a man be married to over two dozen women and father children with none of them? The answer is that Joseph did not view polygamy as a license for licentiousness, and how he lived this doctrine defies the modern caricatures that have sprung up around it.

Again, understand the narrowness of my point. I’m not saying polygamy is wonderful, and I concede it is strange and disturbing. What I am saying is that it wasn’t the sexual free-for-all that your suggesting with accusations of polyandry, and all this needs to be understood in its proper historical and theological context.

Also, I’m probably going to have to say the word “sex” a lot, mainly to deny its inclusion in Joseph’s non-marriage sealings. I know that, puritanically speaking, we got into trouble about this sort of thing when we had to acknowledge that God has genitalia, but the main objection to polyandry is the idea that Joseph was sleeping with other men’s wives, and Joseph wasn’t sleeping with other men’s wives. He was sealed to them in a religious ceremony, and then these women continued sleeping with their lawful husbands.

That’s an odd arrangement by modern standards, surely, but it’s not consistent with the caricature you’re trying to perpetuate.

Among them being [Apostle Orson Hyde, who was sent on his mission to dedicate Palestine when Joseph secretly married his wife, Marinda Hyde](#) .

Probably not true. [The reports are conflicting](#), and Marinda signed an affidavit asserting the sealing happened in 1843, not 1842, the time Orson was on a mission. John D. Lee says that Orson both knew and approved - “Hyde’s wife, with his consent, was sealed to Joseph for an

eternal state.” Marinda Hyde continued to live with Orson Hyde long afterward, and she was sealed to him after his death, even though they had been divorced. It has never been church policy to seal a woman to two men, so the fact that Marinda was sealed to Orson is unusual. Regardless, there is zero evidence that Joseph and Marinda had a sexual relationship.

Church Historian Elder Marlin K. Jensen and unofficial apologists like FairMormon do not dispute the polyandry.

They do, in fact, at least in the way you’re describing it. Your link to Elder Jensen’s remark cuts him off after three short sentences, so we can’t follow up, but the Church’s essay, as I quoted at the outset of this section, points out that the typical definition of polyandry does not describe what happened in these instances, and that Joseph did not involve “shared financial, residential, and sexual resources.”



Nancy Marinda Johnson Hyde
*Perhaps sealed to, but never married
to Joseph Smith*

UPDATE: The Church admits the polyandry in its October 2014 [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#) essay.

As referenced twice above, your statement is misleading, if not wholly incorrect.

The Church and apologists now attempt to justify these polyandrous marriages by theorizing that they probably didn’t include sexual relations and thus were “eternal” or “dynastic” sealings only. How is not having sex with a living man’s wife on earth only to take her away from him in the eternities to be one of your [Joseph] forty wives any better or any less immoral?

For two obvious reasons:

First, if Joseph isn’t a prophet, then the “sealing” is meaningless, which is why disbelieving husbands had no problem with their wives participating in a ceremony they thought had no efficacy. You, Jeremy, also don’t believe this sealing means anything, so why would you call it immoral if it’s an empty exercise in superstition? If you’re concerned that this is actually going to accomplish something, then you are conceding the validity of Joseph’s prophetic authority and the divine origins of plural marriage.

Second, these are consenting adults. Jedidiah M. Grant, Heber J. Grant’s father and my great-great-grandfather, stood proxy for Joseph Smith when he married my great-great-grandmother, Rachel R. Ivins, who was sealed to the Prophet after his death. To say Joseph is going to “take her away” is to presume that neither Jedidiah nor Rachel agreed to this arrangement. While that certainly seems strange to us, everyone involved made that decision of their own volition, so nobody was being “taken away” from anybody else.

If you want to argue that girls like Helen Mar Kimball, who was 14 at the time of her dynastic, non-sexual sealing, were too young to consent to such a thing, you’re still

conceding that Joseph’s authority would result in her being married to Joseph Smith after she died, and, again, conceding that God sanctioned plural marriage in the first place and will honor it in the life to come.

During the summer of 1841, Joseph Smith tested Helen Mar Kimball’s father, Apostle Heber C. Kimball, by asking Heber to give his wife, Vilate – Helen’s mother – to Joseph:



Vilate Kimball
Never sealed to and never married
to Joseph Smith

“...shortly after Heber's return from England, he was introduced to the doctrine of plural marriage directly through a startling test—a sacrifice that shook his very being and challenged his faith to the ultimate. He had already sacrificed homes, possessions, friends, relatives, all worldly rewards, peace, and tranquility for the Restoration. Nothing was left to place on the altar save his life, his children, and his wife.

Then came the Abrahamic test. Joseph demanded for himself what to Heber was the unthinkable, his

Vilate. Totally crushed spiritually and emotionally, Heber touched neither food nor water for three days and three nights and continually sought confirmation and comfort from God. On the evening of the third day, some kind of assurance came, and Heber took Vilate to the upper room of Joseph's store on Water Street. The Prophet wept at this act of faith, devotion, and obedience. Joseph had never intended to take Vilate. It was all a test.”

– Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer, p.93

If Joseph’s polygamous/polyandrous marriages are innocuous “dynastic sealings” meant for the afterlife, as the Church and apologists are now theorizing, and Joseph wanted to “dynastically link” himself to the Kimball family, why was Apostle Heber C. Kimball so troubled by Joseph’s command for his wife that he “touched neither food nor water for three days and three nights”?

Because the test clearly involved a proposal that wasn’t for that kind of sealing. Heber C. Kimball calls this an “Abrahamic test.” That’s significant, as it is compelling evidence that Joseph recognized genuine polyandry as being transgressive of the plural marriage revelation.



Abraham and Isaac by Titian
(Note: Painting may not be historically accurate.)

People talk about Abrahamic tests as if they're just really, really difficult things, but they're far more than that. Abraham was asked to do something *he knew was morally wrong*. Abraham knew that murder was contrary to the law of God, so asking him to kill anyone would have been excruciatingly difficult. But to ask him to kill Isaac? The birthright son and the heir to the Abrahamic covenant? He was born by miraculous means, yet suddenly the same God who allowed an old woman to bear a child is now asking Abraham to murder that child. The amount of inner torture this caused Abraham is unfathomable.

So if this truly was an Abrahamic test for Heber C. Kimball - and all evidence suggests that it was - the same kinds of rules apply. Heber had received a blessing saying that he and Vilate would never be separated, and then came this request. Heber knew, then, that what Joseph

was asking him to do was contrary to the laws of God, and he was being asked to do it to prove his loyalty. Personally, I have a problem with that. Indeed, I have a problem with all Abrahamic tests, especially the first one, because I'm pretty sure that if such a thing were asked of me, I would flatly refuse.

But that's not the issue you raise here. You're saying that this is proof that all of Joseph's sealings to married women were like this test. That's like saying that all prophets actually sacrificed their firstborn sons. Heber C. Kimball recognized this was uniquely different from the other sealings, strongly suggesting that the dynastic "polyandry" that actually happened wasn't like this at all.

- Out of the 34 women, 7 of them were teenage girls as young as 14-years-old.

Precisely one of the girls Joseph was sealed to – Helen Mar Kimball – was 14 years old. The rest were older than sixteen, which was marriageable age in the 19th Century. Many of them were middle-aged and older than Joseph. And the evidence strongly suggests that the sealing to Helen Mar Kimball was a sealing only, not a marriage. She continued to live with her parents, who approved the sealing, and Joseph was dead a year later. No sex.

Joseph was 37-years-old when he married 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball, twenty-three years his junior. Even by 19th century standards, this is shocking.

It's also not true, at least in the way you're implying. Joseph was sealed in a dynastic union to Helen Mar Kimball, not married in the shocking – i.e. sexual – sense. He never lived with her, and he never slept with her. Helen later married Horace Whitney when she was 18 and bore him eleven children.

UPDATE: The Church now admits that Joseph Smith married Helen Mar Kimball "several months before her 15th birthday" in its October 2014 Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo essay.

From that same essay:

Helen Mar Kimball spoke of her sealing to Joseph as being "for eternity alone," suggesting that the relationship did not involve sexual relations. After Joseph's death, Helen remarried and became an articulate defender of him and of plural marriage.



Helen Mar Kimball
*Sealed to, but never married to
Joseph Smith*

Joseph took 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball's hand in marriage after his disturbing Abrahamic test on her father, Heber, while promising Helen and her family eternal salvation and exaltation if she accepted:

“Just previous to my father’s starting upon his last mission but one, to the Eastern States, he taught me the principle of Celestial marriage, and having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet’s own mouth. My father had but one Ewe lamb, but willingly laid her upon the alter: how cruel this seemed to the mother whose heartstrings were already stretched until they were ready to snap asunder, for he had taken Sarah Noon to wife and she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice, but the Lord required more. I will pass over the temptations which I had during the twenty four hours after my father introduced to me the principle and asked me if I would be sealed to Joseph, who came next morning and with my parents I heard him teach and explain the principle of Celestial marriage - after which he said to me, ‘If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation and that of your father’s household and all of your kindred.’”

This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward. None but God and angels could see my mother’s bleeding heart – when Joseph asked her if she was willing, she replied, ‘If Helen is willing, I have nothing more to say.’ She had witnessed the sufferings of others, who were older and who better understood the step they were taking, and to see her child, who had scarcely seen her fifteenth summer, following in the same thorny path, in her mind she saw the misery which was as sure to come as the sun was to rise and set; but it was all hidden from me.”

– Helen Mar Kimball Whitney 1881 Autobiography, A Woman’s View, BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997, p.482-487 12

Why all the agony and anguish if this was an innocuous “Dynastic Linking” and sealing for the afterlife?

Who on earth ever said these sealings were “innocuous?” You may believe that there is no afterlife, or that Joseph’s sealings will not endure there, but the Kimballs clearly believed otherwise. This was an act of extraordinary significance to them, even though it seems silly to you. The point is not that plural marriage was easy; the point is that it was not the opportunity for sexual predation that you insist that it was.

Why did it seem “cruel” to Vilate, “whose heartstrings were already stretched”?

Because, according to the source you quote, Heber had “already taken Sarah Noon to wife and she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice.” Again, all the early accounts of plural marriage suggest that they viewed it as a severe trial. It was not the blithe sexual free-for-all that you characterize it to be.

- Among the women and girls was a mother-daughter set and three sister sets. Several of these girls included Joseph’s own foster daughters who lived and worked in the Smith home (Lawrence sisters, Partridge sisters, Lucy Walker).

I take issue with the term “foster daughters,” as it is not one that Joseph or any of these women would have recognized. It is true that Joseph had legal responsibility for these

women, but it is a presentist error to assume that their situation correlates with a 21st Century understanding of what foster parenting is.

If some of these marriages were non-sexual “dynastic” “eternal” sealings only, as theorized by the Church and apologists, why would Joseph need to be sealed to a mother and daughter set? The mother would be sealed to the daughter and would become part of Joseph’s afterlife family through the sealing to her mother.

Thank you for clarifying your objection here. In your last version of your letter, you just raised this issue as if it were self-explanatory as to why this was problematic. I would speculate that this was necessary because both mother and daughter would want to claim a spouse in the eternities. The family relationship is essential, yes, but there is a unique relationship between husband and wife in the Celestial Kingdom that does not come solely from being part of a dynastic line. (See D&C 131: 2-4).

I would also speculate that this is strong evidence that the relationship in mortality was not sexual, as I think either mother or daughter - probably both - would complain if Joseph were having sex with either or both of them. No such complaints are recorded, even long after Joseph’s death.

Further, Joseph died without being sealed to his children or to his parents. If a primary motive of these “sealings” was to be connected in the afterlife, as claimed by the Church and apologists, what does it say about Joseph’s priorities and motives to be sealed to a non-related and already married woman (Patty Sessions) and her 23-year-old already married daughter (Sylvia Sessions) than it was to be sealed to his own parents and to his own children?

I don’t know what’s funnier - that your source for this information is a Reddit “Ask Me Anything” from Brian Hales, the “unofficial apologist” you despise as much as or more than “Tapir Dan,” or that Hales answers your question in the thread itself and you didn’t bother to notice.



Brian Hales
*Despised Apologist and/or
respected CES Letter source*

“By adoption I think you mean child-to-parent sealings?” Hales says in his AMA. “None were performed during Joseph’s lifetime because they can only be performed in a temple.” There’s your answer.

As to what it says “about Joseph’s priorities and motives,” this may well have been why Joseph’s top priority in his final days was the completion of the Nauvoo Temple, but he was tragically murdered before these ordinances could be performed during his mortal life. They were, of course, performed by proxy on his behalf after his death, as Joseph was confident they would be.

• Joseph was married/sealed to at least 22 other women and girls before finally being sealed to his first legal wife, Emma, on May 28, 1843. Emma was not aware of most of these other girls/women and their marriages to her husband.

And you know this how? We have no idea how many of these marriages were known to Emma. Later in life, she refused to admit that Joseph had ever practiced plural marriage, so she's largely an unreliable witness, although we do have records of her knowledge and approval of several of these marriages. You are welcome to presume whatever you like, but that is all it is - presumption on your part, not demonstrable historical fact.

Why was “elect lady ” Emma the 23rd wife to be sealed to Joseph?

Because Emma refused to accept plural marriage, and, contrary to your accusations, Joseph didn't force women to be sealed to him, not even his own wife.

Some of the marriages to these women included promises by Joseph of eternal life to the girls and their families...

Yes.

Richard Bushman, in answering the question as to why a husband would consent to having their wives sealed to Joseph, said that the “only answer seems to be the explanation Joseph gave when he asked a woman for her consent: they and their families would benefit spiritually from a close tie to the Prophet.” (Rough Stone Rolling, p. 439) This kind of explanation demonstrates that these marriages functioned in a spiritual rather than a carnal context. If Joseph really were just trying to bed as many women as he possibly could, he constructed a very inefficient vehicle for that process.

... or threats that he (Joseph) was going to be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if the girls didn't marry him.

No.

You are conflating two stories into one in order to make Joseph look as seedy as possible. There was an angel with a drawn sword connected to plural marriage, but it's a story with quite a different context than the one you're suggesting.

All the accounts of the sword-bearing angel come after Joseph's lifetime in reminiscences of those close to him. In every one, the angel appeared due to Joseph's reluctance to engage in plural marriage as a general principle, not because he had to marry any specific woman. Not one of the accounts of the angel has Joseph telling anyone, “If you don't marry me, an angel will kill me.” If that happened, even once, it'd be very hard to imagine that a woman wouldn't have mentioned it. None of them do.



Angel with a Sword
by Hans Melming
15th Century

I have a problem with this. This is Warren Jeffs territory.

Actually, this is precisely the opposite of the way Warren Jeffs, a convicted pedophile, conducted the principle of plural marriage. Joseph saw plural marriage as a religious principle to bind families together, not a license for sexual adventurism. He was sealed to dozens of women with whom he had no sexual relations, and he did not have sexual relations with any underage women. There is no evidence of coercion, and there is solid evidence that he took no for an answer. Jeffs, on the other hand, forced underage girls to marry and have sex with himself and other men or be damned forever. You're trying to drag Joseph Smith into Warren Jeffs territory, but the facts don't support you in that effort.

This is not the Joseph Smith I grew up learning about in the Church and having a testimony of.

That's because this is not the Joseph Smith that is Joseph Smith. The Warren Jeffs-like Joseph Smith that you're describing here is a grotesque caricature of the real thing.

Keep in mind that of the 34 women you're talking about, 33 of them were married after 1841. By June of 1844, Joseph Smith was dead. All of these weddings, then, took place during a compressed three-and-a-half year time frame that was the busiest period of Joseph's life, when he was doing a great many of the things you were telling people about on your mission. This was when he was building the second-largest city in Illinois and the largest religious building in the country, as well as leading a rapidly expanding church and, oh yeah, running for President of the United States. For most of these sealings, the wives got a ceremony and nothing more.

It's noteworthy, too, that Joseph fathered nine children with Emma, yet, as far as has been verified, he had no children with any of his other wives. That alone is the basis for the specious RLDS claim that Joseph couldn't have been a polygamist after all. While that doesn't prove any such thing, it does suggest that sex was not the only or even the primary motivation for these marriages. It demonstrates that plural marriage does not negate everything else Joseph Smith was and did, and that you're condemning him based on a series of assumptions that don't match the record.

This is not the Joseph Smith that I sang "Praise to the Man" to or taught others about two years in the mission field.

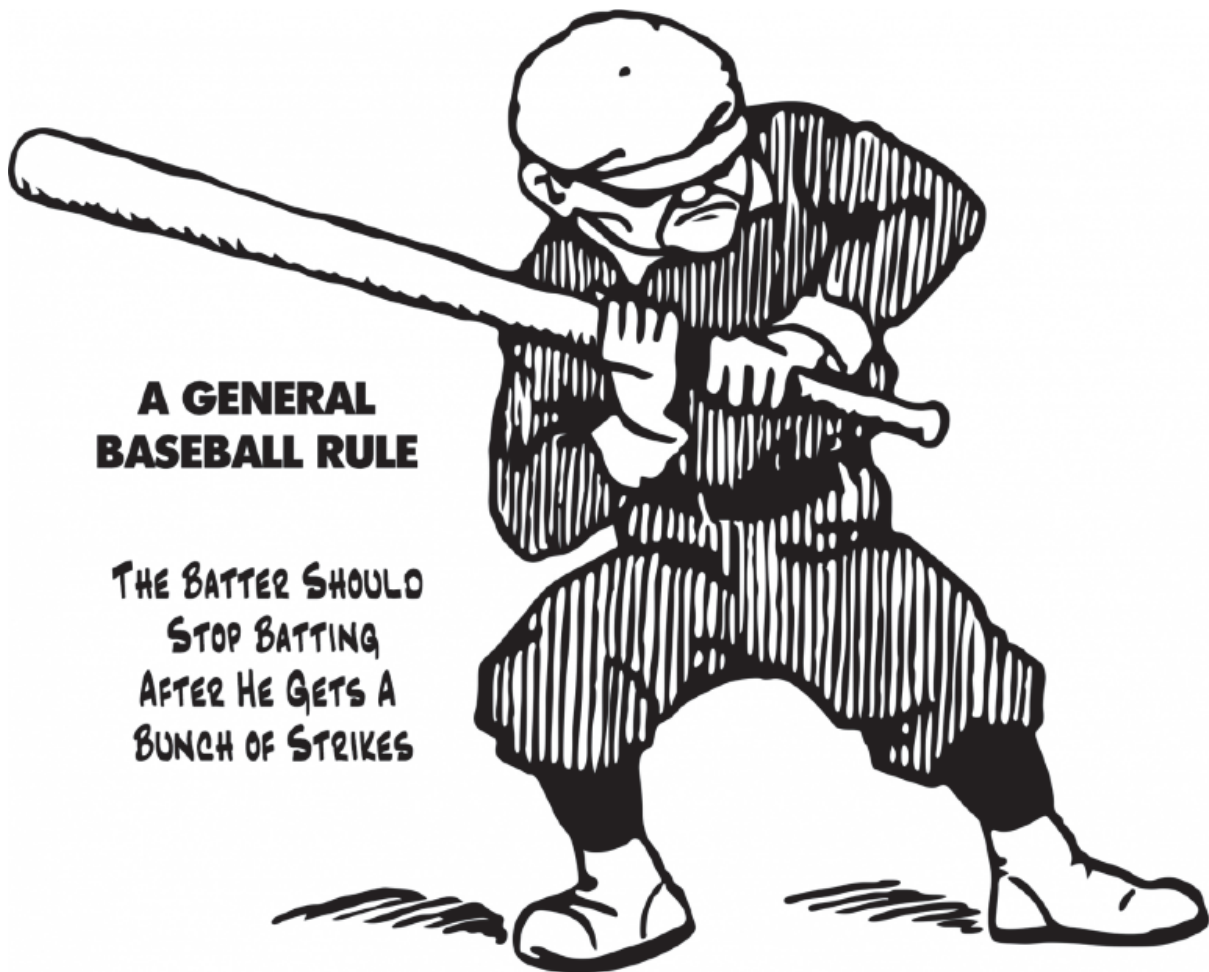
Are you saying that when you served a mission, you didn't know Joseph Smith was a polygamist? When investigators brought up polygamy, did you assume they were lying? That's astonishing to me. I don't know how anyone could spend more than a week in the mission field and not know this information.

A lot of members don't realize that there is a set of very specific and bizarre rules outlined in [Doctrine & Covenants 132](#) (still in LDS canon despite President Hinckley publicly stating that polygamy is not doctrinal) on how polygamy is to be practiced.

You're getting very legalistic here. The context of President Hinckley's statement suggests that he was not disavowing previous polygamy but, instead, drawing a distinction between the past and present. He was absolutely correct in saying that it is not doctrinal to practice

plural marriage today. I can think of no faster route to excommunication from the Church than becoming a polygamist. His statement is consistent with the passage in Jacob 2: monogamy is the doctrinal norm, but there are periods in history where the Lord requires polygamous exceptions to the rule.

As for the “specific and bizarre rules,” I find that a puzzling construct. Aren’t rules, by their nature, supposed to be specific? There are specific rules as to how to play baseball, for instance. If there weren’t, the game would be unplayable. (“Rule 17: The batter should probably stop batting after he gets a bunch of strikes.”) As to the idea that “a lot of members don’t realize” what these rules are, one wonders why they can’t read the revelation itself, which the Church has been printing as scripture for 175 years or so.



As to whether the rules are “bizarre,” we’ll address those with the examples you provide below.

It is the kind of revelation you’d expect from the likes of Warren Jeffs to his FLDS followers.

No, it is the kind of revelation *you’d* expect from the likes of Warren Jeffs to his FLDS followers. Or, to be more precise, you provide a flawed analysis of the revelation because you deliberately misinterpret Section 132 to match your own expectations, which are rooted in inaccurate and distorted information. This tells me a great deal about your expectations and nothing about Section 132.

The only form of polygamy permitted by D&C 132 is a union with a virgin after first giving the opportunity to the first wife to consent to the marriage.

This is inaccurate, but before I point out why it's inaccurate, I want to take several steps back and point out just how far down the rabbit hole you're going here.

Your initial polygamy objections are premised on the idea that Joseph is Warren Jeffs, and polygamy was just an excuse to have sex with a lot of women, including underage girls. That was John C. Bennett's M.O. – his "spiritual wifery," which had no accompanying revelation to justify it, involved him telling married women that they should sleep with him because they were "spiritually married," so they could do as they pleased with their husbands none the wiser. That strikes me as a far more effective method to achieve easy sexual gratification – no rules, no boundaries, and no responsibility.

Joseph's plural marriage, however, didn't operate like this at all. Sex was not a part of most of these relationships. He married old widows who never saw him after the ceremony. He was sealed to married women who never had any significant relationship with him, sexual or otherwise, and who continued to live as wives to their existing husbands. And the revelation which authorized Joseph to do all this set very clear guidelines as to what was appropriate and what was not, including strict prohibition of the kind of polyandry of which you accuse him.

So now here you are, criticizing Joseph for practicing polygamy because of his supposed sexual licentiousness, and then you turn around and lay out reasons why Joseph wasn't actually following his own revelation. Do you see the exasperating futility of what you're doing? What if, for instance, it could be demonstrated – and I think it can be demonstrated – that Joseph's behavior was consistent with the boundaries set in Section 132? Would you be okay with polygamy then?

If not, then what's the point?

You've settled on the idea that this is all just Joseph the Fraud creating a flimsy pretext to justify adultery, yet you then nitpick here and adopt a tortured legalistic interpretation of Section 132 to indict him for not living up to the rules of his own fraud. The fact that he made any rules at all is a clear argument against fraud. L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, once wrote a note to himself in which he said "All men are your slaves." Surely Joseph could have given himself similar license if Section 132 was solely a product of his imagination. Maybe something like "Verily, I say unto you, my servant Joseph, that all women are given to you to do with as you will." See how easy that was? Why would a sexual predator make things as difficult as Section 132 did for Joseph?

If it's a fraud, then the rules don't matter, and you're just looking for more excuses to berate Joseph Smith.

Since the CES Letter became your livelihood, it's become undeniably clear that all the questions you ask aren't really questions at all – they're indictments. They couldn't get Al Capone on racketeering and murder charges, so they got him on tax evasion. Similarly, if you can't tear down Joseph Smith on the basis of him being a simple pervert, then you can get

him on the contradictory charge of not following his own revelation. You don't care if people believe that Joseph plagiarized *View of the Hebrews* or the *First Book of Napoleon* just as long as they don't believe the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be. This explodes the premise that you're "just asking questions." You're not inquiring; you're carpet bombing, and you don't care about the collateral damage you're inflicting in the lives of the faithful.

If the first wife doesn't consent, the husband is exempt and may still take an additional wife, but the first wife must at least have the opportunity to consent. In case the first wife doesn't consent, she will be "destroyed." Also, the new wife must be a virgin before the marriage and be completely monogamous after the marriage or she will be destroyed (D&C 132: 41 & 63).



Al Capone: Tax Evader
(But not a polygamist, as far as we know)

You're leaning pretty heavily on the word "virgin," as if God expects every sealing to be preceded by a medical exam a la Princess Diana before her wedding to Prince Charles. I don't think that interpretation of the word is at all consistent with the context or how the Lord views sexual purity.

Consider a victim of sexual assault, who, medically speaking, is no longer a virgin. D&C 132 still provides the doctrinal template for how monogamous sealings are performed today, and under your legalistic interpretation of this scripture, innocent victims would not be eligible to be sealed in the temple, despite the fact that they have done nothing wrong. The more appropriate contextual understanding of the word "virgin" here is a woman who is sexually pure in the eyes of God. So even a repentant adulterer would not be disqualified, because the Lord has said that when we repent of our sins, he will "remember them no more." (D&C 58:42)

As for wives being "destroyed," no doubt that's some pretty harsh language. Almost as harsh as "damned." In the context of what's being described, however, it has a unique spiritual application that you're deliberately missing. D&C 132 outlines the nature of exaltation, which is a continuation of posterity throughout the eternities. But when a river is damned, it does not continue. So it is when a person is damned – their posterity is capped. The destruction being talked about here is not being hit by a meteor or run over by a bus. It's the destruction of the opportunity to have eternal increase.

It is interesting that the only prerequisite that is mentioned for the man is that he must desire another wife: "if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another..." It does not say that the man must get a specific revelation from the living prophet, although **many members today assume that this is how polygamy was practiced.**

I've added emphasis to that last phrase of yours, because it is critically instructive. Are we wrong to assume that? Why? Generations of Latter-day Saints have read Section 132 and not

reached the conclusion that just wanting more wives was all that was necessary to justify marrying them. But they're all wrong, and you're the only one smart enough to get it right? There are so many other qualifiers in this very complex and far-reaching revelation with regard to when marriage is appropriate, but you cherry-pick a single sentence and presume it simply obliterates everything else.

So much of your rejection of the church is rooted in the idea that every word in the revelations has a singular and self-evident meaning, so when anyone else interprets those words differently than you do, they're obviously wrong. But if that were the case, then there would be no division in the Christian world, as everyone could read the Bible and never disagree about what it means. This is the reason living prophets are essential. Revelation is necessary not just to tell us new doctrine, but to give us greater understanding of the doctrine we already have.

D&C 132 is unequivocal on the point that polygamy is permitted only “to multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.” This would be consistent with the Book of Mormon prohibition on polygamy except in the case where God commands it to “raise up seed .”

There are a lot more words between “multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of me” that you fail to cite.

Here is the text in its entirety, from verse 62:

“for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, **and** to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, **and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men.**” [Emphasis added.]

You want to get legalistic? Let's get legalistic. Just for fun, let's parse the living snot out of this.

This clause begins with multiplying and replenishing as a primary justification. Then we get the word “and” thrown in there. You're reading this as if it says “they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, **in order** to fulfil the promise...”

But that's not what it says.

“And” suggests we're about to get a second reason, not a clarification of the first. In fact, a tight, strict-constructionist reading of this verse reveals three different and distinct reasons for plural marriage, not “only” the replenishment of the earth, as you contend. (You also mistakenly assume that “bear the souls of men” is a reiteration of “multiply and replenish the earth.” That's a pretty big mistake, as I will shortly demonstrate.)

So let's review the three reasons:

1. **Multiply and replenish the earth.**

You're right; D&C 132 is unequivocal on this point, just as it is unequivocal on the two points that follow.

2. **Fulfil [sic] "the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world."**

What promise? This seems to have reference to the "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21) Joseph cited the need to restore ancient practices to prepare for the Second Coming as a justification for polygamy, and this verse provides a credible scriptural context for him to do so. So just relying on this phrase – plural marriage is acceptable because it fulfills God's promises – would be justification enough for the practice, at least according to D&C 132.

3. **For "their exaltation in the eternal worlds, *that* they may bear the souls of men."**

Oh, this one's my favorite. Notice the emphasis I added on the "that." The word appears there to create a conditional clause. You claim the bearing of souls is the same thing as multiplying and replenishing the earth, but the actual text insists that the bearing of the souls of men will only be made possible by "exaltation in the eternal worlds." This is a promise of eternal increase, of bearing souls after the earth is no longer around to be replenished. Big, big difference.

And right here, with Reason #3, we have a clear rationale and justification for Joseph being sealed to women with whom he made no attempts to multiply and replenish the earth – i.e. no sex.

AGAIN, CONTRARY TO D&C 132, THE FOLLOWING SUMMARIZES HOW POLYGAMY WAS ACTUALLY PRACTICED BY JOSEPH SMITH

- Joseph married 11 women who were already married. Multiple husbands = Polyandry .

Sealings, not marriages. No sex. Not polyandry.

- Unions without the knowledge or consent of the husband, in cases of polyandry.

The evidence says precisely the opposite - we have records of husbands in these cases both knew and consented, as in the case of Ruth Sayers. From an 1887 account:

While there the strongest affection sprang up between the Prophet Joseph and Mr. Sayers. The latter not attaching much importance to the/ theory of a future life

insisted that his wife Ruth/ should be sealed to the Prophet for eternity, as he himself should only claim her in this life. She was/ accordingly the sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith's presence and thus were became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. She however though she/ continued to live with Mr. Sayers / remained with her husband until his death.

Whereas we have no records proving Joseph Smith was sealed to legally married women without the knowledge and consent of their legal husbands, or that Joseph had sexual relations with any such husbands. No polyandry.

- These married women continued to live as husband and wife with their first husband after marrying Joseph.

Which is compelling evidence that Joseph wasn't sleeping with them. Not polyandry, and no sex.

- A union with Apostle Orson Hyde's wife while he was on a mission ([Marinda Hyde](#)).

A disputed date, and evidence suggests Orson both knew and consented. Sealing only, not polyandry. Also no sex.

- A union with a newlywed and pregnant woman ([Zina Huntington](#)).

Your link provides no evidence she was pregnant at the time of the sealing. (That's not to say that she wasn't, but only that I can't find any record of it.) Regardless, it was an eternity-only sealing, not a marriage, and one to which her husband consented, as your source admits.

From an [interview](#) with Zina Huntington in 1898:

Q. "Then it is a fact, Mrs. [Zina] Young, is it not, that you married Mr. Smith at the same time you were married to Mr. [Henry] Jacobs?"

A. "What right have you to ask such questions? I was sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity."

Q. "Mrs. Young, you claim, I believe, that you were not married to him for time?"

A. "For eternity. I was married to Mr. Jacobs, but the marriage was unhappy and we parted."

Married for time and not eternity means sealing, not marriage. Notice Zina corrects the questioner who claims she was married by saying she was sealed to Joseph and married to Mr. Jacobs. Not polyandry, and no sex.

- Threats that Joseph would be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if they did not enter into the union ([Zina Huntington](#), [Almera Woodard Johnson](#), [Mary Lightner](#)).

No. As noted above, none of those women say Joseph told them he would be slain if they didn't marry him. They say Joseph told him an angel with a drawn sword would kill him if he didn't enter into plural marriage as a general principle. Zina initially turned Joseph down, which she would not likely have done had Joseph told her his life was at stake.

- Unions without the knowledge or consent of first wife Emma including to teenagers who worked with Emma in the Smith home such as the Partridge sisters and the Lawrence girls.

Very strange that you would cite these as examples of marriages performed without Emma's knowledge or consent, as records show that Emma was aware of and approved the marriages to both the Partridges and the Lawrences.



Emily Partridge
Married to Joseph with Emma's consent

From Emily Partridge:

Emma had consented to give Joseph two wives if he would let her choose them for him, and... she choose Eliza and myself... She afterwards gave Sarah and Maria Lawrence to him, and they lived in the house as his wives.

- Promises of salvation and exaltation for the girls and/or their entire families.

We've already covered this, but how is this contrary to D&C 132? Isn't that what you're supposedly "summarizing" by simply repeating, word for word, an assertion you made just a few pages earlier?

JOSEPH'S POLYGAMY ALSO INCLUDED:

- Dishonesty in public sermons, 1835 D&C 101:4, denials by Joseph Smith that he was practicing polygamy...

Richard Bushman in *Rough Stone Rolling* refers to these as "carefully worded" denials, which is the accurate way to describe them. Joseph's most vigorous denials were directed at the idea that he was an adulterer, which he insisted – and which he believed – he was not. He also leaned heavily on the idea that his only legal wife was Emma, which was true. I think it likely that a fraud wouldn't have carefully worded anything and lied with impunity – the John C. Bennett and/or Donald Trump model – and taken no pains to craft evasive answers that were technically true but still misleading.

Understand, however, that I agree with you here to an extent. I don't think there's any question that Joseph was not fully honest in these statements. He justified it to himself by the belief that he was protecting himself, his family, and others engaged in plural marriage from physical harm. I like to think he took the "Abraham-said-his-wife-was-his-sister" approach. Even since the beginning, when Adam had to choose between not eating the fruit and having children, human prophets have been forced, like all of us, to make difficult choices between two bad options.

Joseph's destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* that exposed his polygamy and which destruction of the printing press initiated the chain of events that led to Joseph's death.

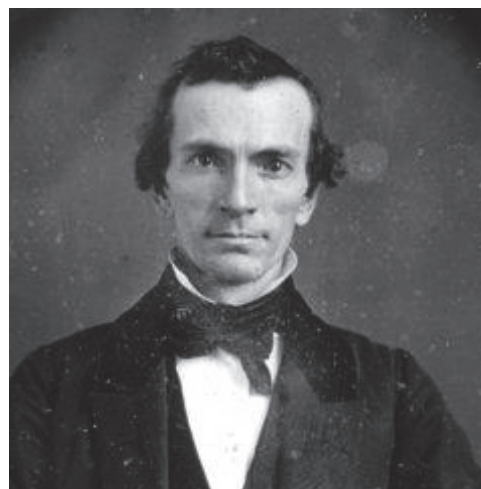
Yes. I remember listening to Truman Madsen's hagiographic Joseph Smith tapes on my mission, where he describes this event in almost your exact words. There's been no attempt, that I know of, by the Church to justify the Nauvoo Expositor destruction. Elder Ben B. Banks, former member of the presidency of the Seventy, [told an audience at BYU Idaho](#) that "both friends and enemies of the Prophet now agree that the act, legal or not, was unwise and inflammatory and was the major immediate factor that culminated in the Prophet's death." Elder Banks was my first mission president and a beloved mentor. He performed my wedding in the Salt Lake Temple. A more kind, faithful – and orthodox – Latter-day Saint has never lived. If Ben Banks agrees with you here, I don't think there's anyone who would dispute this.

Joseph's marriage to Fanny Alger was described by Oliver Cowdery as a "[dirty, nasty, filthy affair](#)" – Rough Stone Rolling, p.323

It was. (Actually, he said "scrape" instead of "affair.") Although, as *Rough Stone Rolling* makes clear on the same page, Joseph made no effort to deny the relationship, but only to deny that the relationship was adultery.

Oliver's life has always fascinated me. He was the first person baptized in this dispensation; he was indispensable in the translation of the Book of Mormon; he was one of the Three Witnesses; he saw John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John; he was side-by-side with Joseph when the Savior Himself appeared at the Kirtland Temple dedication.

If all these miraculous experiences were nothing but frauds, Oliver could have profited tremendously by bringing down Joseph Smith's house of cards. Yet even when his anger at Joseph drove him out of the Church, he never denied any of this, and he came back to the Church late in his life, after Joseph was dead and despite having no position of prominence or authority.



Oliver Cowdery
Why didn't he expose the "fraud?"

Apparently, whatever he thought of the Alger relationship, Oliver was ultimately able to accept that Joseph Smith's character was not so soiled by plural marriage as to invalidate his prophetic role.

William McLellin reported a conversation he had with Emma Smith in 1847, which [account](#) is accepted by both LDS and non-LDS historians, describing how Emma discovered her husband's affair with Fanny Alger:

"One night she [Emma] missed Joseph and Fanny Alger. She went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true."

By saying this account is “accepted” by LDS historians, you are overstating your case considerably. You link to Brian Hales’s page as your source, where Hales points out that “[m]ost of the above details came from late and antagonistic sources. Therefore, readers may want to weigh what we ‘know’ in light of those factors.”

And, indeed, there are at least two reasons to be deeply skeptical of McLellin’s account.

First, McLellin was a bitter enemy of the Church in 1847, having been excommunicated nine years earlier. At one point, he ransacked Joseph’s home and later asked for permission to flog the prophet after he had been arrested.

From The 1864 Millennial Star:



William McLellin
Dubious Source; Wannabe Flogger

“While Joseph was in prison at Richmond, Mo., Mr. McLellin, who was a large and active man, went to the sheriff and asked for the privilege of flogging the Prophet; permission was granted, on condition that Joseph would fight. The sheriff made McLellin's earnest request known to Joseph, who consented to fight, if his irons were taken off. McLellin then refused to fight, unless he could have a club, to which Joseph was perfectly willing; but the sheriff would not allow them to fight on such unequal terms.”

This does not strike me as the kind of man who would hesitate to tell tall tales about Joseph Smith.

Second, in 1847, Emma was refusing to admit that her husband had ever been a polygamist. The idea that she would tell a story like this about Joseph to anyone is unlikely, but that she would tell it to a man who had ransacked her home just a few years before

utterly defies credulity.

In addition, this isn’t a contemporaneous account - McLellin wrote this story way, way after the fact in an 1872 letter, one more reason that a healthy dose of skepticism would be wise.

[LDS polygamy apologists further discuss Emma’s disturbing discovery and the aftermath here](#) .

How can “they” - i.e. one person, Brian Hales - “further discuss” something in the identical article as your first link on the subject? I would think further discussion is not the same thing as linking to the same article twice. In addition, the “further” discussion centers around a dubious statement from Ann Eliza Webb Young, a deeply antagonistic, unreliable source who wasn’t even born when Joseph was married to Fanny.

The fact that what Brian Hales chooses to “further discuss” undermines your point suggests that, once again, you haven’t bothered to read your own source.

Joseph was practicing polygamy before the sealing authority was given. LDS historian, Richard Bushman, states: “There is evidence that Joseph was a polygamist by 1835” – Rough Stone Rolling, p.323. Plural marriages are rooted in the notion of “sealing” for both time and eternity. The “sealing” power was not restored until April 3, 1836 when Elijah appeared to Joseph in the Kirtland Temple and conferred the sealing keys upon him. So, Joseph’s marriage to Fanny Alger in 1833 was illegal under both the laws of the land and under any theory of divine authority; it was adultery.

The best evidence suggests that Joseph received the revelation now recorded in Section 132 sometime in 1831 when he was engaged in his translation of the Bible. Such a revelation would have given him the authority to perform a plural marriage for time only, but not for eternity until the sealing power was restored. So in the case of Fanny Alger, we have a case of a marriage – including sex – that was not a sealing. There were several other cases where this happened even after the sealing keys were restored. In addition, we don’t have a firm date on when the marriage took place, and some scholars place it after the Kirtland Temple dedication.

D&C 132:63 very clearly states that the only purpose of polygamy is to “multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.”

We’ve just been over this, and you got it wrong then, too. These are also two very different things. See previous.

Why did Joseph marry women who were already married?

He didn’t. He was sealed to women who were already married, but not married to them. See previous.

These women were obviously not virgins, which violated D&C 132:61.

No violation. They were pure in the eyes of God. See previous.

Zina Huntington had been married seven and a half months and was about six months pregnant with her first husband’s baby at the time she married Joseph; clearly she didn’t need any more help to “bear the souls of men.”

Say it with me now: sealing, not marriage, no sex. See above.

How about the consent of the first wife, which receives so much attention in D&C 132? Emma was unaware of most of Joseph’s plural marriages, at least until after the fact, which violated D&C 132.

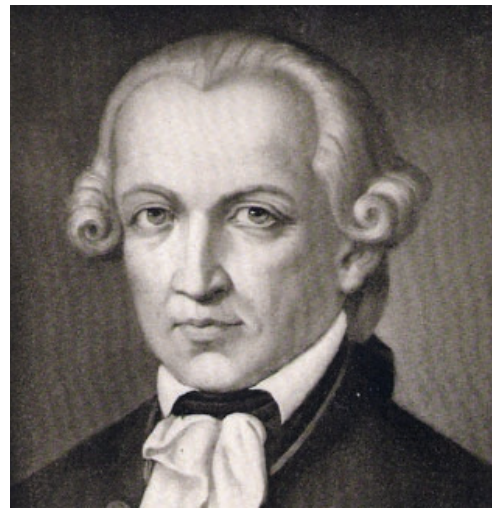
Can you provide me a number of marriages of which Emma was aware? No, because you don’t know, and neither do I, and neither does anyone else. We do know there are some marriages where she was aware and consenting. And D&C 132, actually makes a provision

that the man is not subject to the “law of Sarah,” i.e. the consent of the first wife, if the first wife rejects the principle altogether. This put Joseph in the position of having to choose Emma or the Lord, and I doubt either you or I would have fared better in walking that line if placed in a similar predicament.

The secrecy of the marriages and the private and public denials by Joseph Smith are not congruent with honest behavior.

That is a rather Kant-ian approach to the problem.

Immanuel Kant was the philosopher who insisted that honesty was a “categorical imperative,” and that it was never appropriate to tell a lie under any circumstances. The famous example to illustrate this comes from the story of “Kant’s Axe,” where Kant posits that if an axe-wielding murderer shows up on your doorstep and asks where your best friend is so he can go kill him, the “categorical imperative” of honesty required you to answer him truthfully, even if it were likely to result in your friend’s grisly death.



Immanuel Kant
Philosopher; Axe Aficionado

From my perspective, an honest answer in that situation would be entirely immoral. Yes, honesty is important. But my friend is more important. In that situation, he represents a higher value – love trumping honesty.

There are plenty of other situations, most far less dramatic, where I feel another value can trump honesty. What did you think of my talk, Bishop? Well, Sister Jones, you had nothing interesting to say, and I had a hard time paying attention to you because I couldn’t take my eyes off of that honker you call a nose. Dad, did you enjoy my piano recital? Why, no, son, I thought it was deathly boring, and you may have been the worst one up there. Honey, does this dress make me look fat? Oh my, yes. You look like a whale in that thing!

In those examples, I believe kindness is far more important than honesty. Values are often competing priorities, and they can’t all be satisfied in every case.

The choices in mortality are seldom choices between good and evil. (Should I go to Church this Sunday or rob a bank instead? Maybe I’ll flip a coin.) They’re usually choices between less good and more good. Joseph firmly believed, and not without good reason, that the lives of many good people were in danger if he were to be fully forthright about polygamy. In hindsight, as you read his “carefully worded” denials, you can see the struggle and his attempt to be as honest as he felt was safe. You may have chosen differently in that case, but surely you wouldn’t tell an axe murderer where your best friend was.

Emma was not informed of most of these marriages until after the fact.

Again, you know this how? See above.

The Saints did not know what was going on behind the scenes as polygamy did not become common knowledge until 1852 when Brigham Young revealed it in Utah.

Given that roughly 25% of the Church was practicing plural marriage as they crossed the plains, this is a ridiculous statement. The 1852 declaration of plural marriage was an announcement to the world, not a statement to the Church, which was living with the doctrine firsthand.

Joseph Smith did everything he could to keep the practice secret from the Church and the public.

Actually, there are several incidences where Joseph tried to teach the principle and was disheartened by the Saints' unwillingness to accept it.

In fact, Joseph's desire to keep this part of his life a secret is what ultimately contributed to his death when he ordered the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor, which dared publicly expose his private behavior in June 1844. This event initiated a chain of events that ultimately led to his death at the Carthage jail.

I know of no-one, in or out of the Church, who denies that destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor was the catalyst that precipitated the murder of Joseph Smith. I do, however, think it's incorrect to somehow characterize the Expositor as a sort of principled, just-the-facts exposé of polygamy. Rhetorically, it was way, way over the top. Joseph was characterized as one of the "blackest and basest scoundrels that has appeared upon the stage of human existence since the days of Nero, and Caligula" intent on "spreading death, devastation and ruin throughout you [sic] happy country like a tornado."

Yeah, Woodward and Bernstein this ain't.

Consider the following denial made by Joseph Smith to Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo in May 1844 – a mere few weeks before his death:

"...What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers."

– *History of the Church, Vol. 6, Chapter 19, p.411*

Again, look at the actual text. As Bushman pointed out above, it's "carefully worded." Joseph full statement here is vigorously denying adultery, of which Joseph believed he was not guilty, as he was married to the women with whom he was having sexual relations. The seven wives reference in the thing is the only direct reference to polygamy, and Joseph is leaning on the idea that Emma is his only legal wife, which, too, was true. Misleading? Yes. But not nearly as brazenly dishonest as you're suggesting.

It is a matter of historical fact that Joseph had secretly taken over 30 plural wives by May 1844 when he made the above denial that he was ever a polygamist.

He's denying he's an adulterer, not a polygamist, and many of the wives were sealings, not marriages, no sex.

If you go to Familysearch.org – an LDS-owned genealogy website – you can clearly see that Joseph Smith had many wives. The Church's new October 2014 [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#) essay acknowledges that Joseph Smith was a polygamist.

Those facts have been openly acknowledged by the Church for over 150 years.

The facts speak for themselves – from 100% LDS sources – that Joseph Smith was dishonest.

See previous. Joseph tried to walk the line between honesty and keeping himself and his family safe, and, like all human beings trying to satisfy conflicting values, he wasn't always able to do.

The following 1835 edition of Doctrine & Covenants revelations bans polygamy:
[1835 Doctrine & Covenants 101:4](#): “Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”

There's that careful wording again. Notice the use of the word “but” in reference to women, but not to men. Women are therefore explicitly prohibited from having more than one husband, while men “should have one wife,” without the explicit prohibition of having more than one. Also keep in mind that plural marriage, at least in the minds of the Saints, was not “polygamy” as understood by 19th Century folk – i.e. harems and concubines and seraglios. Even after plural marriage became public, the Utah saints went out of their way to distance themselves from those kinds of practices. This revelation is trying to put some distance between those two versions of polygyny, which, in practice, really were quite different from each other.

[1835 Doctrine & Covenants 13:7](#):

“Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else.”

And? A polygamist would be in full agreement with this. A man cleaving unto a woman who is not his wife is adultery.

[1835 Doctrine & Covenants 65:3](#):

“Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation.”

Yes. Notably, this uses the language of Genesis, which somehow did not stop many of the ancient patriarchs from practicing polygamy. It states the lawfulness of having one wife but makes no statement on the lawfulness of having more than one.

Joseph Smith was already a polygamist when these revelations were introduced into the [1835 edition of the Doctrine & Covenants](#) and Joseph publicly taught that the doctrine of the Church was monogamy. Joseph continued secretly marrying multiple women as these revelations/scriptures remained in force.

The doctrine of the Church was monogamy. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that monogamy is the standard, and polygamy is the occasional exception. Joseph's teaching on this subject was therefore correct, as anyone entering into plural marriage without priesthood authorization to do so would be guilty of adultery.

In an attempt to influence and abate public rumors of his secret polygamy, Joseph got 31 witnesses to sign an affidavit published in the LDS [October 1, 1842 Times and Seasons](#) stating that Joseph did not practice polygamy. Pointing to the above-mentioned D&C 101:4 scripture, these witnesses claimed the following:

“...we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.”

Nope. Quote the rest of it, please.

We the undersigned members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and residents of the city of Nauvoo, persons of families do hereby certify and declare that we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to show that Dr. J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a creature of his own make as we know of no such society in this place nor never did. [Emphasis added]



John C. Bennett: Spiritual Wife-ist
No relation. At all.

This was not, in fact, an affidavit “stating that Joseph did not practice polygamy.” It is an affidavit disavowing “Dr. J.C. Bennett’s ‘secret wife system,’ i.e. the “spiritual wifeism” I described earlier, which was a flimsy pretext for adultery and antithetical to the principle of plural marriage as practiced by Joseph.

The problem with this affidavit is that it was signed by several people who were secret polygamists or who knew that Joseph was a polygamist at the time they signed the affidavit. In fact, Eliza R. Snow, one of the signers of this affidavit, was Joseph Smith’s plural wife.

She was also, if some sources to be believed, on the receiving end of John C. Bennett’s predatory “spiritual wife” advances. She would have every legitimate reason to come out in full force of Dr. Bennett’s gross distortion of the principle of plural marriage. In addition, the fact that 31 witnesses could make this statement with a clear conscience undermines your implication that they saw a conflict between the predatory seduction they were denouncing and the principle of plural marriage they were practicing.

Joseph and Eliza were married 3 months earlier on June 29, 1842. Two Apostles and future prophets, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, were very aware of Joseph’s polygamy behind the scenes when they signed. Another signer, Bishop Whitney, had personally married his daughter Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph as a plural wife a few months earlier on July 27, 1842; Whitney’s wife and Sarah’s mother Elizabeth (also a signer) witnessed the ceremony.

So if this was such a blatant lie, why did no one object? Are we to assume that all of these people were as blithely dishonest as you suggest Joseph Smith was? The far more plausible explanation is the idea that this affidavit was denouncing a practice that they believed was wholly inconsistent with the doctrine they were then living.

What does it say about Joseph Smith and his character to include his plural wife and associates – who knew about his secret polygamy/polyandry – to lie and perjure in a sworn public affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist?

It says that you have unwittingly misinterpreted this affidavit as perjury when it was not.

Now, does the fact that Joseph Smith practiced polygamy and polyandry while lying to Emma, the Saints, and the world about it over the course of 10+ years prove that he was a false prophet? That the Church is false? No, it doesn't.

Well, that's mighty big of you, but it's also a distortion of reality. Joseph practiced no polyandry – sealings, no marriage, no sex. You really have no idea what he told Emma. No question he was less than fully honest in discussing the practice with the world, but the fact that he still attempted to reconcile honesty with concern for the safety of the Saints speaks well of him.

Also, 10+ years is really stretching it. He was first married to a plural wife in late 1835/early 1836, and he was dead by 1844, so nine years is the best you can do. Given that almost all of Joseph's practice of the doctrine took place in the two-and-a-half years of his life, that's an unsustainable accusation.

What it does prove, however, is that Joseph Smith's pattern of behavior or modus operandi for a period of at least 10 years of his adult life was to keep secrets, be deceptive, and be dishonest – both privately and publicly.

Is a bishop or stake president who refuses to discuss the private confession of an adulterer in public being secretive, deceptive, and dishonest? If you ask a bishop directly if Brother So-and-So had an affair, would he be wrong to try and find some way to deflect the question to protect the sanctity of the confidentiality to which he is bound? Should we applaud a bishop who blabs about such private matters because that bishop is being honest?

This is a line I have had to walk in my own family. Having been involved as a bishopric member in administering disciplinary councils, I learned things about my fellow ward members about which I cannot speak or even hint to own wife. When such things come up in passing, I try not to be dishonest, but I definitely do everything I can to skirt the subject. Does this make me a liar? By your definition, yes. From my perspective, I'm trying to balance the value of honesty with the value of protecting those who trust me to keep things confidential.

Just as I do not deny that polygamy is strange and even troubling, I think it is impossible for any remotely objective observer to deny that Joseph believed it to be the will of God, and that he practiced plural marriage as a religious principle, not as a vehicle for sexual predation. As such, he felt duty bound to keep such matters confidential in the same spirit that church leaders today do not publicize the confessional discussions they have with church members.

It's when you take this snapshot of Joseph's character and start looking into the Book of Abraham, the Kinderhook Plates, the Book of Mormon, the multiple First Vision accounts, Priesthood restoration, and so on that you start to see a very disturbing pattern and picture.

When you apply a single lens colored with a blanket assumption of dishonesty, then of course every pattern is disturbing. You're like the citizens of the Emerald City who wear green glasses so that everything looks green. (That doesn't happen in the movie, but it's in the book. And the musical *Wicked*.)



You've been unable to objectively demonstrate dishonesty in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, or the multiple – and consistent – First Vision accounts. All you've been able to do is show your own assumption of dishonesty in instances that are often based on your own misunderstandings and not the facts.

What's truly disturbing to me is that every time it's possible to give Joseph the benefit of the doubt, you choose not to grant it to him. In fact, you choose to interpret all of his actions in as harsh a light as possible. I think it would be wise to get a clear pair of glasses.

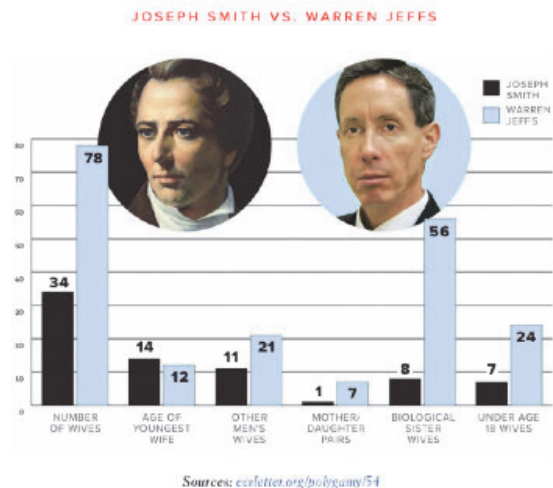
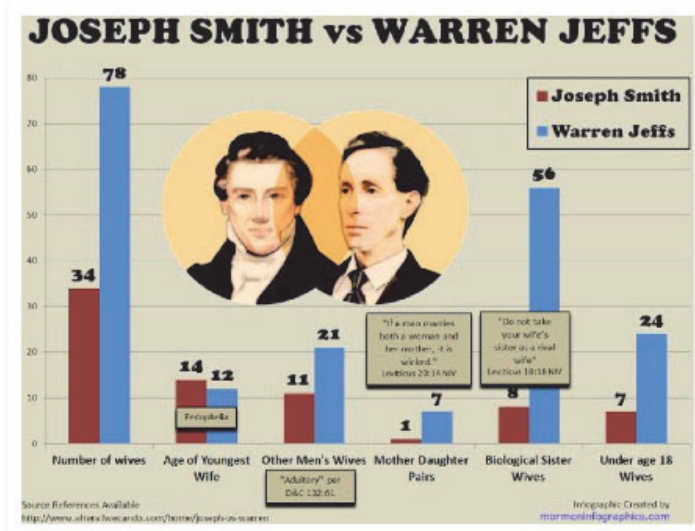
Today, Warren Jeffs is more closely aligned to Joseph Smith's Mormonism than the modern LDS Church is.

As noted above, the Jeffs comparison is unjustified. It's like saying rape and marital intimacy are essentially the same thing.

And now we come back to MormonInfographics.com and another plagiarized re-packaging:

Old Version with Tone Problems

New, Plagiarized Version



PROPHETS

Concerns & Questions

“...The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of the Church to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place.”

– PRESIDENT WILFORD WOODRUFF , *WILFORD WOODRUFF: HISTORY OF HIS LIFE AND LABORS* , P.57 2

“Keep the eyes of the mission on the leaders of the Church...We will not and...cannot lead [you] astray.”

– ELDER M. RUSSELL BALLARD , *STAY IN THE BOAT AND HOLD ON!* , OCTOBER 2014 CONFERENCE

“Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life...”

– *2013 RACE AND THE PRIESTHOOD* ESSAY, LDS.ORG

(2013 “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators” throwing yesterday’s “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators” under the bus over yesterday’s racist revelations and doctrines)

(Jeremy, you provide no evidence of a racist revelation, and your understanding of what constitutes doctrine is deeply flawed.)

“And, to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine.

“I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect, and His doctrine is pure. But He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes.”

– PRESIDENT DIETER F. UCHTDORF, *COME, JOIN WITH US*, OCTOBER 2013

“We don’t believe in infallibility of our leaders.”

– PRESIDENT DALLIN H. OAKS, *PRESS CONFERENCE*, JANUARY 15, 2018

SHORT ANSWER:

The Lord will never interfere with human agency, and agency and infallibility are wholly incompatible. At no point is agency extracted from the leaders of the Church, so even prophets are entirely capable of making mistakes.

1. ADAM-GOD

President Brigham Young taught what is now known as “Adam–God theory.” He taught that Adam is “our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.” Brigham not only taught this doctrine over the pulpit in conferences in 1852 and 1854 but he also introduced this doctrine as the Lecture at the Veil in the endowment ceremony of the Temple.

Yeah, Adam-God is wacky. It makes no sense, even in context. I can’t find any evidence that it penetrated the culture of the Church, which leaves open the possibility that the early saints understood Brigham in a way that eludes modern interpretation. (That’s also the case with blood atonement, which we’ll get to later.) There doesn’t seem to be any attempt by church members to apply Adam-God in practice, which, if this were binding doctrine, would likely have had a greater impact than a handful of confusing sermons. Fundamentalist splinter groups now teach this, but they didn’t start doing so until long after Brigham was dead.



PICTURED: Adam AND God, not Adam AS God
Michelangelo had it right

Stephen Robinson, a BYU professor who sadly passed away in June of 2018, had the best take on this in his book *Are Mormons Christians?*, the relevant excerpt of which [can be found online](#). His opinion is reflective of my own on this subject:

Yet another way in which anti-Mormon critics often misrepresent LDS doctrine is in the presentation of anomalies as though they were the doctrine of the Church. Anomalies occur in every field of human endeavor, even in science. An anomaly is something unexpected that cannot be explained by the existing laws or theories, but which does not constitute evidence for changing the laws and theories. An anomaly is a glitch.

For example, if a chemist combines two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen a hundred times in a row, and ninety-nine times she gets water but on the hundredth time she gets alcohol, this does not mean that one percent of the time the laws of chemistry are different. It simply means that something was wrong with the hundredth experiment, even though the experimenter may not know what it was. Beakers may have been mislabelled; grad students may have been playing a practical joke; instruments might have given incorrect readings; secretaries might have typed the wrong information. If the anomaly could be reproduced experimentally, then it would be significant and would demand a change in the theories. But if it can't be reproduced, it is simply ignored—as an anomaly. It is assumed that some unknown factor was different in the case of the anomalous results, and the experiment yielding those results is therefore invalid. Moreover, to ignore such anomalies is not considered dishonesty, but represents sound scientific method...

A classic example of an anomaly in the LDS tradition is the so-called “Adam-God theory.” During the latter half of the nineteenth century Brigham Young made some remarks about the relationship between Adam and God that the Latter-day Saints have never been able to understand. The reported statements conflict with LDS teachings before and after Brigham Young, as well as with statements of President Young himself during the same period of time. So how do Latter-day Saints deal with the phenomenon? We don't; we simply set it aside. It is an anomaly. On occasion my colleagues and I at Brigham Young University have tried to figure out what Brigham Young might have actually said and what it might have meant, but the attempts have always failed. The reported statements simply do not compute—we cannot make sense out of them. This is not a matter of believing it or disbelieving it; we simply don't know what “it” is. If Brigham Young were here we could ask him what he actually said and what he meant by it, but he is not here, and even expert students of his thought are left to wonder whether he was misquoted, whether he meant to say one thing and actually said another, whether he was somehow joking with or testing the Saints, or whether some vital element that would make sense out of the reports has been omitted.

For the Latter-day Saints, however, the point is moot, since whatever Brigham Young said, true or false, was never presented to the Church for a sustaining vote. It was not then and is not now a doctrine of the Church, and—like the chemist who can neither explain nor reproduce her results—the Church has merely set the phenomenon aside as an anomaly.

Brigham also published this doctrine in the *Deseret News* on June 18, 1873 :

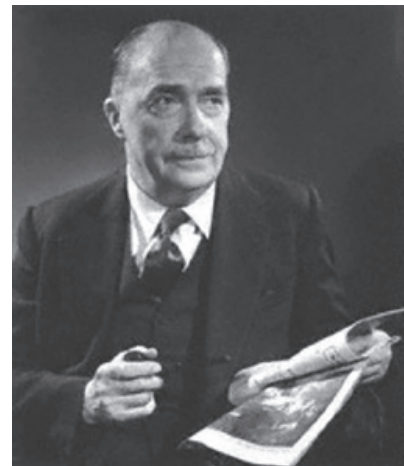
*“How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular **doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me – namely that Adam is our father and God – I do not know, I do not inquire, I care nothing about it. Our Father Adam helped to make this earth, it was created expressly for him, and after it was made he and his companions came here. He brought one of his wives with him, and she was called Eve, because she was the first woman upon the earth. Our Father Adam is the man who stands at the gate and holds the keys of everlasting life and salvation to all his children who have or who ever will come upon the earth. I have been found fault with by the ministers of religion because I have said that they were ignorant. But I could not find any man on the earth who could tell me this, although it is one of the simplest things in the world, until I met and talked with Joseph Smith.**”*

That’s actually quite helpful in understanding Brigham’s context here. The Church, particularly in the temple, continues to teach much of this today. We still believe that Adam helped to make the earth, and that it was created expressly for him. We also believe that Father Adam is the Ancient of Days, and he was the first to hold all the keys of the priesthood and at some future date, he “shall come to visit his people, or the Ancient of Days shall sit, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet.” (D&C 116:1)

We keep coming back to the problem of presentism in your historical analysis of early Latter-day Saint life, so it might be helpful to review what that term actually means.

British author L.P. Hartley famously said that “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.” He was right. How people saw themselves and the world around them was not necessarily the same as we see it. Presentism is the fallacious view that modern interpretations of words and events were common to our ancestors, and that they saw things the same way we do.

But for the most part, that’s nonsense. In the first place, the ancients didn’t see themselves as ancient, and it didn’t occur to them that they weren’t acting according to “modern” standards. After all, they were as modern as it got up to that point in history, and we are likely to look just as benighted and ignorant to generations yet to come.



L.P. Hartley
Novelist and Non-presentist

Similarly, Latter-day Saints in the 19th Century were living in a time of different norms and mores. They also thought they were right on the edge of the Millennium, and it didn’t occur to them that they were “early” Saints, or that their lives would become our history lessons. They also had their own vernacular and slang, their own fashions, and their own understanding of science and the world around them. When reviewing their lives, therefore, it’s essential to try to understand their words and their actions as they would have understood them, not as we would.

I say this as preface to Adam/God because it seems clear that 19th Century Saints interpreted Brigham's lessons on this differently than we would. How do I know that? Because if they really believed that Adam was the father of Jesus and our Heavenly Father, their ceremonies in the temple and the teachings they passed down to their children would reflect a radical doctrinal shift. Or, absent that, there would be some kind of shift and then a shift back as people rejected Adam/God, so we would have some kind of paper trail of a controversy where Latter-day Saints decided to defy their prophet.

We have none of that. What we have are a handful of anomalous sermons that don't seem to have made any impact on how anyone viewed God or Adam or anything else. All practice of "Adam/God-ism," if you will, has come from splinter groups who adopted the idea long after Brigham Young was dead. The logical conclusion is that properly understanding Adam/God the way Brigham's contemporaries did requires further information we simply don't have.

Contrary to the teachings of Brigham Young, subsequent prophets and apostles have since renounced the Adam-God theory as false doctrine.

That's probably because it is a false doctrine, at least as it's understood by modern sensibilities. It seems likely that Brigham meant something different to those who heard him firsthand than those who read his words in the 21st Century. Since the Church made no effort to incorporate the Adam-God idea, as we understand it, into practice, that seems the most likely conclusion to draw.

President Spencer W. Kimball renounced the Adam-God theory in the October 1976 General Conference:

"We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations. Such, for instance, is the Adam-God theory. We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine."

– Our Own Liahona

And amen to President Kimball for that.

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

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

I'm not a fan of the Seven Deadly Heresies, but that's another discussion. Your point, however, is that prophets and apostles after Brigham have vigorously disavowed modern practice Adam-God as false doctrine, and you are entirely correct, just as they were correct to disavow it.

Ironically, Elder McConkie's June 1980 condemnation asks you to trust him and President Kimball as today's living prophet.

I don't see how that's ironic at all. Wasn't President Kimball the living prophet in 1980?

Further, McConkie is pointing to the endowment ceremony as a source of factual information.

Meaning what? The "factual information" Elder McConkie is citing is that the endowment ceremony makes it very clear that Adam is the archangel Michael, not God the Father. Given that Brigham Young wrote the endowment ceremony when they got to Salt Lake based on his memory of Nauvoo, Brigham clearly knew that Adam was Michael, not Heavenly Father, which make these anomalous forays into Adam God-ism more confusing.

What about the Saints of Brigham's day who were following their living prophet?

What about them? The records of the day suggest that they saw no need to incorporate our interpretation of Adam-God into Latter-day Saint theology, so they obviously understood Brigham's point in a way that we don't.

And what about the endowment ceremony of their day where Adam-God was being taught at the veil?

That's actually a question that undermines your point. If they were taught this at the veil and they interpreted it in the same way you do, then why didn't this doctrine survive? Why do we see no evidence of it filtering into Church theology or practice? The answer seems to be that we are approaching Brigham's words with historical presentism that is causing us to misinterpret what he was trying to say.

Yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine and yesterday's prophet is today's heretic.

I don't think you've thought through the implications of your assumption here. For no prophet to ever say something that isn't later shown to be wrong by revelation, then you have to believe that the entirety of information on every subject would have to be given to them from heaven. At what point did you assume that took place? Did Joseph get it all before he died? Even if he did – which he didn't – up until the point where the download was complete, doesn't that make him yesterday's heretic for most of his life?

Consider that this can be true not just from prophet to prophet, but even within any given prophet's tenure as a prophet. Latter-day Saints, including Joseph and Oliver, believed in a traditional Christian heaven and hell when the Church was organized in 1830. Then in 1832, Joseph and Sidney Rigdon had the vision of the Three Degrees of Glory, and it blew the

traditional Christian theology to smithereens. So Joseph himself believed yesterday's false doctrine and was yesterday's heretic. Of course, no one is under condemnation for being mistaken in the absence of revelation, as we're all judged on the level of light and knowledge we receive.

Latter-day Saint theology is diametrically opposed to that kind of thinking. We believe the Lord teaches his people the way he always has – “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.” (2 Nephi 28:30) If that's the process, then surely it means that the Church is going to move away from positions of error when it receives greater light. If your assumption were correct, that would also negate the Ninth Article of Faith, which states that “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and **we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.**” [Emphasis added]

If he's going to reveal many great and important things tomorrow, won't that make all of us yesterday's heretics? The fact is that this has always been the Lord's method throughout all generations of time. It has always been the case that people who reject living prophets almost always do so by professing fealty to dead ones. Those who rejected Christ did so in the name of Abraham, just as those who most vigorously fight against Joseph Smith do so in the name of Christ.

2. BLOOD ATONEMENT

Along with Adam-God, Brigham taught a doctrine known as “Blood Atonement ” where a person's blood had to be shed to atone for their own sins as it was beyond the atonement of Jesus Christ.

You put this in quotes as if this is what Brigham himself called it. He didn't. This is another example of presentism on your part. You're describing Blood Atonement as a codified, sustained revelation that represented the doctrine of the Church, when, in fact, it was a bit of overheated rhetoric on Brigham's part that was designed to scare the Saints into recommitting to the gospel during a period historians call the “Mormon Reformation” of 1856 and 1857.

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

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

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

I have had men come to me and offer their lives to atone for their sins. It is true that the blood of the Son of God was shed for sins through the fall and those committed by men, yet men can commit sins which it can never remit...There are sins that can be atoned for by an offering upon an altar, as in ancient days; and there are sins that the blood of a lamb, or a calf, or of turtle dove, cannot remit, but they must be atoned for by the blood of the man.”

– *Journal of Discourses 4:53-54*

Basically, we’re looking at a big heaping mess of 19th Century rhetorical excess right here. This was part and parcel with the Mormon “reformation,” where Brigham felt it necessary to scare the hell out of everyone in order to get them to recommit to living the gospel. People were rebaptized, and Brigham was essentially playing the part of Billy Graham, laying it on as thick as he possibly could – and, clearly, going too far on this particular occasion.

How do we know this was heated rhetoric that wasn’t taken very seriously? Because while we have this intemperate sermon, we don’t actually have any documented practice of blood atonement. (The Church, in the footnotes to *their essay on 19th Century violence*, says that there was “at least one instance” where someone took action based on this, but I don’t know what that would be.) Brigham knew his audience, and he knew they would understand how much of this was just bluster. The problem would be if people actually started killing themselves or other people, but that’s not what happened.

There is, however, scriptural precedent for this kind of spiritual “scared-straight” approach.

Check out D&C 19, where God states that endless punishment isn’t really endless, and eternal punishment isn’t really eternal. The Lord acknowledges that describing punishment this way is “more express than other scriptures, that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name’s glory.”

In other words, God is literally trying to scare the hell out of people. Brigham is taking that approach here, I think, and, in my estimation, not doing a very good job at it.

We keep circling back to the idea of prophetic infallibility – you believed in it, and you were crushed when it turned out not to be true. But it isn’t true, and that’s a good thing. An infallible prophet no longer has agency, and the one thing the Lord will never do is mess with agency, even for the guys in the First Presidency.

UPDATE: The Church now confirms in its [Peace and Violence among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints](#) essay that Blood Atonement was taught by the prophet Brigham Young.



Brigham Young

A prophet prone to rhetorical excess

I don't understand why this is an "update," as you provided a link to this essay in your last CES Letter version, too.

You're also incorrect. Here's what the essay says about Blood Atonement.

*This concept, which came to be known as blood atonement, was a stock component of anti-Mormon rhetoric in the 19th century. While many of the exaggerated claims that appeared in the popular press and anti-Mormon literature are easily disproven, it is likely that in at least one instance, a few Latter-day Saints acted on this rhetoric. Nevertheless, most Latter-day Saints seem to have recognized that the blood atonement sermons were, in the words of historian Paul Peterson, **"hyperbole or incendiary talk"** that were **"likely designed to frighten church members into conforming with Latter-day Saint principles.** To Saints with good intentions, they were calculated to cause alarm, introspection, and ultimately repentance. For those who refused to comply with Mormon standards, it was hoped such ominous threats would hasten their departure from the Territory." (See Isaac C. Haight letter to Brigham Young, June 11, 1857, Brigham Young Office Files; Peterson, "Mormon Reformation of 1856–1857," 67, 84n66; see also *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. [1992], "Blood Atonement," 1:131.) [Emphasis added.]*

As with the Adam-God theory, the Blood Atonement doctrine was later declared false by subsequent prophets and apostles.

No. As with the Adam-God theory, blood atonement was never a doctrine to begin with.

This isn't just an opinion. D&C 26:2 requires that "[a]ll things shall be done by common consent in the church." For a revelation or doctrine to be binding on the membership at large, it has to be brought before the Church as a whole and sustained as such. That has not been the case with either Adam/God or blood atonement. Neither is or ever has been an official doctrine of the Church.

Yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine. Yesterday's prophet is today's heretic.

Except when yesterday's doctrine isn't doctrine, and yesterday's prophet is viewed through a presentist lens. But we should always be happy to praise new light and knowledge when it enters the world rather than cling to error.

3. POLYGAMY

Brigham Young taught the doctrine that polygamy is required for exaltation:

"The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy." – Journal of Discourses 11:269

You really need to read the rest of the sermon, where he insists that to receive eternal life "you will be polygamists **at least in your faith.**" [Emphasis added] He comes back to this idea two other times in the speech. In other words, his message was that the Saints of the time needed to accept the divine origins of the doctrine, not necessarily engage in the practice. (I

realize that would require you to read your own source, which is something you have repeatedly demonstrated an unwillingness to do.)

Several other prophets after Young, including Taylor, Woodruff, Snow, and Joseph F. Smith gave similar teachings that the New and Everlasting Covenant of plural marriage was doctrinal and essential for exaltation.

Nope. The New and Everlasting Covenant as defined in D&C is celestial marriage, which includes monogamous sealings. Even Brigham Young admitted to George Q. Cannon. that “there would be men in the Celestial Kingdom that had but one wife.”

It’s even in the scriptures. Doctrine & Covenants 132:4: “For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.”

The new and everlasting covenant is celestial marriage, not plural marriage.

In a September 1998 Larry King Live interview (14:37), President Hinckley was asked about polygamy:

Larry King: You condemn it [polygamy]?

Hinckley: I condemn it. Yes, as a practice, because I think it is not doctrinal.

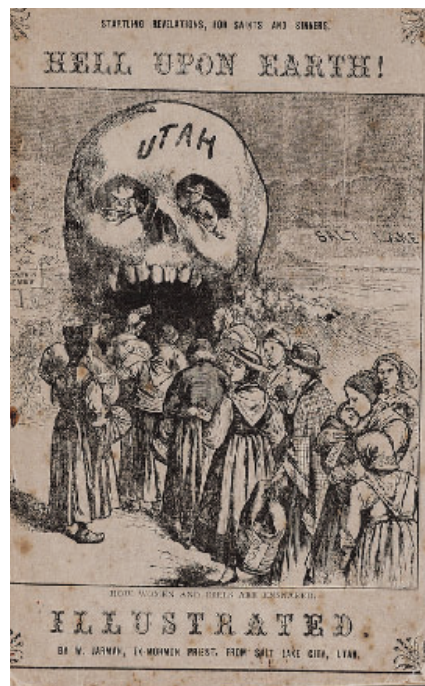
President Hinckley was correct. The doctrine is clear: monogamy is the standard; polygamy is the exception. Since that exception is not now authorized, it is not doctrinal to violate the monogamous standard.

Contrary to President Hinckley’s statement, we still have Doctrine & Covenants 132 in our canonized scriptures.

“Our?” Do you consider the Doctrine and Covenants to be scripture? My understanding is you resigned your membership in the Church, yes? How, then, is D&C still part of your scriptures?

In any case, it is not at all contrary to President Hinckley’s statement that D&C 132 remains scripture. The bulk of D&C 132 deals with the marriage covenant and the sealing power. Plurality of wives isn’t mentioned until verse 61 of a 66-verse revelation.

Much of the modern church’s most precious theology is inextricably tied to the principles in D&C 132. When primary children sing “Families Can Be Together Forever,” they’re referencing D&C 132. The concept of sealing families together, as well as the doctrine of theosis, trace their theological roots to this revelation.



This is either a 19th Century anti-polygamy cartoon or a very early draft of the CES Letter with serious tone problems.

We're also still practicing plural marriage in the Temples by permitting men to be sealed to more than one woman (so long as only one is living). Apostles Elder Oaks, Elder Perry, and Elder Nelson are modern examples of LDS polygamists in that they're sealed to multiple women.

Who's this "we?" You have chosen to separate yourself from the Church in no uncertain terms. Why do you keep referencing yourself as a member when that is no longer the case?

That's why I find it amusing that you're upset about sealings that you don't believe are valid. President Oaks, President Nelson, and Elder Perry, while sealed to multiple women, have never been married to more than one woman at a time. Unless you accept their sealing authority, which you don't, then your objection is baseless.

Polygamy is doctrinal. Polygamy is not doctrinal.

Correct. It is doctrinal when it is authorized; when unauthorized, it is not.

Yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine. Yesterday's prophets are today's heretics.

Amen! As it always has been, as it always will be. Precept on precept. If such were not the case, living prophets would never be necessary.

4. BLACKS BAN

As you know, for close to 130 years blacks were not only banned from holding the priesthood but black individuals and black families were blocked from the saving ordinances of the Temple. Every single prophet from Brigham Young all the way to Harold B. Lee kept this ban in place.

Now we finally get to something I find genuinely troubling, too. Frankly, I'm not particularly enamored with the Church's record on the subject. I have spent a great deal of time defending the Church's exclusion of black members from leadership prior to 1978, and my arguments have fallen flat with others and, frankly, with me.

After the Church reversed its policy excluding black leaders a little over thirty years ago, several church leaders dusted off [2 Nephi 26:33](#) and made it the centerpiece of several very good sermons on the subject. I particularly like [Elder Bruce R. McConkie's sermon](#), which contained this startlingly candid admission of error:

“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. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.”

– Bruce R. McConkie, [“All Are Alike Unto God.”](#) August 18, 1978

Those who honestly and open-heartedly examine the life of Brigham Young will come to the conclusion that he was a mighty man called by God to lead the Church and do a great work. But as evidenced by some of the issues you raise, anyone who believes he was infallible is missing the boat.

Indeed, pretty much all of the racism that wormed its way into Church policy can be traced back to Brigham, who gave more credence to popular 19th century theories about the ancestry of the African people than he should have. It certainly doesn't come from Joseph Smith, who received the fundamental revelations that form the spiritual foundation for the Church as it existed then and today. That scripture quoted above from 2 Nephi, for instance, has been around for over 180 years. Joseph Smith himself ordained several black men to the priesthood. When asked about "the situation of the negro," as was the language of the time, here was Joseph Smith's reply:

"They came into the world slaves mentally and physically. Change their situation with the whites, and they would be like them. They have souls, and are subjects of salvation. Go into Cincinnati or any city, and find an educated negro, who rides in his carriage, and you will see a man who has risen by the powers of his own mind to his exalted state of respectability. The slaves in Washington are more refined than many in high places, and the black boys will take the shine of many of those they brush and wait on." – History of the Church, Volume 5, page 216.



"I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races ... I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."

- Abraham Lincoln, September 18, 1858

That's not to say that Joseph Smith was Martin Luther King, but the view expressed in the preceding paragraph is remarkably enlightened for that time period. I doubt even Abraham Lincoln, who firmly believed that blacks were inferior to whites, would have been nearly as egalitarian.

The idea that the African people descended from Cain and were a cursed race did not originate with the LDS Church. It was a popular 19th Century justification for slavery, and while Brigham Young certainly believed it, there is no scriptural justification for using that idea to exclude black members from Church leadership. Indeed, the idea was not codified as church policy until long after Brigham Young's death.

David O. McKay, president of the Church from 1950 to 1970, made this very clear when he stated:

"There is not now, and there never has been a doctrine in this church that the negroes are under a divine curse. There is no doctrine in the church of any kind pertaining to the negro. We believe that we have a scriptural precedent for withholding the priesthood from the negro. It is a practice, not a doctrine, and the practice someday will be changed. And that's all there is to it." - David O McKay, 1954

President McKay repeatedly stated that the priesthood ban was a policy, not a doctrine, although it would take a revelation to reverse it.

Prophets, Seers, and Revelators of 2013 – in the Church’s December 2013 *Race and the Priesthood* essay – disavowed the “theories” of yesterday’s Prophets, Seers, and Revelators for their theological, institutional, and doctrinal racist teachings and “revelation.”

Your use of the word “revelation” – quotation marks yours – is interesting. Can you show me the revelation that banned blacks from the priesthood? You can’t, because none exists.

Yesterday’s racist doctrine and revelation is now today’s “disavowed theories.”

You haven’t demonstrated that the priesthood ban was either doctrine or revelation.

Additionally, the above-mentioned essay also withdraws “that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse” while ironically contradicting the Book of Mormon itself:

2 NEPHI 5:21

“And he had caused the cursing to come up on them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.”

Not a contradiction at all. This is in reference to the Lamanites, who are believed to be ancestors of Native Americans, not people of African descent. This verse does not have reference to the people denied priesthood and temple opportunities. No one has ever tried to use this passage or any other passage in the Book of Mormon to deny the priesthood or temple blessings to Native Americans.

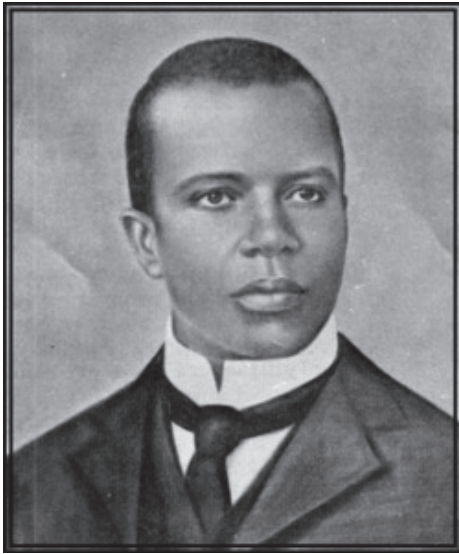
This verse can’t be taken in isolation without considering The Book of Mormon’s larger racial complexity. By the time we get to 4th Nephi, there are no racial distinctions whatsoever, and some of the most righteous people in the narrative are those with darker skin. There are repeated condemnation of racism throughout the book and a broad statement that “he denieth none that come unto him, black and white... all are alike unto God.” (2 Nephi 26:33)

Church leaders, both then and now, consider Lamanites to be ancestors of modern Native Americans and to be part of the House of Israel and heirs to a magnificent destiny, not people under a curse.

Joseph Smith permitted the priesthood to at least two black men. Elijah Abel was one of them. Walker Lewis was another.

Correct. Brigham Young even referred to Walker Lewis as “one of the best Elders.” As the Church’s Race and the Priesthood essay makes clear, there is “no reliable evidence that any black men were denied the priesthood during Joseph Smith’s lifetime.”

Indeed, early critics of the Church insisted that the Church was far too accommodating to people of African descent. The Church has never segregated its congregations the way the vast majority of sects did up through the 20th Century, and the Church was accused of being far too abolitionist in its public statements. Joseph Smith opposed slavery when he was a candidate for the President of the United States.



Quaku Walter Lewis
"One of our best elders"

So, Joseph Smith gives the priesthood to blacks. Brigham Young bans blacks. Each and every single one of the 10 prophets from Brigham Young to Harold B. Lee supported what Spencer W. Kimball referred to as a "possible error" (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.448-449).

A possible error, yes, because error is possible, due to the central nature of agency to Mormon theology.

Heavenly Father likes blacks enough to give them the priesthood under Joseph Smith but He decides they're not okay when Brigham Young shows up. And He still doesn't think they're okay for the next 130 years and the next 9 prophets until President Kimball decides to get a revelation.

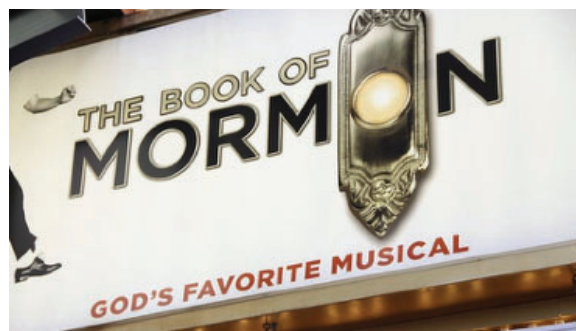
Heavenly Father's love for all people has been clear in the Book of Mormon since the founding of the Church. 2 Nephi 26:33 states that "[The Lord] denieth none that cometh unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; ... all are alike unto God." The fact that the Church didn't fully live up to that principle is the fault of man, not God.

The same God who "denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female" is the same God who denied blacks from the saving ordinances of the Temple for 130 years. Yet, He apparently changed His mind again in 1978 about black people.

Still quoting from the Book or Mormon musical, are we? I thought South Park theology might not make your "tone problem" cut.

Of course God didn't change his mind about black people. God instead had to wait for fallible white people to reject racism.

Since I first answered this question, the Church has celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Priesthood Revelation, and there's been a great deal of further discussion on the subject that merits a mention here.



Includes the lyric "I believe that in 1978 God changed his mind about black people." So does the CES Letter. Both also mention elephants. Coincidence?

Somewhere around the time of the “Be One” celebration, Daniel Peterson - I’m tired of repeating your obnoxious nickname for him, so I won’t - was asked on Facebook whether or not he thought the denial of priesthood and temple blessings was, indeed, a mistake. His response was that he was open to the idea that it could have been Brigham Young’s error at the outset, but he was much less open to the idea that the Lord would have allowed the mistake to endure over the course of roughly 125 years, give or take.

I’ve thought about that, and I’ve since discovered scriptural precedents, both ancient and modern, that may provide some more light on how something this awful could have been allowed to continue in the Church with at least the appearance of divine sanction.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites approached the prophet Samuel and demanded him to “make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” (1 Samuel 8:5) Samuel took the question to the Lord, who made it very clear that a king was a bad idea, and that the desire for a king in this instance was a rejection of the sovereignty of God. The Lord gave Samuel a lengthy list of all the terrible and oppressive things a king would do, and he predicted that the Israelites would eventually “cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.” (I Samuel 8:18)



King Saul
Not one of our best kings

It didn’t matter. “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.” (I Samuel 8:19)

Having made up their minds, the Lord, in verse 22, “said to Samuel, Harken unto their voice, and make them a king.”

Now if one were to read Verse 22 in isolation without the context of the previous verses, you would get the impression that a king for Israel was the Lord’s idea. And, in fact, when the king is chosen, the Lord becomes part of the process through anointing and prophetic counsel. Yet at the outset, the Lord was explicit that this is not what he wanted.

The issue, once again, is one of agency. The Lord did not want Israel to have a king, but Israel did. So, rather than force His will on a people determined to be defiant, God chose to use that defiance for His own purposes.

Those purposes become clearer in Jacob chapter 4 of the Book of Mormon, where Jacob talks about how ancient Israel “despised the words of plainness” of the prophets and, instead, “sought for things that they could not understand.”

Here’s the rest of verse 14:

Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it *God hath done it, **that they may stumble.***
[Emphasis added]

I read this as saying, "You don't like plain language, Israel? You want things you can't understand? You want to look beyond the mark? All right, your wish is granted. Now you get to see what happens when you decide to do things your way instead of God's."

This same principle comes into play when Joseph Smith petitions the Lord three times to allow Martin Harris to show the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon to his wife. The Lord says no twice. The third answer is different, but not because the Lord has changed his mind. Rather, it's because the Lord knew that Joseph was not willing to use his agency the way the Lord wanted, so the Lord turned that defiance into an opportunity to teach an important lesson. The stumbling taught Joseph obedience from that point forward.

Back to the issue at hand: we have no record of any revelation denying the priesthood to people of African descent. Instead, we have Brigham Young perpetuating the folk doctrine of the 19th Century which originated out of the Church that black people bear the curse of Cain. There's also evidence of a campaign to “otherize” early Mormons as a different, even sub-human, race.



Life Magazine's 1904 "otherizing" anti-Mormon cartoon with offensive racial overtones.

At the time, all the nations, even the oppressed ones, believed that races were part of a hierarchy of greater and lesser humans, and intermarriage was an unspeakable horror. How hard would it be to believe that on this issue, that the Church, in an echo of Israel of old, wanted to be “like all the nations?”

Not hard at all, it seems to me. Also not hard to believe that because they desired it, God hath done it, that we may stumble. And stumble we have. (Boy, have we ever.)

Why did it endure for 125 years? Sadly, because it likely didn't occur to anyone that there was anything wrong with it, as it was consistent with the racist mores of the time. I don't think any church leaders bothered to question it for at least a century. And by the time they did, it's not surprising that the answer was “the Lord will not hear you in that day,” the same as it was to ancient Israel. President McKay is the first on record to challenge it, but given that he was also a segregationist, it seems unlikely that he would be willing to accept an answer that would include an interracial couple being sealed in the temple. It wasn't until Spencer W. Kimball came along that the prayers were heard and answered, because he was willing to accept the answer without qualifications.

Also, keep in mind that while we had this egregious error as part of our theology for 125 years, Israel had a king for over 400 years, during which time the monarchy produced all kinds of disasters and eventually ended up in Israel's utter collapse. At no time will the Lord override agency, even after 400 years of a grievous error. So if it took 125 years before we were able to accept the Lord's will that “all are alike unto God,” that's our fault, not God's.

Of course, the revelation He gives to the Brethren in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1, 1978 has absolutely nothing to do with the [IRS potentially revoking BYU's tax-exempt status](#), [Stanford and other universities boycotting BYU athletics](#), [we can't figure out who's black or not in Brazil](#), (São Paulo Temple dedicated/opened just a few months after revelation), and that Post-Civil Rights societal trends were against the Church's racism.

On the contrary, I'm sure the revelation had a great deal to do with all of those things. Why would that be a problem? Revelations don't come in a vacuum and never have. Remember, the Word of Wisdom was received because Emma was tired of cleaning up the tobacco stains all over the floor in the School of the Prophets. Revelations come when we ask questions, and we ask questions when there are pressing circumstances that require an answer.

I would think Christ's one true Church would have led the Civil Rights movement; not be the last major church on the planet in 1978 to adopt it.

Indeed! That's probably why Church issued strong statements in support of the Civil Rights Movement well before the 1978 revelation. The following statement was read by a member of the First Presidency in the October 1963 General Conference:

During recent months, both in Salt Lake City and across the nation, considerable interest has been expressed in the position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the matter of civil rights. We would like it to be known that there is in this Church no doctrine, belief, or practice that is intended to deny the enjoyment of full civil rights by any person regardless of race, color, or creed.

We say again, as we have said many times before, that we believe that all men are the children of the same God, and that it is a moral evil for any person or group of persons to deny any human being the right to gainful employment, to full educational opportunity, and to every privilege of citizenship, just as it is a moral evil to deny him the right to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience.

On this one, the Church beat Congress to the punch. The landmark Civil Rights Act, which codified these ideas into law, didn't pass until 1964, an act which my Latter-day Saint grandfather, Senator Wallace F. Bennett, voted for and wholeheartedly supported.

How can we trust these “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators,” who have been so wrong about so many important things for so long while claiming to be receiving revelations from God?

For a number of reasons, including the fact that they have been right about far, far more than they have been wrong, and there has never been any revelation presented to the Church denying the priesthood or temple blessings to those of African descent.

You quoted Joseph Fielding McConkie before, so I'd like to quote him again. In his book *Answers: Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions*, he addresses the following question on page 180 and 181: “If we can't trust the judgment of the prophet in everything, how can we trust it in anything?”

This chain of thought is used by fundamentalists who claim the Bible to be inherent and infallible. Their argument is that if the Bible is an error on the smallest thing, be it a matter of science, history, geography, or whatever, we cannot possibly trust it when it speaks of Christ or gospel principles. All manner of contortions are necessary to maintain this position. It makes of their theology a pious fraud and constantly requires its adherents to lie, as it were, for God.

What if we assume that a person who made a mistake on one matter could never be trusted on another matter? Because we have all made mistakes, there would not be a soul left upon the face of the earth we could trust. The irony of the argument of infallibility as it applies to the Bible is that those who make it cannot agree among themselves about what its various passages mean. Of what value is an infallible book among people whose interpretations of it are so terribly flawed?

The idea of infallibility simply doesn't work. Are children justified in rejecting the inspired counsel of their parents if they can show them some other things their parents erred? Can we set aside the counsel of the bishop if we know something of his own shortcomings? Can we disregard the instruction of the family physician if we discover he misdiagnosed an illness on some past occasion? Perfection is not requisite for trust, nor need we be perfect to enjoy the prompting of the Spirit or to share in the wisdom of heaven. Gratefully, that is the case, for were it not, none of us would be suitable for the Lord's service.

Yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine. Yesterday's 10 prophets are today's heretics.

Just as all of us will be tomorrow's heretics when new light and knowledge enters the world. If this were not the case, we'd all have nothing more to learn.

5. MARK HOFMANN

In the early to mid-1980s, the Church paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in expensive and valuable antiques and cash to Mark Hofmann – a con man and soon-to-be serial killer – to purchase and suppress bizarre and embarrassing documents into the Church vaults that undermined and threatened the Church's story of its origins. The documents were later proven to be forgeries.

I'm tempted to include a GIF of Luke Skywalker saying "Every word you just said is wrong," except I hate *The Last Jedi*. And it is true that Hofmann was both a con-man and serial killer, and that the documents were forgeries. But when it comes to your description of the actions of the Church, however, Luke Skywalker's message applies.



Three facts get in your way:

1. The Church did not pay “hundreds of thousands of dollars in expensive and valuable antiques and cash to Mark Hofmann.”

Cash was not a part of most of these transactions, and most of the documents were donated to the Church by individual members at no cost to the Church itself.

2. Seven out of ten of the fake documents supported the Church's narrative and were not at all "embarrassing," and only one of them could be described as "bizarre."

The reason people were troubled by the possibly bizarre Salamander Letter when it surfaced is because Hofmann's forgeries were consistent with the Church's official story of its origins – most notably the fake Charles Anthon letter, which is the item that President Kimball is looking at in the above picture.

The Church [lists ten documents at the LDS.org website](#) that were referenced in official Church materials, seven of which are highly supportive of the Church's story. Hofmann was essentially "building the brand" by creating documents that would establish his credibility as a dealer. Had he simply been peddling bizarre, embarrassing nonsense, it is unlikely he would have been taken seriously.

3. The Church did nothing to suppress these documents and published them immediately.

The forgery that most challenging to the Church's history was the Salamander Letter, which claimed that Moroni was a lizard. It was not purchased by the Church; it was donated to the Church, which "suppressed" the document by publishing the full text of it in the Church News not long after they secured it.

The other two documents that were embarrassing were the Joseph Smith III blessing, where Joseph Smith, Jr. supposedly selected his son as his successor, and the Josiah Stowell note, which confirmed that Joseph was a treasure seeker, which was already confirmed in Joseph's original history. Hofmann said in an interview that he was confident the Church would be eager to "buy the blessing on the spot and bury it," i.e. purchase and suppress. The Church did nothing of the kind and initially turned Hofmann away. Later, after negotiations with the RLDS Church to buy the JS III blessing fell through, the Church entered into a new round of discussions with Hofmann and agreed to a non-cash trade to secure the fake blessing, which they then offered at no cost to the Reorganized Church. The Church immediately made the content of the letter public.

That's a pretty lousy job of suppression.

- **The lack of discernment by the Brethren on such a grave threat to the Church is troubling.**

Another assumption of prophetic infallibility. I'm convinced that over 90% of all the objections you raise in the CES Letter would vanish on the wind if you recognized how wrong it is to assume that prophets that aren't perfect can't really be prophets.

But all right, let's pretend things had gone the way you assume they ought to have gone.

Imagine the apostles meeting in the upper rooms of the Salt Lake Temple the day after Hofmann approached them with his first forgery. Suddenly, the room is filled with light. Moroni appears to warn them of the fraud, maybe even quoting a scripture or two from the 1769 version of the KJV. Consequently, the Brethren cut off all negotiations with Hofmann

along and deliver a mighty rebuking to him for his evil ways. Perhaps they also excommunicate him to boot.

What happens then?

Well, if I'm Hofmann, I go to the press. Hofmann appeared to be a meek, unassuming kind of guy, and he would have been able to generate tremendous media sympathy if the big, bad Brethren had been so mean to him. The same historical experts who validated the documents in the real turn of events would no doubt validate them in this fantasy world we're imagining, so suddenly the media narrative is that the Church is burying its head in the sand about its own history.

Soon, the Salt Lake Tribune is on the front door of the Church Office Building, demanding to know why they refuse to accept reality. Out comes Dallin Oaks or Gordon Hinckley to say – what? That Moroni told them it was a fraud? Suddenly the Church comes across as an ignorant bully, and Hofmann looks like the guileless innocent speaking truth to power.

This would have been a far graver threat to the integrity of the Church than the way it really happened.

- Speeches by [Elder Dallin H. Oaks](#) and [President Gordon B. Hinckley](#) offered apologetic explanations for troubling documents ([Salamander Letter](#) and [Joseph Smith III Blessing](#)) that later ended up, unbeknownst to Elder Oaks and President Hinckley at the time of their apologetic talks, being proven complete fakes and forgeries.

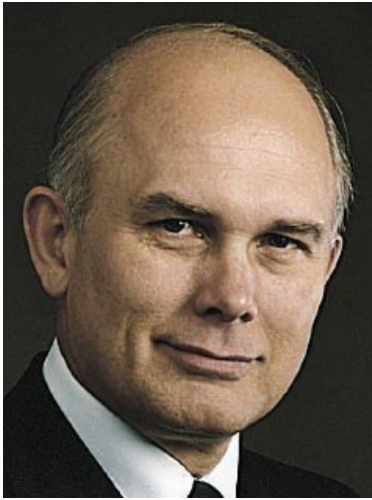
They were far more bekownst than you imply. Elder Oaks's talk to which you link, and which you likely have not read, is entirely focused on treating such documents with considerable skepticism. President Hinckley's talk is a recounting of the line of authority from Joseph Smith to Spencer Kimball, with the document serving as a catalyst for the discussion rather than as the object of it. It is only directly referenced at the beginning and end of the talk.

THE FOLLOWING IS ELDER OAKS' 1985 [DEFENSE OF THE FAKE SALAMANDER LETTER](#) (WHICH OAKS EVIDENTLY THOUGHT WAS REAL AND LEGITIMATE AT THE TIME):

“Evidently?” What rubbish. The evidence suggests precisely the opposite conclusion. The talk makes it clear Elder Oaks was, at the time, deeply skeptical of the Salamander Letter.

In section 1, Elder Oaks lays the groundwork for skepticism. “Some recent news stories about developments in Church history rest on scientific assumptions or assertions, such as the authenticity of a letter,” he says at the outset. “Whether experts or amateurs, most of us have a tendency to be quite dogmatic about so-called scientific facts. Since news writers are not immune from this tendency, news stories based on scientific assumptions should be read or viewed with some skepticism.”

In case you miss the point, he concludes Section 1 as follows:



*Dallin H. Oaks, circa 1985
Apostle and Hofmann Skeptic*

“As a result, the news media are particularly susceptible to conveying erroneous information about facts, including historical developments that are based on what I have called scientific uncertainties. This susceptibility obviously applies to newly discovered documents whose authenticity turns on an evaluation of handwriting, paper, ink, and so on. As readers **we should be skeptical about the authenticity of such documents**, especially when we are unsure where they were found or who had custody of them for 150 years. Newly found, historically important documents can be extremely valuable, so there is a powerful incentive for those who own them to advocate and support their authenticity. The recent spectacular fraud involving the so-called Hitler diaries reminds us of this and should convince us to be cautious.” [Emphasis added]

Do these sound like the words of someone who “evidently” thought the Salamander Letter “was real and legitimate at the time?” Certainly not to me. It sounds like he is warning Church instructors that these documents could well be forgeries.

The whole talk is structured a love letter to skepticism. The sections are labeled “1. Scientific Uncertainties,” “2. Lack of Context,” “3. Truths and Half-Truths,” “4. Bias,” “5. Balance,” and “6. Evaluation.” These are bright neon signs screaming for skepticism. Once again, you have cherry-picked the relatively brief section you like and ignored the blaring sirens against authenticity that constitute the main body of the talk. Which, once again, suggests you haven’t bothered to read your own source.

Let’s look, however, at the part you’ve cherry-picked for us:

“Another source of differences in the accounts of different witnesses is the different meanings that different persons attach to words. We have a vivid illustration of this in the recent media excitement about the word salamander in a letter Martin Harris is supposed to have sent to W. W. Phelps over 150 years ago. All of the scores of media stories on that subject apparently assume that the author of that letter used the word salamander in the modern sense of a ‘tailed amphibian.’

One wonders why so many writers neglected to reveal to their readers that there is another meaning of salamander, which may even have been the primary meaning in this context in the 1820s. That meaning, which is listed second in a current edition of Webster’s New World Dictionary, is ‘a spirit supposed to live in fire’ (2d College ed. 1982, s.v. ‘salamander’). Modern and ancient literature contain many examples of this usage.

A spirit that is able to live in fire is a good approximation of the description Joseph Smith gave of the angel Moroni: a personage in the midst of a light, whose countenance was ‘truly like lightning’ and whose overall appearance ‘was glorious

beyond description' (Joseph Smith-History 1:32). As Joseph Smith wrote later, 'The first sight [of this personage] was as though the house was filled with consuming fire' (History of the Church, 4:536). Since the letter purports only to be Martin Harris's interpretation of what he had heard about Joseph's experience, the use of the words white salamander and old spirit seem understandable.

In view of all this, and as a matter of intellectual evaluation, why all the excitement in the media, and why the apparent hand-wringing among those who profess friendship with or membership in the Church? The media should make more complete disclosures, but Latter-day Saint readers should also be more sophisticated in their evaluation of what they read."

Even in this section, where Elder Oaks addresses the possibility that the Salamander Letter might be genuine, he uses a skeptic's vocabulary. It's "a letter Martin Harris *is supposed to have sent* to W. W. Phelps over 150 years ago." [Emphasis added] Earlier in this talk that you haven't bothered to read, under the section "Bias," Elder Oaks reviews different ways historians can recount historical events, each one revealing different biases of the writer.

1. *Reporting the event as having happened.*
2. *Relating the event in the witness's own words while disclosing the author's belief that the witness's account is truthful.*
3. *Stating that the person who reported the event believed that it happened.*
4. *Relating the event but implying that it probably did not happen.*
- 5–6. *Ignoring the event, or distorting it, or stating that it did not happen.*

If Elder Oaks believed the letter was genuine, he would have reported its delivery under the parameters of Section 1 - reporting this event as having happened. It would therefore be "a letter Martin Harris sent to W.W. Phelps." But it was, instead, a letter "Martin Harris is supposed to have sent." This, at best, falls into category 4. The best that can be said is that Elder Oaks was open to the possibility that the Salamander Letter could have been genuine, but his bias, as defined within the talk, was firmly against authenticity.

Back to Joseph Fielding McConkie, who directly answered this question in *Answers*, on page 179. responding to the query "How can prophets be deceived, as in the case of Mark Hoffman?"

This question is simply another way of asking why prophets aren't infallible. It is doubtful that those asking the question suppose themselves obligated to be faultless. Why, then, do they suppose other must be? We do not believe in the infallibility of missionaries, or Sunday School teachers, or even bishops or stake presidents. At what point do we suppose infallibility must begin?

He also goes on to quote a revelation where Joseph Smith was warned that one of his failings would be a tendency to trust the untrustworthy:

In a revelation dealing with the lost one hundred and sixteen pages of the Book of Mormon the Lord told Joseph Smith: "But as you cannot always judge the righteous, or as you cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous, therefore I say unto,

hold your peace until I shall see fit to make all things known unto the world concerning the matter” (D&C 10:37)

So it seems Joseph Smith was warned, by revelation, that he could not “always tell the wicked from the righteous.” Why should it be surprising that his successors were equally willing to accept people in good faith?

So, what just happened?

What happened was that Elder Oaks warned church historians to be deeply skeptical of the Salamander Letter for a number of reasons, although he addressed the possibility that, despite his own doubts, it could be genuine.

Elder Oaks defended and rationalized a completely fake and made up document that Mark Hofmann created...

No. You only think that’s what just happened because you didn’t bother to read your own source.

... while telling “Latter-day Saint readers” to be “more sophisticated in their evaluation of what they read.”

This “sophisticated” thing really seems to bother you, as you bring it up again several more times down the road. I read “sophisticated” as being synonymous with or at least similar to “skeptical.” A “sophisticated” reader would be likely to evaluate historical documents without presentism - hence the reference to 1820 definitions of “salamander” - and with appropriate skepticism as to their authenticity. Under those standards, the CES Letter could do with a lot more sophistication.

- There was significant dishonesty by President Hinckley on his relationship with Hofmann, his meetings, and which documents that the Church had and didn’t have.

This is a baseless charge for which you have no evidence.

Your link calls up a footnote in a Wikipedia article that says “At seventy-two, Hinckley had begun filling the role that would increasingly dominate his life, his role as de facto president of the church.” Nothing at all about “significant dishonesty” as promised by the hyperlink. At some point, it really would help if you read your own references.

- Just hours following the bombings on the morning of October 15, 1985, murderer Mark Hofmann met with Elder Dallin H. Oaks in the Church Office Building:

“He’s just killed two people. And what does he do? He goes down to the church office building and meets with Dallin Oaks. I can’t even imagine the rush, given Hofmann’s frame of reference, that this would have given him. To be there standing in front of one of God’s appointed apostles, after murdering two people, and this person doesn’t hear any words from God, doesn’t intuit a thing. For Hofmann that must have been an absolute rush. He had pulled off the ultimate spoof against God.”

– *The Poet and the Murderer: A True Story of Literary Crime and the Art of Forgery*, p.232

Lots of mind-reading in this passage. Neither you nor this author have the first idea what Elder Oaks was thinking or feeling at this moment, let alone that he “doesn’t intuit a thing.” Even if God were screaming in his ear, what should he have done? Performed a citizen’s arrest? Tackled him? Struck him down with a lightning bolt?

The more I read Elder Oaks’s contemporaneous accounts of dealing with Hofmann, the more convinced I become that he was skeptical from day one. The fact that Hofmann is rotting behind bars demonstrates that justice was served, and that outcome may well have been thwarted if an apostle had unceremoniously pounced on Hofmann without any evidence than the “words from God” ringing in his head.

Elder Oaks had a serial murderer right in front of him in his office just hours after Hofmann killed two people ([Oaks later admits this meeting](#)).

In the talk, Oaks reiterates that he had admitted to the meeting in a previous public statement. Once again, have you even read the talk to which you’re linking?

What does this say about the discernment of the Brethren when they can’t discern a murderer and con man, hell-bent on destroying Mormonism, right under their noses?

How do you know there was no discernment? I still don’t understand what you expected Elder Oaks to do in those ten minutes in 1985. Tai Kwon Do, perhaps?



Oaks v. Hofmann, 1985

(Dramatization. May not have happened. Be sophisticated in evaluating this image.)

Discernment doesn't deputize apostles to strike down evil-doers with their bare hands. As to "what does this say" about all the issues you raise, it says that you haven't read Elder Oaks's answer to that very question in the link to the talk you provide. From your link:

As everyone now knows, Hofmann succeeded in deceiving many: experienced Church historians, sophisticated collectors, businessmen-investors, national experts who administered a lie detector test to Hofmann, and professional document examiners, including the expert credited with breaking the Hitler diary forgery. But why, some still ask, were his deceits not detected by the several Church leaders with whom he met?

In order to perform their personal ministries, Church leaders cannot be suspicious and questioning of each of the hundreds of people they meet each year. Ministers of the gospel function best in an atmosphere of trust and love. In that kind of atmosphere, they fail to detect a few deceivers, but that is the price they pay to increase their effectiveness in counseling, comforting, and blessing the hundreds of honest and sincere people they see. It is better for a Church leader to be occasionally disappointed than to be constantly suspicious.

You continue to presume that Elder Oaks was not at all skeptical of Hofmann when, in fact, the links you provide are dripping with Oaks's skepticism. All of this was right under your nose the whole time, and it didn't even require revelation to see it. All it required was for you to read your own sources, which, again and again, you never bother to do.

• [Ultimately, the Church was forced to admit it had, in the First Presidency Vault, documents \(McLellin Collection\) that the Church previously denied it had.](#)

I'm not sure I understand the accusation here, and I'm sure you do not.

Your source is accusing the Church of suppressing the McLellin Collection they knew they owned by attempting to buy the McLellin Collection from Hofmann, which doesn't make a lick of sense.

Such a scenario would require them to know that Hofmann was a fraud, yes? So wouldn't that imply discernment on their part? Otherwise, why are they buying these documents to suppress them because they already have them? Honestly, how is this supposed to work?

There's also zero evidence that the Church was "forced to admit" anything. Your breathless source's liberal use of exclamation points and ALL CAPS notwithstanding, Richard Turley announced the McLellin documents as soon as he found them. Your source treats this as if it were some kind of unforced error - Turley's "BOMBSHELL!" But the information was released without any prompting and with no opposition from Church leaders. Turley is now the head of the Church PR Department and one of the writers of the new Church history book *Saints*. It would be highly unlikely he would hold such a position if he had violated some secret suppression directive back in the 80s.

Your source - and you - speak of the “McLellin Collection” as if it were some kind of prepackaged product with a handy-dandy label identifying it as such, like everything in the old Adam West *Batman* series.



Reality is seldom that tidy or well-marked. The things which go by the name of the “McLellin Collection” are a number of journals and letters attributed to William McLellin. The fact that the Church had some items written by McLellin does not negate the possibility of additional documents or confirm the existence of a self-contained “collection.” If authentic new McLellin-related documents surface, that will not be evidence of suppression of existing McLellin documents.

Although if they are, surely Batman will be on the case.



The McLellin documents were critical for the investigation of the Hofmann murders.

No, they weren't. The investigation of the Hofmann murders hinged on handwriting and ink analysis of the forgeries, and the authentic McLellin documents weren't part of the investigation at all. Not even a little bit.

- While these “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators” were being duped and conned by Mark Hofmann’s forgeries over a four-year period (1981-1985), the Tanners – considered some of the biggest critics of the Church – actually came out and said that the Salamander Letter was a fake.

Well done, Tanners.

Even when the Salamander Letter proved very useful in discrediting the Church, the Tanners had better discernment than the Brethren did.

What do you mean by “discernment?” You have repeatedly used that word to describe your expectations of magical powers you thought Church leaders possessed that would allow them to spot all liars. Are you therefore suggesting that the Tanners knew the Salamander Letter was fake by supernatural means?

It should also be said that even when the Salamander Letter proved very useful in discrediting the Church, the Church made no effort to hide its existence or content from Church members or the public at large.

While the Tanners publicly rejected the Salamander Letter, the Church continued buying fakes from Hofmann...

No, they didn't. The letter was donated to the Church on April 18, 1985. After that, the Church procured a single additional item from Hofmann in October of 1985 shortly before the murders - a copy of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, likely authentic, which they obtained by means of a trade estimated to be worth \$700.

... and Elder Oaks continued telling Latter-day Saints to be more sophisticated.

No, he didn't. He used this phrase precisely once in August of 1985, so he couldn't very well have “continued telling” people something he had only said a single time. It's also important to note that he said this in a talk where he expressed considerable skepticism of the Salamander Letter - a talk you apparently haven't read. You are also misreading his intent in using the word “sophisticated.” He was encouraging skepticism, not acceptance.

I'm told that prophets are just men who are only prophets when acting as such (whatever that means).

I'm not sure what it means, either, at least in the way you describe it. Are you suggesting that when they are acting as prophets, they cease to be men? Are they possessed a la Linda Blair and have their bodies taken over by the Spirit so they can no longer act on their own volition? The assumption of infallibility is so problematic that I don't understand how anyone could

possibly think it compatible with the Restored Gospel. It's remarkable to me that in the five years since you first published your letter, you haven't ever thought to challenge your basic assumptions.

You act as if it's self-evident that a true prophet acting as a prophet and not acting as a man would never do anything wrong, even though the scriptures are replete with prophets who make a number of errors, sometimes very serious ones. Yet it doesn't seem to have occurred to you that it's your own mistaken assumptions that are the problem, not prophetic mistakes.

I'm told that, like all prophets, Brigham Young was a man of his time.

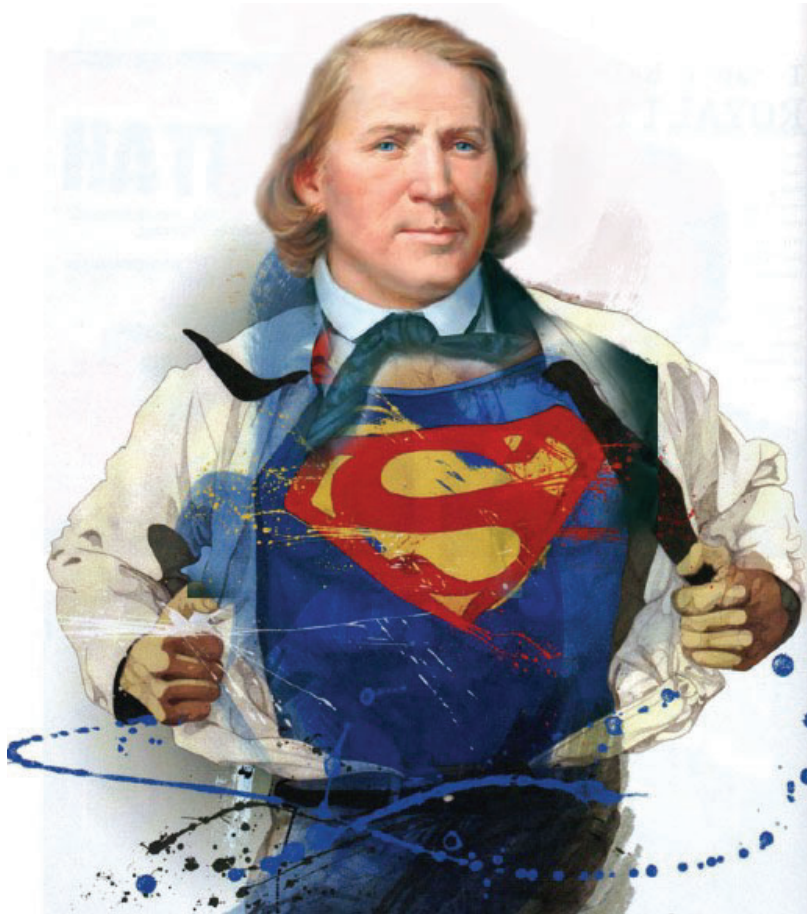
Of course he was. I would think the beard alone would give that away. He's either a man of the 19th Century or a 20th Century member of ZZ Top.

What, did you assume he was a man out of his time? That he was somehow able to live in mortality without functioning in the era in which he lived? Was he the Doctor from Doctor Who, able to skip in and out of any moment at will?



Brigham Who
Man Not Of His Time

As I'm answering you this second time around, I'm noticing more and more how strange some of your basic assumptions are. I've been a member of the Church for all 50 years of my middle-aged life, and it never occurred to me that Brigham Young or anyone other prophets could be anything other than men of their times. I sincerely don't understand why you expected it to be otherwise.



Look! Up in the sky!
It's a man! It's a prophet! It's - SUPER-BRIGHAM!

For example, I was told that Brigham Young was acting as a man when he taught that “God revealed to [him]” that “Adam is our father and God” and the “only God with whom we have to do.”

Was he not? Do prophets cease to be men when they act as prophets? How does that work?

I’m getting this image of Clark Kent tearing open his shirt to reveal the Superman crest so there’s a clearly delineated marker in the transformation from fallible and infallible.

These are not super-beings or robots. Every prophet the Lord has ever called has been a man with agency and the freedom and capacity to make mistakes.

Never mind that Brigham taught this over the pulpit in not one but

two conferences and never mind that he introduced this theology into the endowment ceremony in the Temples.

On the contrary, that’s of critical importance, especially the fact that this was taught in the temple. The temple ceremony, as you may recall, involves Adam’s participation quite extensively, and it is made crystal clear that Adam is not Heavenly Father. Brigham Young personally wrote that temple ceremony based on what he remembered from Nauvoo, so he somehow saw no conflict between what he was teaching at the veil and what temple-goers had just been taught seconds earlier in the endowment ceremony itself. This suggests that we are missing some key piece of information that would allow us to interpret this the way the 19th Century Saints would have interpreted it.

For what it’s worth, my very smart, law professor brother-in-law, an unofficial theologian if there ever was one, views this as Brigham’s emphasis on the fact that Adam stands at the head of the human family. The Book of Abraham talks about “the Gods” who created the world, and the temple makes it clear that one of those was Michael, later named Adam. Brigham may have been saying that of those three, Adam is *our* father and the only “god” from whom we are physically descended.

I’m not sure I buy that, personally, but I appreciate the attempt to figure out some kind of context in which Brigham’s teaching might have been accepted by those who heard it.

Since Adam's status in the temple endowment has remained unchanged from Brigham's time to this, and since Brigham himself is the one who wrote that ceremony, it's safe to assume that nobody who taught or heard the Adam/God language thought it inconsistent with the principles you learned when you received your endowment.

Never mind that Brigham Young made it clear that he was speaking as a prophet:

"I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture."

– *Journal of Discourses 13:95*

Should we also never mind that you didn't even bother to read the *very next sentence* after this cherry-picked phrase? "Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon." If he's infallible, why would he have to correct his sermons? That's an admission that someone feigning infallibility would never make. In addition, since when do we believe in infallible scriptures? "If there be errors, they are the mistakes of men" applies to both the written and spoken word.

Also, why are you quoting this in the context of Adam-God? The sermon you're quoting here says absolutely nothing about that subject. You would know that if you had read it. Which you obviously haven't.

Why would I want my kids chanting "Follow the Prophet" with such a ridiculous and inconsistent 187-year track record?

"Ridiculous 187-year track record?" You think Adam-God, Mark Hofmann, and other anomalous quirks constitute the entirety of the legacy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? The track record of the Church is one of lives blessed by service freely given to members and non-members alike. The amount of good that prophets have done vastly outweighs the human errors they have made.

Although I also don't much like the song "Follow the Prophet." It sounds too much like the "Stonecutters Song" from the Simpsons.



**Who controls the British crown? Who keeps the metric system down?
We do! We do!**

What credibility do the Brethren have?

A great deal, actually. They've been wrong on occasion, but they've also been very, very right the vast majority of the time.

Why would I want them following the prophet when a prophet is just a man of his time teaching his "theories" that will likely be disavowed by future "Prophets, Seers, and Revelators"?

You're looking at the teachings of the prophets through a fun-house mirror. It's a gross distortion to say that prophets primarily teach "theories" that are later disavowed. What percentage of Brigham Young's entirety of teachings is no longer consistent with what the church currently teaches? There's no way to definitively quantify it, but objectively speaking, it's a pretty small percentage. What's the likelihood that, say, baptism by immersion will become passé under the next church president? Are we going to abandon the Book of Mormon? Ditch the Sabbath Day? When should we expect a repudiation of the Sermon on the Mount?

By fixating on anomalous episodes in history that are inconsistent with how the church currently operates, you're overlooking the fact that, on the whole, the Church has been remarkably consistent in its doctrines and practices for nearly two centuries.

If his moral blueprint is not much better than that of their Sunday School teachers?

Sure! Why should his moral blueprint be any better than those of Sunday School teachers? Shouldn't Sunday School teachers be teaching good doctrine, too?

This is where your argument falls apart. If the Lord can create infallible prophets, then why should he stop with prophets? Why not extend infallibility all the way to Sunday School teachers and scoutmasters and nursery leaders? Either agency is essential, and everyone from prophets to Sunday School teachers has it, or it's irrelevant, and we should all be robots that are never allowed to veer off course to any degree.

If, historically speaking, the doctrine he teaches today will likely be tomorrow's false doctrine?

Not likely at all, but certainly possible when new light and knowledge is revealed, as we have been promised it will be.

Perhaps you are content with learning nothing more about God than you were taught by fallible Sunday School teachers, but there is a flood of knowledge waiting to be revealed, and "[a]s well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints." (D&C 121:33)

KINDERHOOK PLATES & TRANSLATOR CLAIMS

Concerns & Questions

“I insert fac-similes of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook...I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the Ruler of heaven and earth.”

– JOSEPH SMITH, JR., *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, VOL. 5, CHAPTER 19, P.37*

Although this account [i.e. the one referenced above] appears to be the writing of Joseph Smith, it is actually an excerpt from a journal of William Clayton.”

– “Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth- Century Hoax.” AUGUST 1981 ENSIGN

“Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth- Century Hoax.”

– AUGUST 1981 ENSIGN

You clearly haven't read the August 1981 Ensign, because it points out that you are in error when you attribute your first quote on this page to Joseph Smith. You owe it to your readers to be at least passingly familiar with your own source material.

- JIM BENNETT, *A FAITHFUL REPLY TO THE CES LETTER FROM A FORMER CES EMPLOYEE*, 10/2018

1. KINDERHOOK PLATES

SHORT ANSWER:

Joseph Smith did not translate the fraudulent Kinderhook Plates and wrote nothing about them. There is nothing substantive to this accusation at all, and other than the Keokuk, Iowa lands of Joseph Smith's youth, this may well be the weakest section of the entire CES Letter.

LONG ANSWER:

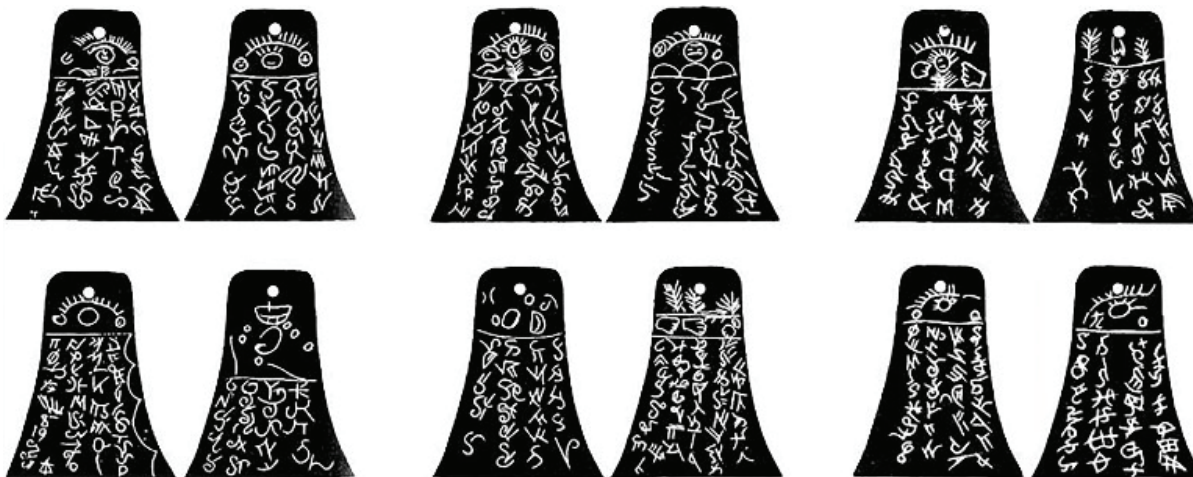
In CES Letter 3.0, I recommend removing this section altogether. Pinning so much of your argument on such an easily debunked assertion is quite foolish.

“Church historians continued to insist on the authenticity of the Kinderhook Plates until 1980 when an examination conducted by the Chicago Historical Society, possessor of one plate, proved it was a nineteenth-century creation.”

– LDS Historian Richard Bushman, [Rough Stone Rolling, p.490](#)

Not really. Read Bushman's footnote - #27 in this chapter. He's referencing the fact that B.H. Roberts relied on William Clayton's journal language in the History of the Church as a first-person statement from Joseph Smith. So while this could be considered the de facto position of the Church until it was specifically repudiated, there are no recent historical defenses of the Kinderhook Plates, and, really, no significant references to them anywhere other than in William Clayton's journal.

FACSIMILES OF THE SIX DOUBLE-SIDED KINDERHOOK PLATES



Yep! There they are!

And, once again, you plagiarize MormonInfographics.com. Here's your new, plagiarized version:

JOSEPH SMITH'S TRANSLATION	THE HOAX UNCOVERED
<p><i>"I insert facsimiles of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook... I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth." —Joseph Smith, Jr.</i></p>	<p><i>The plates turned out to be a hoax. Metallurgical tests revealed the plates to be of late 19th century construction. In addition, the script was created using a 19th-century chemical etch process. In August, 1981 LDS Ensign Magazine conceded: "Kinderhook plates bought to Joseph Smith appear to be a 19th-century hoax."</i></p>

- The plates were named after the town in which they were found - Kinderhook, IL. A farmer claimed he dug the plates out of a mound. They took the plates to Joseph Smith for examination and he translated a portion.

71


- Not only did Joseph not discern the fraud, he added to the fraud by "translating" the fake plates. The LDS Church now concedes it's a hoax. What does this tell us about Joseph Smith's gift of translation?

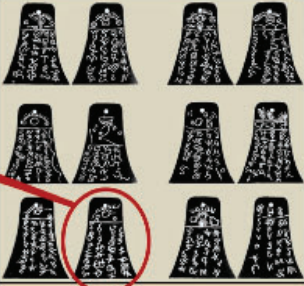
And here's the original MormonInfographics version, perhaps with "tone problems."

Kinderhook Plates

History of the line of Ham or Hoax?

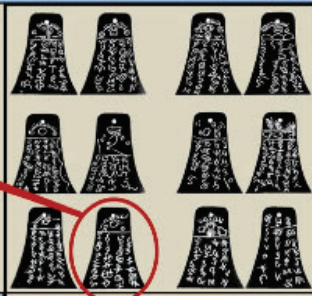
This is an actual plate that is currently with the Chicago Historical Society. [1]





Above are facsimiles of the 6 double-sided Kinderhook Plates

Plates were named after the town in which they were found.




Chicago ●
Nauvoo ●
State of Illinois
● **Kinderhook**
A farmer claims he dug the plates out of a mound. They took the plates to Joseph Smith for examination, he translated a portion. [2]

Joseph Smith translation:

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

The Hoax Uncovered [4]

The plates turned out to be a hoax. Metallurgical tests revealed the plates to be of late 19th century construction. In addition, the script was created using a 19th-century chemical etch process.
In August, 1981 LDS Ensign Magazine conceded: "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a 19th-Century Hoax"



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

[1] Letter from the Chicago Historical Society, 5/23/2005, <http://www.mormonthink.com/kinderhookplates.html#hereplatestoday>
 [2] Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends, Volume 1, 3886, Affidavit, pp 20 / 4
 [3] History of the Church, v. 5, p. 322
 [4] Ensign Magazine, August 1981, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth Century Hoax", Stanley B. Kimball

mormoninfographics.com

This is a bit more egregious plagiarism on your part than your previous cribbing from the MormonInfographics folks. You actually use text from the graphic as if it's your own original language, and you ignore the footnotes in the original graphic. Any student turning in this kind of sloppily plagiarized work would get a failing grade and may well get kicked out of their program of study.

So, assuming you've actually read the work you've stolen, let's deal with the charges here.

As the Ensign article you quoted makes clear, Joseph never said anything about the Kinderhook Plates. Quoting from your own source, which you haven't read:

Although this account appears to be the writing of Joseph Smith, it is actually an excerpt from a journal of William Clayton. It has been well known that the serialized "History of Joseph Smith" consists largely of items from other persons' personal journals and other sources, collected during Joseph Smith's lifetime and continued after the Saints were in Utah, then edited and pieced together to form a history of the Prophet's life "in his own words." It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for biographers to put the narrative in the first person when compiling a biographical work, even though the subject of the biography did not actually say or write all the words attributed to him; thus the narrative would represent a faithful report of what others felt would be helpful to print. The Clayton journal excerpt was one item used in this way. For example, the words "I have translated a portion" originally read "President J. has translated a portion. ..."

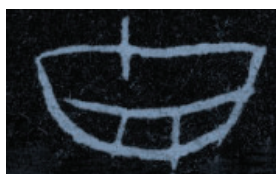
(So you could probably get away with your plagiarism if you were a 19th Century biographer, but that's about it.)

The problem here is that William Clayton was incorrect. The details are all available [here](#), but the TL/DR version is that he compared one character to a character on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers that looked like this:



(The previous image and the other Kinderhook Plate images are taken from Don Bradley's [article](#), and he credits them to the Church Historical Department.)

So according to the KEP, that character had reference to Ham, son of Noah, and it looked like a boat-shaped image on plate 2 of the Kinderhook Plates, which looked like this:



Joseph apparently took a look at the plates, compared the two images, and then got excited, thinking that he'd found a true mark of antiquity and that this was somehow Ham-related. He makes some remarks to that effect, and William Clayton writes all this down in his journal as if Joseph had "translated a portion of them..." i.e. one character. Nothing supernatural; no Urim and/or Thummim, and not even a rock in a hat.

And that was it. No more about the Kinderhook Plates; no translation, nothing. It's almost as if, after that single moment of excitement, Joseph quickly realized someone was pulling his leg, and he moved on to other things.

The end.

2. BOOK OF ABRAHAM

As outlined in the "Book of Abraham" section, Joseph Smith got everything wrong about the papyri, the facsimiles, the names, the gods, the scene context, the fact that the papyri and facsimiles were 1st century CE funerary text, who was male, who was female, etc. It's gibberish.

It isn't gibberish. Gibberish is defined as "unintelligible or meaningless speech or writing." What Joseph wrote was both intelligible and meaningful, whether or not it was an accurate translation. "Gibberish" might refer to nonsense syllables that Kevin Mathie, your single Egyptological expert with only musical theatre training, might put into a singalong in the latest version of *Saturday's Voyeur*. Regardless, just summarizing your previous charges doesn't make them any truer.

There is not one single non-LDS Egyptologist who supports Joseph's Book of Abraham, its claims, or Joseph's translations.

And there is barely one non-LDS Egyptologist who has bothered to investigate Joseph's Book of Abraham, its claims, or Joseph's translations. Despite your quotes from three long-debunked 19th Century dudes who never saw the Joseph Smith papyri, you have Robert Ritner. That's it.

Even [LDS Egyptologists](#) acknowledge there are serious problems with the Book of Abraham and Joseph's claims.

You use a plural noun - "Egyptologists" - and then link to an article from precisely one LDS Egyptologist, who disagrees with the majority of LDS Egyptologists. That's misleading. And since you just toss this out without comment, you clearly haven't read the article, so you have no idea what's in it.

To be fair, this time I haven't read it either, as I presume that if this dude had anything new to add, he wouldn't be getting a throwaway mention in a late summary of your argument. Although my guess, even without reading it, would be that he would be a much more credible source than Kevin Mathie.

Joseph Smith made a claim that he could translate ancient documents. This is a testable claim.

Not if you don't have the original documents to compare to the translation.

Joseph failed the test with the Book of Abraham.

Only if you mistakenly assume that the scraps we have are the actual source material, which they aren't.

He failed the test with the Kinderhook Plates.

Unless you know of a translation of the Kinderhook Plates that everyone else has missed, your assertion is demonstrably false.

With this modus operandi and track record, how can I be expected to believe that Joseph translated the keystone Book of Mormon?

Because the Book of Mormon came first, and you haven't been able to lay a finger on it. The Book of Mormon defies all of your weak and contradictory attempts to discredit it, and it stands as an incontrovertible witness to the miracle of its own creation.

And that he translated with a rock in a hat?

A rock in a hat?! Have you mentioned this before?!!

That the gold plates that ancient prophets went through all that time and effort of making, engraving, compiling, abridging, preserving, hiding, and transporting were useless?

Who says they were useless? They were extraordinarily useful. They provided tangible evidence of the Book of Mormon's divine origins, and they were viewed by multiple witnesses, including many not mentioned in the official Three and Eight Witness testimonies. They also provide a stumbling block for critics who want to pretend Joseph made it all up have to account for the overwhelming physical evidence that Joseph actually had some kind of plates. (Hence the theories of forged tin plates, etc.)

The plates tangibly tied the Book of Mormon to the ancient world and to what Richard Bushman calls the "transcendent sphere." They are, as Bushman said, indeed some of "the most gritty and appealing parts of the Mormon story." Very useful, indeed.

Moroni's 5,000 mile journey lugging the gold plates from Mesoamerica (if you believe the unofficial apologists) all the way to New York to bury the plates, then come back as a resurrected angel, and instruct Joseph for 4 years only for Joseph to translate instead using just a...rock in a hat?

Alas, we keep coming back to the rock in a hat. What have you got against rocks in hats? Some of my best friends have rocks in their hats. (Or maybe in their head.)

In all seriousness, I wonder what process would have been sufficient to impress you. You sound like Naaman in the Old Testament. He got ticked off because the prophet told him to bathe seven times in the Jordan River to cure his leprosy. He wanted some far grander process, or at least a better river. If the rock hadn't been in the hat, would that have been better? Maybe if Moroni had stuck around personally to dictate to Oliver? What if the rock were the Hope Diamond? What if the hat was that cool, huge hat from the opening of *Lidsville*?

In all seriousness the rock in the hat is culturally odd to Jeremy Runnells and Jim Bennett and 21st Century folks, but it wasn't culturally odd to Joseph Smith, and since he was the one doing the translating, I don't see any problem with the Lord communicating with him by means of methods that would have been familiar to Joseph, even if they are strange to us.



He's gonna need a bigger rock.

A rock he found digging in his neighbor's property in 1822 and which he later used for treasure hunting – a year before Moroni appeared in his bedroom and 5 years before he got the gold plates and Urim and Thummim?

That's the one! It probably put his mind at ease to be able to have familiar frame of reference to help him relate to the overwhelming task of transitioning from "a boy of no consequence in the world" to a prophet, seer, and revelator.

Joseph Smith claimed to have translated three ancient records.

No, Joseph claimed to have translated two ancient records. There is no translation and no claim of translation of the Kinderhook Plates.

The Book of Abraham: proven a fraud.

Nope. Not even close. (Unless you like musicals.)

The Kinderhook Plates: found to be a hoax.

Good thing Joseph didn't try to translate them.

The Book of Mormon: the only one of the three for which we do not have the original.

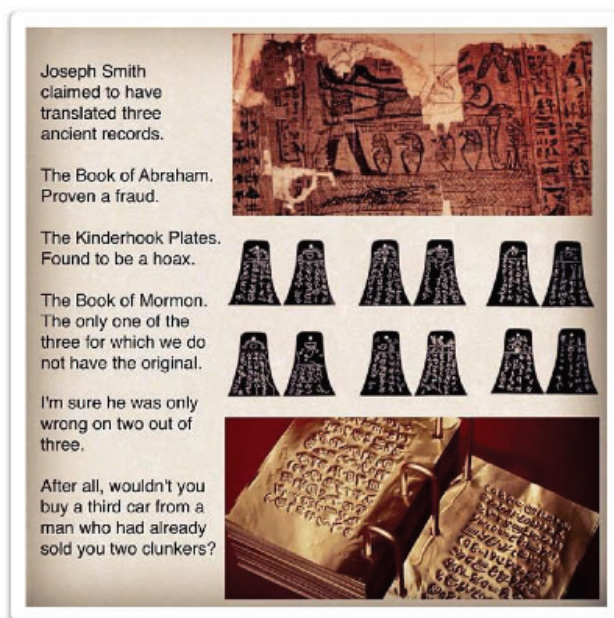
Wholly incorrect. The only one of the three for which we do have the original is the fraud that Joseph made no attempt to translate.

I'm sure he was only wrong on two out of three.

So far, you haven't proven him wrong on any of them, and you've completely misrepresented the facts on the Kinderhook Plates.

AFTER ALL, WOULDN'T YOU BUY A THIRD CAR FROM A MAN WHO HAD ALREADY SOLD YOU TWO CLUNKERS?

The capital letters are impressive, I'll give you that. What's not impressive is that, once again, you lifted all this language from a graphic in your previous version.



A graphic for which we have the original.

In any case, it's still weird to call the Book of Mormon the third "clunker" when it's the one that came first. Trying to discredit it by misrepresenting what came later isn't a way to make a strong case.

But if you want to rely on this logic, how many clunkers about the Book of Mormon should we buy from the CES Letter? Is it stolen from the *View of the Hebrews*, *The Late War*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, the King James Bible, Captain Kidd, or the lands of Joseph Smith's youth from over 2,000 square miles?

More importantly, why should your readers buy any of the clunkers from sources you haven't read? Or the sources that don't mean what you say they mean? Or the graphics you plagiarize without giving attribution?

With the CES Letter, the clunkers just keep on comin'!

TESTIMONY & SPIRITUAL WITNESS

Concerns & Questions

“We should not just go on our own feelings on everything...Granted, our feelings can be wrong; of course they can be wrong...We do indeed advocate the full use of the Holy Spirit to guide us to truth. How does the Holy Spirit work? How does He testify of truth and witness unto us? Through feelings...”

– FAIRMORMON BLOG, [CAN WE TRUST OUR FEELINGS?](#)

*“We should not just go on our own feelings on everything...Granted, our feelings can be wrong; of course they can be wrong. **But the LDS faith doesn’t solely advocate the use of our own subjective feelings.** We do indeed advocate the full use of the Holy Spirit to guide us to truth. How does the Holy Spirit work? How does He testify of truth and witness unto us? Through feelings, **but if you have ever felt a witness of the Holy Spirit, then you know it’s not just following your own subjective feelings. It is very different.**”*

– FAIRMORMON BLOG, [CAN WE TRUST OUR FEELINGS?](#) [Emphasis - and full, accurate quote - added]

“Our unique strength is the ability to touch the hearts and minds of our audiences, evoking first feeling, then thought and, finally, action. We call this uniquely powerful brand of creative ‘HeartSell’® - strategic emotional advertising that stimulates response.”

– LDS CHURCH-OWNED [BONNEVILLE COMMUNICATIONS](#)

*“Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind **AND** in your heart, by the Holy Ghost...”*

– LDS CHURCH-PUBLISHED [DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS](#) [Emphasis and ALL CAPS added]

“Feelings Aren’t Facts.”

– BARTON GOLDSMITH, PH.D., [PSYCHOTHERAPIST](#)

“Fish are friends, not food.”

- BRUCE. FICTIONAL CARTOON SHARK WHO DOES NOT EXIST, DESPITE WHATEVER WARM AND FUZZY FEELINGS JEREMY RUNNELLS MAY HAVE HAD WHILE WATCHING *FINDING NEMO*.

SHORT ANSWER:

You assume every church and faith views the Spirit the same way Latter-day Saints do, and they don't. You also equate emotions with the Spirit in a one-to-one correlation, but a spiritual witness speaks both to the mind and the heart to communicate knowledge that goes well beyond warm and fuzzy feelings.

LONG ANSWER:

This is the one section of the CES Letter that makes me feel as if the Church truly let you down. Because if you could have gone through Primary, Sunday School, Seminary, and even a two-year mission and still have such a warped and inadequate understanding of the Holy Ghost, something went dreadfully wrong along the way.

1. Every major religion has members who claim the same thing: God or God's spirit bore witness to them that their religion, prophet/pope/leaders, book(s), and teachings are true.

Not really, no. You'd be hard-pressed to find Catholic sermons where priests implore their parishioners to pray to know whether or not the Catholic church is true, or whether the Pope has been called of God. They rely on the weight of Catholic history and tradition and the argument of apostolic succession to establish their authority.

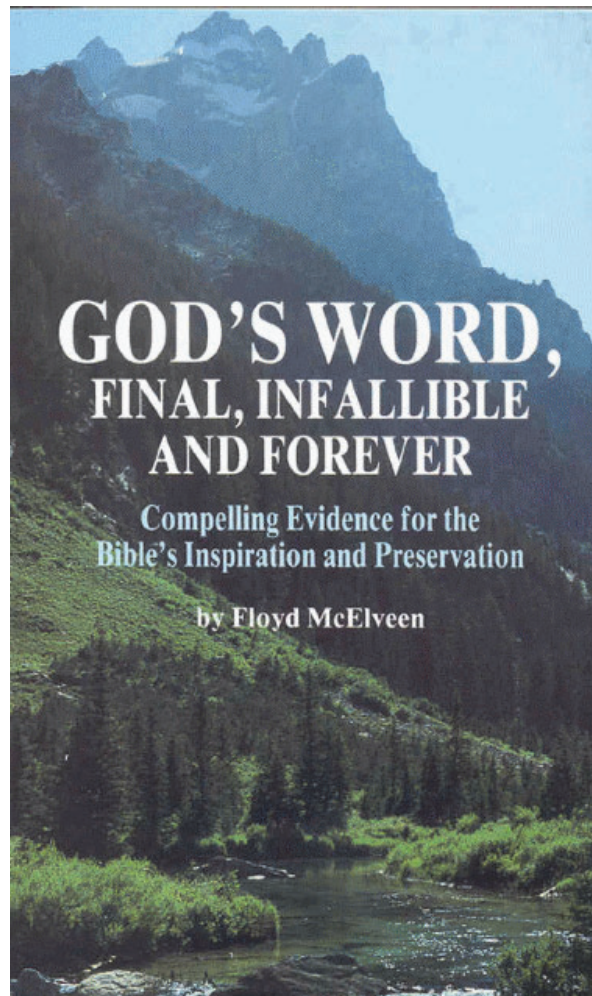
And while it's true that Protestants emphasize a spiritual experience with Jesus, they, too, lean on arguments from authority when it comes to any specific theology. The a priori assumption is that the Bible is infallible, and biblical proof-texts take precedence over Latter-day Saint - style claims of spiritual confirmation of its truthfulness.

Joseph Fielding McConkie, on page 83 of his book "Here We Stand," says that he has "frequently asked classes of returned missionaries if they ever met anyone who, while professing a belief in the Bible, could at the same time honestly say they prayed to know if it was true. I have yet to receive an affirmative response to that question."

More McConkie, from the same book, pages 43 and 44:

An anti-Mormon book that uses the title *God's Word Final, Infallible, and Forever* gives its readers three standards that, if followed, will assure that they will not be caught in the Mormon net. Each of these standards, we are to assume, is rooted in the Bible. First, as readers we are warned not to pray about the message; after all, it is reasoned, people have been deceived by their prayers. The second warning is not to trust our feelings, because, we are told, feelings can also be deceptive. The third warning is not to trust our minds, for "our minds are reprobate." So, the book concludes, if we refuse to pray, to trust our feelings, and to use our minds, there is no chance the Mormons will get us. (That was the only conclusion in a lengthy book which I was able to agree.)

What than are we to trust? The answer is, of course, the Bible [and not prayers, feelings, or our minds.]



Don't trust your prayers, minds, or feelings
But the mountains on the book cover are pretty cool.

The premise that everyone has direct access to heaven and can – and should – receive personal revelation as confirmation of truth turns out to be a uniquely Latter-day Saint idea.

In your next question, you list a number of different religious traditions and simply assume that practitioners of these faiths interpret the Spirit the same way Latter-day Saints do, when, in fact, they do not. This is not to denigrate anyone's faith, but rather to point out that seeing the world through a Latter-day Saint lens might lead us to believe that everyone else approaches God the way we do, and they don't.

2. Just as it would be arrogant for a FLDS member,...

The FLDS have been convicted of child molestation at the highest levels of leadership, and they are firmly in apostasy. I have no problem rejecting any of their claims to spiritual authority.

... a Jehovah's Witness, ...

I would bet serious money that you have never heard a Jehovah's Witness testify of having a spiritual experience confirming the truth of their faith. They simply don't do this. They rely on dogmatic legalistic interpretations of the Bible to persuade, not spiritual experiences.



... a Catholic,...

Catholics don't bear testimony like this, either. For centuries, mass was only in Latin, which the vast majority of Catholics didn't understand. Mystery is major part of Catholic worship, and they see tremendous virtue in believing without knowing. They also point to what they claim is an unbroken line of authority from Peter through the Bishop of Rome - i.e. the Pope - to prove their status as Christ's one true church. They do not ask their members to pray for a spiritual witness the way Latter-day Saints do.



... a Seventh-day Adventist,...

Seventh-day Adventism takes a dogmatic approach similar to that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, except their pet issue is the Sabbath, not the name of God. Their faith is rooted in their confidence that they, alone, are interpreting the Bible correctly due to their understanding that the Sabbath is on Saturday, not Sunday. The kinds of spiritual expressions that are commonplace among Latter-day Saints are not part of Seventh-day Adventist worship.



... or a Muslim...

In Arabic, Islam means "submission." The way Muslims approach God is quite removed from the kind of personal, one-on-one spiritual experience that Latter-day Saints are encouraged to have. We see ourselves as gods in embryo; they see themselves as supplicants who can never approach God as anything but supplicants. They would likely consider it quite forward and inappropriate to question the divine will.



... to deny a Latter-day Saint's spiritual experience and testimony of the truthfulness of Mormonism it would likewise be arrogant for a Latter-day Saint to deny others' spiritual experiences and testimonies of the truthfulness of their own religion, ...

With the exception of the spiritually corrupt FLDS Church, none of these faith traditions speak of spiritual experiences the way Latter-day Saints do. There are no Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh-day Adventist, or Muslim testimony meetings.

...Yet, every religion cannot be right and true together.

To the extent that they believe the truth, they absolutely can. And each of these faith traditions teaches a great deal of divine truth.

Joseph Smith taught:

Have the Presbyterians any truth? Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists, [etc.] any truth? Yes, they all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up or we shall not come out pure Mormons.

Gordon B. Hinckley said something similar in 2002:

This wondrous Restoration should make of us a people of tolerance, of neighborliness, of appreciation and kindness toward others. We cannot be boastful. We cannot be proud. We can be thankful, as we must be. We can be humble, as we should be.

We love those of other churches. We work with them in good causes. We respect them... To these we say in a spirit of love, bring with you all that you have of good and truth which you have received from whatever source, and come and let us see if we may add to it.

We also have no reason to doubt that God loves all His children, regardless of what faith they believe and church they attend. There is every reason to believe He hears and answers their prayers, and that he provides them with spiritual experiences that demonstrate His love for them.

LDS MEMBER IN 2017

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know that Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's true Prophet today.

(It's Russell M. Nelson now, but I get your point.)

FLDS MEMBER IN 2017

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know that Warren Jeffs is the Lord's true Prophet today.

RLDS MEMBER IN 1975

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know that W. Wallace Smith is the Lord's true Prophet today.

LDCJC MEMBER IN 2017

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know The Latter Day Church of Jesus Christ is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon and the Book of Jeraneck are true. I know that Matthew P. Gill is the Lord's true Prophet, Seer, Revelator, and Translator today.

Where's the Catholic testimony in your examples? The testimony of the Jehovah's Witness or the Muslim? Your original premise was that all churches operate this way, yet you only use groups rooted in a common theology as your examples. You would never hear a Catholic, Protestant, Jew, or Muslim bear this kind of testimony.

It's also telling that you have to reach back to 1975 to find an example of what the RLDS would say, because a modern Community of Christ member surely wouldn't speak this way. That leaves us with the FLDS and the LDCJC, two tiny splinter groups rife with corruption, fraud, and pedophilia. Do I think we're right and they are deceived? Absolutely.

Same method: read, ponder, and pray.

That's not the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim method. In fact, for the centuries preceding Vatican II, the Catholics actively discouraged Bible reading in favor of study of church traditions. None of the major Eastern religions would prescribe this kind of method, either.

All four testimonies cannot simultaneously be true.

So now it's just four testimonies among churches rooted in the Latter-Day Saint tradition? No more talk of Muslim testimony meetings? Isn't this a bait-and-switch?

If the comparison is between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and these three others, it's really no contest. There are striking reasons why our claims to truth and authority preclude the claims of groups that have either abandoned any pretext of exclusive priesthood authority - i.e. the Community of Christ - or have become so corrupt and venal as to abdicate any right to spiritual gifts - i.e. FLDS and LDCJC.

For you to make a credible case on this claim, you have to provide evidence that the faith traditions you cited from the outset bear these kinds of testimonies. They don't, which renders your point moot.

Is this the best God can come up with in revealing His truth to His children?

Yes, this is the best God can come up with in revealing His truth to His children. We ask, and He answers. That is how it has always been and always will be.

Only .2% of the world's population are members of God's true Church. This is God's model and standard of efficiency?

No, this is God's way of telling us we need to do our temple work, which will eventually provide 100% of the world's population, past and present, with the opportunity to fully accept or reject the gospel. Mormons are astonishingly inclusive here in a way that no other religion can match.



God's model and standard of efficiency
Ordinances provided to 100% of the population, past and present

Also, at no point in the history of the world were God's people anything but a tiny minority of the world's population. Even in the last days, when the Church reaches its zenith, Nephi tells us he "beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few." (1 Nephi 14:12)

Praying about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon does not follow that the LDS Church is true.

No, but a spiritual answer to such a prayer does.

The FLDS also believe in the Book of Mormon. So do dozens of Mormon splinter groups.

And they are right to do so. In the case of the FLDS and the LDCJC, they are also engaged in grievous sin, which distorts their ability to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost. As for the other groups, they're at varying levels of belief in the Book of Mormon. The Community of Christ has essentially downgraded it to the status of inspired fiction, and other groups have done the same.

Praying about the first vision: Which account is true? They can't all be correct together as they conflict with one another.

No, they don't. They're remarkably consistent. We've already covered this.

If God's method to revealing truth is through feelings, it is a very ineffective and unreliable method.

That's why it is only part of God's method. D&C 8:2 gives us this promise: "Yea, behold, I will tell you in your **mind and in your heart**, by the Holy Ghost." [Emphasis added.] Yes, the heart and its feelings are part of the equation, but they are also accompanied by the imparting of intelligence to the mind. Spiritual experiences are intellectual as well as emotional. Joseph Fielding McConkie used to say that the Lord has never given us a mindless revelation. Genuine spiritual experience sink deeply into every part of us, and they are far more profound than just warm fuzzies. They teach us things that we didn't know before.

Perhaps the best example of this is Joseph Smith's own experience in reading James 1:5. He describes his personal revelation in the following terms:

"Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did;" – Joseph Smith – History 1:12

There's a powerful feeling here, yes, but there's also deep intellectual engagement. "I reflected on it again and again." This wasn't just a nice, pleasant feeling - there was knowledge and information imparted in this spiritual transaction, as there is in every encounter with the Holy Ghost.



Joseph Smith later taught that "No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator." Revelation is far more intellectually substantive than just a pleasant emotional buzz. And it's a very reliable and effective way to teach truth, change lives, and build enduring faith.

We have thousands of religions and billions of members of those religions saying that their truth is God's only truth and everyone else is wrong because they felt God or God's spirit reveal the truth to them.

And yet you can only provide examples of precisely four, all rooted in a common theological tradition originating with Joseph Smith. You ought to be able to provide the testimonies that demonstrate that thousands of other religions and billions of other worshipers do this, and you can't, because they don't. Outside of the LDS tradition, that's not generally how other religions define their relationship with their church or with God.

Each religion has believers who believe that their spiritual experiences are more authentic and powerful than those of the adherents of other religions.

If that's true, you should be able to provide examples, and you cannot. This does not mean that people in other churches don't have spiritual experiences, but rather that they do not, as a general rule, take a Latter-day Saint approach to them in incorporating them into their individual faith.

They cannot all be right together, if at all.

If they all believe in God, then they are all right together on that point. All those who believe in Jesus are all right together about that, too. When they believe in prayer, righteousness, kindness, charity and service, which all of them do, they are all right together, and they can receive a witness of the Spirit that the Lord is pleased with what they are doing. The Spirit confirms truth wherever it is found, and it can be found just about everywhere, both in and out of the Church.

It seem that when you were a member of the Church, you clearly believed in a much more adversarial, un-Christian approach to people of other faiths than Church teachings would warrant.

4. Joseph Smith received a revelation, through the peep stone in his hat...

I presume this is the same hat, but is this a new rock or just the old one with a freshly insulting name?

... to send Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery to Toronto, Canada for the sole purpose of selling the copyright of the Book of Mormon, which is another concern in itself (why would God command to sell the copyright to His word?).

Perhaps because it could provide the fledgling Church with revenue in order to fulfill its mission. Same reason he asks us to pay tithing, really. While he has the capacity to flood the Church with riches by miraculous means, He requires us to fulfill the purposes of mortality by putting forth effort to do His will.

The mission failed and the prophet was asked why his revelation was wrong.

No. You ignore the fact that the revelation was conditional. The text of the revelation says the following:

“And I grant unto my servant a privilege that he may sell a copyright through you — speaking after the manner of men — for the four provinces **if the people harden not their hearts against the enticings of my spirit and my word;**” [Emphasis added]

The people hardened their hearts, and so the copyright wasn't sold, and the revelation wasn't wrong. Pretty straightforward. God doesn't interfere with the agency of his children - even the Canadians.



We have agency, eh!
Take off, hosers!

Joseph decided to inquire of the Lord regarding the question. Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer testified:

“...and behold the following revelation came through the stone: ‘Some revelations are of God; and some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil.’ So we see that the revelation to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right was not of God, but was of the devil or of the heart of man.”

– An Address to All Believers in Christ, p.31

Testimony written 57 years after the fact when Whitmer was deeply disaffected with Joseph Smith and was providing reasons why Joseph should be seen as a fallen prophet. (Tangentially, this 57-years-later testimony is also our main source for the rock-in-the-hat story you love so much, and its late date and Whitmer's disaffection are the reasons the McConkies and the Joseph Fielding Smiths of the world reject the hat/stone idea, and why I'm still prone to agree with them.)

Whitmer didn't participate in going to Canada, and accounts from those who accompanied Joseph on the trip contradict Whitmer's opinion. The contemporaneous document makes it clear that the Lord told Joseph that the people of Canada had a say in whether or not the copyright would be sold. Whether or not Joseph actually said what Whitmer says he said does not change the fact that the actual outcome was consistent with the revelation.

How are we supposed to know what revelations are from God, from the devil, or from the heart of man if even the Prophet Joseph Smith couldn't tell?

Joseph Smith got better and better at telling the difference as he grew and learned, just like all of us do. Understanding the things of the Spirit requires effort and diligence on our part, and, as with any skill, people improve their ability as they work at it.

We each have an individual responsibility to discern truth from error. "By the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things." (Moroni 10:5) That's a promise given to all, not just prophets.

Elder Boyd K. Packer said the following:



Elder Boyd K. Packer

"Be ever on guard lest you be deceived by inspiration from an unworthy source. You can be given false spiritual messages. There are counterfeit spirits just as there are counterfeit angels. (See Moro. 7:17.) Be careful lest you be deceived, for the devil may come disguised as an angel of light.

The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual. We occasionally find people who receive what they assume to be spiritual promptings from God, when those promptings are either centered in the emotions or are from the adversary."

– The Candle of the Lord, Ensign, January 1983

That's by far my favorite talk that Elder Packer ever gave, and I don't fully understand your objection to it. Again, we have run into an unquestioned assumption of yours that probably ought to be examined before answering any further.

Mortality is designed as “a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God.” (Alma 12:24) That probation requires us to demonstrate our willingness to choose good over evil, which is the primary challenge of mortality and the only way to learn and to grow. Put simply, it's a test, and you seem to be assuming that God is the ultimate “cheat sheet,” or perhaps some kind of spiritual super-Google. Instead of studying and finding the answers ourselves, you expect God to hand them out to the whole class before the test begins. That would defeat the whole purpose of why we came to Earth in the first place.

What kind of a method is this if Heavenly Father allows Satan to interfere with our direct line of communication to Him? Sincerely asking for and seeking answers?

I don't accept the premise of your question. I believe that when our hearts are pure and we are truly sincere, the Lord's voice will cut through any attempts by Satan to stifle it. Yet the Lord never interferes with agency, and people can too often receive “answers” that conveniently coincide with the answers they wanted or expected, which is a case of mistaking their own desires for the will of God. That's our fault, not His.

Are we now expected to not only figure out when a prophet is speaking as a prophet and not as a man...

Prophets do not cease to be fallible and mortal men when they speak as prophets. There is no Super-Brigham.

... while also trying to figure out whether our answers to prayer are from God, from the devil, or from ourselves?

Yes, of course. What I don't understand is how you expected it to be otherwise. The Church you believed in was one where apparently no thinking or spiritual effort was required on your part, and you could function as a mindless automaton with no danger of encountering evil or error as long as you attended enough meetings and checked off all the appropriate boxes. That Church does not exist and never has.

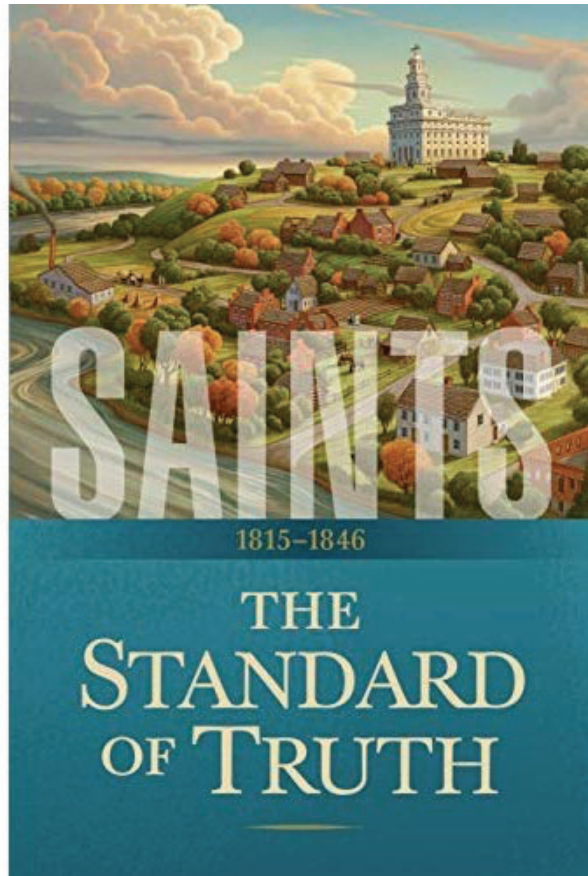
5. As a believing Mormon, I saw a testimony as more than just spiritual experiences and feelings. I saw that we had “evidence” and “logic” on our side based on the correlated narrative I was fed by the Church about its origins.

We did, and we do. Spiritual experiences are not contrary to logic and evidence, and, indeed, strengthen and support both. As for the Church's narrative, the Church is doing a magnificent job in offering greater transparency and information than ever before, particularly with the release of their new book *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, which you can read online at no charge.

Here's an excerpt you might like from page 61:

Meanwhile, Joseph and Oliver started translating. They worked well together, weeks on end, frequently with Emma in the same room going about her daily work.²⁴ Sometimes Joseph translated by looking through the interpreters and reading in English the characters on the plates.

Often he found a single seer stone to be more convenient. He would put the seer **STONE IN HIS HAT!!!!!!!**, place his face into the **HAT!!!!!!** to block out the light, and peer at the **STONE!!!!!!**. Light from the **STONE!!!!!!** would shine in the darkness, revealing words that Joseph dictated as Oliver rapidly copied them down.²⁵



[Emphasis, ALL CAPS, larger font, and gratuitous exclamation points added.]

I lost this confidence when I discovered that the gap between what the Church teaches about its origins versus what the primary historical documents actually show happened, and between what history shows what happened, what science shows what happened...couldn't be further apart.

And yet here I am, still a believing Latter-day Saint who has looked at all the same documents that you have, and I still see we have evidence and logic on our side, as well as spiritual confirmation of that truth. How is that possible? Maybe it's because at every opportunity to interpret that same evidence, you take the point of view that is the most critical of Joseph and the Church and refuse to give the Latter-day Saint argument the benefit of any doubts.

I read an experience that explains this in another way:

"I resigned from the LDS Church and informed my bishop that the reasons had to do with discovering the real history of the Church. When I was done he asked about the spiritual witness I had surely received as a missionary. I agreed that I had felt a sure

witness, as strong as he currently felt. I gave him the analogy of Santa; I believed in Santa until I was 12. I refused to listen to reason from my friends who had discovered the truth much earlier...I just knew. However, once I learned the facts, feelings changed. I told him that Mormons have to re-define faith in order to believe; traditionally, faith is an instrument to bridge that gap between where science, history and logic end, and what you hope to be true. Mormonism re-defines faith as embracing what you hope to be true in spite of science, fact and history.”

I cannot second-guess someone else’s experience. What’s interesting, though, is how critical you are of those who bear their testimonies when confronted with difficult information, yet that’s exactly what you’re doing here. This person is bearing their testimony of the untruthfulness of the Gospel. It’s impossible to argue with a testimony, which may be why so many people, when backed into a corner, toss that out as the best they can do.

For my part, all I can say is that my experience has been markedly different than this one, and I don’t believe for one second that Latter-day Saints “have to re-define faith in order to believe,” and that science, fact, history, and faith all have truth that can be circumscribed into one great whole.

6. Paul H. Dunn: Dunn was a General Authority of the Church for many years.

Indeed! I adored Paul H. Dunn. Still do. Marvelous speaker – funny, engaging, and perceptive.

He was a very popular speaker who told powerful faith-promoting war and baseball stories.

He told a lot of other stories, too. He spoke on a great deal of subjects, and, while he clearly made serious errors in judgment, he was, on the whole, a good and decent man.

Many times Dunn shared these stories in the presence of the prophet, apostles, and seventies.

I presume this is based on the assumption that these leaders had no discernment when Elder Dunn started telling tall tales. Again, it’s your assumptions that ought to be questioned here. If they sensed something was off, what were they supposed to have done? Jump up and interrupt Elder Dunn’s sermons? Maybe some more Tae Kwon Do?

The reality is that the vast majority of what Elder Dunn taught was completely in harmony with the teachings of the Church, and the tall tales he told were the subject of firesides and smaller gatherings outside of General Conference, making them more



Elder Paul H. Dunn

difficult to subject them to apostolic oversight. I think it likely that the Brethren were more concerned than you realize, but they don't correct people in ways that cause unnecessary embarrassment to those being corrected. Still, Elder Dunn was forced to apologize to the entire Church in the Church News, which was likely extraordinarily painful for him. You have no idea what was going on behind the scenes.

Stories such as how God protected him as enemy machine-gun bullets ripped away his clothing, gear, and helmet without ever touching his skin and how he was preserved by the Lord. Members of the Church shared how they strongly felt the Spirit as they listened to Dunn's testimony and stories.

Did they? Did you hear these members testify of Elder Dunn's truthfulness? You're making another assumption here that you can't back up.

I think it likely that members simply accepted all of Elder Dunn's words at face value, but that doesn't mean they prompted spiritual confirmation. I was on my mission in an apartment in Dundee, Scotland, when I first heard a talk with the war story where the guy died in Paul Dunn's arms, and I remember thinking, "Hunh. That sounds a little too good to be true." This wasn't a major revelation – there were no alarm bells clanging, and I didn't feel prompted to toss my Paul Dunn tapes into the trash.

But what that says to me is that the Spirit testifies of truth even when it's being delivered by imperfect vessels, mainly because it is always being delivered by imperfect vessels. Paul Dunn's false stories did not negate the confirmation of his true ones, and I'm willing to bet that other people had the same kind of nagging doubts I did about the stuff he was making up.

Unfortunately, Dunn was later caught lying about all his war and baseball stories and was forced to apologize to the members. He became the first General Authority to gain "emeritus" status and was removed from public Church life.

G.A.s now receive emeritus status at every conference, so this isn't particularly noteworthy. I also remember being in the Tabernacle after the scandal when Paul Dunn received an award for something or other, so I think it's a bit over-the-top to say he was "removed from public Church life."

What about the members who felt the Spirit from Dunn's fabricated and false stories?

I'm not convinced they did feel the Spirit when Paul Dunn was not telling the truth. They may have felt emotionally moved – Paul Dunn was a very dynamic speaker, after all, and his stories tugged at the heartstrings – but despite your assumptions, that's not the same thing as feeling the Spirit.

What does this say about the Spirit and what the Spirit really is?

Quite a lot, actually. It says the Spirit testifies of truth wherever it is found, and even in unlikely places and from imperfect vessels. The vast majority of what Paul Dunn said was true, and the Spirit didn't deprive those listening to him of confirmation of the truths he told even though Elder Dunn made poor choices. It also tells us that we each have a responsibility

to discern truth from error, and we do not abdicate that responsibility to someone else's ecclesiastical position, because even our leaders are fallible.

7. The following are counsels from members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on how to gain a testimony:

“It is not unusual to have a missionary say, ‘How can I bear testimony until I get one? How can I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the gospel is true? If I do not have such a testimony, would that not be dishonest?’ Oh, if I could teach you this one principle: a testimony is to be found in the bearing of it!”
– *Boyd K. Packer, The Quest for Spiritual Knowledge*

This, too, is great advice from Elder Packer, and you seem to be missing the point of it entirely.

Again, it's likely you have not read the whole talk. “You cannot force spiritual things,” he says at the outset. “You must await the growth.” These are not the instructions of someone telling people to get out and lie for the Lord.

The next few paragraphs after the one you quote clarifies his intent:

“Somewhere in your quest for spiritual knowledge, there is that “leap of faith,” as the philosophers call it. It is the moment when you have gone to the edge of the light and stepped into the darkness to discover that the way is lighted ahead for just a footstep or two. “The spirit of man is,” as the scripture says, indeed “the candle of the Lord” (Proverbs 20:27).

It is one thing to receive a witness from what you have read or what another has said; and that is a necessary beginning. It is quite another to have the Spirit confirm to you in your bosom that what you have testified is true. Can you not see that it will be supplied as you share it? As you give that which you have, there is a replacement, with increase!

To speak out is the test of your faith.”

This talk helped me to understand faith and how it works, namely that if you push yourself to your limit, the Lord shows you the next steps. It's a talk that confirms the principle found in Ether 12:6 – “I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.”

Indulge me as I share a practical example from my own life. Every year since the beginning of time, my extended family has attended Aspen Grove Family Camp up in Provo Canyon. Being morbidly afraid of heights, I spent years avoiding Aspen Grove's massive ropes course, where you climb up into the trees and walk around on metal wires that are about thirty feet above the ground. You're attached to belay lines and are perfectly safe, but even though I mentally understood that, that didn't keep my legs from wobbling like jelly with every step I took when I finally tried the thing. It wasn't until I actually fell and the belay mechanisms

caught me that I got a feel for just how safe I was, and I was able to move forward in a terror-free manner.

That's the experience that gave me a hands-on practical lesson in faith.



My son braving the new Aspen Grove Rope Course, 2017

The reason we “receive no witness until after the trial of [our] faith” is not because God is refusing to let us in on His secrets. The truth is that that’s the way faith works. No matter how much one of those nice Aspen Grove staffers were to describe to me the safety features of the helmets and the ropes and the carabiners – I dig the word “carabiner” – it wasn’t until I actually tested the stuff for myself that I was able to develop the faith and confidence to rely on them.

“Faith,” therefore, is not synonymous with “belief,” or passive intellectual assent. Intellectually, I believed I was safe from the first moment. But my negligible faith – my willingness and confidence to act on that belief – didn’t gain strength until after it had been tried. Elder Packer is merely pointing out that exercising enough faith to bear a testimony will provide the spiritual confirmation necessary to strengthen it.

That’s a true principle that has been verified time and time again.

“Another way to seek a testimony seems astonishing when compared with the methods of obtaining other knowledge. We gain or strengthen a testimony by bearing it. Someone even suggested that some testimonies are better gained on the feet bearing them than on the knees praying for them.”

– Dallin H. Oaks, [Testimony](#)

Context is helpful here, too. In this talk, which you apparently haven’t read either, Elder Oaks also counsels people to fast, pray, and study in order to build a testimony. Neither he nor Elder Packer are asking people to bear a testimony that they do not believe to be true.

As a young man, I remember asking my own father how I could bear a testimony when I didn’t actually know that the Church was true. “Do you believe the Church is true?” he asked me. I said that I did. “Well, why can’t you say that? If that’s the extent of your testimony, there’s no shame in sharing where you are.” I then found that bearing that degree of testimony – I had faith and belief – strengthened my personal conviction. Accompanied with

study and prayer, I can now stand up and testify to my knowledge of the truthfulness of the Restored Gospel, and my bearing of the testimony I had was instrumental in building the testimony I have.

“It may come as you bear your own testimony of the Prophet... Consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith in your own voice, listening to it regularly... Listening to the Prophet’s testimony in your own voice will help bring the witness you seek.”

– Neil L. Andersen, Joseph Smith

In other words, repeat things over and over until you convince yourself that it’s true. Just keep telling yourself, “I know it’s true... I know it’s true... I know it’s true” until you actually believe it and you have a testimony that the Church is true and Joseph Smith was a prophet.

It’s disappointing, but not surprising, that this deeply dishonest garbage is still in your CES Letter. Because you have tortured Elder Anderson’s message here beyond recognition in what appears to be a deliberate distortion of his intent.

When first I read this with your ellipses, I assumed Elder Andersen was counseling people to record their own personal testimony of the prophet and listen to it, which admittedly seemed strange. You’ve done some very selective and misleading editing here, as that isn’t what Elder Andersen was saying at all.

The first sentence you quote is from an entirely different paragraph and is not connected to the rest of the text. Here’s his pertinent statement without the ellipses:

Next, read the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Pearl of Great Price or in this pamphlet, now in 158 languages. You can find it online at LDS.org or with the missionaries. This is Joseph’s own testimony of what actually occurred. Read it often. Consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith in your own voice, listening to it regularly, and sharing it with friends. Listening to the Prophet’s testimony in your own voice will help bring the witness you seek.

He’s not asking people to bear their own testimonies and listen to themselves saying “I know Joseph Smith was a prophet.” He’s asking people to read *Joseph Smith – History*, which will strengthen their testimony. He then asks them to consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith – i.e. “I saw a pillar of light, etc.” – not recording their testimony of Joseph Smith – i.e. saying “I know it’s true” over and over again.

If you follow Elder Andersen’s instructions – a suggestion, really, as advice to “consider” something isn’t really an apostolic mandate – you won’t be telling yourself “I know it’s true” over and over again; you’ll be listening to and pondering Joseph’s words, not your own.

You’ve grossly distorted both Elder Andersen’s words and his intent here, and you need to be honest with your readers or simply remove this charge altogether.

How is this honest? How is this ethical?

It certainly isn't honest or ethical to grossly distort an apostle's words and intent.

What kind of advice are these Apostles giving when they're telling you that if you don't have a testimony, bear one anyway?

Had you read their whole talks and not just the cherry-picked crowdsourced Reddit excerpts, you'd know that's not what they're saying.

How is this not lying?

Because no one is being asked to say anything that isn't true.

There's a difference between saying you know something and you believe something.

Yes, and one can bear a testimony of both. Bearing testimony of one will strengthen the testimony of the other. Did you notice that in none of the genuine quotes from these talks do these apostles give any counsel as to what words the testimony needs to include? Never do they say "testify that you know instead of testifying that you believe." Except, of course, in the false Bizarro Elder Anderson quote that you constructed.

What about members and investigators who are on the other side listening to your "testimony"? How are they supposed to know whether you actually do have a testimony of Mormonism or if you're just following Packer's, Oaks' and Andersen's counsel and you're lying your way into one?

Elders Packer, Oaks, and Andersen would agree that nobody should lie when they're bearing their testimony. That is not their counsel, despite your dishonest attempts to pretend that it is.

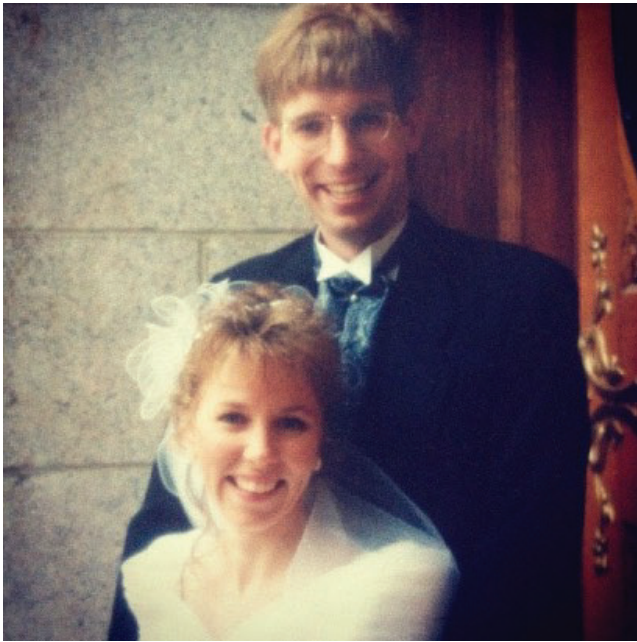
8. There are many members who share their testimonies that the Spirit told them that they were to marry this person or go to this school or move to this location or start up this business or invest in this investment. They rely on this Spirit in making critical life decisions.

Indeed, and I am very skeptical of such members. When teaching Sunday School, I will occasionally ask the class which brand of toothpaste the Lord wants them to use. This usually gets a laugh, as most people realize that the Lord doesn't care. People who expect spiritual confirmations to guide them through every decision in their life are conducting themselves contrary to D&C 58:26, where the Lord says, "For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward."



The Lord has no favorite toothpaste.

The reason we were sent to Earth was to exercise our own agency and use our own judgment. Waiting around for the Lord to tell us what to do at every turn is essentially a low-grade version of the plan we rejected in the pre-mortal life.



*Best decision I ever made
Confirmed time and again*

But what about the big decisions? Who we marry, where we go to school, what we should do for a living? Personally, I prayed very hard to get a confirmation as to whether or not I should marry my wife. I received no answer one way or the other. Then I was kneeling across the altar from her in the Salt Lake Temple, and I got a very clear, sweet message from the Spirit that I was doing the right thing. That actually made me somewhat frustrated. I was thinking, “You know, Lord, I would have appreciated this if you’d given me this message just a few days ago.” But in my experience, that’s not how the Lord works. He expects me to make decisions and act on them, and only afterward does the confirmation come. I receive no witness until after the trial of my faith.

When the decision turns out to be not only incorrect but disastrous, the fault lies on the individual and never on the Spirit.

The Spirit never overrides our agency, so we are always accountable for our own decisions. That’s the plan. And the Lord also knew that we would make mistakes, some of them disastrous. That’s why the Infinite Atonement is at the center of the plan.

The individual didn’t have the discernment or it was the individual’s hormones talking or it was the individual’s greed talking or the individual wasn’t worthy at the time.

Those are all possibilities, but none of us are in a position to judge another’s heart. We’re also not always able to see if things that look like huge mistakes work out as blessings down the road.

This poses a profound flaw and dilemma: if individuals can be so convinced that they’re being led by the Spirit but yet be so wrong about what the Spirit tells them, how can they be sure of the reliability of this same exact process and method in telling them that Mormonism is true?

I think the process you’re describing is not the same process the Lord uses to communicate with his children. There’s a reason the Spirit is referred to as a “still, small voice.” It requires experience and effort and commitment to know how and when to listen, and the Spirit’s gentle promptings can be overlooked or ignored when our focus is elsewhere. You seem to be advocating a process where the Spirit screams at us through a megaphone. Certainly that would be harder to ignore, but it would also defeat the purpose of mortality, which is to learn to exercise faith.

How are faith and feelings reliable pathways to truth?

They aren't. The Spirit is, and the Spirit is more than just faith and feelings. It is also intellectual enlightenment that accompanies feelings. It speaks to both the mind and the heart, and it is not just a pleasant feeling or a passive belief.

Is there anything one *couldn't* believe based on faith and feelings?

That's the wrong question. There is a great deal one couldn't believe based on a true witness of the Spirit, which is much more than just faith and feelings.

If faith and feelings can lead one to believe and accept the truth claims of any one of the hundreds of thousands of contradictory religions and thousands of contradictory gods... how then are faith and feelings reliable pathways to truth?

That's a pretty big "if," and it shouldn't go unchallenged. With the exception of small, apostate splinter groups, people outside of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not typically base their faith on the kind of spiritual witnesses you're mislabeling as just "faith and feelings."

9. I felt the Spirit watching *Saving Private Ryan* and *Schindler's List*. Both R-rated and horribly violent movies.

Me, too. Other R-rated movies where I've felt the Spirit include "The Shawshank Redemption," and, most recently, "Spotlight." I think the counsel to avoid R-rated movies is a good general rule, but I don't think the Motion Picture Association of America is infallible, either, nor do I think they have a mandate from heaven. There are valuable lessons and profound truths in both of those movies, so it doesn't surprise me that the Spirit would bear witness to them.

It's odd, though, for you to say you felt the Spirit watching these movies, as you don't believe there is such a thing as the Spirit.

I also felt the Spirit watching *Forrest Gump* and the *The Lion King*.

Well, okay. Except I think *Lion King* in particular is just plain awful, although I recognize that's a minority position.

After learning these disturbing issues, I attended a conference where former Mormons shared their stories. The same Spirit I felt telling me that Mormonism is true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet is the same Spirit I felt in all of the above experiences.

Which would strongly suggest, along with all your previous descriptions of the Spirit as nothing more than a warm and pleasant feeling, that you don't understand what the Spirit is.

Does this mean that *The Lion King* is true? That Mufasa is real and true? Does this mean that *Forrest Gump* is real and the story happened in real life?

No, it means that you somehow managed to spend decades in a Church and get a terribly distorted view of what the Spirit is - or, more appropriately, *who* He is. When you felt the Spirit during *Forrest Gump*, was He telling you Forrest Gump was a historical figure? Because the Spirit isn't an inanimate object; He is a member of the Godhead who imparts information. When confirming truth, the Holy Ghost actually tells you what it is that He's confirming.

When I felt the Spirit during *Schindler's List*, for instance, He confirmed the truth that sacrifices made to save Jews during World War II were noble and good, and that I was seeing a story that reinforced true and good virtues. During *The Shawshank Redemption*, He confirmed that friendship and compassion are of infinite worth. During *Spotlight* He confirmed that it was right to call attention to the terrible child abuse taking place in the Catholic church.

For you to ask whether feeling the Spirit means that Mufasa truly exists, you give the impression that you see the Spirit as something akin to the buzzer that rings at church when there are five minutes left in Sunday School. To you, He's a thing, not a person, and, furthermore, He's a thing that can only impart binary information. (i.e. Warm feelings means this is historical; no warm feelings means this is not.) This actually makes me very sad, because if you could spend your whole life in the Church and ask if a good feeling you have during *The Lion King* is spiritual confirmation that Mufasa was a historical figure, then there is something fundamentally wrong with how we teach children – and adults, for that matter – about how the Spirit operates.



Why did I feel the Spirit as I listened to the stories of “apostates” sharing how they discovered for themselves that Mormonism is not true?

How can you say you felt the Spirit after you rejected the existence of a Spirit as you listened to people deny that there actually is a Spirit? Especially when you think feeling the Spirit confirms the physical existence of cartoon characters?

Why is this Spirit so unreliable and inconsistent?

He isn't. Your own spiritual education, however, seems to have been far more unreliable and inconsistent than it ought to have been.

How can I trust such an inconsistent and contradictory Source for knowing that Mormonism is worth betting my life, time, money, heart, mind, and obedience to?

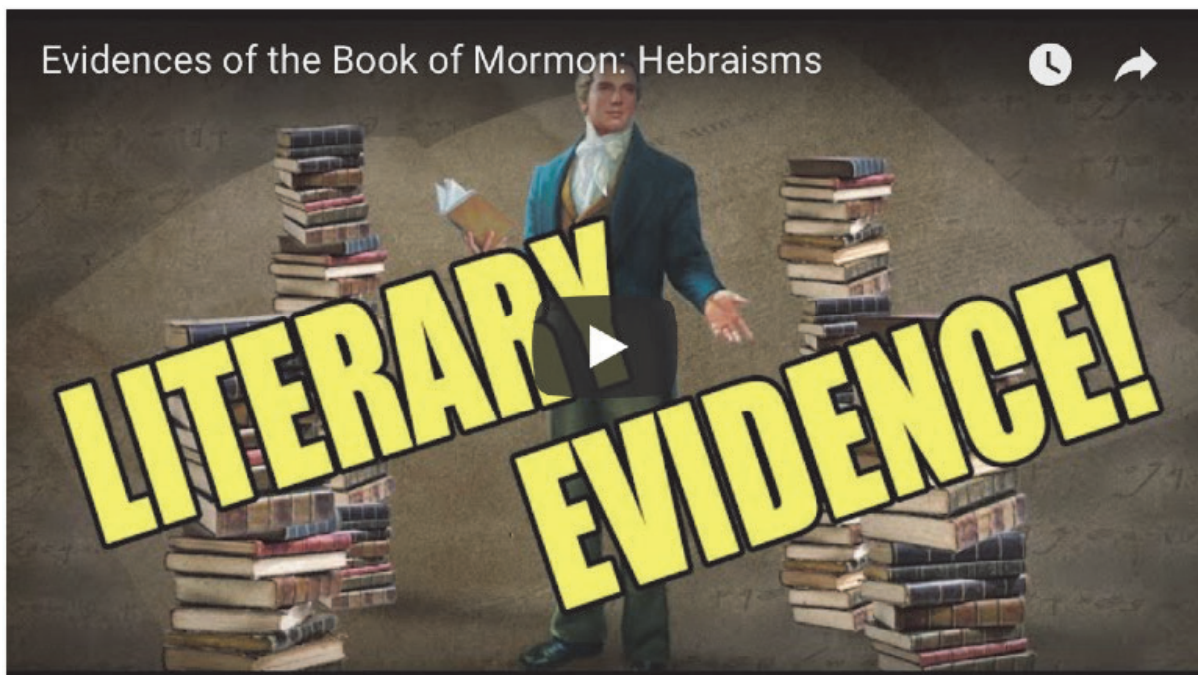
You can't. Because based on your observations here, whatever source you've been listening to bears little or no resemblance to the Spirit.

The following [mind-blowing video](#) raises some profound and thought-provoking questions about the reliability of "a witness from the Holy Ghost" for discerning truth and reality:

CESLETTER.ORG/SPIRIT

The video raises the same questions and challenges you've raised in your text, and my above responses apply to this video as well. What I find mind-blowing is how off the mark your understanding of the Spirit really is.

Oh, and also [this video about Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon](#) that pretty much blows all your View of the Hebrews/Late War/Napolean nonsense out of the water.



PRIESTHOOD RESTORATION

Concerns & Questions

“The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication.”

– LDS HISTORIAN AND SCHOLAR RICHARD BUSHMAN *ROUGH STONE ROLLING*, P. 75

*The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication. Did Joseph add the stories of angels to embellish his early history and make himself more of a visionary? **If so, he made little of the occurrence. Cowdery was the first to recount the story of John’s appearance, not Joseph himself.** In an 1834 Church newspaper, Cowdery exulted in his still fresh memory of the experience. “On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace unto us, while the vail was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance!” When Joseph described John’s visit, he was much more plainspoken. Moreover, he inserted the story into a history composed in 1838 but not published until 1842. It circulated without fanfare, more like a refurbished memory than a triumphant announcement. [Emphasis added]*

– FULL PARAGRAPH FROM LDS HISTORIAN AND SCHOLAR RICHARD BUSHMAN *ROUGH STONE ROLLING*, P. 75. BUSHMAN DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS A LATER FABRICATION.

SHORT ANSWER:

Your insistence that nobody knew about the priesthood restoration is based on faulty assumptions, not facts. Priesthood is all over the Book of Mormon and in early revelations, and Richard Bushman, your primary source for this assertion, does not agree with you.

LONG ANSWER:

1. Like the first vision story, none of the members of the Church or Joseph Smith's family had ever heard prior to 1832 about a priesthood restoration from John the Baptist or Peter, James, and John.

And like your error with regard to the First Vision story, you assume that if something wasn't yet written down in its entirety, that constitutes proof that it was never spoken of or discussed, which is a wholly ridiculous assumption.

Although the priesthood is now taught to have been restored in 1829, Joseph and Oliver made no such claim until 1832, if that.

Joseph and Oliver made no claim of anything until 1832, because 1832 was the year they started writing down history. People were being ordained to the priesthood beginning in 1830. How could they be ordained if Joseph and Oliver made no claim to its restoration?

Even in 1832, there were no claims of a restoration of the priesthood (just a 'reception' of the priesthood)...

I am certain you can make no substantive distinction between "reception" and "restoration." This is straining at gnats.

... and there certainly was no specific claims of John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John.

The written documentation came in 1834, but there's no reason to believe it wasn't discussed. Joseph didn't write anything about this until 1838, as Bushman recounts above. When Joseph did make the claim, it "circulated without fanfare," which would be surprising if this were a sensational piece of information that the Saints had never heard before.

Like the first vision accounts, the story later got more elaborate and bold with specific claims of miraculous visitations from resurrected John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John.

Lots of problems with this. The 1835 First Vision account is shorter and less elaborate than the 1832 account. Written records of Church history began in 1832, and Oliver wrote something down about this in 1834, after every worthy male member had received the priesthood. This is continuing your mistaken assumption that anything not written down didn't happen.

LDS historian and scholar, Richard Bushman, acknowledges this in *Rough Stone Rolling*:

“Summarizing the key events in his religious life in an 1830 statement, he mentioned translation but said nothing about the restoration of priesthood or the visit of an angel. The first compilation of revelations in 1833 also omitted an account of John the Baptist. David Whitmer later told an interviewer he had heard nothing of John the Baptist until four years after the Church’s organization. Not until writing in his 1832 history did Joseph include ‘reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministering of angels to administer the letter of the Gospel’ among the cardinal events of his history, a glancing reference at best...The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication.”

You keep trying to imply Bushman agrees with your analysis here. and he doesn't. Bushman, who is a believing Latter-day Saint, provides solid reasons for why Joseph was reticent to discuss these things openly in the 62 words you deliberately omit with your ellipsis, likely because they undermine your premise. Here they are, as you may not have read them before:

... a glancing reference at best. Joseph had not told his mother about his First Vision, and spoke to his father about Moroni only when commanded. His reticence may have shown a fear of disbelief. Although obscure, Joseph was proud. He did not like to appear the fool. Or he may have felt the visions were too sacred to be discussed openly. They were better kept to himself. The late appearance...



Richard Bushman

A scholar who does not agree with Jeremy Runnells, regardless of how often Jeremy Runnells quotes him

Why did it take 3 plus years for Joseph or Oliver to tell members of the Church about the restoration of the priesthood under the hands of John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John?

Bushman's above explanation is a good one, which is probably why you ignore it and cherry-pick *Rough Stone Rolling* out of context.

In any case, it's likely they didn't. Joseph and Oliver announced they had been baptized and ordained the day the Church was organized, and revelations prior to 1834 make reference to their priesthood authority. When the story was printed, nobody treated it like it was news, which would be surprising if it were the first time they had heard about it.

2. David Whitmer, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthood restoration:

“I never heard that an Angel had ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood until the year 1834[,] [183]5, or [183]6 – in Ohio...I do not believe that John the Baptist ever ordained Joseph and Oliver...”

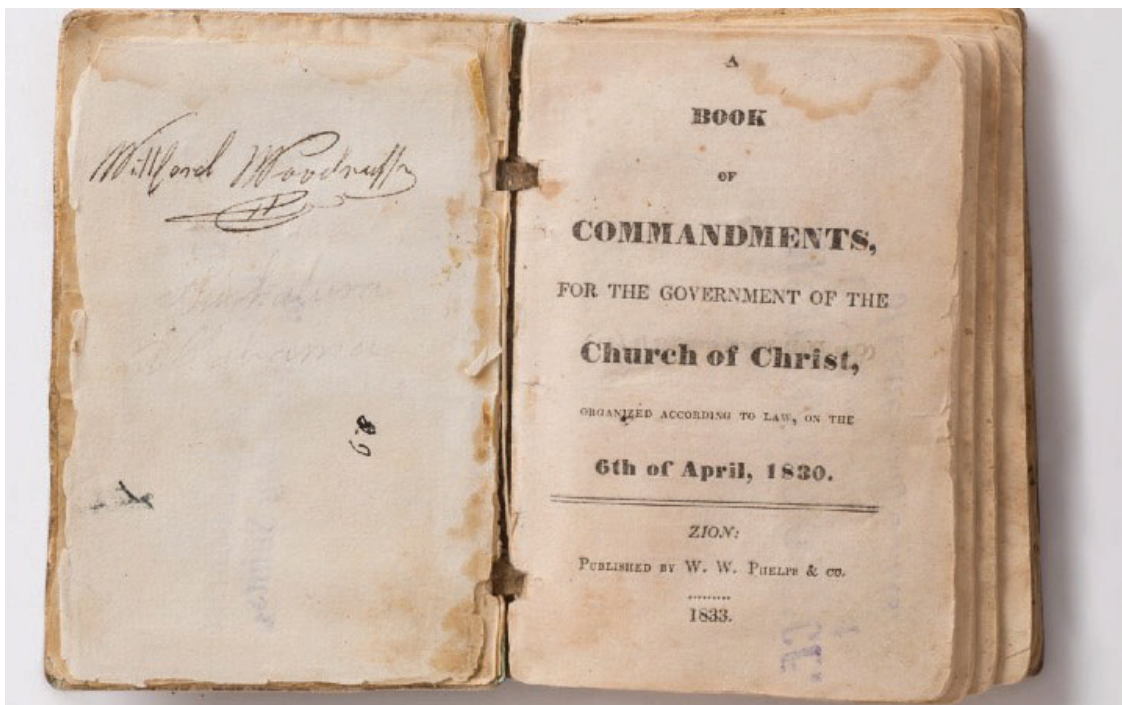
– *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:137

Whitmer himself was given priesthood authority in 1829, as referenced in a contemporaneous revelation recorded in [D&C 18:9](#). He didn't doubt the veracity of that authority while he was a member of the Church. Only decades later, when he was severely disaffected from Joseph Smith, does he begin to criticize the details.

Your selective use of David Whitmer as a source is problematic for you. If you're willing to accept his skepticism about the priesthood restoration, you have to account for the fact that he stood by his testimony of the Book of Mormon until the day he died. If Joseph were a fraud, wouldn't Whitmer have recanted his testimony as one of the Three Witnesses?

3. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery changed the wording of an earlier revelation when they compiled the 1835 Doctrine & Covenants, adding verses about the appearances of Elijah, John the Baptist, and Peter, James, and John **as if those appearances were mentioned in the earlier revelation in the Book of Commandments, which they weren't.** [Emphasis added]

And how did they do that? Did they add a verse that said, “By the way, this stuff was totally mentioned in the Book of Commandments?” This is an absurd charge. They made no attempt to claim this language was in the earlier version.



Wilford Woodruff's Copy of the Book of Commandments
Incomplete, but not infallible

As mentioned earlier, Joseph changed the wording of several verses in the Book of Mormon after it was first published. He edited a number of his revelations over the course of his life. That's actually the very nature of the Restoration – we do not believe in inerrant prophets or in inerrant scripture, and, unlike Catholics or Protestants who believe in a closed canon, we believe more light and knowledge is always welcome.

Compare the [1833 Book of Commandments Chapter 28 \(XXVIII\)](#) to the [1835 Doctrine and Covenants Section 50 \(L\)](#). The chapter in modern Doctrine and Covenants is [D&C 27](#). This section claims to be a revelation from the Lord to Joseph Smith in August 1830.

The following text is what Joseph and Oliver added to the 1830 revelation in 1835 while presenting it as if this was already part of the original revelation given to Joseph by the Lord in August 1830.

You're making a mistaken assumption here, namely that the Book of Commandments was intended as a comprehensive, infallible collection of all revelations given to Joseph Smith. It wasn't, nor was it ever intended to be.

From the [Millennial Star, 1857](#):

Joseph, the Prophet, in selecting the revelations from the Manuscripts, and arranging them for publication, did not arrange them according to the order of the date in which they were given, neither did he think it necessary to publish them all in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, but left them to be published more fully in his History. Hence, paragraphs taken from revelations of a later date, are, in a few instances, incorporated with those of an earlier date. Indeed, at the time of compilation, **the Prophet was inspired in several instances to write additional sentences and paragraphs to the earlier revelations.** In this manner the Lord did truly give 'line upon line, here a little and there a little,' the same as He did to a revelation that Jeremiah received, which, after being burned by the wicked king of Israel, the Lord revealed over again with great numbers of additional words (See [Jeremiah 36:32](#)) [Emphasis added]

Notice how it's packed with miraculous claims of visitations and receptions of authority by these resurrected beings that the original 1830 revelation does not contain.

It looks, actually, like a revelatory expansion consistent with how the Millennial Star described the process by which Joseph expanded and revised his revelations. Richard Bushman, who does not agree with you, [put it this way](#) in *Rough Stone Rolling*:

The editing process uncovered Joseph's anomalous assumptions about the nature of revealed words. He never considered the wording infallible. God's language stood in an indefinite relationship to the human language coming through the Prophet. The revealed preface to the Book of Commandments specified that the language of the revelations was Joseph Smith's: 'These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.' They were couched in language suitable to Joseph's time. The idioms, the grammar, even the tone had to be comprehensible to 1830s

Americans. Recognizing the pliability of the revealed words, Joseph freely edited the revelations 'by the Holy Spirit,' making emendations with each new edition. He thought of his revelations as imprinted on his mind, not graven in stone. With each edition, he patched pieces together and altered the wording to clarify meaning. The words were both his and God's."

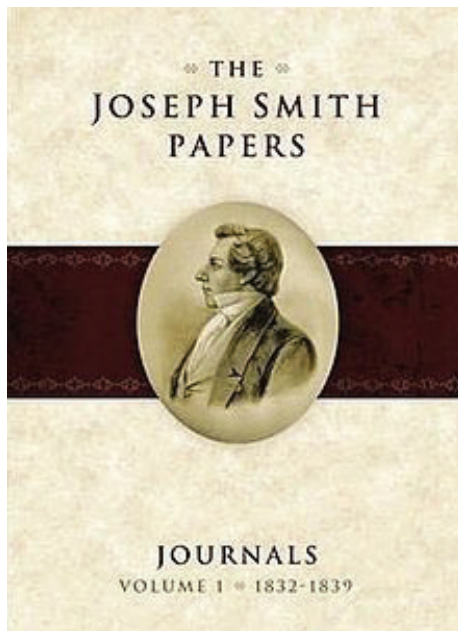
That principle applies to your lengthy excerpts quoted below:

2. ...and with Moroni, whom I have sent unto you to reveal the book of Mormon, containing the fulness of my everlasting gospel; to whom I have committed the keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim; and also with Elias, to whom I have committed the keys of bringing to pass the restoration of all things, or the restorer of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, concerning the last days: and also John the son of Zacharias, which Zacharias he (Elias) visited and gave promise that he should have a son, and his name should be John, and he should be filled with the spirit of Elias; which John I have sent unto you, my servants, Joseph Smith, jr. and Oliver Cowdery, to ordain you unto this first priesthood which you have received, that you might be called and ordained even as Aaron: and also Elijah, unto whom I have committed the keys of the power of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, that the whole earth may not be smitten with a curse: and also, with Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham your fathers; by whom the promises remain; and also with Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days:

3. And also with Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry: and of the same things which I revealed unto them: unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all things both which are in heaven and which are on earth: and also with all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world: wherefore lift up your hearts and rejoice, and gird up your loins, and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, having done all ye may be able to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth; having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace which I have sent mine angels to commit unto you, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of my Spirit, which I will pour out upon you, and my word which I reveal unto you, and be agreed as touching all things whatsoever ye ask of me, and be faithful until I come, and ye shall be caught up that where I am ye shall be also. Amen.

That was long.

You can see and compare for yourself on the Joseph Smith Papers (LDS owned and operated) website. The direct links are above.



The Joseph Smith Papers
A Really Lousy Cover-Up

I don't understand. Wasn't your whole faith crisis precipitated by the Church trying to suppress such information? Providing the primary sources for everything Joseph Smith ever wrote is a remarkable act of transparency for a Church that's supposedly hiding everything from its members.

4. Had the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood under the hand of John the Baptist been recorded prior to 1833, it would have been **expected** to appear in the Book of Commandments. [Emphasis added]

Expected by whom? Expectations are not universal, and your continued assumption that everyone shares yours is not a sign of good scholarship.

The Book of Commandments was not designed to be comprehensive, and a number of Joseph's early revelations were not included. It was certainly never

presumed to be a closed canon by Joseph Smith or his contemporaries. Their expectations were apparently quite different from yours.

However, nowhere in the Book of Commandments is this miraculous and doctrinally vital event recorded.

And even today, the First Vision is only obliquely mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants. If we should have expected John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John in the Book of Commandments, shouldn't we expect the First Vision there, too? Joseph first wrote it down in 1832, yet it still hasn't made its way into any of the D&C sections.

Your deeply flawed expectation that the Book of Commandments was a complete, perfect, and finished summation of all of Joseph's revelations and history is the problem here.

Had the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John been recorded prior to 1833, it likewise would have been expected to appear in the Book of Commandments.

The passive voice - "it would have been expected" - hides your assumptive flaws. What you're actually saying is "I, Jeremy Runnells, expected the Book of Commandments to include everything significant that ever happened to Joseph Smith." That's not what the Book of Commandments was designed to be, and simply announcing that your expectations were repeatedly unmet is not a credible indictment of the book itself.

However, nowhere in the Book of Commandments is this miraculous and doctrinally vital event recorded.

See my previous answer to this sentence. This repeated complaint rings hollow, as you believe the event is fictional and not miraculous or doctrinally relevant.

5. It wasn't until the 1835 edition Doctrine & Covenants that Joseph and Oliver backdated and retrofitted Priesthood restoration events to an 1829-30 time period – none of which existed in any previous Church records; including Doctrine & Covenants' precursor, Book of Commandments...

Didn't you just say this? What is the value in repeating a flimsy charge almost verbatim as a newly numbered item right after saying it the first time? Does it make my argument stronger if I cut and paste my previous answers to your previously-stated questions?

... nor the original Church history as published in *The Evening and Morning Star*.

What original Church history in *The Evening and Morning Star*? *The Evening and Morning Star* contains revelations, speculative essays, and items of instruction, not Church history. Items like the translation of the Book of Mormon and the visits of Moroni, which you concede were commonly discussed prior to 1830, don't get a mention in them, either. It was a newspaper, not an "original Church history," and certainly nothing close to a comprehensive one.

6. Melchizedek Priesthood given by Lyman Wight – not Peter, James, and John:

"During the turbulent meeting, Joseph ordained five men to the high priesthood, and Lyman Wight ordained eighteen others, including Joseph. The ordinations to the high priesthood marked a milestone in Mormon ecclesiology. Until that time, the word 'priesthood,' although it appeared in the Book of Mormon, had not been used in Mormon sermonizing or modern revelations. Later accounts applied the term retroactively, but the June 1831 conference marked its first appearance in contemporary records..."

*The Melchizedek Priesthood, Mormons now believe, had been bestowed a year or two earlier with the visit of Peter, James, and John. If so, **why did contemporaries say the high priesthood was given for the first time in June 1831? Joseph Smith himself was ordained to this 'high priesthood' by Lyman Wight. If Joseph was already an elder and apostle, what was the necessity of being ordained again?"***
– *Rough Stone Rolling*, p.157-158 7 (emphasis added)

I think your readers are entitled to know that Richard Bushman, who does not agree with you, did not simply ask this question and leave it hanging, unanswerable, as if the entire lie of the Priesthood had been exposed once and for all. He actually answers the question in his very next sentence:

The usual explanation is that Joseph meant to say "high priest," one of the offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood, not "high priesthood." By this interpretation, high priests, officers in the priesthood, were ordained for the first time at the conference, though the Melchizedek Priesthood was received earlier.

That would be my answer - the confusion, I think, is largely semantic, and that the different terminology is being used to describe ordination to a priesthood office. This is the first time people were specifically labeled as high priests.

Bushman doesn't stop there. ("But that is not what Joseph said," he notes in his next sentence.) His further explanation is as follows:

The confusion may indicate that the division into two priesthoods, with elders in the higher and priests and teachers in the lower, was not clear before 1831. Joseph may not have realized that elders were part of the Melchizedek Priesthood already and were being ordained to the office of high priest rather than receiving the powers of the high priesthood. Although he understood the distinction by the 1840s, he seems to have fallen back into the confusion of those early years when he wrote about the ordinations. In this case, experience may have outrun comprehension.



*Melchizedek
Not Lyman Wight*

You have to account for confusion here because the Melchizedek Priesthood is all over the Book of Mormon, which, of course, was published in 1830. Alma 13:14 says "Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever." All of Chapter 13, which has undergone no significant revision since it was first published, outlines the high priesthood and ordination in terms that are still consistent with how priesthood is exercised to this day. If Joseph had written the Book of Mormon, it seems unlikely that he'd have outlined how all this works in 1830 and then made up a fresh new fraudulent invention in 1831.

IF PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN ORDAINED JOSEPH SMITH TO THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD IN 1829 , WHY DID LYMAN WIGHT ORDAIN JOSEPH SMITH TO THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD AGAIN IN 1831?

All caps! You clearly mean business! Regardless, here are three questions that undermine the premise of your question, along with the answers.

1. Why would Lyman Wight think he had the authority to give Joseph Smith the priesthood? (Because he had already received that priesthood moments before under the hand of Joseph Smith. So clearly this was an ordination to an office, not the first bestowal of the priesthood.)
2. Why would Joseph Smith think he needed Lyman Wight to give him the priesthood after Joseph gave the priesthood to Lyman Wight and four other men moments earlier? (Because this was an ordination to an office in the priesthood, not the bestowal of the priesthood itself.)
3. Why do Section 20 of the Doctrine & Covenants, written in 1829, and the Book of Mormon, written in 1830, describe the high priesthood in great detail if it wasn't invented until 1831? (Because the concept of the high priesthood wasn't a later invention as the CES

Letter erroneously posits.)

Forgive me for not using all caps. I don't think them necessary to refute your weak argument.

The actual minutes of this June 1831 conference showing “Joseph Smith jr. & Sidney Rigdon were ordained to the High Priesthood under the hand of br. Lyman Wight” can be viewed on the official [Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

There's that lousy Church suppression again - how dare they make all primary sources available to anyone with a wireless connection!

That same site, incidentally, notes that “Brs. Lyman Wight John Murdock Reynolds Cahoon Harvey Whitlock & Hyrum Smith were ordained to the high Priesthood under the hand < of > br. Joseph Smith jr.” prior to Lyman Wight ordaining Joseph Smith to the office of high priest. How, exactly, would you ordain someone when you don't have the priesthood yourself?



“[The story of the priesthood restoration] circulated without fanfare, more like a refurbished memory than a triumphant announcement.”

- Richard Bushman, who does not agree with Jeremy Runnells

WITNESSES

Concerns & Questions

At the end of the day? It all doesn't matter. The Book of Mormon Witnesses and their testimonies of the gold plates are irrelevant. It does not matter whether eleven 19th century treasure diggers with magical worldviews saw some gold plates or not. It doesn't matter because of this one simple fact:

JOSEPH DID NOT USE THE GOLD PLATES FOR TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON

“[The gold plates] are a powerful, resonant, sacred object that can be (compared) to other sacred objects in other religions ... and that it has profound religious meaning. Joseph — or the Lord — came closest to offering concrete evidence of supernatural intervention in the provision for witnesses of the plates.”

– LDS HISTORIAN AND SCHOLAR RICHARD BUSHMAN, BOOK OF MORMON LANDS CONFERENCE, 2010. DR. BUSHMAN DOES NOT AGREE WITH JEREMY RUNNELLS

SHORT ANSWER:

The testimony of the Book of Mormon Witnesses has withstood the test of time in remarkable ways, and your response to them is deeply marred by your selective reliance on a handful of second-hand, very late hearsay sources that contradict the over 200 firsthand accounts that don't support your assumptions.

It's also extraordinarily dishonest of you to continually re-quote different sections from the same sources and pretend they come from different accounts.

LONG ANSWER:

Many of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates, including all of the Three Witnesses, were, at some point in their lives, deeply disaffected with the Prophet Joseph Smith. Yet all remained true to their testimonies, even though they had significant incentive to expose Joseph's "fraud." Their testimonies have been under attack for nearly two centuries, and yet they still hold up.

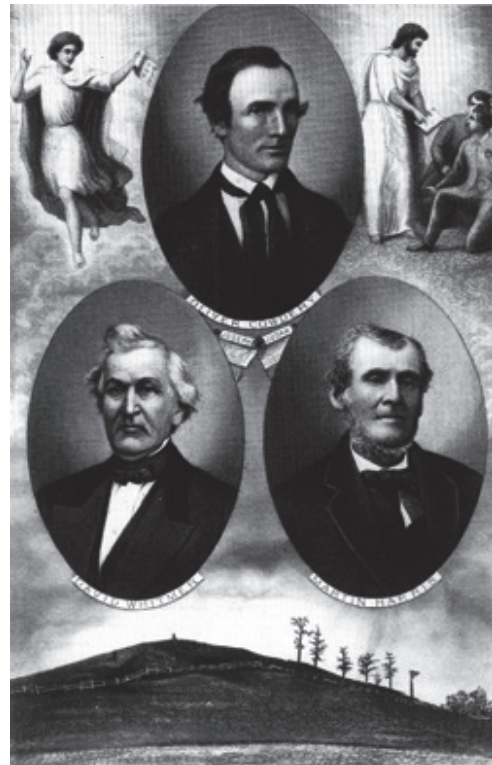
There are over 60 firsthand accounts by these witnesses that describe the physical reality of the gold plates, and they do so without the kind of "spiritual eye" nonsense that is included in all of your second-hand, hearsay accounts, many of which were written decades after the fact by people who did not know any of the witnesses personally. A great deal of what you've written in this section is not just sloppy scholarship on your part; it isn't scholarship at all.

The testimony of the Three and Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon is a key part to the testimonies of many members of the Church.

Is it? I have never heard the Three or Eight Witnesses mentioned in a testimony meeting in all my 50 years of churchgoing. I think the Witnesses are solid and powerful, but I doubt that their accounts are central to the testimonies of most members.

Some even base their testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon on these 11 witnesses and their claims.

If they do, then they're not following the instructions of the Book of Mormon itself, which counsels members to base their testimonies on the witness of the Holy Ghost. That's not to discount the value of the testimony of these 11 witnesses, which are remarkably consistent



The Three Witnesses
Their testimony still holds up

and reliable, but rather to emphasize that this kind of evidence ought to confirm faith rather than establish it.

As a missionary, I was instructed to teach investigators about the testimonies of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon as part of boosting the book's credibility.

I wasn't. None of the six discussions I taught made any reference to Book of Mormon witnesses, although I'm older than you. Yet the new discussions that replaced the ones I taught made no mention of the Witnesses, and "Preach my Gospel" makes no mention of the Book of Mormon witnesses. While it's possible that your mission president was off on his own program on this one, the testimony of the Book of Mormon Witnesses has not been and is not now part of the curricula missionaries are instructed to teach to investigators.

There are several critical problems for relying and betting on these 19th century men as credible witnesses.

The problems you proceed to enumerate are based largely on the premise that these people are, in fact "19th century men" who believed things common to many 19th Century men. How could the Book of Mormon have had any witnesses who were not "19th century men," given that it came forth in the 19th Century?

MAGICAL WORLDVIEW

In order to truly understand the Book of Mormon witnesses and the issues, one must understand the magical worldview of people in early 19th century New England.

Yes, one must. And you clearly don't. Your attempt to discredit these men is riddled with presentism. You keep assuming that they were as ridiculous to their contemporaries as they are to you, which they were not. You aren't understanding them; you are harshly judging them by applying 21st Century expectations to a 19th Century reality.

These are people who believed in folk magic, divining rods, visions, second sight, peep stones in hats, treasure hunting (money digging or glass looking), and so on.

People then – and people now – believed and believe in a number of harmless superstitions. Why does this disqualify them from being instruments in the hands of the Lord? The evidence suggests that belief in folk magic left Joseph and Oliver open to the idea of genuine revelation.

Many people believed in buried treasure, the ability to see spirits and their dwelling places within the local hills and elsewhere. This is one reason why treasure digging as a paid service was practiced.

What are the other reasons?

Joseph Smith, his father, and his brother Hyrum had engaged in treasure hunting from 1820–1827.

I'm glad you've changed this from your previous version, where you claimed that treasure hunting was their "family business," which it was not. Their family business was farming, at least according to the tax receipts. In any case, your dates suggest a documented precision to Joseph's treasure hunts that can't be sustained by the record.

Joseph was hired by folks like Josiah Stowell, who Joseph mentions in his history.

It's disingenuous to say that "Joseph was hired by folks like Josiah Stowell" when we only have record of Joseph being hired by one "folk" – i.e. Josiah Stowell. If you can produce other clients for this non-existent treasure hunting business, that would bolster your case considerably.

As for Josiah Stowell, Joseph worked for him for less than a month digging for silver with no success, until he "finally... prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it." (JS-H 1:56.) Hardly a long-term career pursuit.

In 1826, Joseph was arrested and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York on the complaint of Stowell's nephew who accused Joseph of being a "disorderly person and an imposter."

Joseph was neither arrested nor brought to trial. He was called to appear at a preliminary hearing which was quickly dismissed with no charges filed. The matter was so insignificant that it was never raised again, even as Joseph was forced to confront a host of other far more serious legal charges throughout his life.

It would not have been unusual during this time for a neighbor, friend, or even a stranger to come up to you and say, "I received a vision of the Lord!" and for you to respond, in all seriousness, "Well, what did the Lord say?"

Should they have responded without seriousness? You clearly think this is ridiculous, and you refuse to allow for the possibility that your flawed presentist sensibility isn't the appropriate vehicle for judging what is or isn't unusual in a 19th Century context.

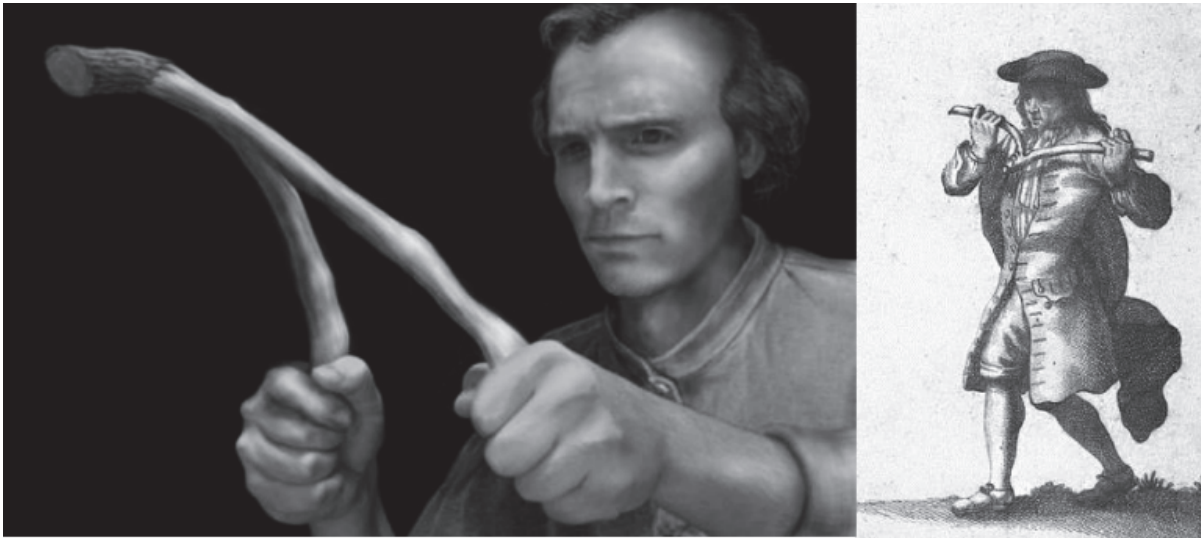
This is one of the reasons why 21st century Mormons, once including myself, are so confused and bewildered...

... and presentist. You do not understand, even in the smallest degree, that people living in a different time and a different culture can reasonably perceive the world in a way that is starkly different from the way you perceive it, and that doesn't make them stupid or even wrong.

... when hearing stuff like Joseph Smith using a peep stone in a hat...

A WHAT?!!

... or Oliver Cowdery using a divining rod or dowsing rod such as illustrated below:



For my part, I am a 21st Century Latter-day Saint, and I find this neither confusing nor bewildering. I find it evidence that Joseph and Oliver lived in a different place and time and believed in harmless superstitions that were common to their era.

My wife was a missionary in Chile. In almost every home she visited, including homes of Church members, people had an inflated brown paper bag in the center of the main living area, because they were convinced that the bag kept bugs away. They also chastised her for drinking cold drinks on a hot day, or hot drinks on a cold day, as they insisted that would make a person “chueca,” which roughly translates as “crooked.” Both of these ideas have no factual basis and are firmly in the realm of superstition, yet members who believe them don’t get denied temple recommends.

The use of divining rods (such as the one above) is actually mentioned in the scriptures.

And why shouldn’t it be? D&C Section 1 tells us that the Lord speaks to his prophets “in their **weakness, after the manner of their language**, that they might come to understanding.” [Emphasis added.] If the Lord is able to make a connection to Oliver by means of a harmless superstition, doesn’t that fit the bill of communicating with people in their weakness and their level of understanding?

In Doctrine & Covenants 8, the following heading provides context for the discussion:

“Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. In the course of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Oliver, who continued to serve as scribe, writing at the Prophet’s dictation, desired to be endowed with the gift of translation. The Lord responded to his supplication by granting this revelation.”

I should note that since you first wrote your letter, the Church has published a new history that says the following:

They returned to work, and Oliver began to wonder if he could translate as well. He believed that God could work through instruments like seer stones, and he had occasionally used a divining rod to find water and minerals. Yet he was unsure if his

rod worked by the power of God. The process of revelation was still a mystery to him.

Joseph again brought Oliver's questions to the Lord, and the Lord told Oliver that he had power to acquire knowledge if he asked in faith. The Lord confirmed that Oliver's rod worked by the power of God, like Aaron's rod in the Old Testament. He then taught Oliver more about revelation. "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost," He declared. "Behold, this is the spirit of revelation."

- *Saints, p. 64*

So now, as you "expose" the Church's supposed suppression of this information, you now have to account for the fact that it is explicitly discussed in an official, widely publicized history that all members are encouraged to read.

The revelation states, in relevant part:

D&C 8:6-11

(Emphasis Added)

*6. 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;*

7. Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you.

*8. Therefore, doubt not, **for it is the gift of God; and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works**; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, **for it is the work of God**.*

*9. And, therefore, **whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that I will grant unto you**, and you shall have knowledge concerning it.*

*10. Remember that **without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith**. Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not.*

*11. Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and **that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred**; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you.*

I think the truly relevant part of this section is in two verses preceding these:

2. Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

3. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation...

This is a magnificent revelation, and you seem to have missed the point of it completely. Had you taken the time to understand those verses, you might have realized that warm, fuzzy feelings during cartoons don't mean that Mufasa is a historical figure.

You emphasize some interesting language here that has little to nothing to do with the divining rod. For instance, “without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith” is pretty good advice, with or without a rod. And the translation of ancient records doesn’t seem to be linked to the rod at all.

From the D&C 8 account, we don’t really know much about what exactly the “gift of Aaron” is that Oliver Cowdery received.

From the Church’s recently published history in *Saints*, though, we absolutely do, as referenced above.

What is “the gift of Aaron”? The text provides several clues:

As referenced above, so does the Church’s recently published and widely publicized history.

- Oliver has a history of using it, since “it has told [him] many things.”

“[Oliver] believed that God could work through instruments like seer stones, and he had occasionally used a divining rod to find water and minerals.

- *Saints, the Church's recently published and widely published history, p. 64*

- It is “the gift of God.”

“The Lord confirmed that Oliver’s rod worked by the power of God, like Aaron’s rod in the Old Testament.”

- *Saints, the Church's recently published and widely publicized history, p. 64*

- It is to be held in Oliver’s hands (and kept there, impervious to any power).

That’s not actually what the revelation says. It says it can’t be taken out of his hands, not that it can withstand a nuclear blast.

- It allows Oliver to “do marvelous works.”

“The Lord confirmed that Oliver’s rod worked by the power of God, like Aaron’s rod in the Old Testament.”

- *Saints, the Church's recently published and widely publicized history, p. 64*

- It is “the work of God.”

Sorry, what’s the difference between the “work of God” and the “gift of God?”

- The Lord will speak through it to Oliver and tell him anything he asks while using it.

Again, not actually what the revelation says. At no point does the Lord say he will

talk through the rod.

- It works through faith.

Again, not actually what the revelation says. It says that “without faith you can do nothing.” That would imply that the rod requires faith, but this is a much broader lesson here.

- It enables Oliver to translate ancient sacred documents.

The revelation doesn't say this at all.

With only these clues, the “gift of Aaron” is difficult to identify.

Good thing, then, that the Church has actively identified it in its recently published and widely publicized history on page 64.

The task becomes much easier, however, when we look at the original revelation contained in the Book of Commandments, a predecessor volume to the Doctrine & Covenants, used by the LDS Church before 1835.

It also becomes easier when you read page 64 of *Saints*, the Church's recently published and widely publicized history.

Specifically, [Section 7 of the Book of Commandments](#) contains wording that was changed in the [Doctrine & Covenants 8](#).

Does it not strike you as ironic that you are linking to two websites owned and maintained - and actively publicized - by the Church to prove that the Church is suppressing this information?

The term “gift of Aaron” was originally “rod” and “rod of nature” in the Book of Commandments:

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

– [The Book of Commandments 7:37](#) (emphasis added)

So, what is the “gift of Aaron” mentioned in D&C 8?

Well, according to the recently published history that the Church is actively encouraging all of its members to read, it's a dowsing rod.

It is a “rod of nature.”

Which, as the Church is now telling all of its members in its recently published and widely

publicized history, is a dowsing rod.

What is a “rod of nature”?

Well, according to the recently published history that the Church is actively encouraging all of its members to read, it is a dowsing rod. But go ahead, the suspense is killing me, as you seem to think you’ve discovered something the Church is actively trying to hide, despite the fact that all the sources you link to were created and maintained, at great expense, by the Church that’s supposedly keeping this information from its members, who are being encouraged to study a new, easy-to-read history that puts this information on page 64.

It is a divining rod or dowsing rod...

A **WHAT?!!**

as illustrated in the above images...

... and repeatedly mentioned in Church sources being actively promoted to the general membership.

... which Oliver Cowdery used to hunt for buried treasure.

Nope. Dowsing rods were used to find water. There’s no source that tells us of Oliver Cowdery hunting for buried treasure with a dowsing rod, or, really, hunting for treasure at all. If you knew of one, you’d link to it, and you don’t.

Cowdery’s use of a divining rod to search for buried treasure...

... didn’t happen. Or, at least, we have no record of it happening. And aren’t you the guy who says that if it wasn’t written down, it couldn’t have happened and no one could have known about it?

... evokes similar images of Joseph Smith hunting for treasure with a peep stone in a hat.

A **WHAT?!!**

My flabbergasted reaction aside, you have no record that the stone was in a hat when used for treasure hunting. The hat was used for translation so Joseph could read off of the stone without extraneous light. There’s no mention of a hat in any treasure hunts, and you don’t get to alter the historical record willy-nilly just to make Oliver and Joseph look weirder than they actually were. And, really, to a 19th Century observer, they weren’t weird at all. You keep applying your culture to theirs and judging them harshly for not being like you. That’s, again, terrible scholarship.

Thankfully, the Lord doesn’t do that. He speaks to his servants “in their weakness, after the

manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.” (D&C 1:24) These were things that both Joseph and Oliver understood, so the Lord was more than willing to use them for his purposes. The fact that it is strange to our culture shouldn't allow us to smugly condescend to those whose manner is different than ours.

Remember Ammon talking to King Lamoni about the Great Spirit in [Alma 22](#)? Lamoni's understanding of God was mingled with superstition, but rather than condemn Lamoni for his superstitions, he built on the common ground in his incorrect tradition to lead Lamoni to a better understanding. That's the way the Lord has always worked, and that's all he's doing here by indulging Oliver's interest in dowsing rods. Aaron's rod worked miracles in the Old Testament, where the Lord indulged Moses's use of a rod to part the Red Sea, strike rocks to bring forth water, and raise up with a serpent wrapped around it in order to heal Israel. Could God have accomplished all those things through Moses without using a rod? Of course. But using the rod was apparently helpful to Moses, so God worked through Moses in his weakness, and after the manner of his language and understanding. I don't see why that's a problem.



The Rod of Aaron
It sprouted flowers. Now that's weird.

The revision to “gift of Aaron” connects the dowsing rod to Moses's rod, thereby leading Oliver to a greater understanding of the Lord's purposes. It's a rather elegant teaching method, it seems to me, to communicate by means of commonly understood iconography.

Oliver also wished to use his divining rod, in the same way Joseph Smith used his stone and hat, to translate ancient documents.

None of the revelations state that Oliver used his rod in his attempt to translate.

Doctrine & Covenants 8 indicates that the Lord, through Joseph Smith, granted Oliver's request to translate using a...rod.

No it... doesn't. The rod was not specified as an instrument of translation. You are making an assumption and therefore possibly misreading the revelation.

If Oliver Cowdery's gift was really the use of a divining rod – and it was –

.. as the Church explicitly mentions in its newly published and widely publicized history...

... then this tells us that the origins of the Church are much more rooted in folk magic and superstition than we've been led to believe by the LDS Church's whitewashing of its origins and history.

A history they have gone to great lengths to publicize to the membership at large. It's pretty hard to whitewash a history you keep publishing for the world to see.

As for being "rooted in folk magic," that's a pretty silly charge. Folk magic was a point of entry, not a doctrinal foundation. The Lord used harmless superstitions to establish enough common ground to help Joseph and Oliver receive genuine revelation. None of the doctrines of the Church, even the very early Church, teach folk magic as religious principles.

But if past whitewashing is the problem, let's return to the version of history that you remember. To the right is one of the pictures you provided that represented your "whitewashed" understanding of how Joseph translated.



Joseph began to translate the writing on the gold plates. Joseph did not know what the writing meant. God helped him. Joseph used the Urim and Thummim to understand the words. We can read what he translated. It is called the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith—History 1:62

See? Now THAT makes a lot more sense, what with Joseph wearing a pair of granny spectacles attached to a suit of armor and all. That's how translation is supposed to be done – two rocks and a coat of armor, not one rock and a hat. (That's sarcasm, obviously, but this picture accurately represents at least part of how the translation took place.)

Do you see yet just how petty your objection is? From my perspective, this "whitewashed" picture looks even weirder than the rock in the hat. But since this culturally fits your own expectations, it's acceptable to you, buviout something that uses something more akin to a 19th Century person's cultural expectations is entirely unacceptable. Presentism, thy name is Runnells.

WITNESSES

We are told that the witnesses never disavowed their testimonies...

Which is both true and not unimportant. At different points in their lives, all of the Three Witnesses were bitterly opposed to Joseph Smith and could have profited greatly from exposing him as a fraud. They never did, even at great personal cost to their own reputations. David Whitmer never came back and had plenty of nasty things to say about Joseph, yet he never once denied his testimony and reaffirmed it on his deathbed.

... but we have not come to know these men or investigated what else they said about their experiences.

We haven't? Who's "we?" People in and out of the Church have scrutinized the Three and Eight Witnesses for the better part of two centuries. Maybe you haven't, but don't drag "we" into this.



MARTIN HARRIS

There are 11 witnesses to the Book of Mormon: Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, Hiram Page, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. – who all shared a common worldview of second sight, magic, and treasure digging – which is what drew them together in 1829.

No, what drew most of them together was that they were related to each other. We have no record of any of them engaging in treasure digging or “second sight.” Oliver used a dowsing rod, and Hiram Page had a seer stone of his own. Other than that, there’s no evidence of any similarly harmless superstitions being engaged in by any of these men. Folk magic was not the defining characteristic of these people’s lives.

The following are several facts and observations on three of the Book of Mormon Witnesses:

Most of what follows is hearsay, not fact, and you ignore over 60 firsthand accounts from these witnesses that contradict the specious hearsay that forms the bulk of your objection.

Martin Harris was anything but a skeptical witness.

No, Martin Harris was a remarkably skeptical witness. He swapped out Joseph’s seer stone with another one to test its veracity. The reason we don’t have the lost 116 pages is that he begged Joseph to have something tangible to satisfy his wife’s skepticism. He undertook an expensive journey to New York to have an academic – Charles Anthon, to be precise – verify the particulars of the translated characters. The record shows that he was constantly looking for external validation of Joseph’s claims, which is what skeptical witnesses do.

He was known by many of his peers as an unstable, gullible, and superstitious man.

That reputation befell him largely as a result of his belief in Mormonism. Prior to his acceptance of a religion his neighbors despised, he was a well-respected and wealthy

landowner with a stellar reputation. Even after the Mormons got him, a virulent anti-Mormon critic [conceded](#) that “only his [belief in Mormonism] was Martin deemed insane; on other subjects he exhibited all of his former clearness of brain; he could drive a good bargain, and manage his farming matters as well as ever.” Another non-Mormon contemporary of Martin [reported](#) that “There can’t anybody say a word against Martin Harris. Martin was a good citizen . . . a man that would do just as he agreed with you.” None of that jibes with a reputation for instability or gullibility.

As for superstition, the 19th Century standard is quite different from today’s standard, and anyone willing to hang out with the Mormons probably got tarred with that particular brush. Even after he cast his lot with the Mormons, he had a reputation for honesty. As one critic wrote, “How to reconcile the act of Harris in signing his name to such a statement [i.e. the Testimony of the Three Witnesses], in view of the character of honesty which had always been conceded to him, could never easily be explained.” That comes from your old friend Pomeroy Tucker, who was certainly no fan of Harris or the Church.

In any case, this is all ad hominem nonsense. If it was a fraud, Martin, no matter how unstable, gullible, or superstitious he was, he had plenty of opportunity and motive to come clean. In fact, if he truly was gullible and unstable, it’s likely that he would have cracked under pressure, and there was plenty of pressure on him to expose Joseph as a fraud.

Brigham Young once said of Martin:

“As for Martin Harris, he had not much to apostatize from; he possessed a wild, speculative brain. I have heard Joseph correct him and exhort him to repentance for teaching false doctrines.”

[– Brigham Young Addresses, Vol. 4, 1860 -1864 , Elden J. Watson, p.196-199](#)

This is an oddly uncharitable quote from Brigham that doesn’t seem to be found online anywhere but the CES Letter. Still, according to the poorly-formatted document you provide, this was apparently said in 1862, when Martin was out of the Church and Brigham, bless his heart, was not above gratuitously insulting people he deemed his enemies. When Martin made overtures to rejoin the Church in 1870, Brigham made arrangements to bring him to Utah, where he was rebaptized and all was forgiven.

This quote comes after the Brigham offered the following story about Oliver Cowdery:

A gentleman came to Oliver Cowdery, in Michigan, and begged the privilege of asking a few questions.

"You have been a Mormon?"

"Yes."

"Did you believe Joseph Smith to be a prophet of God?"

"Yes."

"How is it with you now, do you still believe the Book of Mormon to be true?"

"I do not."

"I thought as much."

Oliver Cowdery was a very steady, calm, slow, and correctly spoken man. He replied, "Do not misunderstand me, sir. I mean by that expression that in this matter I am past belief, for I have a perfect knowledge of the truth of the Book of Mormon, that God revealed to Joseph Smith the plates on which it was engraven, and aided him to translate it." This testimony was borne by Oliver Cowdery when he was not a member of this church.

Despite Brigham's unfortunate penchant for ad hominem attacks, it's ridiculous to cite him as a skeptic of Martin's testimony of the Book of Mormon.

Reports assert that he and the other witnesses never literally saw the gold plates, but only an object said to be the plates, covered with a cloth.

"Reports" assert this, do they? Because the overwhelming majority of contemporaneous reports assert that this is nonsense, not the least of which is the report published at the beginning of every edition of the Book of Mormon – i.e. the Testimony of the Three Witnesses, of which Harris was one. And while that testimony is the best known report that directly contradicts your reports in every respect, it is far from the only one.

Richard Lloyd Anderson, a scholar who spent a great deal of his life studying the witness's accounts, said the following:

I have in my files, over the years, about fifty so-called interviews with Oliver Cowdery. "Interview" is a contact, basically, where they said something about The Book of Mormon, it might be detailed; it might be a speech; it might be something he wrote, and so on. And, in the case of David Whitmer, a long interview.

So, here are the statistics about... did I say fifty? Thirty for Oliver Cowdery; a minimum of seventy for David Whitmer; about fifty for Martin Harris; and a minimum of forty—probably one and a half times that much.

So I've got about two hundred times when one of the witnesses said, "I did sign the statement." "The statement means what it says." "I saw the angel." "I saw the plates." Or in the case of the eight witnesses, "I handled the plates." So two hundred very positive and specific statements in many cases and I'm dealing today with about eight or ten documents [that say otherwise], in other words, five percent. And the question is: "Do you believe the 95 percent or do you believe the five?"

I believe the 95 percent, and you believe the five. This is a problem not just because there are nearly ten times as many firsthand accounts supporting the idea that the witnesses actually saw and handled the plates than there other accounts, but that the accounts that deny the physical reality of the plates are generally late, second-or-third-hand hearsay accounts, some

from people who never met or spoke to Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, or David Whitmer.

Additionally, Martin Harris had a direct conflict of interest in being a witness.

That's a nonsensical statement. Either he was a witness or he wasn't. "Conflict of interest" is a legal term of art that has no bearing on whether or not someone witnesses something.

He was deeply financially invested in the Book of Mormon as he mortgaged his farm to finance the book.

He lost that farm, too, yes? When he was excommunicated and disaffected with Joseph Smith, his financial losses would have given him extra incentive to deny his testimony. Why didn't he?

The following are some accounts of the superstitious side of Martin Harris:

"Once while reading scripture, he reportedly mistook a candle's sputtering as a sign that the devil desired him to stop. Another time he excitedly awoke from his sleep believing that a creature as large as a dog had been upon his chest, though a nearby associate could find nothing to confirm his fears. Several hostile and **perhaps unreliable** accounts told of visionary experiences with Satan and Christ, Harris once reporting that Christ had been poised on a roof beam."

—"[Martin Harris: Mormonism's Early Convert](#)," BYU professor Ronald W. Walker, p.34-35 [I added some emphasis there for you.]

Please quote Professor Walker's next paragraph:

Yet despite these eccentricities, more than a dozen of Harris's Palmyra contemporaries left descriptions of the man that describe his honor, honesty, industry, peacefulness, and respectability, his hard-headed, Yankee shrewdness and his growing wealth.

So much of the negative information comes from people eager to discredit Martin that it's impossible to sort out what's true and what's nonsense. If the best indictment you can come up with is that once got weirded out by a sputtering candle and he had a bad dream about a dog, I don't think you're making a particularly compelling case that the guy was a loon.

"No matter where he went, he saw visions and supernatural appearances all around him. He told a gentleman in Palmyra, after one of his excursions to Pennsylvania, while the translation of the Book of Mormon was going on, that on the way he met the Lord Jesus Christ, who walked along by the side of him in the shape of a deer for two or three miles, talking with him as familiarly as one man talks with another."

—*John A. Clark letter, August 31, 1840 in Early Mormon Documents 2:271*

I should note here at the outset that you quote this John A. Clark letter several more times in this section, and each time you do, you try to make it look as if you've found a different

source to discredit Martin Harris. That's terribly dishonest pseudo-scholarship.

This quote can also be found in John A. Clark's book *Gleanings by the Way*, page 258, a book dedicated to exposing the "Mormon delusion" by highlighting the thoroughly debunked and discredited theory that the Book of Mormon was copied from Solomon Spaulding's lost manuscript. (Everyone now knows it was copied from *View of the Hebrews*, *The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain*, and *The First Book of Napoleon*, with sprinkles of Captain Kidd, obscure African maps, and names from Keokuk, Iowa, the land of your youth.)

Clark is a worthless source. He never met Martin Harris, and there is every reason to believe this second-hand hearsay story is a complete fabrication.

"According to two Ohio newspapers, shortly after Harris arrived in Kirtland he began claiming to have 'seen Jesus Christ and that he is the handsomest man he ever did see. He has also seen the Devil, whom he described as a very sleek haired fellow with four feet, and a head like that of a Jack-ass.'"

– Early Mormon Documents 2:271, note 32

See? This is the same source - John Clark again. But you omit his name in the second citation to give the impression that you found someone other than an unreliable non-witness to corroborate your case against Martin Harris. This is another John Clark hearsay fable. Next.

Before Harris became a Mormon, he had already changed his religion at least five times.

Nope. Your link takes us to the Wikipedia article about Martin Harris, which sources this bogus assertion by referencing the Dialogue Article "Martin Harris, Mormonism's Early Convert," pp. 30-33. Remember that one? You just linked to it a few paragraphs earlier, which makes that just one more of your own sources that you've never read.

Nowhere in pages 30-33 of this article – or anywhere else in the article, for that matter – does Ronald Walker make this claim.

Richard L. Anderson, however, has [this to say](#) about the subject.

The arithmetic of Martin's five religious changes before Mormonism is also faulty. The claim comes from the hostile Palmyra affidavits published by E. D. Howe; G. W. Stoddard closed his in sarcasm against Martin Harris: "He as first an orthodox Quaker, then a Universalist, next a Restorioner, then a Baptist, next a Presbyterian, and then a Mormon." Palmyra sources do not yet prove that Martin was a Quaker, though his wife probably was. And no evidence yet associates Martin with the Baptist or Presbyterian churches. Note that the other two names are religious positions, not necessarily churches—philosophical Universalists dissent from traditional churches in believing that God will save all, and Restorationists obviously take literally the many Bible prophecies of God's reestablished work in modern times. An early Episcopal minister in Palmyra interviewed Martin and reduced his five positions to two: "He had been, if I mistake not, at one period a member of the Methodist Church, and subsequently had identified himself with the

Universalists.” Of course Martin could have been a Universalist and Restorationer simultaneously. (Anderson 1981, 168-169)

After Joseph’s death, Harris continued this earlier pattern by joining and leaving 5 more different sects, including that of James Strang (whom Harris went on a mission to England for)...

And it didn’t last long. They actually pulled Martin out of the Strangite mission field, because Martin’s only interest was in the Book of Mormon, not Strang. As soon as he was yanked off of Strangite missionary duty, Harris abandoned and repudiated the Strangites.

... other Mormon offshoots, and the Shakers.

His repeated affiliations with splinter groups demonstrates an eagerness to cling to the testimony of the Book of Mormon, which never wavered. Since he refused to accept plural marriage and the authority of the mainstream Church, he was clearly seeking some way to stay true to his testimony when he could not stay true to Joseph. His flirtation with the Shakers didn’t last long, and he eventually found his way back to full fellowship with the Saints, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Not only did Harris join other religions, he testified and witnessed for them.

No, he testified and witnessed for the Book of Mormon.

It has been reported that Martin Harris “declared repeatedly that he had as much evidence for a Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon” (The Braden and Kelly Debate, p.173).

“It has been reported” is a pretty way of saying “somebody made something up.” The Braden and Kelley debate took place thirteen years after Martin Harris’s death, and it was the first time anyone made this charge. Nobody reported Martin saying such a thing during his lifetime. The person making the charge had never met Harris and had no way to substantiate this allegation, which means you don’t, either.

In addition to his devotion to self-proclaimed prophet James Strang...

His devotion was to the Book of Mormon, not to Strang. The Strangites booted him out not long after he joined.

In addition to devotion to self-proclaimed prophet James Strang, Martin Harris was a follower to another self-proclaimed Mormon prophet by the name of Gladden Bishop. Like Strang, Bishop claimed to have plates, Urim and Thummim, and that he was receiving revelation from the Lord. Martin was one of Gladden Bishop’s witnesses to his claims.

A gross exaggeration. Martin never gave any witness that Gladden Bishop actually had any plates or a Urim and Thummim or anything else. His testimony in this splinter group, as in all the splinter groups he joined, was focused on the Book of Mormon and his original witness, and that’s it.

If someone testified of some strange spiritual encounter he had, but he also told you that he...

- Conversed with Jesus who took the form of a deer

As noted above, it's highly unlikely Martin ever said this.

- Saw the devil with his four feet and donkey head

Martin almost certainly didn't say this, either.

- Chipped off a chunk of a stone box that would mysteriously move beneath the ground to avoid capture

First time you've mentioned this one. Source, please?

- Interpreted simple things like a flickering of a candle as a sign of the devil

Hearsay and dubious, but harmless even if it's accurate.

- Had a creature appearing on his chest that no one else could see

More like woke up from a bad dream. (Also dubious hearsay.)

...would you believe his claims? Or would you call the nearest mental hospital?

I'd do neither. Instead, I'd verify my sources for these claims, as all of them are either grossly exaggerated or altogether bogus.

With inconsistencies...

The inconsistencies are between your hearsay nonsense outnumbered 10-1 by consistent firsthand accounts.

... a conflict of interest...

What does that even mean?

If I saw a rabbit yesterday, the fact that I own rabbits does not give me a "conflict in interest" in being a witness to a rabbit. This is a truly stupid objection.

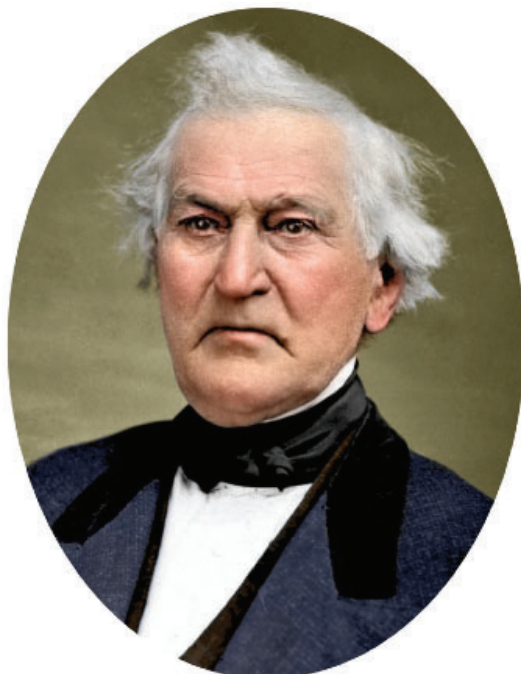
... magical thinking, and superstition like this...

Which is actually just presentism on your part...

... exactly what credibility does Martin Harris have and why should I believe him?

With all the faults and statements that you falsely attribute to him, all the while ignoring the

voluminous evidence that Harris was a well-respected man known for his honesty and good character, no one would believe the testimony of such a caricature, because the straw man you've created bears little or no resemblance to the actual Martin Harris.



DAVID WHITMER

“David claimed in early June 1829 before their group declaration that he, Cowdery, and Joseph Smith observed ‘one of the Nephites’ carrying the records in a knapsack on his way to Cumorah. Several days later this trio perceived ‘that the Same Person was under the shed’ at the Whitmer farm.”

– An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins, p.179

I can find no 1829 version of this story. Dan Vogel reports that Whitmer told this story “with varying detail” beginning in 1877, almost 50 years after the fact. So many of the statements you rely on to discredit David Whitmer come from a time when he was severely disaffected with Joseph, and that disaffection coupled with advanced age makes it difficult to sort out what’s reliable and what’s not.

“In 1880, David Whitmer was asked for a description of the angel who showed him the plates. Whitmer responded that the angel ‘had no appearance or shape.’ When asked by the interviewer how he then could bear testimony that he had seen and heard an angel, Whitmer replied, ‘Have you never had impressions?’ To which the interviewer responded, ‘Then you had impressions as the Quaker when the spirit moves, or as a good Methodist in giving a happy experience, a feeling?’ ‘Just so,’ replied Whitmer.”

– Interview with John Murphy, June 1880, EMD 5:63

Nice try. Whitmer himself quickly issued a statement to directly refute this account of the story immediately after it was published.

His statement:

Unto all Nations, Kindreds, tongues and people unto whom this present Shall come.

It having been represented by one John Murphy of Polo Mo. that I in a conversation with him last Summer, denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

To the end therefore, that he may understand me now if he did not then, and that the world may know the truth, I wish now standing as it were, in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God, once for all to make this public Statement;

That I have never at any time, denied that testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with that book as one of the three witnesses.

Those who know me best, well know that I have adhered to that testimony.—

And that no man may be misled or doubt my present views in regard to the same, I do now again affirm the truth of all my statement[s], as then made and published.

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear; It was no Delusion. What is written is written, and he that readeth let him understand.

A young Mormon lawyer, James Henry Moyle, who interviewed Whitmer in 1885, asked if there was any possibility that Whitmer had been deceived. “His answer was unequivocal... that he saw the plates and heard the angel with unmistakable clearness.” But Moyle went away “not fully satisfied...It was more spiritual than I anticipated.” – Moyle diary, June 28, 1885, EMD 5:141

Sounds like that’s more Moyle’s problem than Whitmer’s. The full Moyle interview provides a distinct physical context for the angel’s appearance:

He said that they (Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris) were out in the primitive woods in Western New York; that there was nothing between them and the Angel except a log that had fallen in the forest; that it was broad daylight with nothing to prevent either hearing or seeing all that took place...he did see and hear the Angel and heard the declaration that the plates had been correctly translated; that there was absolutely nothing to prevent his having a full, clear view of it all. I remember very distinctly asking him if there was anything unnatural or unusual about the surroundings or the atmosphere. He answered that question. I do not remember exactly the words he used, but he indicated that there was something of a haze or peculiarity about the atmosphere that surrounded them but nothing that would prevent his having a clear vision and knowledge of all that took place. He declared to me that the testimony which he published to the world was true and that he had never denied any part of it.

(James Henry Moyle, statement, 13 September 1938; in Dan Vogel (editor), *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 1996–2003), 5 vols, 5:146-147.)

The idea seems to be that Moyle wanted some kind of concrete description of the “haze or peculiarity” and was unsatisfied when Whitmer couldn’t directly explain the spiritual element of the vision in more mundane, down-to-earth terms. Both Moyle and Whitmer would be surprised to see this exchange used to support a contention that Whitmer didn’t actually see the plates or the angel.

Whitmer’s testimony also included the following:

“If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon; if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens and told me to ‘separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so it should be done unto them.’”

– David Whitmer, [An Address to All Believers in Christ](#) (promoting his Whitmerite sect)

If David Whitmer is a credible witness, why are we only using his testimony of the Book of Mormon while ignoring his other testimony claiming that God Himself spoke to Whitmer “by his own voice from the heavens” in June 1838 commanding Whitmer to apostatize from the Lord’s one and only true Church?

In June, 1838, David Whitmer had already been excommunicated from the Church for two months. The voice from God, therefore, wasn’t telling him to “apostatize from the Lord’s one and only true Church,” as he was already in a state of apostasy when the voice from heaven reportedly spoke to him. Apostasy tends to warp one’s spiritual perceptions.



OLIVER COWDERY

Like Joseph and most of the Book of Mormon witnesses, Oliver Cowdery and his family were treasure hunters.

No, they weren't. By profession, Joseph Smith and his family were farmers, and Oliver Cowdery was a schoolteacher. There is no record of Oliver Cowdery engaging in treasure hunting, either professionally or as an amateur treasure hunting hobbyist.

Oliver's preferred tool of trade, as mentioned above, was the divining rod.

And there is no record of what he did with that divining rod. Most people who used such rods used them to try to find water to dig wells, not find buried treasure.

He was known as a "rodsman."

He was? You put the word in quotes – can you therefore give me a contemporary firsthand source that labeled him as such? Because he was actually known as a "schoolteacher." And, later, a "lawyer." Although "lawyer" is arguably a far more pejorative term than "rodsman."

Along with the witnesses, Oliver held a magical worldview.

You offer this arbitrary, presentist label as if it's self-explanatory and it somehow disqualifies Oliver from being a serious person. Oliver was quite accomplished, both in and out of the Church, and he was also highly respected, both in and out of the Church, and his career demonstrates that he was a rather practical man, not some wannabe wizard, as you seem to be implying.

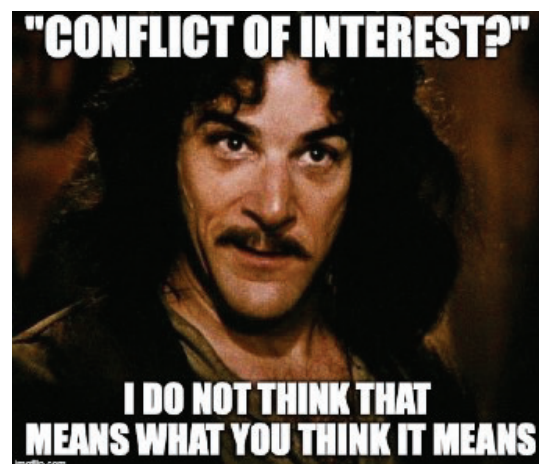
Also, Oliver Cowdery was not an objective and independent witness.

What on earth is an "objective and independent witness?" Witnesses either see things or they don't. If I see a banana on the sidewalk, my objectivity and independence have no bearing on whether I've seen a sidewalk banana or not.

As scribe for the Book of Mormon, co-founder of the Church, and cousin to Joseph Smith, a conflict of interest existed in Oliver being a witness.

As I mentioned earlier, this isn't a thing. "Conflict of interest" is a term used to describe people who, say, stand to gain private financial rewards for their action in official public capacities, or lawyers who represent or influence clients on opposite sides of a dispute. It has nothing to do with witnessing anything. You either witness something or you don't.

To paraphrase Inigo Montoya, you keep using that phrase, but I do not think it means what you think it means.



SECOND SIGHT

People believed they could see things as a vision in their mind. They called it “second sight.”

Which people? Some people? All people? Only crazy people?

We call it “imagination.”

We do? Are you including me in this? Because when I use my imagination, I don't see things as visions in my mind and believe they're real.

It made no difference to these people if they saw with their natural eyes or their spiritual eyes as both were one and the same.

And you think that's the same thing as a 21st Century understanding of the word “imagination” that *we* all believe? Do you personally know anyone who claims that what they see in their imagination is just as real as what they see what their eyes? I don't.

As mentioned previously, people believed they could see spirits and their dwelling places in the local hills along with seeing buried treasure deep in the ground.

Which people? Short people? Fat people? Psoriatic people? Because none of the Three Witnesses believed this, or, if they did, you have no documentation that they did.

This supernatural way of seeing the world is also referred in Doctrine & Covenants as “the eyes of our understanding .”

“The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened. We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber.”

That's the verse you link to to show that the phrase “the eyes of our understanding” has reference to visions of “buried treasure deep in the ground?” They're talking about something happening right in front of them (“[he was] standing upon the breastwork of the [Kirtland Temple] pulpit, before us”) not underground treasure miles away.

There is absolutely no support in the actual text of D&C 110 for your bizarre interpretation of this phrase.

If the plates and the experiences were real and tangible as 21st century Mormons are led to believe, why would the witnesses make the following kind of statements when describing the plates and the experience:

“While praying I passed into a state of entrancement, and in that state I saw the angel and the plates.” – EMD 2:346-47

“I never saw the gold plates, only in a visionary or entranced state.” – EMD 2:346-47

They wouldn't. Those two statements are part of a single quote attributed to Martin Harris after his death by Anthony Metcalf, who referred to Joseph Smith as a “pretend prophet” and was trying to discredit the Church. They contradict everything Martin Harris had to say firsthand about the experience, and it is extraordinarily unlikely that Harris would suddenly change his story so radically when being interviewed by an antagonistic critic. That's why no credible historian, in or out of the Church, accepts these bogus hearsay slanders as reliable.

Martin Harris, in the last years of his life, had this to say:

“The Prophet Joseph Smith, and Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer and myself, went into a little grove to pray to obtain a promise that we should behold it with our eyes **natural eyes**, that we could testify of it to the world” (EMD 2:375). [Emphasis added, strikethrough in original.]

Deliberate use of the phrase “natural eyes” is in direct contradiction to your straw-man premise of “second sight” or “eyes of our understanding.”

Or how about this one:

“Gentlemen, do you see that hand? Are you sure you see it? Are your eyes playing a trick or something? No. Well, as sure as you see my hand so sure did I see the angel and the plates.” (Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981), 116)

Why do you ignore everything Martin Harris actually said and instead take the word of a hostile critic citing posthumous hearsay at face value?

“He only saw the plates with a spiritual eye” – *Joseph Smith Begins His Work, Vol. 1, 1958*

More posthumous hearsay from John Gilbert, a hostile critic of the Church written in 1892, seventeen years after Martin's death and at least sixty years after this likely-bogus confession allegedly took place.

“I saw them with the eye of faith.”

– John A. Clark to Dear Brethren, 31 Aug. 1840, *Episcopal Recorder* (Philadelphia) 18 (12 Sept. 1840): 98

Third time you've cited John Clark. He's no more reliable now than the first two times you cited him.

“As shown in the vision” – Zenas H. Gurley, Jr., *Interview with David Whitmer on January 14, 1885*

You're splitting hairs here. Describing a visit from an angel as a “vision” does not preclude that it was a literal experience. We refer to Joseph Smith's “First Vision,” but we do not deny that the Father and the Son were physically present for the experience with that description.

“...when I came to hear Martin Harris state in public that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundation was sapped & the entire superstructure fell in heap of ruins, I therefore three week since in the Stone Chapel...renounced the Book of Mormon...after we were done speaking M Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city throught [sic] a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight was false, if it had not been picked out of—— [him/me?] but should have let it passed as it was...”

– Letter from Stephen Burnett to “Br. Johnson,” April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2

Another hearsay statement from a bitter Church critic that is demonstrably false on its face. He claims Martin and the other witnesses admitted this in public, which is extraordinarily curious, as such a damning admission would no doubt have prompted a wave of apostasy and a great deal of consternation that would surely have made its way into someone else’s journal. As it stands, without any shred of corroborating evidence that Martin made such a public statement, there’s every reason to believe that Burnett is making this up.

The foreman in the Palmyra printing office that produced the first Book of Mormon said that Harris “used to practice a good deal of his characteristic jargon and ‘seeing with the spiritual eye,’ and the like.” – [Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress, p.71](#)

This is a longer version of *precisely the same hearsay, 60+-years-after-the-fact quote from John Gilbert* that you cited *just four quotes earlier!* Not only is it a new source, it’s *not even a new quote!*

Why only quote the same statement from Gilbert twice? Why not break this into three quotes to give an even greater illusion of credibility?

Two other Palmyra residents said that Harris told them that he had seen the plates with “the eye of faith” or “spiritual eyes”
– EMD 2:270 and 3:22

The first comes from John A. Clark again - the *fourth* time you’ve quoted him, and the second time you have used this same quote. He’s no more reliable now than he was the first three times, and his “eye of faith” statement doesn’t gain credibility by repetition.

The second comes from a Presbyterian pastor who was hostile to the Church and never met Martin Harris, and it comes with an admission that it is hearsay that came to him by way of gossip – the pastor never heard Martin say “spiritual eyes,” as Martin had left Palmyra before any such supposed confession took place.

John H. Gilbert, the typesetter for most of the Book of Mormon, said that he had asked Harris, “Martin, did you see those plates with your naked eyes?” According to Gilbert, Harris “looked down for an instant, raised his eyes up, and said, ‘No, I saw them with a spiritual eye.’” – EMD 2:548

And there it is! Ladies and gentlemen, we have a **John Gilbert trifecta!**

This is the **same exact quote used three times in a row, presented as if it were three different statements.** You have also quoted John A. Clark four times and used his exact same “eye of faith” statement twice. So you say we ought to reject Martin Harris based on the statements of seven different witnesses: John H. Gilbert, John H. Gilbert, John H. Gilbert, John A. Clark, John A. Clark, John A. Clark, and John A. Clark.

Unbelievable. And pathetic.

If these witnesses literally really saw the plates like everyone else on the planet sees tangible objects...why strange statements like, “I never saw them only as I see a city through a mountain”? What does that even mean?

It means Stephen Burnett made it up.

I’ve never seen a city through a mountain. Have you?

No, but I’ve seen you pretend that two guys are actually seven different guys.

Why all these bizarre statements from the witnesses if the plates were real and the event literal?

Why so few actual statements if you have to pretend two men are seven men?

These aren’t “bizarre statements from the witnesses.” The witnesses never made these statements. These are run-of-the-mill lies from two cranks making stuff up over half a century after the fact.

Why would you need a vision or supernatural power to see real physical plates that Joseph said were in a box that he carried around?

You wouldn’t. That’s why the Eight Witnesses describe the utterly mundane experience of having “seen and hefted” the plates, minus any supernatural power. And none of them denied their testimonies, either.

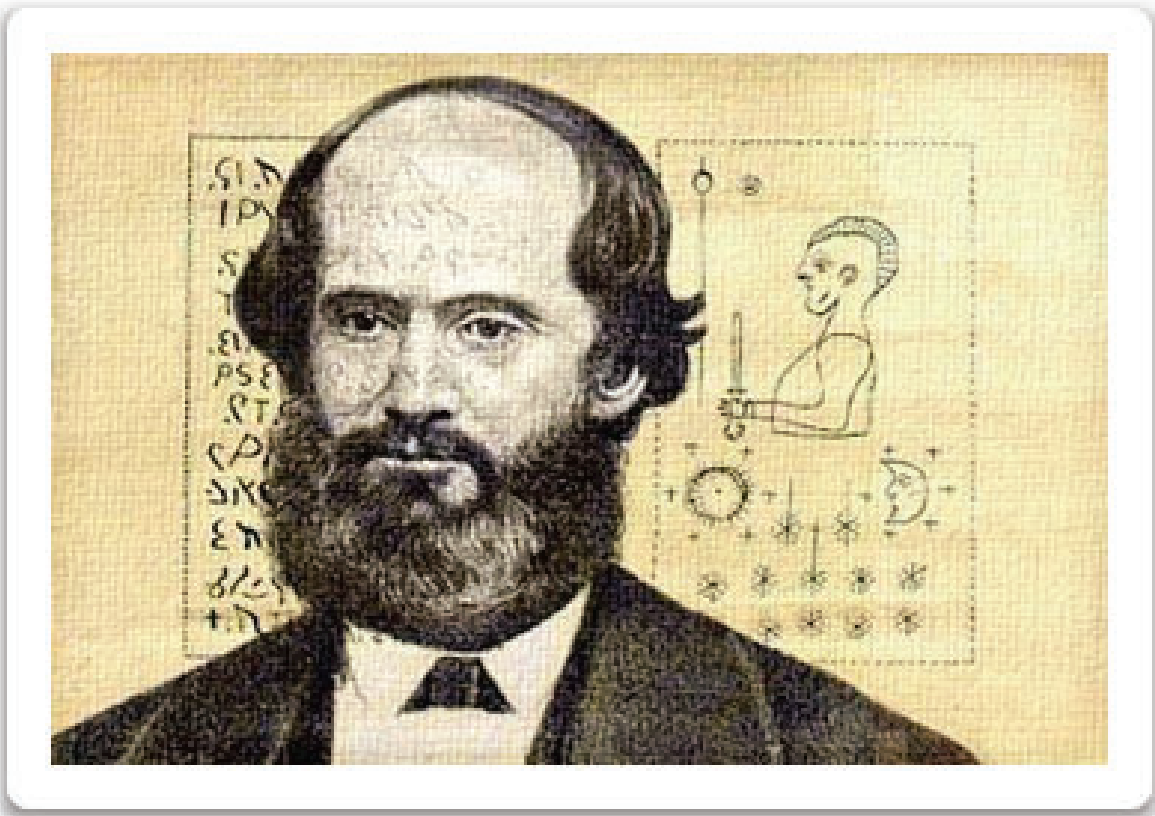
When Martin Harris was asked, “But did you see them [plates] with your natural, your bodily eyes, just as you see this pencil-case in my hand? Now say no or yes to this.” Martin answered, “I did not see them as I do that pencil-case, yet I saw them with the **eye of faith**; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me, though at the time they were covered over with a cloth.” – [Origin and History of the Mormonites, p.406](#) 16

John A. Clark returns for a fifth encore, ladies and gentlemen, to say precisely what he said in two of his previous four appearances in Jeremy's narrative. And yet none of Martin Harris's 50 firsthand contemporaneous accounts that directly contradict Clark's hearsay are ever cited in the CES Letter. Tell me again who it is that's suppressing the truth?

Why couldn't Martin just simply answer "yes"?

Perhaps he did. We'll never know, because every firsthand report of what Martin actually said is deliberately excluded from the CES Letter.

JAMES STRANG AND THE VOREE PLATES WITNESSES



This should be good for a laugh.

James Strang and his claims are absolutely fascinating.

If you're fascinated by pale imitations and weak retreads.

He was basically Joseph Smith 2.0 – but with a twist.

And the twist is – Strang's church went nowhere and now has less than 300 followers.

Like Joseph, Strang did the following:

- Claimed that he was visited by an angel who reserved plates for him to translate into the word of God. “The record which was sealed from my servant Joseph. Unto thee it is reserved.”

And unlike Joseph, Strang had no other witnesses to this angel or to any of his revelations.



*The Entirety of the Strangite Movement as of 2005
Less than 300 followers in Vorhee, Wisconsin*

- Received the “Urim and Thummim.”

And unlike Joseph, nobody else ever saw his Urim and/or Thummim.

- Produced 11 witnesses who testified that they too had seen and inspected ancient metal plates.

And unlike Joseph, there was nothing remotely supernatural about the experience. 11 people watched Strang dig up eighteen paper-sized plates that had likely been buried there by Strang the night before.

- Introduced new scripture. After unearthing the plates (the same plates as Laban from whom Nephi took the brass plates in Jerusalem), Strang translated it into scripture called the “Book of the Law of the Lord.”

And unlike Joseph, who translated a 265,000-word, complex, internally consistent 1,000-year history in sixty days despite being functionally illiterate, the well-educated Strang took a decade to produce a book about a fifth as long with no coherent narrative.

– Established a new Church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite). Its headquarters is still in Voree, Wisconsin.

And unlike Joseph, Strang's church dwindled to the point where it had “had around three hundred members in 1998.”

- Like the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Law of the Lord has the testimony of its Witnesses in its preface:

TESTIMONY

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

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

*SAMUEL GRAHAM,
SAMUEL P. BACON,
WARREN POST,
PHINEAS WRIGHT,
ALBERT N. HOSMER,
EBENEZER PAGE,
JEHIEL SAVAGE.*

And unlike Joseph, none of these witnesses report any supernatural or even spiritual experience or event. These plates were on public display until the turn of the century – plenty of other people saw them, too. They were not in any identifiable language, and they rival the Kinderhook plates for evidence of authenticity, or lack thereof.

In addition to the above 7 witnesses, there were 4 witnesses who went with Strang as they unearthed the Voree Plates:

TESTIMONY OF WITNESSES TO THE VOREE PLATES

1. On the thirteenth day of September, 1845, we, Aaron Smith, Jirah B. Wheelan, James M. Van Nostrand, and Edward Whitcomb, assembled at the call of James J.

Strang, who is by us and many others approved as a Prophet and Seer of God. He proceeded to inform us that it had been revealed to him in a vision that an account of an ancient people was buried in a hill south of White River bridge, near the east line of Walworth County; and leading us to an oak tree about one foot in diameter, told us that we would find it enclosed in a case of rude earthen ware under that tree at the depth of about three feet; requested us to dig it up, and charged us to so examine the ground that we should know we were not imposed upon, and that it had not been buried there since the tree grew. The tree was surrounded by a sward of deeply rooted grass, such as is usually found in the openings, and upon the most critical examination we could not discover any indication that it had ever been cut through or disturbed.

2. We then dug up the tree, and continued to dig to the depth of about three feet, where we found a case of slightly baked clay containing three plates of brass. On one side of one is a landscape view of the south end of Gardner's prairie and the range of hills where they were dug. On another is a man with a crown on his head and a scepter in his hand, above is an eye before an upright line, below the sun and moon surrounded with twelve stars, at the bottom are twelve large stars from three of which pillars arise, and closely interspersed with them are seventy very small stars. The other four sides are very closely covered with what appear to be alphabetic characters, but in a language of which we have no knowledge.

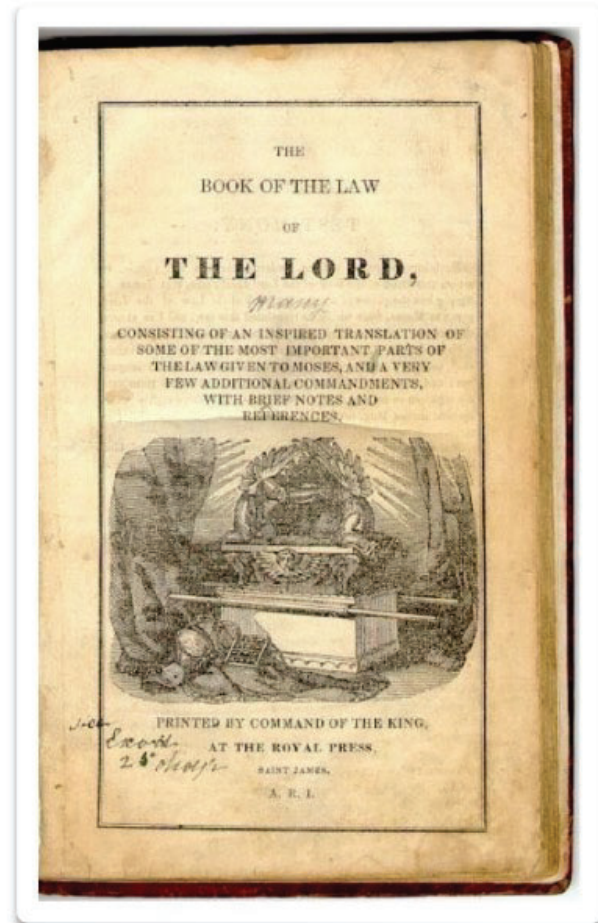
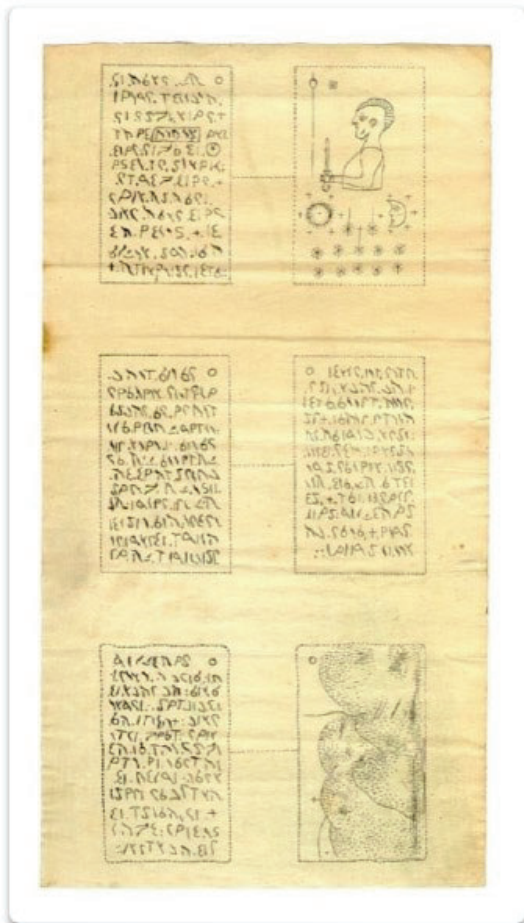
3. The case was found imbedded in indurated clay so closely fitting it that it broke in taking out, and the earth below the soil was so hard as to be dug with difficulty even with a pickax. Over the case was found a flat stone about one foot wide each way and three inches thick, which appeared to have undergone the action of fire, and fell in pieces after a few minutes exposure to the air. The digging extended in the clay about eighteen inches, there being two kinds of earth of different color and appearance above it.

4. We examined as we dug all the way with the utmost care, and we say, with utmost confidence, that no part of the earth through which we dug exhibited any sign or indication that it had been moved or disturbed at any time previous. The roots of the tree stuck down on every side very closely, extending below the case, and closely interwoven with roots from other trees. None of them had been broken or cut away. No clay is found in the country like that of which the case is made.

5. In fine, we found an alphabetic and pictorial record, carefully cased up, buried deep in the earth, covered with a flat stone, with an oak tree one foot in diameter growing over it, with every evidence that the sense can give that it has lain there as long as that tree has been growing. Strang took no part in the digging, but kept entirely away from before the first blow was struck till after the plates were taken out of the case; and the sole inducement to our digging was our faith in his statement as a Prophet of the Lord that a record would thus and there be found.

AARON SMITH,
JIRAH B. WHEELAN,
J. M. VAN NOSTRAND,
EDWARD WHITCOMB.

And, again, unlike Joseph, there's nothing supernatural or even spiritual in this testimony. There's also absolutely no reason to doubt it or renounce it. I'm pretty sure these guys actually did dig up the plates Strang had buried the night before. The greatest mystery to unravel is "how did he make it look like the ground hadn't been disturbed?"



And there they are. Very cool. Now you're a witness, too!

Like Joseph, Strang had a scribe (Samuel Graham) who wrote as Strang translated.

And unlike Joseph, Strang, who was well-educated, didn't actually need one. His use of a scribe was just one more way to imitate Joseph.

Along with several of the witnesses, Graham was later excommunicated from Strang's Church. There is no **direct evidence** that any of the above 11 Strang witnesses ever denied their testimony of James Strang, the Voree Plates, Strang's church or Strang's divine calling.

I added some emphasis there to highlight your hypocrisy on this point. Because every piece of hearsay that could possibly prove embarrassing to Martin Harris is cited by you as

unimpeachable gospel even if it comes from conversations that took place decades after the fact and after Harris was dead, but the contemporaneous hearsay that had two of the witnesses denouncing Strang as a fraud and one of them admitting he helped Strang forge the plates is only indirect evidence, so you can conveniently ignore it.

The hearsay in question, as quoted by from the [infallible Wikipedia](#):

Some have insisted that the Voree plates were forged by Strang. Isaac Scott, an ex-Strangite, claimed that Caleb Barnes, Strang's former law partner, said that he and Strang had fabricated them from a tea kettle belonging to Strang's father-in-law, as part of a [land speculation](#) scheme they had hatched.[13]

According to Scott, Barnes and Strang "made the 'plates' out of Ben [Perce]'s old kettle and engraved them with an old saw file, and ... when completed they put acid on them to corrode them and give them an ancient appearance; and that to deposit them under the tree, where they were found, they took a large auger ... which Ben [Perce] owned, put a fork handle on the auger and with it bored a long slanting hole under a tree on 'The Hill of Promise,' as they called it, laying the earth in a trail on a cloth as taken out, then put the 'plates' in, tamping in all the earth again, leaving no trace of their work visible." [13]

You have to be consistent. If you believe the hearsay that says Martin Harris talked to a deer he thought was Jesus, you also have to believe the hearsay that said the witnesses helped forge these bogus plates. This hearsay actually comes from people who knew Strang. Most of the anti-Harris hearsay comes six decades later from people who never met him.

As for denying this testimony, what's to deny? They dug up the homemade plates that Strang had buried the night before. I have no reason to doubt it, because it's a mundane, everyday sort of event. Similarly, when I was twelve years old, someone put a dead fish in my tent at Boy Scout camp. I've never denied my testimony of that event, and I never will.

Every single living Book of Mormon witness besides Oliver Cowdery accepted Strang's prophetic claim of being Joseph's true successor and joined him and his church.

Which is very peculiar if they actually knew Joseph Smith was fraud. Why seek out a successor to a bogus prophet after the bogus prophet dies? Their interest in perpetuating the cause of the Book of Mormon demonstrates that their belief in it was wholly sincere.

Also, it's not true. Only two of the Eight Witnesses followed Strang – Hiram Page and John Whitmer. In any case, they were all quickly disillusioned and abandoned Strang completely.

Additionally, every single member of Joseph Smith's family except for Hyrum's widow also endorsed, joined, and sustained James Strang as "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator."

And then walked away after they realized he wasn't what he claimed to be.

What does this say about the credibility of the Book of Mormon witnesses if they were so easily duped by James Strang and his claims of being a prophet called of God to bring forth new scripture from ancient plates only to later turn out to be a fraud?

It says they still believed in Joseph's prophetic mission and the veracity of the Book of Mormon, one after Joseph was gone and they could have profited greatly from exposing him as a fraud. That strengthens their testimony of the Book of Mormon considerably.

NO DOCUMENT OF ACTUAL SIGNATURES

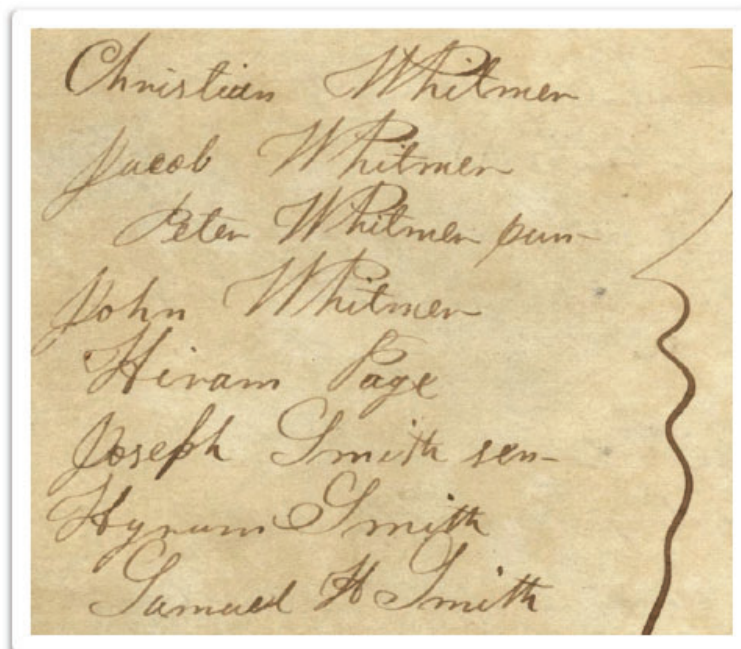
The closest thing we have in existence to an original document of the testimonies of the witnesses is a printer's manuscript written by Oliver Cowdery. (you can see black/white photo on *Joseph Smith Papers* [here](#))

Again, at the Church's own website, no less! More suppression?

Every witness name except Oliver Cowdery on that document is not signed; they are written in Oliver's own handwriting. Further, there is no testimony from any of the witnesses, with the exception of David Whitmer, directly attesting to the direct wording and claims of the manuscript or statements in the Book of Mormon.

Which means what, exactly? Every witness repeatedly reaffirmed their testimonies throughout their lives in a variety of settings. The statement was not a legal document, so no signatures were necessary. Certainly there's no record of any witness disputing any details of the statement.

Closest Original to Testimony of Witnesses



And isn't Oliver's penmanship lovely?

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

Not true at all. What, now you’re just going to re-quote the same hearsay again?

For example:

Testimony of Three Witnesses (which includes Martin Harris) states:

“...that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon;”

Martin Harris:

“...he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them...”

– Letter from Stephen Burnett to “Br. Johnson,” April 15, 1838, in Joseph Smith Letter Book, p. 2

Yep, that’s exactly what you’re going to do. Thank you for providing citation for this bogus hearsay quote the third time you cite it, as someone may have missed it the first two times around.

You cite Martin Harris, as if the quote that follows is firsthand, and then your quote begins with “he said he had hefted...” This is not a quote from Martin Harris. Every firsthand quote from Martin Harris reaffirms his testimony, so you repeat the same small handful of tired second-hand hearsay quotes instead.

Dude, this is getting ridiculous.

“I did not see them as I do that pencil-case, yet I saw them with the eye of faith; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me, though at the time they were covered over with a cloth.”

– Origin and History of the Mormonites, p. 406

Third time’s a charm, I guess. This is the third time you have used this precise quote, and the fifth time you have quoted John Clark. You don’t have a lot of ammunition here. Ironically, even when you include secondhand hearsay, there are less than half as many CES Letter witnesses against the Book of Mormon as there are original witnesses to the gold plates.

There is a difference between saying you “beheld and saw the plates and the engravings thereon” and saying you “hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them” or that the plates “were covered over with a cloth” and that you “did not see them as [you] do that pencil-case, yet [you] saw them with the eye of faith” or “with a spiritual eye.”

But there is no difference between these quotes and previous four or five times you cited them.

When I was a missionary, my understanding and impression from looking at the testimony of the Three and Eight Witnesses in the Book of Mormon was that the statements were legally binding documents in which the names represented signatures on the original document similar to what you would see on the original US Declaration of Independence.

It was? Why? It certainly wasn't my impression, and it certainly isn't anything that is taught by the Church. Why or how would these testimonies serve any binding legal purpose? These weren't affidavits; they weren't notarized. Nobody was going to introduce this stuff into a court of law. It's your weird assumption here that's the problem, not the testimony.

In any case, the Witnesses claimed that they did sign the original manuscript, most of which was destroyed via water damage. Only about 25% of it survives, so, yes, the original document was lost. That's bad news if any of these witnesses needs to use the original to apply for a loan or something, but it has no bearing on the veracity of their testimony whatsoever.

This is how I presented the testimonies to investigators.

Then, sorry to be blunt, but you were kind of a weird missionary who was off on his own program. No reference to the witnesses was found in the six discussions I taught, and I've since reviewed "Preach My Gospel," which is the current lesson plan, and it, too, makes no mention of the witnesses, let alone the supposedly legally binding nature of the document they signed.

According to the above manuscript that Oliver took to the printer for the Book of Mormon, they were not signatures.

And nobody has ever made any attempt to pretend that they were.

Since there is no document or evidence of any document whatsoever with the signatures of all of the witnesses, the only real testimonies we have from the witnesses are later interviews given by them and eyewitness accounts/affidavits made by others, some of which are shown previously.

And previously and previously and previously. (And previously.) But the only ones which are cited in the CES letter are a small handful of dubious hearsay statements which would be laughed out of a court of law.

From a legal perspective, the statements of the testimonies of the Three and Eight witnesses hold no credibility or weight in a court of law as there are a) no signatures of any of the witnesses except Oliver, b) no specific dates, c) no specific locations,

Good thing they were never intended to be presented in a court of law, then.

And, by the way, when I present the CES Letter to investigators, I do so having been under the impression that it is a legally binding document in which your name represented a signature on the original document similar to what you would see on the original US Declaration of Independence. Yet I can find no signature of yours, no evidence that it was ever notarized, changing dates and no location. Your letter would never have any credibility or weight in a court of law. Can we therefore assume that the whole thing is nonsense?

and d) some of the witnesses made statements after the fact that contradict and cast doubt on the specific claims made in the statements contained in the preface of the Book of Mormon.

You have precisely three such statements, all unreliable hearsay, you have previously presented the same three statements a total of twelve times. Previously.

CONCLUSION

“THE WITNESSES NEVER RECANTED OR DENIED THEIR TESTIMONIES”

Neither did James Strang’s witnesses; even after they were excommunicated from the church and estranged from Strang.

That’s because they had nothing to recant. They really did see the fake plates they dug up, just as a bunch of people saw the fake Kinderhook plates. The people who saw the Kinderhook plates have never recanted the fact that they saw them, just as I have never recanted my fish-in-a-tent story.



*A Dead Fish, Like Unto the Dead Fish I Witnessed In My Tent
I cannot and will not recant!!*

Neither did dozens of Joseph Smith's neighbors and peers who swore and signed affidavits on Joseph and his family's characters.

Were any of them asked to recant? Were any of them challenged on the veracity of their statements, or persecuted or ridiculed for making such statements? Maybe some of them thought better of their positions later on and changed their mind, but we'll never know, because as far as the record goes, they were never given any formal opportunity to recant.

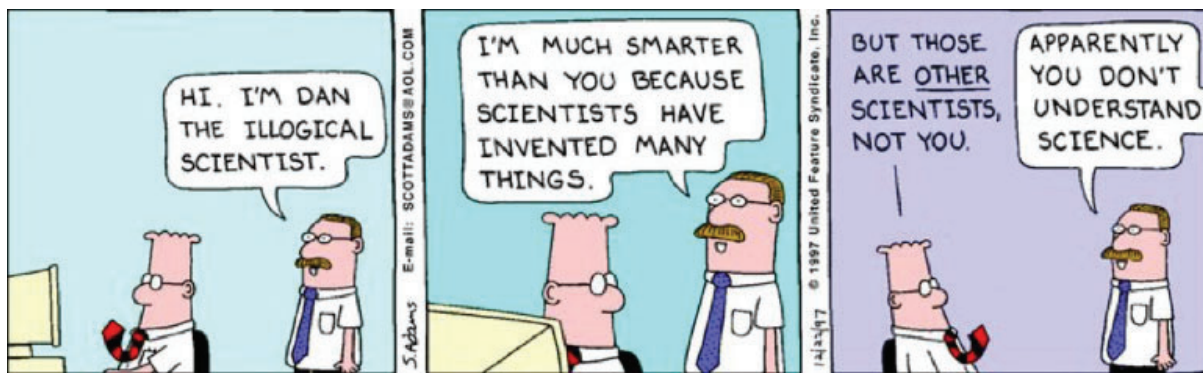
Neither did many of the Shaker witnesses who signed affidavits that they saw an angel on the roof top holding the *Sacred Roll and Book* written by founder Ann Lee. Same goes with the thousands of people over the centuries who claimed their entire lives to have seen the Virgin Mary and pointing to their experience as evidence that Catholicism is true.

There are also thousands of witnesses who never recanted their testimonies of seeing UFO's, Big Foot, the Loch Ness Monster, Abominable Snowman, Aliens, and so on.

It simply doesn't mean anything. People can believe in false things their entire lives and never recant. Just because they never denied or recanted does not follow that their experience and claims are true or that reality matches to what their perceived experience was.

The logical conclusion to this principle is that no witness on any subject can ever be believed, because there have been lots of false witnesses who have born testimony of ridiculous things. If we apply this warped logic to the CES Letter, we have to throw out everything you say, because people have written letters about religious topics that have later proven to be incorrect.

You and Dan the Illogical Scientist should hang out and swap stories.



For the record, I served my mission in Scotland and visited Loch Ness several times. Each time, there was a guy in a kilt standing in front of Urquhart Castle who made a living telling tall Nessie tales for tips, and the stories were different with every visit. (I think he was drunk.) Furthermore, none of his stories were signed or notarized, which would get them thrown out in a court of law.

PROBLEMS

1. In discussing the witnesses, we should not overlook the primary accounts of the events they testified to.

Then why do you do precisely that as you consistently and eagerly overlook all of their own primary accounts in favor of hearsay statements from decades after the fact?

The official statements published in the Book of Mormon are not dated, signed (we have no record with their signatures except for Oliver's), nor is a specific location given for where the events occurred. These are not eleven legally sworn affidavits but rather simple statements pre-written by Joseph Smith with claims of having been signed by three men and another by eight.

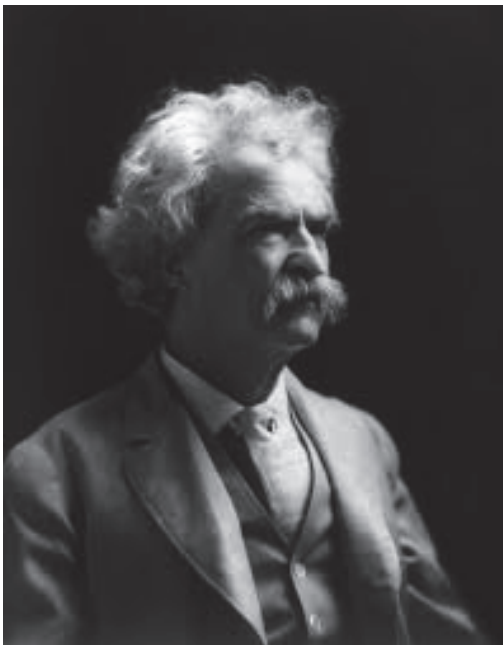
I'm sorry, but didn't you just say this? How is this charge in any way different from what you said a page or two ago? It was a goofy charge then, and it's a goofy charge now. Nobody other than you has ever presumed this was somehow a legally binding document. (Perhaps you ought to quote Stephen Burnett again.)

2. All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, excepting Martin Harris, were related by blood or marriage either with the Smiths or Whitmers. Oliver Cowdery (married to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer and cousin to Joseph Smith), Hiram Page (married to Catherine Whitmer), and the five Whitmers were related by marriage. Of course, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. were Joseph's brothers and father.

Mark Twain made light of this obvious problem:

"...I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified." – *Roughing It*, p.107-115

Mark Twain is awesome. Have you read what he had to say about Mormon women?



Our stay in Salt Lake City amounted to only two days, and therefore we had no time to make the customary inquisition into the workings of polygamy and get up the usual statistics and deductions preparatory to calling the attention of the nation at large once more to the matter.

I had the will to do it. With the gushing self-sufficiency of youth I was feverish to plunge in headlong and achieve a great reform here—until I saw the Mormon women. Then I was touched. My heart was wiser than my head. It warmed toward these poor, ungainly and pathetically “homely” creatures, and as I turned to hide the generous moisture in my

eyes, I said, “No—the man that marries one of them has done an act of Christian charity which entitles him to the kindly applause of mankind, not their harsh censure—and the man that marries sixty of them has done a deed of open-handed generosity so sublime that the nations should stand uncovered in his presence and worship in silence.

As to the fact that all the witnesses were related, I’m not quite sure what your point is. This is only really an issue with the Eight Witnesses, not the the Three Witnesses, who weren’t related except in the case Oliver Cowdery, who was third cousin to Joseph’s mother, making him Joseph’s third cousin once removed. (I’m curious as to how many of your third cousins once removed you know personally.) Citing Oliver’s marriage to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer does not support your argument at all, as the marriage took place in 1832, two years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The supernatural nature of the experience of the Three Witnesses is a far bigger deal than the more mundane experience of the Eight Witnesses, and, in any case, this is just one more ad hominem attack that doesn’t address the particulars of their testimony.

3. Within eight years, all of the Three Witnesses were excommunicated from the Church. This is what Joseph Smith said about them in 1838:

“Such characters as ...John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them.” – History of the Church Vol. 3, Ch. 15, p. 232

This is what First Counselor of the First Presidency and once close associate Sidney Rigdon had to say about Oliver Cowdery:

“...a lying, thieving, counterfeiting man who was ‘united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs in the deepest dye, to deceive, cheat, and defraud the saints out of their property, by every art and stratagem which wickedness could invent...”
– February 15, 1841 Letter and Testimony, p.6-9

What does it say about the witnesses and their characters if even the Prophet and his counselor in the First Presidency thought they were questionable and unsavory?

It says the witnesses, being personally insulted, had even more incentive to stick it to Joseph Smith and expose him as a fraud, which they could have done easily. Why didn’t they?

4. As mentioned in the above “Polygamy/Polyandry” section, Joseph was able to influence and convince many of the 31 witnesses to lie and perjure in a sworn affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist.

As mentioned above, this is not accurate. The 31 witnesses signed an affidavit – wait, do we have their original signatures? – stating that Joseph was not engaged in John C. Bennett’s “spiritual wifery,” which he was not, and that he was not an adulterer, which he also was not. No lie and no perjury.

Is it outside the realm of possibility that Joseph was also able to influence or manipulate the experiences of his own magical thinking, treasure digging family and friends as witnesses?

I would think so, yes. Joseph spurned them, insulted them, and kicked them out, and they faced personal and financial ruin for refusing to recant. If their testimony was based solely on Joseph's manipulations, their disaffection provided them with every reason to expose him as a fraud at the earliest opportunity.

5. If the Prophet Joseph Smith could get duped with the Kinderhook Plates thinking that the 19th century fake plates were a legitimate record of a "descendent of Ham," how is having gullible guys like Martin Harris handling the covered gold plates going to prove anything?

Joseph was not duped by the Kinderhook Plates, and Martin saw the plates and the angel, contrary to the sixth(!) time you have invoked this piece of unreliable hearsay.

James Strang's claims and Voree Plates Witnesses are distinctive and more impressive compared to the Book of Mormon Witnesses:

Utter nonsense. No angels, no voice from heaven, no Urim and Thummin, Liahona, or Sword of Laban. Nothing supernatural. Far less distinctive and completely unimpressive.

- All of Strang's witnesses were not related to one another through blood or marriage like the Book of Mormon Witnesses were.

Nor were any of the Three Witnesses, barring a third cousin.

- Some of the witnesses were not members of Strang's church.

None of the Three or Eight Witnesses were members of Joseph's church, because the church was not yet organized when they wrote their testimonies.

- The Voree Plates were displayed in a museum for both members and non-members to view and examine.

Because there was nothing ancient, valuable, supernatural, or particularly remarkable about them.

- Strang provided 4 witnesses who testified that on his instructions, they actually dug the plates up for Strang while he waited for them to do so.

Digging is hard.

- They confirmed that the ground looked previously undisturbed.

Just as my tent looked undisturbed when I found the dead fish in it. We've been over this already. I cannot and will not recant!

7. The Shakers and Ann Lee:

The Shakers felt that “Christ has made his second appearance on earth, in a chosen female known by the name of Ann Lee, and acknowledged by us as our Blessed Mother in the work of redemption” (*Sacred Roll and Book*, p.358). The Shakers, of course, did not believe in the Book of Mormon, but they had a book entitled *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book; From the Lord God of Heaven, to the Inhabitants of Earth.*



Cool! They look like they’re doing the dance in the “Thriller” video.

More than 60 individuals gave testimony to the *Sacred Roll and Book*, which was published in 1843. Although not all of them mention angels appearing, some of them tell of many angels visiting them. One woman told of eight different visions.

Here is the testimony statement (page 304 of *Sacred Roll and Book*):

We, the undersigned, hereby testify, that we saw the holy Angel standing upon the house-top, as mentioned in the foregoing declaration, holding the Roll and Book.

*BETSEY BOOTHE.
LOUISA CHAMBERLAIN.
CATY DE WITT.
LAURA ANN JACOBS.
SARAH MARIA LEWIS.*

SARAH ANN SPENCER.

LUCINDA MCDONIELS.

MARIA HEDRICK.

So we shouldn't accept the testimony of Book of Mormon witnesses because the Shakers, who no longer exist and whose central claims have been completely discredited by the passage of time, claimed to see angels? How is that anything but a non sequitur? Each testimony should be evaluated on its own merits. As it stands, the Shakers no longer exist, so I don't see much value in reviewing their testimonies.

Joseph Smith only had three witnesses who claimed to see an angel. The Shakers, however, had a large number of witnesses who claimed they saw angels and the Sacred Roll and Book.

And the Shakers no longer exist, which pretty much destroys the credibility of Shaker witness claims.

There are over a hundred pages of testimony from "Living Witnesses."

And yet the Shakers aren't living any more – it's a completely dead and discredited movement. Are you arguing that we ought to resurrect the dead Shaker movement based on these witnesses?

The evidence seems to show that Martin Harris accepted the *Sacred Roll and Book* as a divine revelation.

No, it doesn't, no matter how many times you recycle the same tired hearsay quotes. (I think it's four for this one.)

Clark Braden stated: "Harris declared repeatedly that he had as much evidence for a Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon" (The Braden and Kelly Debate, p.173).

Braden, who never met Harris, passed along this uncorroborated hearsay years after Harris's death and decades after Harris allegedly said it. I resent having to type that again, as this is the fifth time you've quoted this. You may enjoy repeating yourself, but I find it tedious.

Why should we believe the Book of Mormon witnesses but not the Shakers witnesses?

Because time has conclusively demonstrated that the Shaker witnesses were wrong, based on the fact that the Shakers no longer exist. There is no reason to consider the Shaker witnesses in evaluating the Book of Mormon witnesses. Each should be evaluated on their own merits.

What are we to make of the reported Martin Harris comment that he had as much evidence for the Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon?

We are to make that you are obsessed with unreliable hearsay nonsense and enjoy repeating yourself. (For a sixth time with this quote.)

In light of the James Strang/Voree Plates witnesses,

who claimed to see something as mundane as a fish in a tent,

the fact that all of the Book of Mormon Witnesses – except Martin Harris – were related to either Joseph Smith or David Whitmer,

which is overblown – third cousin once removed? – and largely irrelevant,

along with the fact that all of the witnesses were treasure hunters who believed in second sight,

which is not true,

and in light of their superstitions and reputations...

which were mild superstitions in line with conventional 19th Century thinking, and the undeniable fact that they enjoyed very good reputations for honesty and good character,

why would anyone gamble with their lives in believing in a book based on anything these men said or claimed or what's written on the testimonies of the Witnesses page in the Book of Mormon?

Sorry, who's gambling their lives by believing in the Book of Mormon? Certainly not you or me. You know who was? The Three and Eight Witnesses, who experienced massive persecution and personal ruin for refusing to back down from their testimonies.

The mistake that is made by 21st century Mormons is that they're seeing the Book of Mormon Witnesses as empirical, rational, nineteenth-century men instead of the nineteenth-century magical thinking, superstitious, and treasure digging men they were.

No, the mistake is that presentist 21st Century ex-Latter-day Saints like you condescend to 19th Century men and distort harmless beliefs in antiquated superstitions into something more significant than they actually were.

They have ignored the peculiarities of their worldview, and by so doing, they misunderstand their experiences as witnesses.

It's very easy to misunderstand witnesses when you ignore everything they actually said in favor of a handful of hearsay statements that you repeat ad nauseum, each time pretending they're something new.

At the end of the day? It all doesn't matter.

It doesn't? Then why are you wasting my time?

The Book of Mormon Witnesses and their testimonies of the gold plates are irrelevant.

They are? Then why didn't you say so? I could have moved on to the next chapter.

It does not matter whether eleven 19th century treasure diggers with magical worldviews saw some gold plates or not.

Well, it matters somewhat that you misrepresent farmers and schoolteachers as professional treasure diggers, as your eagerness to label them in the most negative light possible demonstrates your unwillingness to engage this issue with any attempt to keep an open mind.

It doesn't matter because of this one simple fact:

Let me guess: A rock? A hat?

JOSEPH DID NOT USE THE GOLD PLATES FOR TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON



sigh

I honestly do not understand why the rock in the hat is such a huge obstacle for you. If Joseph had translated the record by means of plucking his own eyebrows and lighting them on fire, it would make no difference to me whatsoever. The product of the method, not the method itself, is what matters. You have not come anywhere close to discrediting the Book of Mormon with repeated whining about rocks in hats.

I won't bother reposting here the language you plagiarized from the graphic in your last version of the CES Letter. After this section, I've had it with vain repetition.

TEMPLES AND FREEMASONRY

Concerns & Questions

“Because of their Masonic characters the ceremonies of the temple are sacred and not for the public.”

– OCTOBER 15, 1911, MESSAGE FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENCY, 4:25.0

“Because of their Masonic characters the ceremonies of the temple are sacred and not for the public. But there is nothing disloyal in them, as so often asserted, nor in their performance is there the slightest departure from the principles of decorum and propriety.”

– OCTOBER 15, 1911, MESSAGE FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENCY, 4:25.0

SHORT ANSWER:

There's nothing sinister about Masonic influence in Latter-day Saint temple ceremonies, and these ordinances will be performed for the entirety of the human family, making the temple universally inclusive.

LONG ANSWER:

1. Just seven weeks after [Joseph's Masonic initiation](#), Joseph introduced the LDS endowment ceremony in [May 1842](#).

While there are elements of the temple ceremony that demonstrably precede Joseph initiation into Masonry – chunks of the Book of Moses are in the endowment ceremony, for instance – I think you're absolutely right not to chalk this up to coincidence. The pattern Joseph set was that events served as catalysts for seeking revelation. Remember, the Word of Wisdom came as the result of Emma getting tired of cleaning up tobacco stains. The revelation on plural marriage came after Joseph asked a question in the course of translating the KJV. Answers from heaven are received only after someone asks.

Since revelation doesn't come in a vacuum, my guess is that Joseph sensed something ancient in the Masonic ceremony and asked about it, which led to the endowment. I don't think there's anything sinister in acknowledging the likely connection.

2. President Heber C. Kimball, a Mason himself and a member of the First Presidency for 21 years, made the following statement:

“We have the true Masonry. The Masonry of today is received from the apostasy which took place in the days of Solomon, and David. They have now and then a thing that is correct, but we have the real thing.”

– Stanley B. Kimball, Heber C. Kimball and Family: The Nauvoo Years, p.458

Sure. In other words, the Masons have some ancient practices – “now and then a thing is correct – mixed in with apostate corruptions, and the endowment represents the truth of what masonry should be.

3. If Masonry had the original temple ceremony but became distorted over time, why doesn't the LDS ceremony more closely resemble an earlier form of Masonry, which would be more correct rather than the exact version that Joseph Smith was exposed to in his March 1842 Nauvoo, Illinois initiation?

Two things. One, you're frankly acknowledging here that the Mormon endowment ceremony is different enough from Masonry to be its own thing and not just a pale copy of Masonic ritual, which is the accusation that most critics of the Church make. Second, why should an

earlier form of Masonry be more correct? The rituals of Solomon's temple preceded Masonry by thousands of years. Whatever changes modern Masons have made to their ceremony took place over a relatively short period of time in comparison, so they would be unlikely to have any bearing on whatever portion of truth survived the intervening millennia between Solomon and the Masons.

You're making assumptions again and not recognizing that you're likely to be proceeding from a flawed premise.

4. Freemasonry has zero links to Solomon's temple.

Define "links." You would be correct to say that it's impossible to demonstrate that the rituals of Masonry have been handed down from the time of Solomon in an unbroken chain. You would be incorrect to say that Masons have not appropriated their understanding of ancient practices into their ceremony. The "link," then, would not be a passed-down line of authority but one of similar ideas, many of which the Masons undoubtedly got wrong but a few, apparently, they got right.

Although more a Church folklore, with origins from comments made by early Mormon Masons such as Heber C. Kimball, than being Church doctrine, it's a myth that the endowment ceremony has its origins from Solomon's temple or that Freemasonry passed down parts of the endowment over the centuries from Solomon's temple.

The Church makes no attempt to claim that either Freemasonry or the endowment claim their authority from being "passed down" in an unbroken chain from Solomon's temple.

By way of comparison, the Roman Catholic Church claims their priesthood authority through apostolic succession, while the Mormons claim that their priesthood authority was restored after a long period of apostasy. So while one group claims to have their authority passed down in an unbroken chain while the other claims it was lost and then restored, both groups agree that there is such a thing as priesthood authority, and that there was such a thing as priesthood authority anciently.

Similarly, our authority to perform the endowment ceremony and sealing ordinances does not come from a claim of "masonic succession," so to speak. While many, including me, believe that what we do now in temples bears a resemblance to what they did anciently – although we don't know the extent of that resemblance – our authority to perform these ordinances came by means of modern revelation, not from being passed down.

Solomon's temple was all about animal sacrifice.

Oh, nonsense. Solomon's temple had a whole lot more going on than just animal sacrifice. If you doubt me, then consult the [infallible Wikipedia](#):

Freemasonry has its origins to stone tradesmen in medieval Europe – not in 950 BC Jerusalem.

True, although Freemasonry was attempting to mimic the rituals of what happened in 950 BC Jerusalem.

FairMormon admits these facts:

“Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence to support a continuous functioning line from Solomon’s Temple to the present. We know what went on in Solomon’s Temple; it’s the ritualistic slaughter of animals.”

– [The Message and the Messenger: Latter-day Saints and Freemasonry](#)



Solomon’s Temple
Much More than Animal Sacrifice

It’s rather misleading to say that “FairMormon admits these facts,” as this is an article that is solely the responsibility of its author, not of FairMormon as a whole, and it’s certainly not the official position of the Church. The writer, a man named Greg Kearney, is both a Latter-day Saint and a Mason, so he’s got an interesting perspective, but he makes no claims of being a scholar, and he is mistaken about Solomon’s Temple, which included much more than the ritualistic slaughter of animals.

That said, it’s a fascinating article, and it offers an interesting perspective on the relationship between temple rituals and Masonry that I had never considered before:

I draw a bright line between the temple endowment and the temple ritual.

The endowment is revealed doctrine necessary for the salvation of the Saints. It teaches us God's relationship to man; our duties and our responsibilities. The endowment has never changed and if you think about it, what the endowment is are commitments to the law of sacrifice, to the law of consecration, to the law of chastity. These things are fixed and these things can be found throughout every dispensation of time. That is the endowment.

It's revelatory in nature and content, it's a restorationist view of religion, it offers universal salvation—Latter-day Saints are Universalists as I always say which always makes everybody shudder.

So we have the endowment and then we have the messenger: the ritual. How the endowment is taught and this is where I believe Masonry played a part. Joseph Smith sat in Lodge, he watched as humble farmers—most of whom he knew probably couldn't read and write well—learned complicated, difficult ritual and he said in his mind, 'Ah! This is how I'll do it. This is how I'll teach the endowment to the Saints.' Why? Because they already knew the ritual. They wouldn't pay attention to the ritual; they'd pay attention to the message because they already knew the ritual. And so, there is that kind of genesis, that ritualistic form, that asking of questions back and forth that we get. All of that comes as Joseph Smith tries to communicate these truths.

I think this is brilliant, and it encapsulates the core of the endowment's relationship with masonry. The ritualistic structure is similar to Masonry, but the message of what is being taught by the ritual is not. The message of the endowment is the only thing that matters, and the ritual can be altered, or even abandoned, if it's no longer helpful or necessary.

“Masonry, while claiming a root in antiquity, can only be reliably traced to medieval stone tradesmen.”

– Similarities Between Masonic and Mormon Temple Ritual

The sentence directly preceding this one provides helpful context: “Many of the Masonic symbols to which Mr. Norton refers pre-date Freemasonry by thousands of years.” In other words, there are ancient elements incorporated into Masonry, and many of those same elements are in the Latter-day Saint temple ritual. That does not mean that Masonry has been an unbroken tradition since antiquity.

This is another excellent article by Greg Kearney, and it includes another great summary of the connection between Latter-day Saint temples and Masonic tradition:

...the endowment ritual has undergone many changes over the years. The ritual is changed to meet the needs of members and to better communicate the endowment to them. Remember, there is a difference between the endowment ritual and the endowment itself. The ritual is not the endowment, but how the endowment is taught—in much the same way that the Catholic Mass is not Holy Communion but

how Holy Communion is given to the congregation.

When Joseph was first trying to communicate the truths of the endowment he used a ritual form familiar to the saints of his day. That ritual form was, in some respects, Masonic in nature. As the saints lost their connection to Masonry the symbolic meaning of the penalties and other Masonic elements was lost as well. They became meaningless to all but a few Latter-day Saint Freemasons. So the penalties were removed along with other elements both Masonic and non-Masonic which no longer served the purpose of communicating the truths of the endowment.

“It is clear that Freemasonry and its traditions played a role in the development of the endowment ritual.”

– Similarities Between Masonic and Mormon Temple Ritual

Context, please. If you’re going to use this quote, you have a responsibility to at least use the whole sentence:

“It is clear that Freemasonry and its traditions played a role in the development of the endowment ritual *but not the degree that Mr. Norton would like to suggest.*” [Emphasis added.]

The whole paragraph is helpful, actually, as it’s clear that Kearney is making a point directly opposite to the one you’re trying to make with his words :

It is clear that Freemasonry and its traditions played a role in the development of the endowment ritual but not the degree that Mr. Norton would like to suggest. Further he also brings up only similarities not the differences between the two. For example the central story in the endowment is the allegory of Adam and Eve. In Masonry it is the story of the master builder of Solomon’s temple Hiram Abiff. Whole vast sections of the Masonic ritual are not and have never been found in the temple endowment.

The simple fact is that no one ever received their endowment in a Masonic lodge and no one has ever been made a Mason in an LDS temple. As a LDS Freemason I find the similarities reassuring rather than disturbing.

If there’s no connection to Solomon’s temple, what’s so divine about a man-made medieval European secret fraternity and its rituals?

I don’t know of any prophet or apostle who has ever claimed Freemasonry is divine. If they did, we’d all be counseled to become Freemasons.

5. Why did the Church remove the blood oath penalties and the 5 Points of Fellowship at the veil from the endowment ceremony in 1990? Both of these were 100% Masonic rituals.

They were probably removed because both were 100% Masonic rituals and unnecessary.

What does this say about the Temple and the endowment ceremony if 100% pagan Masonic rituals were in it from its inception?

“Pagan?” That’s an interesting complaint. Since you’re now something of an agnostic/atheist, why would you be at all concerned about paganism? Accusations of paganism usually come from evangelical Christians who think paganism is Satanic. For my part, if something appears to be pagan, it’s probably because it’s quite ancient, which undermines the idea that all of this is a medieval invention.

What does it say about the Church if it removed something that Joseph Smith said he restored and which would never again be taken away from the earth?

Joseph Smith said that penalties and the 5 Points of Fellowship would never be taken from the earth? When? Perhaps you’re referring to the sealing power, the keys of the priesthood, and the spirit of Elijah, all of which are still very much a part of temple worship.

6. Is God really going to require people to know secret tokens, handshakes, and signs to get into the Celestial Kingdom?

Yes, which is why God is going to provide that information to every person who has ever lived or ever will live by means of proxy temple ordinances. The temple is extraordinarily inclusive in a way that no other religious tradition can match.

What is the purpose of them?

To establish a covenantal relationship with the whole human family that will “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers’ (Malachi 4:6) and bind together every person who has ever lived. A magnificent purpose, I’d say.

Doesn’t Heavenly Father know our names and know us personally? Indeed, aren’t the very hairs on our heads numbered?

He does, and they are. What does that have to do with temples?

And couldn’t those who have left the Church and still know of the secret tokens, handshakes, and signs (or those who have watched the endowment ceremony on You Tube) benefit from that knowledge?

The covenants are the issue, not the physical mechanics of the covenants. Those mechanics aren’t likely to be helpful to those who either violate their covenants or never made the covenants in the first place. At the same time, every member of the human family will have the opportunity to make these covenants for themselves, so YouTube is superfluous.

7.Does the eternal salvation, eternal happiness, and eternal sealings of families really depend on medieval originated Masonic rituals in multi-million dollar castles?

Earlier, you admitted that the endowment ceremony has significantly departed from Masonry, and now you call the endowment nothing more than “medieval originated Masonic rituals.”

Which is it? Make up your mind.

Eternal salvation, eternal happiness, and eternal sealings depend on the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. The rituals are symbols that connect us to God, but it is God that saves, not the rituals.

Is God really going to separate good couples and their children who love one other and who want to be together in the next life because they object to uncomfortable and strange Masonic temple rituals and a polygamous heaven?

No one is going to be forced to live polygamously, so a “polygamous heaven” isn’t a helpful description. As for God separating couples and families, why should he? All those couples and children will have these rituals performed on their behalf, so there will be no need to separate them. The temple doctrine of redemption of the dead are extraordinarily inclusive and know of no parallel in the wider Christian world. But it’s nice that you got another dig in there about polygamy instead of one more mention of the rock in the hat.

You’ve added a graphic showing the Five Points of Fellowship that I chose not to include in this reply, as I think many would see it as disrespectful to both Latter-day Saints and to Freemasons. It is quite true that this was a ritual element in Latter-day Saint temple worship until 1990, just as it’s true that it is no longer used or relevant. Instead, here’s a sphinx from outside the Masonic Temple in Salt Lake City, which is cool-looking.



SCIENCE

Concerns & Questions

“Since the Gospel embraces all truth, there can never be any genuine contradictions between true science and true religion...I am obliged, as a Latter-day Saint, to believe whatever is true, regardless of the source.”

– HENRY EYRING, *FAITH OF A SCIENTIST*, P. 12,31

*“Latter-day revelation teaches that there was **no death on this earth before the fall of Adam**. Indeed, death entered the world as a direct result of the Fall.”*

– 2017 LDS BIBLE DICTIONARY TOPIC: DEATH

“4000 B.C. – Fall of Adam”

– 2017 LDS BIBLE DICTIONARY TOPIC: CHRONOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

“More than 90 percent of all organisms that have ever lived on Earth are extinct...At least a handful of times in the last 500 million years, 50 to more than 90 percent of all species on Earth have disappeared in a geological blink of the eye.”

– NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, *MASS EXTINCTIONS*

“The idea that the religion of Christ is one thing, and science is another, is a mistaken idea, for there is no true religion without true science, and consequently there is no true science without true religion.”

- BRIGHAM YOUNG, 1874

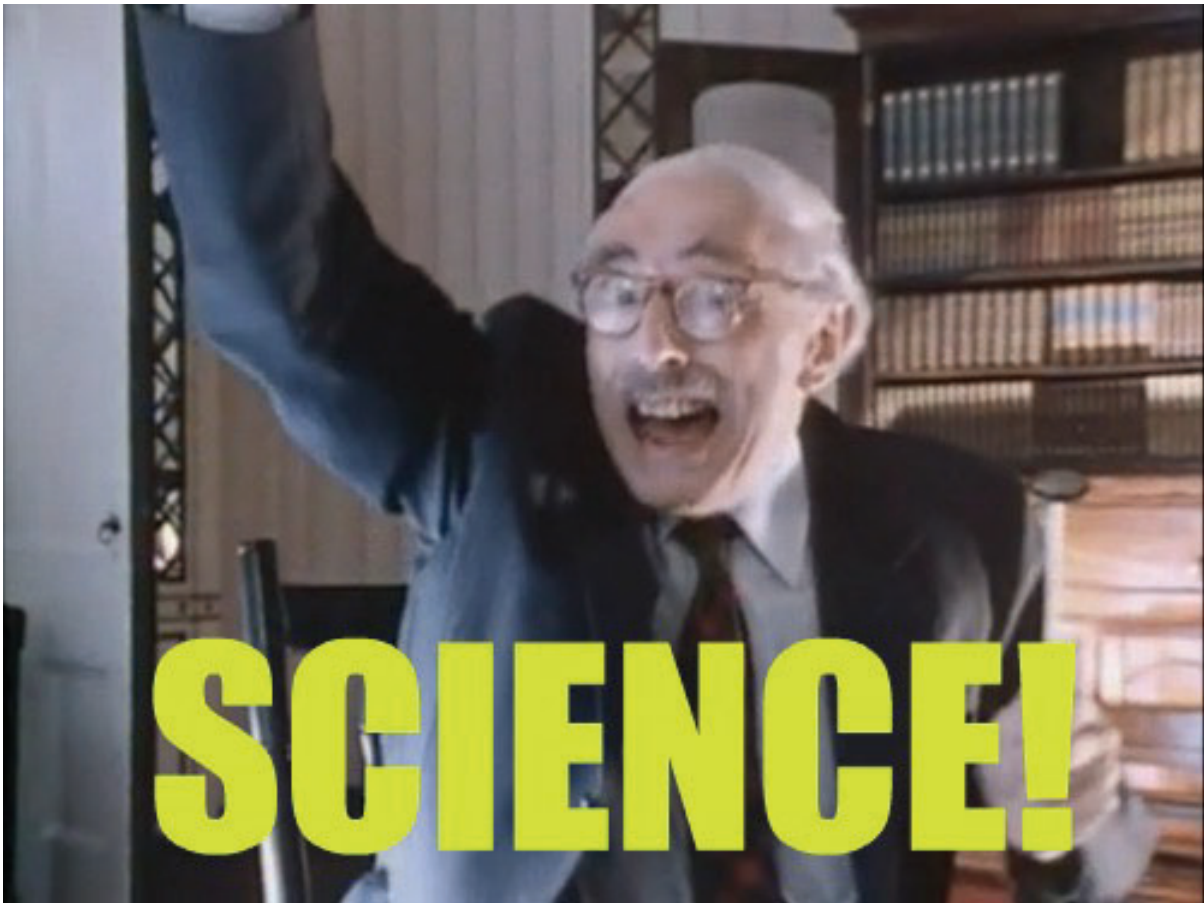
“In these respects we differ from the Christian world, for our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. ... [W]hether the Lord found the earth empty and void, whether he made it out of nothing or out of the rude elements; or whether he made it in six days or in as many millions of years, is and will remain a matter of speculation in the minds of men unless he give revelation on the subject.”

- BRIGHAM YOUNG, 1971

SHORT ANSWER:

Latter-day Saint theology is remarkably accepting of scientific truth, and supposed conflicts between science and religion are largely matters of personal opinion, not Church doctrine. No one is required to reject science to be a faithful Church member, and evolution and geological time are taught at Church-owned universities.

LONG ANSWER:



The problem Mormonism encounters is that so many of its claims are well within the realm of scientific study, and as such, can be proven or disproven.

No, the real problem is that you're about to make a lot of scientific claims for the Church that the Church doesn't make for itself.

To cling to faith in these areas, where the overwhelming evidence is against it, is willful ignorance, not spiritual dedication.

It's a good thing, then, that Latter-day Saints are not required to take a scientific position on what is figurative and what is literal in scriptural stories.

[1.2 Nephi 2:22](#) and [Alma 12:23-24](#) state there was no death of any kind (humans, all animals, birds, fish, dinosaurs, etc.) on this earth until the "Fall of Adam..."

Here's 2 Nephi 2:22:

And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

Where does this say there was no death of any kind on this earth before the Fall?

Here's Alma 12: 23-24:

And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.

And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.

Where does this say there was no death of any kind on this earth before the Fall?

... which according to [D&C 77:6-7](#) occurred 7,000 years ago.

Here's D&C 77:6-7:

6 Q. What are we to understand by the book which John saw, which was sealed on the back with seven seals?

A. We are to understand that it contains the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence.

7 Q. What are we to understand by the seven seals with which it was sealed?

A. We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh.

Where do these scriptures mention the date of the Fall of Adam?

This scripture has long fascinated me, as it refers to the seven thousand years of the earth's "temporal existence." What does that mean? Since we reject *ex nihilo* creation and believe the matter out of which the earth was made is eternal, surely that dirt is older than 7,000 years – it's so old, in fact, that it can't really be measured. Is that what D&C 77 is saying – the physical planet has only existed for 7,000 years? (Actually, the real number would be less than 6,000 years, because the last thousand years of the temporal existence would constitute the millennium in which Christ reigns personally on the earth.) Because that's not just inconsistent with science; it's inconsistent with scripture.

7,000 years isn't the chronological age of dirt; it's the length of earth's "continuance" or "temporal existence." So what does that mean?

I think of it in these terms. How old is the city of London?

According to Wikipedia, infallible source of all wisdom, the city was founded in 43 AD and first referred to as "Londinium" a little less than a century later. Did London exist prior to 43 AD? Well, physically, yes, of course it did. The Thames was flowing, but it wasn't called the Thames. All the dirt was presumably there, too, but it wasn't called London, because there was no one there to call it London. So it really wasn't quite London yet, despite its geographical relationship to the town and then city that would later occupy that spot of ground.



Londinium circa 200 AD

Not too long after the start of its temporal history

History is concerned with chronology and where there is no chronology, there isn't really any history to speak of, either. Anthropologists refer to the era prior to man's arrival as "pre-history," as in "prehistoric times." So when does history begin?

Specifically, if the chunks of matter that make up the earth have always existed, at what point did they participate in earth's "continuance" or "temporal," i.e. time-based, "existence?" I submit that the criteria is the same as that of when London began.

History began when people showed up who were capable of recording time, which would require mathematics, writing, and philosophy – in a word, civilization. It's not scientifically ludicrous to say that, regardless of biological origins, functional human civilization is somewhere around 7,000 years old, give or take.

In any case, I don't think the idea of earth's 7,000 year-old temporal existence mentioned in Latter-Day Saint scripture ought to be viewed through an *ex nihilo* filter, nor do I think it presents a significant intellectual roadblock to credible theories about the origins of both the

earth and the life upon it.

So where does the Fall of Adam fit into that timeframe? No idea. God has not seen fit to reveal the dates or the process, so I feel no responsibility to worry about it or to reject scientific evidence about both the age of the earth and the origins of life.

It is scientifically established there has been life and death on this planet for billions of years. How does the Church reconcile this?

It doesn't.

“Whether the mortal bodies of man evolved in natural processes to present perfection, through the direction and power of God; whether the first parents of our generations, Adam and Eve, were transplanted from another sphere, with immortal tabernacles, which became corrupted through sin and the partaking of natural foods, in the process of time; whether they were born here in mortality, as other mortals have been, are questions not fully answered in the revealed word of God.” (Improvement Era, August, 1908, 778.)

“The Church itself has no philosophy about the modus operandi employed by the Lord in His creation of the world” (Joseph F. Smith, *Juvenile Instructor* 46 (April 1911): 208-09).

That one's kind of fun, as Joseph F.'s son, Joseph Fielding Smith, wrote a book called *Man: His Origin and Destiny* to refute evolution and claim the earth was only a few thousand years old. He tried to get the Church to publish the book, but my great-grandfather David O. McKay, who was a firm believer in evolution, death before the Fall, and geological time, disagreed with Joseph Fielding Smith on just about everything in that book.

Here's a letter President McKay wrote on the subject:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
47 E. South Temple Street
Salt Lake City, Utah
David O. McKay, President

February 3, 1959

Dr. A. Kent Christensen
Department of Anatomy
Cornell University Medical College
1300 York Avenue
New York 21, New York

Dear Brother Christensen:

I have your letter of January 23, 1959 in which you ask for a statement of the Church's position on the subject of evolution.

The Church has issued no official statement on the subject of the theory of evolution.

Neither 'Man, His Origin and Destiny' by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, nor 'Mormon Doctrine' by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, is an official publication of the Church...

Sincerely yours,
[signed]
David O. McKay
(President)

How do we explain the massive fossil evidence showing not only animal death but also the deaths of at least 14 different Hominin species over the span of 250,000 years prior to Adam?

We explain it by teaching precisely that information in biology classes at church-owned universities like BYU and BYU-Idaho.

2. If Adam and Eve are the first humans, how do we explain the dozen or so other Hominid species who lived and died 35,000 – 2.4 million years before Adam? When did those guys stop being human?

That's a question that B.H. Roberts and James E. Talmage frequently asked, as they believed in the idea of "pre-Adamites," as they called them. It is true many prophets and apostles doubted evolution, but many more have not. The Church has taken no official position on the subject, so there's no need for it to "explain" any of this, as it's not spiritually relevant. The Church is concerned with why God created the heavens and the earth, not how.

3. Genetic science and testing has advanced significantly the past few decades. I was surprised to learn from results of my own genetic test that 1.6% of my DNA is Neanderthal.

I suspect mine would be higher. I'm quite the caveman. I often leave the milk out after eating a bowl of cereal.

How does this fact fit with Mormon theology and doctrine that I am a literal descendant of a literal Adam and Eve from about 7,000 years ago?

Given that there is no official Church theology that gives us a date for Adam and Eve, I'd say you don't have to worry about that in the slightest.

Where do the Neanderthals fit in?

Perhaps you should ask a BYU biology professor, who will likely give you an answer that is consistent with modern scientific thinking.

How do I have pre-Adamic Neanderthal DNA and Neanderthal blood circulating my veins when this species died off about 33,000 years before Adam and Eve?

Many Latter-day Saints have many different answers to that question. Officially, the Church has no position on the matter.

Other events/claims that science has discredited:

- Tower of Babel (a staple story of the Jaredites in the Book of Mormon)

Science has nothing whatsoever to say about the Tower of Babel. Nobody knows where it was, or when it was supposed to have happened. I think there was an actual Tower of Babel, but I neither know nor particularly care how much of the story that has been handed down is literal or figurative. I assume there are elements of both.

- Global flood (4,500 years ago)

There are fully active and faithful Latter-day Saints of every stripe who believe anything and everything that it is possible to believe about the story of Noah and the flood – some who insist that it is 100% scientifically accurate, and others who insist the whole thing is a fable, and everywhere in between. The Church does not require its members to believe any scientific information about a global flood, least of all that it took place 4,500 years ago.

- Humans and animals having their origins from Noah's family and the animals contained in the ark 4,500 years ago. It is scientifically impossible, for example, for the bear to have evolved into several species (Sun Bear, Polar Bear, Grizzly Bear, etc.) from common ancestors from Noah's time just a few thousand years ago.

It's cool that you really like bears. Why would they have had to evolve since Noah's time? Why couldn't there have been all those different bears on the ark? You're making assumptions here based on very little information.

Mind you, I'm not saying there were all those different kinds of bears on the ark - I don't know how much of Noah's ark is literal and how much is figurative, so I don't much care.

There are a host of other impossibilities associated with Noah's Ark story claims.

Maybe this makes me naive, but I feel no need to raise my hand in Sunday School and point out the scientific improbability of Noah's ark, but neither do I get indignant when a biology teacher describes the evolutionary process. There's room in the Church for people who believe all sorts of things about science, and there's no litmus test requiring any degree of literal scriptural interpretation. Latter-day Saint theology teaches that we should seek after truth wherever we can find it, which means we should learn more about science, not less.

OTHER

Concerns & Questions

“The dominant narrative is not true. It can’t be sustained.”

– RICHARD BUSHMAN, LDS HISTORIAN, SCHOLAR, PATRIARCH
[VIDEO](#) | [BUSHMAN’S AFTERMATH LETTER](#)

July 19, 2016

In the middle of the week last week I began to receive thank you notes from people who had read a statement of mine about the Church’s historical narrative requiring reconstruction. I had no idea what was going on until Dan Peterson wrote about a “kerfuffle”—the word of choice for the occasion—on the blogs...

Sampling a few of the comments on Dan Peterson’s blog I discovered that some people thought I had thrown in the towel and finally admitted the Church’s story of its divine origins did not hold up. Others read my words differently; I was only saying that there were many errors in the standard narrative that required correction...

As it is, I still come down on the side of the believers in inspiration and divine happenings—in angels, plates, translations, revelations—while others viewing the same facts are convinced they disqualify Joseph Smith entirely. A lot of pain, anger, and alienation come out of these disputes. I wish we could find ways to be more generous and understanding with one another.”

– RICHARD BUSHMAN, LDS HISTORIAN, SCHOLAR, PATRIARCH, IN HIS SUPPOSED “AFTERMATH LETTER,” WHERE HE AGAIN MAKES IT CLEAR HE DOES NOT AGREE WITH JEREMY RUNNELLS OR THE CES LETTER.

SHORT ANSWER:

The CES Letter led with your strongest arguments, and all of them fall woefully short. Given that reality, it's not surprising that you get nowhere with this assorted handful of leftovers.

LONG ANSWER:

These concerns are secondary to all of the above.

Yes. We all realize that nothing is more important than the rock in the hat.

These concerns do not matter if the foundational truth claims (Book of Mormon, First Vision, Prophets, Book of Abraham, Witnesses, Priesthood, Temples, etc.) are not true.

And you have not made anything close to a convincing case that any of those claims are false.

1. Church's Dishonesty and Whitewashing Over Its History

Adding to the above deceptions and dishonesty over history (rock in hat translation...

Rock, hat. Hat, rock. Kind of like "Oprah, Uma, Uma, Oprah," only different.

... polygamy/polyandry, multiple First Vision accounts, etc.), ...

Which, of course, we've repeatedly discussed already,

...the following bother me:

2013 OFFICIAL DECLARATION 2 HEADER UPDATE DISHONESTY

Offending text:

"Early in its history, Church leaders stopped conferring the priesthood on black males of African descent. **Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice.**" [Emphasis added]

This is a minor variation on a previous theme – not a complaint about the priesthood ban, but on how we talk about it. The Church says that we don't have clear insights about how the ban started. That's an accurate statement.

In sharp contrast to the above statement:

No, what follows is not in sharp contrast to the above statement. It offers reasons for why the ban was put in place and why it continued, but not any information about how it began.

1949 FIRST PRESIDENCY STATEMENT:

This is not, in fact, an official First Presidency Statement. The following is a letter written by the First Presidency to a private individual. Calling it a “First Presidency Statement” implies that it was issued to the general membership of the church, which it was not.

August 17, 1949

Hey! That’s my birthday! (Well, not the 1949 part.)

*The attitude of the Church with reference to Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of **direct commandment from the Lord,***

I, too, have problems with the bolded part of this statement, as it contradicts President McKay’s labeling of the ban as a “policy, not a doctrine,” but I presume you’ve emphasized it because you think it contradicts the statement that we don’t have clear insights into the origin of the ban.

It doesn’t.

We have no record of a revelation – i.e. a direct commandment from the Lord – putting the ban in place, and we don’t know when the ban actually began, given the fact that Joseph Smith ordained black people to the priesthood.

This was written in 1949, around a century after the ordination of black people stopped, but we can’t put a precise date on when that happened, since **Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice.** (See what I did there?)

*on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time. **The prophets of the Lord have made several statements as to the operation of the principle. President Brigham Young said: ‘Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the holy priesthood, and the law of God. They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the holy priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will then come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to.***

I find the bolded portion to be a deplorably racist explanation for the ban that the Church has since disavowed, but how does it offer any clear insight as to how and when the ban began?

President Wilford Woodruff made the following statement: ‘The day will come when all that race will be redeemed and possess all the blessings which we now have.’

See? There was some light amid the darkness. No clear insight into the origins of the ban here, though.

The position of the Church regarding the Negro may be understood when another doctrine of the Church is kept in mind, namely, that the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality and that while the details of this principle have not been made known, the mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintain their first estate; and that the worth of the privilege is so great that spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what the handicap may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure; and that among the handicaps, failure of the right to enjoy in mortality the blessings of the priesthood is a handicap which spirits are willing to assume in order that they might come to earth. Under this principle there is no injustice whatsoever involved in this deprivation as to the holding of the priesthood by the Negroes.

The First Presidency

This is a faulty and racist explanation of the ban, surely, but it in no way offers insight into how and when the ban originated, probably because **Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice.**

Along with the above First Presidency statement, there are many other statements and explanations made by prophets and apostles clearly “justifying” the Church’s racism.

You’re trying to pull a bait-and-switch, because racism isn’t the issue you raised with this objection. You’re saying that the Church is lying when it says we don’t know when and how the ban first began. They aren’t. Certainly none of these quotes provide any clear insights into the origin of this practice.

So, the 2013 edition Official Declaration 2 Header in the scriptures is not only misleading, it’s dishonest.

Not at all. If you have clear insights into the origin of this practice, why don’t you provide them? Why can you not tell me when and where this practice began?

We do have records – including from the First Presidency itself – with very clear insights on the origins of the ban on the blacks.

We do not. We have many clear insights into why the ban was perpetuated, but none into how it began. When was the ban implemented? We don’t know; Church records provide no clear insights. Was the ban a deliberate decision, or was it just something that started happening in practice and was later institutionalized as church policy? I believe the latter to be the case, but we don’t know for sure – Church records provide no clear insights.

And the Church has never had a “ban on the blacks.” Black members have always been welcome, and, unlike many churches of the time, they were never segregated from the rest of the congregation.

UPDATE: The Church released a [Race and the Priesthood](#) essay which contradicts their [2013 Official Declaration 2 Header](#).

Nope. Not even a little bit.

In the essay, they point to Brigham Young as the originator of the ban.

No, they don't. They point to Brigham Young as the first to announce the ban in 1852, but there is plenty of evidence that, in practice, black people had not been ordained to the priesthood for many years prior to that announcement. Did the ordination of black people stop at some point in Joseph Smith's lifetime? Maybe. Many leaders after Brigham certainly thought it did. Fact is, we don't know. **Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice.**

Further, they effectively throw 10 latter-day "Prophets, Seers, and Revelators" under the bus as they "disavow" the "theories" that these ten men taught and justified – for 130 years – as doctrine and revelation for the Church's institutional and theological racism.

When additional light and knowledge comes into the world, we rejoice for what we now have rather than condemn those who didn't have it. People are judged only according to the light and knowledge they have received. That way, nobody gets thrown under the bus.

Finally, they denounce the idea that God punishes individuals with black skin or that God withholds blessings based on the color of one's skin while completely ignoring the [contradiction](#) of the keystone Book of Mormon teaching exactly this.

You couldn't be more wrong on this one. The Book of Mormon's references to skin color have precisely zero to do with the priesthood ban, which was solely applied to men of African descent, not Native Americans, who, because of the Book of Mormon, are promised tremendous blessings that are arguably even greater than those promised to us boring white people.

In addition, the Lamanites were never denied the priesthood and had no blessings withheld because of their skin color, and were often more righteous than the lighter-skinner Nephites. Here's some good anti-racist counsel from a Nephite prophet:

"Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them [i.e. the Lamanites] because of the darkness of their skins;" (Jacob 3:9.)

ZINA DIANTHA HUNTINGTON YOUNG

(The following is a quick biographic snapshot of Zina:)

- She was married for 7.5 months and was about 6 months pregnant with her first husband, Henry Jacobs, when she married Joseph after being told Joseph's life was in danger from an angel with a drawn sword.

Wrong. She was sealed to Joseph for eternity only, never married to him. (No sex.) The angel with the drawn sword did not threaten to kill Joseph if he didn't marry Zina.

Didn't you already raise this in your polygamy section?

- After Joseph's death, Zina married Brigham Young and had a child with him while still legally married to Henry Jacobs.

I can see why you've singled out Zina, as there is, indeed, murkiness as to her married legal status through all of this. What there is not is any confusion as to who Zina considered her husband at any given time. She left Henry, describing her marriage as "unhappy," and lived with Brigham after they were sealed. At no time was she living concurrently with both men. So while this is a tricky one in terms of legality, it is not tricky in terms of sexual polyandry, of which there was none.

Brigham sent Henry on missions while being married to Zina.

Your implication is that Henry was not aware of Zina's sealing to Brigham, which is not the case.

- Zina would eventually become the third General Relief Society President of the Church.

Good for her! Sounds like she was a remarkable woman.

ZINA'S WHITEWASHED BIOGRAPHICAL PAGE ON [LDS.ORG](https://www.lds.org)

- In the "Marriage and Family" section, it does not list Joseph Smith as a husband or concurrent husband with Henry Jacobs.

That's probably because Joseph wasn't her husband or concurrent husband with Henry Jacobs. Joseph and Zina never lived together as husband and wife.

- In the "Marriage and Family" section, it does not list Brigham Young as a concurrent husband with Henry Jacobs.

Probably because she never lived with both men concurrently.

- There is nothing in there about the polyandry.

That's because there wasn't any polyandry, as Zina never lived with more than one husband at a time.

- It is deceptive in stating that Henry and Zina "did not remain together" while omitting that Henry separated only after Brigham Young took his wife and told Henry that Zina was now only his (Brigham) wife.

How is it deceptive? They did not, in fact, remain together. The idea that Henry was the only one who "separated" and that Brigham Young "took" Henry's wife is rather sexist, as it

presupposes that Zina herself had no say in the matter. The LDS.org biography plainly states that Zina was Brigham Young's plural wife.

ZINA'S INDEX FILE ON LDS-OWNED [FAMILYSEARCH.ORG](https://www.familysearch.org)

- It clearly shows all of Zina's husbands, including her marriage to Joseph Smith.

Wasn't your problem that the LDS Church was whitewashing its history by purging references to Zina's sealing to Joseph? If that's the case, how did this reference escape the purge?

In any case, the purpose of Family Search.org is to gather information for temple work, so it makes sense that an eternity-only sealing would be referenced.

Why is Joseph Smith not listed as one of Zina's husbands in the "Marriage and Family" section or anywhere else on her biographical page on [lds.org](https://www.lds.org)?

Because the "Marriage and Family" section doesn't have lists at all. She never lived with Joseph as his wife – she was sealed to him for eternity only. He was not one of her husbands in mortality.

Why is there not a single mention or hint of polyandry on her page or in that marriage section when she was married to two latter-day prophets and having children with Brigham Young while still being married to her first husband, Henry?

Because she was not married to two latter-day prophets. She was married to one - and he definitely gets mentioned - and only sealed to the other. Also because she was not still married to Henry when she had a single child – not multiple children – with Brigham Young.

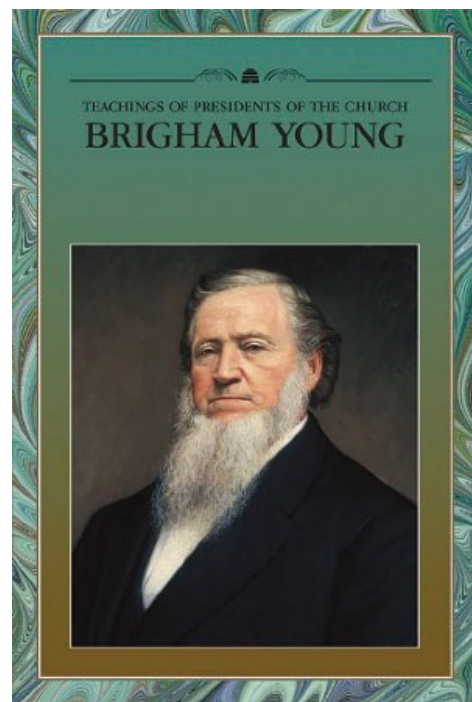
BRIGHAM YOUNG SUNDAY SCHOOL MANUAL

- In the Church's Sunday School manual, Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young, the Church changed the word "wives" to "[wife]."

The parenthetical insertion probably calls attention to Brigham's polygamy more than if it had been left unchanged. If the Church was really trying to whitewash, they would have just left off the S and not acknowledge that the text had been altered.

Not only is the manual deceptive in disclosing whether or not Brigham Young was a polygamist but it's deceptive in hiding Brigham Young's real teaching on marriage:

"The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy." – [Journal of Discourses 11:269](#)



We've covered this. In the same speech, he clarified twice that this meant you had to accept the doctrine of polygamy, not necessarily be a polygamist. Again, you would know that if you read your own source, which you haven't.

CENSORSHIP

In November 2013, Church Historian Elder Steven E. Snow acknowledged the Church's [censorship](#) ...

"Censorship" is a loaded term and not one that accurately characterizes what Elder Snow was saying here.

... and pointed to the advent of the internet as the contributing factor to the Church's inability to continue its pattern of hiding information and records from members and investigators.

All of the information that troubles you - like different First Vision accounts, rocks in hats, Book of Abraham information, a rock in a hat, hats with rocks in them, and rocks that are in hats - has been available for anyone who wanted it. What the Church has done is to push forward the information they think is faith-promoting and stay largely silent about the things they find embarrassing. That was the wrong approach, and, with the publication of [Saints](#), we've come a long way toward correcting that.

"I think in the past there was a tendency to keep a lot of the records closed or at least not give access to information. But the world has changed in the last generation—with the access to information on the Internet, we can't continue that pattern; I think we need to continue to be more open."

The lines prior to this give greater context, which may be why you ignore them:

My view is that being open about our history solves a whole lot more problems than it creates. We might not have all the answers, but if we are open (and we now have pretty remarkable transparency), then I think in the long run that will serve us well.

It's telling that almost all of your complaints about the Church include links to the Church's own websites to see the primary sources that you, yourself, haven't bothered to read. That's pretty lousy censorship.

2. CHURCH FINANCES

There is zero transparency to members of the Church.

Actually, there is complete transparency in the countries that require the Church to disclose its finances - namely, the UK and Canada.

But you know where there is zero financial transparency? The CES Letter Foundation. From the reports I've received, you're making a sizable six-figure income off of your shoddy scholarship. Don't your readers - and especially your donors - deserve to know precisely how much you're personally benefitting from all of this?

Why is the one and only true Church keeping its books in the dark? Why would God's one true Church choose to "[keep them in darkness](#)" over such a stewardship?

Why do you provide a really weird link to a scripture in Ether that talks about oaths used to keep murders secret? Are you equating the Church's unwillingness to release financial statements with deliberately killing people?

History has shown time and time again that secret religious wealth is breeding ground for corruption.

In your last version of your letter, you referred to "corporate secret wealth," not "secret religious wealth." The change is odd, as history doesn't have much to say about "secret religious wealth," because that's not an actual thing.

The Church used to be transparent with its finances but stopped in 1959.

Which means that they were transparent for 129 years longer than the CES Letter Foundation.

ESTIMATED \$1.5 BILLION MEGAMALL CITY CREEK CENTER:



Which was funded by a for-profit entity owned by the church and not paid for by tithes or offerings of church members.

- Total Church humanitarian aid from 1985-2011: \$1.4 billion

Your link works! It didn't in your last version. And if people click on it and actually read your

source - which you don't seem to have done - they'll realize that this is not the totality of all humanitarian aid that the Church gave from 1985-2011. It is the total of all the cash they donated to other agencies for the relief of international disasters.

The distinction is huge. That number does not include, for instance, the money and resources given to Church members in their welfare program, which is much larger than what the Church donates to other organizations. This article from TimesandSeasons.org addresses the importance of the distinction:

Look at that sheet again. It highlights numbers of food storehouses, food production for the needy, employment training, church-run thrift stores, and so on. The sheet states *_also_* discusses global work worldwide on disaster relief (such as responses to tsunami or earthquake victims). It uses different nomenclature for each type of donation. That is *donations to worldwide emergency response are classified under the humanitarian label. But the extensive ongoing infrastructure to feed the needy is classified under the church welfare label.* I contacted the church today and was able to verify that this is correct. [Emphasis in original]

The Church's welfare program includes vast amounts of financial assistance, donated resources, and volunteer man-hours that are vastly in excess of the \$1.4 billion figure.

One other point on this. When I was writing an editorial for the Deseret News, I wrote a piece that slammed the Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea Clinton Foundation, because it was all over the news that they only donated a tiny portion of their money to charity. The paper got a call from the Clinton Foundation and asked me to talk to them. The man I spoke to very patiently and kindly described why the editorial was in error, particularly with regard to the difference between private *non-operating* foundations and private *operating* foundations.

Here's a [legal website](#) that explains the difference:

The IRS recognizes two types of private foundations: **private nonoperating foundations** and **private operating foundations**. Although the IRS uses a number of criteria to distinguish between the two, in practice, the key difference between a private nonoperating foundation and a private operating foundation is how each distributes its income:

- **A private nonoperating foundation** grants money to *other* charitable organizations. This is the more common type of private foundation. These foundations do not directly perform any charitable programs or services
- **A private operating foundation** distributes funds to *its own* programs that exist for charitable purposes. [Emphasis in original]

The Clinton guy explained that the Clinton Foundation is a private *operating* foundation. So when they get money, they don't give it to other charities; they spend it themselves for their own charitable programs.

That is essentially the way the Church operates. When members donate money for welfare purposes, the Church uses that money to fund its own in-house charitable operations, which are massive, efficient, and the envy of welfare relief agencies all across the world. In areas where they do not have a relief infrastructure to quickly respond to natural disasters, they

have donated cash to other organizations that do, such as the Red Cross.

So you continually cite this figure as the totality of all the welfare the Church provides, when the truth is that the Church provides welfare services that are demonstrably far in excess of this figure.

- Something is fundamentally wrong with “the one true Church” spending more on an estimated \$1.5 billion dollar high-end megamall than it has in 26 years of humanitarian aid.

No, something is wrong with your assumptions, which are woefully incorrect.

For an organization that claims to be Christ’s only true Church, this expenditure is a moral failure on so many different levels.

“On so many different levels” is one of those qualifiers that sounds intelligent but isn’t. You cite precisely one such “level” - the Church should spend more on helping people than on malls - but your criticism is based on a huge, whopping error on your part. So what other “levels” have you got?

For a Church that asks its members to sacrifice greatly for Temple building, such as the case of Argentiniens giving the Church gold from their dental work for the São Paulo Brazil Temple, this mall business is absolutely shameful.

The Church would have built the temple with or without the dental work donations. Members weren’t asked to pay a dime for the mall, and none of their donations, dental work or no, were used to fund it.

Of all the things that Christ would tell the prophet, the prophet buys a mall and says “Let’s go shopping!”? Of all the sum total of human suffering and poverty on this planet, the inspiration the Brethren feel for His Church is to get into the shopping mall business?!

The mall wasn’t built with the intent to get the Saints to “go shopping.” City Creek was designed to stave off the urban blight that was gripping downtown Salt Lake City, which would ultimately have placed Temple Square and the surrounding buildings that constitute the headquarters of the Church into the middle of a dangerous slum. City Creek has accomplished that goal by revitalizing downtown and making it safe for families. The fact that this was done without taxpayer or tithpayer dollars makes it a boon to the community that cost Church members nothing at all. It ultimately won’t even cost the Church anything either, as it’s going to make its money back over time.

PRESIDENT HINCKLEY’S DISHONEST INTERVIEW

Since we don’t have access to the full interview, it’s hard to characterize it definitively. Your YouTube link provides a short snippet without any context, which suggests that, like with all the other out-of-context garbage in the CES Letter, there’s much more to the story here.

Hinckley made the following dishonest statement in a 2002 interview to a German journalist:

Reporter: In my country, the...we say the people’s Churches, the Protestants, the Catholics, they publish all their budgets, to all the public.

Hinckley: Yeah. Yeah.

Reporter: Why is it impossible for your Church?

Hinckley: Well, we simply think that the...that information belongs to those who made the contribution, and not to the world. That's the only thing. Yes.

Not dishonest at all. President Hinckley's talking about the confidentiality of individual contributions, which should rightly remain private. I'm willing to bet that if we had more of this interview, we would be able to get a follow-up that would clarify if that's not what the journalist was really asking, or we might see a question before this one that would have provided the appropriate context for President Hinckley's answer.

Where can I see the Church's books? I've paid tithing.

Where can your donors see your books? They've paid you quite well.

Where can I go to see what the Church's finances are? Where can current tithing paying members go to see the books? The answer: we can't.

When I was a counselor in the bishopric, I was actually uncomfortable with how much I knew about the finances of ward members, based on my access to ward tithing and fast offering records. Much of that information is available to counselors and clerks, and it is remarkable to me how responsibly they handle that information. That information isn't the finances of the entire Church, of course, but my personal experience makes me more grateful for confidentiality than curious about the Church's books.

Even if you've made the contributions as President Hinckley stated above? Unless you're an authorized General Authority or senior Church employee in the accounting department with a Non-Disclosure Agreement? You're out of luck.

On the contrary, I could see all the tithing for every member of my ward, and I signed no agreement at all. I'm very grateful for how responsibly clerks and bishopric members handle such sensitive confidential information.

TITHING BEFORE RENT, WATER, ELECTRICITY, AND FEEDING YOUR FAMILY

Tithing: I find the following quote in the [December 2012 Ensign](#) very disturbing:

“If paying tithing means that you can't pay for water or electricity, pay tithing. If paying tithing means that you can't pay your rent, pay tithing. Even if paying tithing means that you don't have enough money to feed your family, pay tithing. The Lord will not abandon you.”

Ripped out of context, it is disturbing. In the article, this advice is given to someone who receives generous financial assistance from the Church in order to get back on their feet, assistance in a dollar amount in excess of the money they paid in tithing.

This despicably dangerous idea of tithing before feeding your family was further perpetuated

in the April 2017 General Conference by Elder Valeri Cordón:

“One day during those difficult times, I heard my parents discussing whether they should pay tithing or buy food for the children. On Sunday, I followed my father to see what he was going to do. After our church meetings, I saw him take an envelope and put his tithing in it. That was only part of the lesson. The question that remained for me was what we were going to eat.”

This is one of those faith-promoting stories where Elder Cordón talks about a miraculous financial blessing that comes as a result. Had such a blessing not materialized, he and his family would, like the previous example, have access to Church welfare programs to ensure that his family didn't starve. Do you have examples of people starving because they paid tithing? If you do, you might want to include them in your next version of the CES Letter. You may have trouble finding them, as I doubt they exist.

Would a loving, kind, and empathic God really place parents in the horrible position of having to choose whether to feed their children or pay what little they have to a multi-billion luxury megamall owning church that receives an estimated \$8,000,000,000 in annual tithing receipts?

The Church's welfare program ensures that Church members need not panic about feeding their children. And precisely \$0 of those tithing receipts went into the funding of City Creek.

“Well, God tested Abraham by asking him to kill his son and besides, the Lord will take care of them through the Bishop's storehouse.”

You put these words in quotes for some reason, despite the fact that no real person actually said this.

Yes, the same god who tested Abraham is also the same crazy god who killed innocent babies and endorsed genocide, slavery, and rape.

Quite the non sequitur there, especially in response to a stupid straw man argument that no one was making. The weirdness of Old Testament accounts does not deny anyone access to the bishop's storehouse.

Besides, whatever happened to self-sufficiency? Begging the Bishop for food when you had the money for food but because you followed the above Ensign advice and gave your food money to the Church you're now dependent on the Church for food money. If you give your food and rent money to the Church, you are not self-reliant...you are Church-reliant.

Just a few paragraphs ago, you were upset that the Church doesn't offer enough humanitarian aid, and now you're complaining that they offer too much aid and make people dependent. Which is it?

DISHONESTLY ALTERING LORENZO SNOW'S WORDS AND TEACHINGS ON TITHING

The Church took the Prophet Lorenzo Snow's 1899 General Conference Address words and deliberately omitted and replaced key words on tithing with ellipsis in its *Teachings of*

Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow manual.

Ellipses aren't an alteration of words, they're an acknowledgment that words have been removed. You can, however, alter meanings with ellipses, as you frequently do in the CES



Lorenzo Snow

"There is no man or woman who can not pay one tenth of what he or she receives."

Letter, such as where you distort Elder Anderson's remarks about the Prophet Joseph Smith's testimony. But that doesn't seem to be the case here.

This is what Lorenzo Snow said in his 1899 General Conference Address:

*"I plead with you in the name of the Lord, and I pray that every man, woman and child **who has means** shall pay one-tenth of their income as a tithing."*

Presentism is getting in your way here again. You are suggesting that President Snow was saying that only people who can afford to pay tithing should pay tithing. That is likely how a modern audience would read that phrase, but it is not at all how a 19th Century audience would have heard it.

Here is how Webster's Dictionary defined "means" in the 19th Century:

"Means, in the plural, income, revenue, resources, substance or estate, considered as the instrument of effecting any purpose."

In other words, if you gave any income, revenue, resources, substance or estate, pay tithing. Rather than exempting anyone, he was saying that anyone with anything should pay tithing. That meaning becomes clear elsewhere in his talk, where he says, "There is no man or woman who can not pay one tenth of what he or she receives." (That quote, incidentally, is in the same Teachings of Lorenzo Snow manual.)

Compare this to how the Church uses and presents Snow's exact same quote today in its *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow manual*:

"I plead with you in the name of the Lord, and I pray that every man, woman and child ... shall pay one-tenth of their income as a tithing."

Yes, because from the context of his remarks, was the substance of his message. Including the words left out by the ellipsis would invite presentist misinterpretation of his message.

The Church dishonestly alters and completely changes Lorenzo Snow's words and teaching on tithing by removing "who has means" from his 1899 General Conference quote in its *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* manual.

On the contrary, the Church honestly sustains President's Snow's words and teachings by avoiding CES Letter-style presentism that distorts his teachings.

In 2012, a Latter-day Saint published an eye-opening blog post that went viral among Internet Mormons: [*Are We Paying Too Much Tithing?*](#)

Sorry, what's an "Internet Mormon?" Church members all over the world have access to the Internet, so this isn't actually a thing.

The article demonstrates how what is currently taught and practiced is contrary to how it was taught and practiced by the Prophet Joseph Smith and subsequent prophets...

I do not sustain the author of this article as a Prophet, Seer, or Revelator, so I will continue to heed prophetic counsel rather than the private opinion of bloggers.

... including Lorenzo Snow; whose above quote was deceptively altered and manipulated for today's tithe-paying members.

Nope. Maybe you should have mentioned the rock in the hat again instead.

2. NAMES OF THE CHURCH

A much more timely objection now than when you first wrote it, methinks.

1830: CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
1834: THE CHURCH OF THE LATTER DAY SAINTS
1838: THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

After revealing "Church of Jesus Christ" on April 6, 1830...

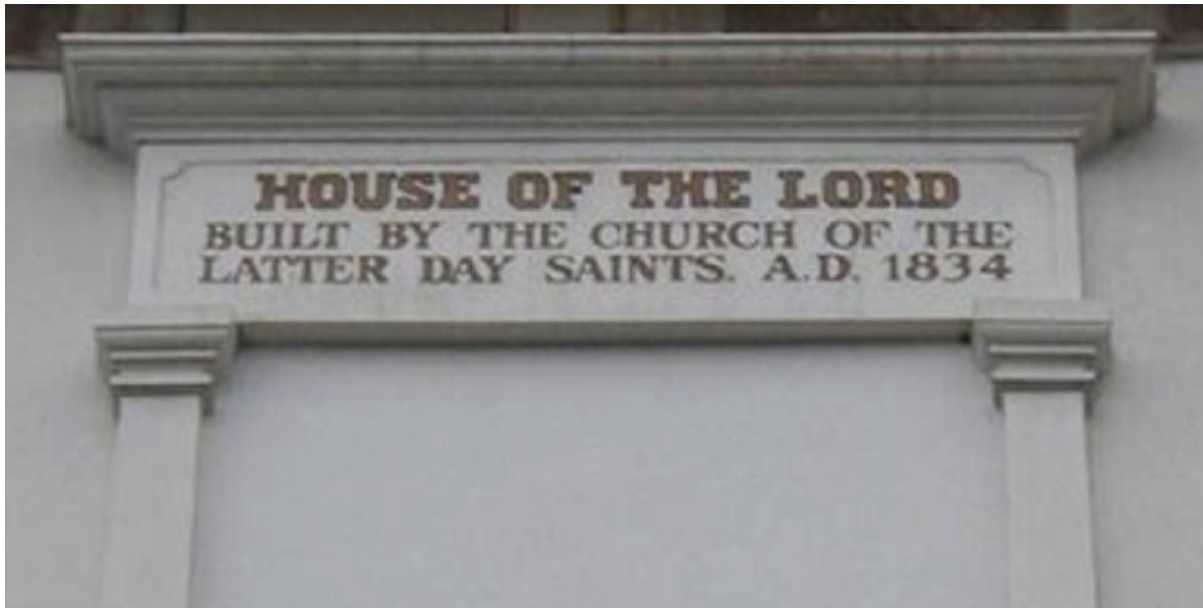
In your last version of your letter, the verb you used here was "deciding," not "revealing." The difference is significant. There is no record of a revelation official naming the Church prior to 1838. Your previous verb, therefore, was more accurate than this one.

... Joseph Smith made the decision on May 3, 1834 to change the name of the Church to "The Church of the Latter Day Saints". Why did Joseph take the name of "Jesus Christ" out of the very name of His restored Church? The one and only true Church on the face of the earth in which Christ is the Head?

Because there was already a church with the legal right to use the name "Church of Christ" that precluded Joseph from doing the same. (You say that they called themselves the "Church of Jesus Christ," but from what I can tell, the name "Jesus" was absent from the original moniker.) So, absent any revelation, Joseph chose a name that would distinguish themselves

from the other Church. The first time a name was given by revelation was in 1838, and that name, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” is the same name the Church has consistently used from that day to this.

KIRTLAND TEMPLE



Four years later on April 26, 1838, the Church name was changed to “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints” and has remained ever since (except the hyphen was added later to be grammatically correct).

Indeed. As I stated at the outset, I’m not concerned about fallible grammar.

Is it reasonable to assume that God would periodically change the name of his Church?

No, which means you are unreasonable in making that assumption. You do not have evidence that God periodically changed the name of his Church,. The first time we have record of God naming His Church is in 1838, and there have been no changes to the name since the Lord Himself settled the question.

If Jesus Christ is the central character of God’s religion on earth and all things are to be done in His name, is it reasonable to assume that God would instruct His Church leaders to entirely leave out the name of Jesus Christ from the period of May 3, 1834 – April 26, 1838?

There is no evidence that God instructed His Church leaders about the name of the Church prior to 1838.

What possible reason could there be for the name changes?

Joseph Smith named the Church absent revelation and then settled on a permanent name when God revealed it. Pretty simple.

Why would Christ instruct Joseph to name it one thing in 1830 and then change it in 1834 and then change it again in 1838?

He wouldn't and didn't.

Why would the name of Christ be dropped from His one and only true Church for 4 whole years?

Because another church was using the name "Church of Christ," which prevented Joseph from using it.

What does this say about a Church that claims to be restored and guided by modern revelation?

It says that we do our best in the absence of direct guidance from heaven, but we don't mess with the Lord after he provides a revelation with a definitive answer.

3. ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

“SOME THINGS THAT ARE TRUE ARE NOT VERY USEFUL ”

Whereas when it comes to the CES Letter's arguments, some things that are useful are not very true.

Elder Boyd K. Packer gave a talk to Church Educational System Instructors and faculty at a CES Symposium on August 22, 1981 entitled *The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect*.

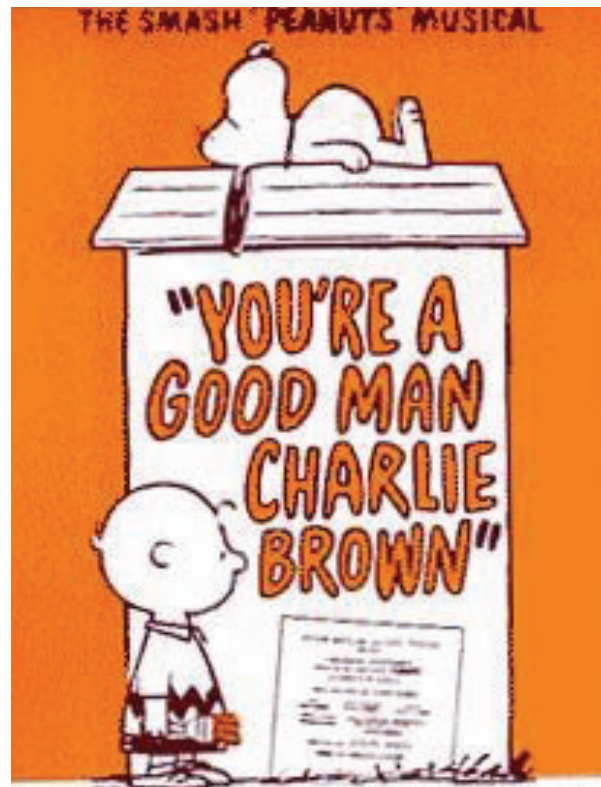
Elder Packer said the following:

“There is a temptation for the writer or the teacher of Church history to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful.”

And I really wish he hadn't said this, as it is open to the kind of misinterpretation you're applying to it. Because when you consider the intent of his statement rather than his poor choice of words, this becomes a rather artless way of stating an undeniably true – and useful – principle.

In fact, the CES Letter is a perfect example of Elder Packer's premise. Your purpose is to persuade people that the LDS Church is a fraud, so you cite truths that are useful to making that case, and you ignore the truths that are not. So you cite three different dubious hearsay statements about Martin Harris and repeat them over a dozen times, but you ignore the dozens of more reliable firsthand accounts that undermine your case, because those statements, while true, aren't useful to your purpose. (Actually, the analogy isn't really perfect, because the statements you quoted about Martin probably aren't true. But I'm sure you get the idea.)

The word “useful” is instructive, especially when you consider the audience to whom Elder Packer’s remarks were addressed. He wasn’t talking to the general membership of the Church in Conference; he was talking to a gathering of CES instructors, who are in the employ of the Church for the specific purpose of building the faith of LDS youth. There are many truths that are not useful to that specific purpose. It is true, for instance, that I played the role of Schroeder in “You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown” in several productions in the Los Angeles area between 1981 and 1985. Is this true? Yes. It is a useful fact for CES Employees to use in their instruction of LDS youth? Probably not, no.



*I was in this show!
A true and useless fact*

Elder Dallin H. Oaks made a similar comment in the context of Church history at a CES Symposium on August 16, 1985 :

“The fact that something is true is not always justification for communicating it.”

That is quite good advice. Telling a child that they are physically repugnant, for instance, is not a good idea, even if it is true.

Joseph using a rock in a hat instead of the gold plates to translate the Book of Mormon is not a useful truth?

A what in a what now?

Elder Packer probably didn’t think that was a useful truth at the time, no. I think he was wrong about that, and the Church has recognized that mistake. That’s why Elder Ballard’s more recent talk to a similar audience of CES employees took the opposite approach to Elder Packer’s. This time around, Elder Ballard counseled them to know all the details of the recent gospel topics essays “like the back of your hand” in order to be able to provide true and useful information that allows the Church to get out in front of these controversial issues. And, yes, that includes your beloved rock in a hat.

And, again, the recent publication of *Saints* shows a willingness to confront all of the truths that trouble you, useful or not.

The fact that there are multiple conflicting first vision accounts is not a useful truth?

It’s more useful to demonstrate the truth that the accounts don’t actually conflict.

The fact that Joseph Smith was involved in polyandry while hiding it from Emma, when D&C 132:61 condemns it as “adultery,” is not a useful truth?

No, because it’s not a truth. Joseph Smith wasn’t involved in polyandry. (Sealings, not marriage, no sex.) It would be useful, however, for CES instructors to point out the true reasons why this charge you continually repeat is not accurate.

Elder Packer continues:

“That historian or scholar who delights in pointing out the weaknesses and frailties of present or past leaders destroys faith. A destroyer of faith – particularly one within the Church, and more particularly one who is employed specifically to build faith – places himself in great spiritual jeopardy.”

Again, this is not the way I’d choose to teach this principle, but Elder Packer was entirely correct here. Look at the verb he uses – “delights.” It’s one thing for a historian or scholar to acknowledge or plainly state the “weaknesses and frailties of present or past leaders,” especially if they do so in context and with an appropriate sense of balance. It’s another thing to “delight” in discussing those weaknesses above all else, as such an approach will paint a distorted picture of reality and, yes, destroy faith. It also would, indeed, place someone in spiritual jeopardy, as they would destroy their own faith, too.

If facts and truths can destroy faith...what does it say about faith?

It says that you misunderstand both what faith is and what facts are. The CES Letter is built on the shoddy premise that truth is self-interpreting and cannot be viewed from multiple points of view. That’s nonsense. Facts are always open to interpretation, and faith cannot withstand a deliberate bias in favor of a hostile narrative that always presumes the worst of early Church members.

If prophets of the Church conducted themselves in such a way that it can destroy faith, what does this say about the prophets?

That they have agency, are fallible, and are in need of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, just like everybody else.

What’s interesting about Elder Packer’s above quote is that he’s focusing on history from the point of view that a historian is only interested in the “weaknesses and frailties of present and past leaders.”

It is interesting, yes, because he’s criticizing the kind of shoddy history you’re presenting in the CES Letter - a history designed to highlight the worst and deliberately omit the best.

Historians are also interested in things like how the Book of Mormon got translated or how many accounts Joseph gave about the foundational first vision or whether the Book of Abraham even matches the papyri and facsimiles.

And those historians, by and large, are quite pleased with *Saints*, the newly published history that tackles all of those issues head on.

Besides, it matters in the religious context what past and present leaders “weaknesses and frailties” are.

Context matters a great deal, yes, which is why it’s disturbing that you’re determined to ignore context whenever it doesn’t advance your hostile narrative of the Church’s origins.

If Joseph’s public position was that adultery and polygamy are morally wrong and condemned by God, what does it say about him and his character that he did exactly that in the dark while lying to Emma and everyone else about it?

It says you are misrepresenting history and, in this instance, not telling the truth.

How is this not a useful truth?

Because it’s not true.

A relevant hypothetical example to further illustrate this point: The prophet or one of the apostles gets caught with child pornography on his hard drive.

I can think of few things that would be more unlikely.



A Religious Hat, Sans Rock
Not exempt from history

This matters, especially in light of his current position, status, and teachings on morality.

It doesn’t matter, because it hasn’t happened.

Just because a leader wears a religious hat does not follow that they’re exempt from history and accountability from others.

Does the hat have a rock in it?

Nobody is saying that religious leaders are exempt from accountability, and it’s not really possible to be “exempt from history.”

Further, testimonies are acquired in part by the recitation of a historical narrative.

They are also destroyed by the creation of false, poorly researched, and hostile narratives like the one in the CES Letter.

Missionaries recite the narrative about Joseph Smith searching and praying for answers, about acquiring the gold plates and translating the Book of Mormon, about the Priesthood being restored along with other foundational narratives.

What missionaries teach is nowhere near a comprehensive telling of Church history, nor is it intended to be. They offer a brand sketch, and, if they don't depart from the program to talk about weird things like the supposedly legally binding nature of the Three Witnesses, the relatively few details they provide are entirely accurate.

Why should investigators and members not learn the correct and candid version of that historical narrative, for better or for worse?

They should. *Saints* provides that splendidly. What they should not learn is the incorrect and deliberately hostile version of the narrative found in the CES Letter.

Are members and investigators not entitled to a truthful accounting of the real origins of Mormonism?

Yes, and they get nothing like that in the CES Letter.

The question should not be whether it's faith promoting or not to share ugly but truthful facts. The question should be: Is it the honest thing to do?

That's a question that ought to be asked more of CES Letter content, so I'll do precisely that going forward.

CRITICIZING LEADERS

Elder Dallin H. Oaks made the following disturbing comment in the PBS documentary, *The Mormons*:

"It is wrong to criticize the leaders of the Church, even if the criticism is true."

The full quote here is helpful:

*"I also said something else that has excited people: that it's wrong to criticize leaders of the Church, even if the criticism is true, because it diminishes their effectiveness as a servant of the Lord. **One can work to correct them by some other means**, but don't go about saying that they misbehaved when they were a youngster or whatever." [Emphasis added]*

As with Elder Packer's statement, this is something I wish Elder Oaks hadn't said, as it, too, is open to misinterpretation. In addition, the snippet you link to is a sort of "preview of coming attractions" for the next episode of the series, so in that footage, the one sentence gets yanked out of any surrounding context and is even more susceptible to being misunderstood. You're always eager to provide less context instead of more. Is that the honest thing to do?

His point is not, as many critics imply, that the church does not tolerate disagreement. It is that public criticism, especially that which is focused on how they “misbehaved as a youngster or whatever,” is the wrong way to handle disagreements. One should “work to correct them by some other means” other than publicly embarrassing leaders, especially on irrelevant points that are discussed solely with the intent to embarrass.

This is actually a Biblical principle. “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault **between thee and him alone**: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” (Matthew 18:15, emphasis added)

RESEARCHING “UNAPPROVED” MATERIALS ON THE INTERNET

In this section, you consistently put words in quotes like “UNAPPROVED,” above, without providing any evidence of people actually using those words. You have no examples of any General Authority criticizing members for looking at “Unapproved” materials, yet you have supposedly quoted somebody saying precisely that. Is that the honest thing to do?

Elder Quentin L. Cook made the following comment in the [October 2012](#) Conference:

“Some have immersed themselves in internet materials that magnify, exaggerate, and in some cases invent shortcomings of early Church leaders. Then they draw incorrect conclusions that can affect testimony. Any who have made these choices can repent and be spiritually renewed.”

Notice that Quentin L. Cook did not use the word “unapproved” or anything like it. His counsel – don’t “immerse” yourself in materials that provide distorted or false information – is good counsel. Do you advocate immersion in materials that provide distorted or false information?

Elder Dieter Uchtdorf said the following in his CES talk “[What is Truth?](#)” (33:00):

“...Remember that in this age of information there are many who create doubt about anything and everything at any time and every place. You will find even those who still claim that they have evidence that the earth is flat. That the moon is a hologram. It looks like it a little bit. And that certain movie stars are really aliens from another planet. And it is always good to keep in mind just because something is printed on paper, appears on the internet, is frequently repeated or has a powerful group of followers doesn’t make it true.”

With which part of this entirely reasonable, common-sense statement do you disagree? And why do you cite this as evidence that the Church is cracking down on “unapproved” materials when President Uchtdorf doesn’t use that word or anything like it?

Why does it matter whether information was received from a stranger, television, book, magazine, comic book, napkin, and yes, the internet?

Certainly not Elder Cook or President Uchtdorf in the quotes you cite. There is no counsel here to avoid any medium of information; the counsel is to make sure that information is true, regardless of where it is found.

They are all mediums or conduits of information. It's the information itself, its accuracy, and its relevance that matters.

Which is precisely what both Elder Cook and President Uchtdorf say in the quotes you provide. Neither of them counsel members to avoid the Internet.

Elder Neil Andersen made the following statement in the [October 2014 General Conference](#) specifically targeting the medium of the Internet in a bizarre attempt to discredit the Internet as a reliable source for getting factual and truthful information:

“We might remind the sincere inquirer that Internet information does not have a ‘truth’ filter. Some information, no matter how convincing, is simply not true.”

How is this “specifically targeting the medium of the Internet?” It's specifically targeting information that is not true. In the same talk, Elder Andersen mentions false information that appeared in Time Magazine. Are we to interpret that as Elder Andersen specifically targeting Time Magazine? I don't think so.

Here's what the Brethren have to say about the Internet:



“We are blessed to live, learn, and serve in this most remarkable dispensation. An important aspect of the fulness that is available to us in this special season is a miraculous progression of innovations and inventions that have enabled and accelerated the work of salvation: from trains to telegraphs to radios to automobiles to airplanes to telephones to transistors to televisions to computers to satellite transmissions to the Internet—and to an almost endless list of technologies and tools that bless our lives. All of these advancements are part of the Lord hastening His work in the latter days.

- Elder David A. Bednar, [To Sweep the Earth](#), BYU Education Week 2014

“Whatever the question is, if we need more information, we search it online. In seconds we have a lot of material. This is marvelous. The Internet provides many opportunities for learning.”

- If Ye Lack Wisdom, by Marcos A. Aidukaitis (First Quorum of the Seventy), April 2014 General Conference

“You live in a world where technological advances occur at an astounding pace. It is difficult for many of my generation to keep up with the possibilities. Depending on how technology is used, these advances can be a blessing or a deterrent. Technology, when understood and used for righteous purposes, need not be a threat but rather an enhancement to spiritual communication.”

-For Peace At Home, by Richard G. Scott (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles). April 2013 General Conference

And on it goes. Nowhere can you find any reference where the Brethren denounce “unapproved” Internet materials. You are making an accusation that your citations don’t in any way support. Is that the honest thing to do?

UPDATE: Ironically, the only way for members to directly read the Church’s admissions and validations of yesterday’s “anti-Mormon lies” is by going on the internet to the [Gospel Topics Essays](#) section of the Church’s website.

This would only be ironic if the Church had ever counseled its members to avoid the Internet, which is something it has never done.

The essays and their presence on lds.org have disturbed and shocked many members – some to the point of even believing that the Church’s website has been hacked.

Examples, please? This is a ridiculous, empty charge with no evidence to support it.

With all this talk from General Authorities against the internet...

You have provided precisely zero evidence of talk from General Authorities against the Internet.

...and daring to be balanced by looking at what both defenders and critics are saying about the Church...

You have provided precisely zero evidence of talk from General Authorities against looking at what both defenders and critics are saying about the Church.

... it is as if questioning and researching and doubting is now the new pornography.

It is? I can find a great deal of statements from General Authorities decrying the old pornography, but not a single statement making any of the claims you’re making. This is an absurd analogy.

Truth has no fear of the light.

Agreed. Which is why General Authorities are encouraging members to seek truth and not falsehood in the statements you've provided.

President George A. Smith said,

“If a faith will not bear to be investigated; if its preachers and professors are afraid to have it examined, their foundation must be very weak.”

Correct. You've provided no examples of General Authorities discouraging investigation of their faith.

A church that is afraid to let its people determine for themselves truth and falsehood in an open market is a church that is insecure and afraid of its own truth claims.

It is also a church that bears no resemblance to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Under Cook's counsel, FairMormon and unofficial LDS apologetic websites are anti-Mormon sources that should be avoided.

That's like saying “the sky is green.” Elder Cook said nothing that could possibly be tortured into meaning this.

Not only do they introduce to Mormons “internet materials that magnify, exaggerate, and in some cases invent shortcoming of early Church leaders...”

Elder Cook's verb was “immersed,” not “introduce.” Big, big difference. FairMormon does not immerse people in material that magnifies, exaggerates, or invents shortcomings of early Church leaders.

... but they provide asinine “faithful answers” with logical fallacies and omissions while leaving members confused and hanging with a bizarre version of Mormonism.

The logical fallacies and omissions that have piled up in the CES Letter give this accusation a “mote v. beam” vibe.

What about the disturbing information about early Church leaders and the Church which are not magnified, or exaggerated, or invented?

What about it? All the statements you cite here encourage people to seek truth and not falsehood. We have nothing to fear from truth, no matter where it's found.

What about the disturbing facts that didn't come from the flat-earthers or moon-hologramers but instead from the Church itself?

Elder Ballard's 2016 talk insists that you should learn as much as you possibly can about them.

Church leaders today are fully conscious of the unlimited access to information, and we are making extraordinary efforts to provide accurate context and understanding of the teachings of the Restoration. A prime example of this effort is the 11 Gospel Topics essays on LDS.org that provide balanced and reliable interpretations of the facts for controversial and unfamiliar Church-related subjects.

It is important that you know the content in these essays like you know the back of your hand. If you have questions about them, then please ask someone who has studied them and understands them. In other words, “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” as you master the content of these essays.

You should also become familiar with the Joseph Smith Papers website and the Church history section on LDS.org and other resources by faithful LDS scholars.

The effort for gospel transparency and spiritual inoculation through a thoughtful study of doctrine and history, coupled with a burning testimony, is the best antidote we have to help students avoid and/or deal with questions, doubt, or faith crises they may face in this information age.

– M. Russell Ballard, “*The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century*,” February 26, 2016

Are those facts invalid when someone discovers them on the internet?

No, and furthermore, no General Authority has ever said that they are.

What happens when a member comes across the Church's *Book of Mormon Translation essay* where they learn – for the first time in their lives – that the Book of Mormon was not translated with gold plates as depicted in Sunday Schools, Ensigns, MTC, General Conference addresses, or Visitor Centers?

Rock-in-hat-rock-in-hat-rock-in-hat?

Depends on the person, I guess. You and I certainly reacted differently. In any case, we're about to find out, as the Church is making a concerted effort to get this information in front of as many members as possible.

Or the Church's *Race and the Priesthood* essay where yesterday's prophets, seers, and revelators are thrown under the bus over their now disavowed “theories”?

Again, the Church is now actively pushing this information to the membership, so we're about to find out.

Or the *Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham essay* and that the Book of Abraham and its facsimiles do not match what Joseph Smith translated?

It will be much better than when they get the story in the CES Letter's plagiarized pseudo-scholarship from the musical director of *Saturday's Voyeur*.

Or the *Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo essay* where they learn the real origins of polygamy and the disturbing details of how Joseph practiced it?

Or the sections in *Saints* that confront this head on, too, and provide context that is deliberately and dishonestly excluded from the CES Letter?

That Joseph was married to other living men's wives and young girls as young as 14-years-old behind Emma's back?

Which isn't true, as the essay makes clear?

That God sent an angel with a drawn sword threatening Joseph?

In a context quite different from the distorted one presented in the CES Letter?

Or any of the other troubling essays, for that matter?

Essays that show that, far from counseling members to avoid the Internet, the Church is doing everything in its power put its whole story and all primary documents online in order to be as open as possible? The Church is going full throttle towards full transparency. You're going to have to find a new line of attack.

Is this member in need of repentance for discovering and being troubled by all the inconsistencies and deceptions?

I wasn't, as I didn't consider it inconsistency and deception. And no General Authority said that doubts make anyone in need of repentance.

President Uchtdorf said:

It's natural to have questions—the acorn of honest inquiry has often sprouted and matured into a great oak of understanding. There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith—even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty.

Why is the member required to repent for discovering verifiable facts and for coming to the same logical conclusion about the LDS Church's dominant narrative that Mormon historian, scholar, and patriarch Richard Bushman did?

“The dominant narrative is not true. It can't be sustained.”

You seem to be under the impression that quoting Richard Bushman out of context multiple times will somehow make him agree with you. He doesn't agree with you, and this doesn't mean what you repeatedly and erroneously insist it means. Richard Bushman remains a

faithful, believing member of the Church. If people come to the same logical conclusions he has come to, they, too, will be faithful and believing members of the Church.

Most of the main information and facts that I discovered and confirmed online about the Church is now found from Church sources, Church-friendly sources, and neutral sources.

Except you have woefully distorted and misinterpreted that information, and many of your sources quoted in the CES Letter are sources you haven't even bothered to read. Is that the honest thing to do?

“And it is always good to keep in mind just because something is printed on paper, appears on the Internet, is frequently repeated or has a powerful group of followers doesn't make it true.” Exactly - the exact same can be said of Mormonism and lds.org.

Yes. The exact same thing can be said of any information found anywhere.

THE SEPTEMBER SIX

“The September Six were six members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were excommunicated or disfellowshipped by the Church in September 1993, allegedly for publishing scholarly work on Mormonism or critiquing Church doctrine or leadership.”

Who are you quoting? Is this a real person or more “unapproved”-style strawman nonsense?

I find it telling that to illustrate the idea the Church routinely goes after members who “publish or share their questions, concerns, and doubts,” you have to reach back 25 years to find actual examples. If this really were an ongoing practice or concern, surely there'd be a great deal more support for your allegation.

In any case, the September Six are now the September Four, as two of these scholars have rejoined the Church in full fellowship. They continue to function as both scholars and faithful members of the Church.

A few months before the September Six, Elder Boyd K. Packer made the following comment regarding the three “enemies” of the Church:

“The dangers I speak of come from the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement (both of which are relatively new), and the ever present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals.”
– Boyd K. Packer, All-Church Coordinating Council, May 18, 1993

You're insinuating that Elder Packer ordered these excommunications, but there is no evidence that this is true, despite decades of innuendo to that effect. Even if Elder Packer was engaged in a systematic crackdown on Mormon scholars, you'd think that he'd have more than six excommunications to his credit over the course of so many years.

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH
MEMBERS COMMITTEE (SCMC)

The spying and monitoring arm of the Church.

That's rather melodramatic.

It is secretive...

Indeed! So secretive that the First Presidency issued a public statement affirming its existence and purpose in the Church News in 1992.

Here's the statement.

First Presidency statement cites scriptural mandate for Church committee

Generally, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not respond to criticism levied against its work. But in light of extensive publicity recently given to false accusations of so-called secret Church committees and files, the First Presidency has issued the following statement:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was established in 1830 following the appearance of God the Father and Jesus Christ to the Prophet Joseph Smith in upstate New York. This sacred event heralded the onset of the promised 'restitution of all things.' Many instructions were subsequently given to the Prophet including Section 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants:" `And again, we would suggest for your consideration the propriety of all the saints gathering up a knowledge of all the facts, and sufferings and abuses put upon them. . . .

And also of all the property and amount of damages which they have sustained, both of character and personal injuries. . . .

And also the names of all persons that have had a hand in their oppressions, as far as they can get hold of them and find them out.

And perhaps a committee can be appointed to find out these things, and to take statements and affidavits; and also to gather up the libelous publications that are afloat;

And all that are in the magazines, and in the encyclopedias, and all the libelous histories that are published...(Verses 1-5.)'

Leaders and members of the Church strive to implement commandments of the Lord including this direction received in 1839. Because the Church has a non-professional clergy, its stake presidents and bishops have varied backgrounds and training. In order to assist their members who have questions, these local leaders often request information from General Authorities of the Church.

The Strengthening Church Members Committee was appointed by the First Presidency to help fulfill this need and to comply with the cited section of the Doctrine and Covenants. This committee serves as a resource to priesthood leaders throughout the world who may desire assistance on a wide variety of topics. It is a General Authority committee, currently comprised of Elder James E. Faust and Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They work through established priesthood channels, and neither impose nor direct Church disciplinary action.

Members who have questions concerning Church doctrine, policies, or procedures have been counseled to discuss those concerns confidentially with their local leaders. These leaders are deeply aware of their obligation to counsel members wisely in the spirit of love, in order to strengthen their faith in the Lord and in His great latter-day work.

– The First Presidency

... and most members have been unaware of its existence since its creation in 1985 after Ezra Taft Benson became president.

Actually, it looks like various versions of this committee have been around since Section 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants was received in 1839.

[Elder Jeffrey R. Holland admitted it still exists in March 2012.](#)

The transcript of that admission:

John Sweeney: What is the Strengthening Church Members Committee?

Elder Holland: The Strengthening Church Members Committee was born some years ago to protect against predatory practices of polygamists.

Sweeney: I asked what it is, not was.

Holland: That is what it is...

Sweeney: So it does still exist?

Holland: It does still exist...it does still exist...

Sweeney: And it.... looks at....it's there to defend the church against polygamists?

Holland: Principally, that is still its principal task.

Sweeney: So what is its subsidiary task?

Holland: I just.... suppose to.... to be protective generally, just to watch and to care for any insidious influence. But for all intents and purposes, that's all that I know

about it...is that it's primarily there to guard against polygamy. That would be the substantial part of the work. I'm not on that committee so I don't know much about it.

The historical evidence and the September Six points to SCMC's primary mission being to hunt and expose intellectuals and/or disaffected members who are influencing other members to think and question, despite Elder Holland's claim that it's a committee primarily to fight against polygamy.

You therefore have a responsibility to provide that historical evidence. You don't, suggesting that the evidence does not exist and you're making this up. Is that the honest thing to do?

“WHEN THE PROPHET SPEAKS THE
DEBATE IS OVER ”

Correct.

N. Eldon Tanner, first counselor in the First Presidency, gave a First Presidency Message in the August 1979 Ensign that includes the following statement:

“When the prophet speaks the debate is over.”

In practice, he's absolutely right. The Church does not function as a democracy. Members do not debate and vote on doctrines or policies, and we do not change doctrines or policies by debating our prophets, who ultimately have the final say on such things.

Some things that are true are not very useful...

Which you deliberately misinterpret,

+ Censorship...

Which you mischaracterize as censorship when it is not,

+ Deceptively altering past quotes...

Which didn't happen,

+ Prioritizing tithing before food and shelter...

Which is a gross distortion,

+ It is wrong to criticize leaders of the Church, even if the criticism is true...

Which you rip out of context,

+ Spying and monitoring on members...

For which you provide no evidence,

+ Intellectuals are dangerous...

Which is deceptively altering Elder Packer's quote, as he said "so-called" intellectuals. He was making to those dissidents who hide behind intellectual credentials. The Church adores faithful intellectuals. What was the mighty Hugh Nibley if not an intellectual?

+ "us versus them" rhetoric...

Which is all over the CES Letter,

+ When the prophet speaks the debate is over...

We just covered this,

+ Obedience is the First Law of Heaven...

That's an ancient biblical principle. What's wrong with it?

= Policies and practices you'd expect to find in a totalitarian system such as North Korea or George Orwell's *1984*; not from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My guess is, like most of your sources, you haven't read *1984*. When first responding to your letter, I had just re-watched the John Hurt/Richard Burton film adaptation of that seminal work. (And yes, it was an R-rated movie.) My memory was fresh enough to recognize this as a ridiculously hyperbolic comparison. At what point have Church leaders set up video monitoring screens in all members houses to enforce orthodoxy under threat of torture by means of a bucket of rats attached to their faces until they publicly confess to non-existent crimes?

The North Korea comparison is equally absurd. Were the September Six sentenced to gulags where they were worked and starved to death? Are rank-and-file members hauled off to such camps when they take down the framed pictures of the prophet that they are required by law to have on display in their homes at all times? By using this kind of hyperbolic, inflammatory language, you demean the actual victims of such totalitarian nightmares and deliberately misrepresent the Church. Is that the honest thing to do?

As a believing member, I was deeply offended by the accusation that the Church was a cult. "How can it be a cult when we're good people who are following Christ, focusing on family, and doing good works in and out of a church that bears His name? When we're 15 million members? What a ridiculous accusation."

It's made even more ridiculous by the fact that you don't seem to know what a cult is.

The word "cult" is objectively meaningless. It used to have reference to any religion and was essentially a measure of size – i.e. a cult is "a small group of religious followers." In today's

vernacular, though, the word “cult” is reserved for spurious or unorthodox religions that deserve scorn and ridicule.

People who throw the word “cult” around with regularity and think they’re saying something factual are simply telling you which religions they don’t like.

The best and most useful definition of “cult” came from my brilliant high school government teacher, Lee Shagin, who put it thusly:

“A cult is someone else’s religion.”

It was only after seeing all of the problems with the Church’s foundational truth claims and discovering, for the first time, the SCMC and the anti-intellectualism going on behind the scenes that I could clearly see the above cultish aspects of the Church and why people came to the conclusion that Mormonism is a cult.

Walter Martin, arguably the most influentially vitriolic critic of the LDS Church in the 20th Century, wrote a book titled “The Kingdom of the Cults” in which he derided several different groups that went afoul of his thinking of what Christianity ought to be. However, in order to begin mudslinging at all the cults he despised, he had to have an ironclad definition of same to anchor the discussion.

The problem was that every part of Martin’s definition could also be applied to early Christianity. All cults, according to Martin, follow a charismatic leader and insist that they’re the only way to heaven. They require sacrifices; they have their own vocabulary. Sounds like he’s describing all those folks following Jesus of Nazareth circa 33 AD. In fact, it also sounds quite a bit like the defenders of the CES Letter and the supporters of the CES Letter Foundation.

[Here’s a fun piece](#) about how John Dehlin’s organization can be defined as a cult, using Zeph on the Shelf’s definition of the term.

So you and Walter Martin can do all you want to try and clarify what a cult is, but ultimately, Lee Shagin’s definition is the better one.

In any case, the way you’re using the word “cult” in connection with 1984 and North Korea suggests you see the Church as some kind of prison that wreaks great havoc on dissidents. But that’s demonstrably nonsense. The fact is that the Church welcomes all, and it also allows all to leave.

This is no totalitarian state; you’re not going to get shot on your way out. As soon as you resign your membership, a simple process that only requires a single letter to your bishop, you will be free and clear. No one will follow you; no one will spy on you, and no one will punish you. Even those assigned to minister to you will leave you alone.

You’ve resigned your membership, so you know this to be true. You now realize by your own personal experience that no 1984 tactics have been employed to bring you back into the fold. There is the likelihood, however, that your Mormon friends and family will still love and care for you and pray on your behalf, but, alas, such kindness can’t really be stopped.

CONCLUSION

“Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a Prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead people, then he should be exposed, his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false...”

– PRESIDENT JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH, DOCTRINES OF SALVATION,
P. 188

“Amen to that! And thank heaven this is almost over.”

- JIM BENNETT, *A FAITHFUL REPLY TO THE CES LETTER FROM A FORMER CES EMPLOYEE*, 10/2018

SHORT CONCLUSION:

Jeremy, this is no longer “just asking questions” or an expression of personal doubt. You are now making money by means of the destruction of the faith of others. That is about as terrible thing as any human being can do. The Church and its members are worthy of so much more.

LONG CONCLUSION:

When I first responded to your letter, I didn't interrupt your conclusion much. I figured it was a heartfelt, personal summation of your personal faith journey, and I thought it appropriate to give you the benefit of the doubt and let you sum up your argument without me butting in.

If that's what the CES Letter originally was, it is nothing like that now.

All of the above arguments were crowdsourced in the ex-Mormon subReddit, and while you disingenuously present all this material as if it's all your own work, you haven't even bothered to read many of your own arguments. Whatever sincerity was present in your initial letter has been drained out by the cold, corporate faith-destroying machine that your organization has become. You are every bit as financially invested in your own apologetics as you accuse Latter-day Saints of being, if not more so. It is no use trying to perpetuate the flimsy “just asking questions” illusion when your very livelihood now depends on having none of your questions satisfactorily answered.

Once, you were a troubled Latter-day Saint who was reeling from information you didn't understand. Now, you now make a living, and quite a fat one, destroying the faith of others. You do so by means of terrible scholarship and deliberate misrepresentation. That approach does not deserve the benefit of the doubt. It deserves vigorous opposition, and that is what my reply now is.

In my first version of my reply, I cited the Christlike tone that Gilbert Scharffs used in his book *The Truth About the Godmakers* and promised to emulate that tone. I was criticized by many that I didn't succeed in that goal, even with that less confrontational version. You accused me of ad hominem attacks when none could be found. And while I am fiercely critical of your terrible scholarship, your plagiarism, and your ignorance of your own sources, you will find no ad hominem attacks in this version, either. I am not interested in calling you names or criticizing you as a human being. I am interested in vigorously standing up for the faith that you have made it your life's mission to destroy.

I will say, however, that I don't think my new, more confrontational approach in the letter is a departure from Christlike principles. Jesus had tremendous patience for sinners who were willing to repent. But he also called the Pharisees “whited sepulchres” that were “full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.” He drove the money changers out of the temple at the end of a whip. And he reserved his strongest language for those who deliberately attempt to destroy the genuine faith of his followers.

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me,” the Lord said, “it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)

I wish you no ill will, Jeremy. I also have no further interest in pretending that what you are doing is anything but profoundly wrong.

When I first discovered that gold plates were not used to translate the Book of Mormon...

And after all this, is it really so simple that this all comes down to the rock in the hat?

... that Joseph Smith started polygamy and disturbingly practiced it in ways I never could have imagined...

And ways which you misinterpret and misrepresent.

and that Joseph's Book of Abraham translations and claims are gibberish...

That word does not mean what you think it means.

I went into a panic...

Panics are irrational. Given that you thought the warm feelings you felt during *The Lion King* were confirmation of Mufasa's historicity, it's clear that whatever faith you had was based on some strange and irrational assumptions.

I desperately needed answers and I needed them immediately. Among the first sources I looked to for answers were official Church sources such as Mormon.org and LDS.org. I couldn't find them.

You should have begun by looking to God. Your assumptions of what the Church is and/or is supposed to be could have been tempered by genuine spiritual insight and a willingness to give the Church the benefit of the doubt. Instead, your first reaction was to completely turn on the Church and assume the worst possible interpretation of every troubling issue that came your way.

I then went to FairMormon and Neal A. Maxwell Institute (formerly FARMS). FairMormon and these unofficial apologists have done more to destroy my testimony than any anti-Mormon source ever could.

“If facts and truths can destroy faith...what does it say about faith?” - Jeremy Runnells.

I find their version of Mormonism to be alien and foreign to the Chapel Mormonism...

What on earth is “Chapel Mormonism?” This isn't a thing.

... that I grew up in attending Church, seminary, reading scriptures, General Conferences, EFY, Church history tour, mission, and BYU.

What you are saying here is that when your long-unchallenged expectations encountered challenges, you questioned the Church rather than questioning your own expectations. It never seems to occur to you that your expectations might be the problem, not the facts.

It frustrates me that apologists use so many words in their attempts to redefine words and their meanings.

Like “Chapel Mormonism,” for instance? Or witness conflicts of interest? Or legally binding witness testimonies? Or “gibberish” which isn’t gibberish? Or “lands of Joseph Smith’s youth” that include Keokuk, Iowa in your case? Or Egyptian scholars that are actually theatre musicians with no Egyptological background? Or sources you haven’t read that are cited to say things they don’t actually say?

I can see how that would be frustrating.

Their pet theories, claims, and philosophies of men mingled with scripture are not only contradictory to the scriptures and Church teachings I learned through correlated Mormonism...they're truly bizarre.

There’s plenty of bizarre on display in the CES Letter.

I am amazed to learn that, according to these unofficial apologists, translate doesn't really mean translate...

You completely misrepresent what translation is, beginning with your very first objection about KJV version “translation errors,” citing a source that says nothing about the assertion you make.

... horses aren't really horses (they're tapirs)...

Which gives you license to gratuitously insult Daniel Peterson as “Tapir Dan” and completely misrepresent his position.

... chariots aren’t really chariots (since tapirs can’t pull chariots without wheels, steel isn't really steel, the Hill Cumorah isn't really in New York (it's possibly in Mesoamerica), Lamanites aren't really the principal ancestors of the Native American Indians...

All these things are theories, not definitive answers. The truth is that there is a great deal about the Book of Mormon we do not know. The insistence that everything be black-and-white and never subject to interpretation is the problem, not the theories themselves. And there is a great deal of evidence of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity that you discard out of hand because you’re upset about tapirs and chariots.

... marriage isn't really marriage (if they're Joseph's plural marriages? They're mostly non-sexual spiritual sealings)...

Hey! There it is! My last “sealings, not marriages, no sex” finally paid off!

... and yesterday's prophets weren't really prophets when they taught today's false doctrine.

Line upon line, precept upon precept. At no point have we ever been taught that all possible knowledge has been revealed. We welcome new knowledge from heaven, even if, or perhaps especially if, it corrects the errors of the past. When we resist new revelation as we cling to the past, we risk losing the knowledge we have.

"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." (Matthew 13:12)

Why is it that I had to first discover all of this – from the internet – at 31-years-old after over 20 years of high activity in the Church?

Because you didn't bother to take responsibility for your own faith. You assumed that discipleship involved simply following orders, not gaining a personal spiritual witness that went beyond warm and fuzzy feelings from Disney cartoons.

I wasn't just a seat warmer at Church. I've read the scriptures several times.

And yet you didn't realize Joseph Smith was a polygamist? Was Doctrine and Covenants 132 not in your copy of the scriptures?

I've read hundreds of "approved" Church books.

There's that word in quotes again. What's an "approved" Church book? Despite your quotes, the Church provides no such designation itself. Are you referring to books published by the Church? Because outside of manuals, the Church itself only publishes a handful of books, including the Scriptures, *Jesus the Christ* and *The Articles of Faith*, and now *Saints*. There aren't hundreds of officially "approved" Church books to read.

I was an extremely dedicated missionary who voluntarily asked to stay longer in the mission field.

More time to discuss the Three Witnesses (non) affidavits? You were apparently teaching people things that weren't in the discussions.

I was very interested in and dedicated to the Gospel.

Yet you were more interested and dedicated to your unquestioned assumptions than the possibility that maybe, just maybe, there was a different, more faithful way to interpret the information you were discovering.

How am I supposed to feel about learning about these disturbing facts at 31-years-old?

Probably embarrassed that it never occurred to you to engage with your faith beyond the kind of rote, unquestioning apathy that "Chapel Mormonism," whatever that is, was expecting of you.

After making critical life decisions based on trust and faith that the Church was telling me the complete truth about its origins and history?

How does the rock in the hat change your critical life decisions? That's the element to which you have taken the most offense, but from my perspective, I see no way in which that should have any bearing on any life decision you make, critical or otherwise.

After many books, seminary, EFY, Church history tour, mission, BYU, General Conferences, scriptures, Ensigns, and regular Church attendance?

How on earth is it possible that you lived through all that and still believed the Spirit was confirming the physical existence of cartoon characters?

So, putting aside the absolute shock and feeling of betrayal in learning about all of this information that has been kept concealed and hidden from me by the Church my entire life, I am now expected to go back to the drawing board.

No, you are expected to challenge your expectations. You are expected to consider the possibility that it is you, not just the Church, that has gotten a great deal wrong.

Somehow, I am supposed to rebuild my testimony on newly discovered information that is not only bizarre and alien to the Chapel Mormonism I had a testimony of...

Sorry, *what testimony?* A testimony requires a knowledge of truth. You clearly didn't have a testimony, as it shattered like glass the moment it came into contact with new information. A knowledge of truth doesn't do that. You can't keep using these terms as if they mean something they don't. And whatever "Chapel Mormonism" is, it's not the true Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ.

... it's almost comical.

It isn't. It's extraordinarily sad. You have chosen to not only abandon whatever faith you have yourself; you have devoted your life to making money by tearing down the faith of others. There is nothing even remotely funny about that.

I'm now supposed to believe that Joseph has the credibility of translating ancient records when the Book of Abraham and the Kinderhook Plates destroy this claim?

You're now supposed to believe that you've been given bad information on both those subjects.

That Joseph has the character and integrity to take him at his word after seeing his deliberate deception in hiding and denying polygamy and polyandry for at least 10 years of his adult life?

You got that seriously wrong and refuse to consider solid evidence to the contrary.

How he backdated and retrofitted the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood restoration events as if they were in the Book of Commandments all along?

That is the least generous interpretation of what happened that it is possible to have.

And I'm supposed to believe with a straight face that Joseph using a rock in a hat is legit?

sigh

This reply is right up against 140,000 words at this point. If we removed all references to the rock in the hat, it would probably be half as long.

Despite this being the exact same method he used to con people out of their money during his treasure hunting days?

No evidence that he conned anyone out of anything. The hearing where he was accused of this ended when Josiah Stowell, his supposed mark, testified on his behalf.

Despite this ruining the official story of ancient prophets and Moroni investing all of that time and effort into gold plates, which were not used because Joseph's face was stuffed in a hat?

140,021 words at this point.

I'm supposed to sweep under the rug the inconsistent and contradictory first vision accounts and just believe anyway?

No, you're supposed to recognize that you're seeing inconsistencies where there are none, and that your presentist assumptions about history are deeply, deeply flawed.

I'm supposed to believe that these men who have been wrong about so many important things and who have not prophesied, "seered," or revealed much in the last 170 or so years are to be sustained as "prophets, seers, and revelators"?

You are supposed to believe that they have gotten far more right than they've gotten wrong, and that no Church office requires the forfeiture of agency.

I'm supposed to believe the scriptures have credibility after endorsing so much rampant immorality, violence, and despicable behavior?

You took this section out of this version, but you still cite it here in the conclusion. Lousy scholarship.

When it says that the earth is only 7,000 years old and that there was no death before then?

It says neither of those things.

Or that Heavenly Father is sitting on a throne with an erect penis when all evidence points to it being the pagan Egyptian god of sex, Min?

Min is the god of fertility and harvest, not the “god of sex.” And you are expected to understand that symbols can be appropriated over time to mean many different things.

The “most correct book on earth” Book of Mormon going through over 100,000 changes over the years?

The addition of punctuation by an uninspired printer racks that number up pretty quickly. The Book of Mormon has not gone through any substantive changes that alter its meaning or its message.

After going through so many revisions and still being incorrect?

And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.” Again, that’s on the first page. The *first frickin’ page*.

Noah’s ark and the global flood are literal events?

Many members believe that, but none are required to. I believe the account makes no attempt to distinguish between the literal and the figurative, and there’s no point in trying to distinguish one from the other.

Tower of Babel is a literal event?

Many members believe that, but none are required to. I believe the account makes no attempt to distinguish between the literal and the figurative, and there’s no point in trying to distinguish one from the other.

The Book of Mormon containing 1769 King James Version edition translation errors and 1611 King James Version translators’ italics while claiming to be an ancient record?

You don’t understand your own accusation here, and you cite sources that do not say what you claim they say.

That there’s actually a polygamous god who revealed a Warren Jeffs style revelation on polygamy that Joseph pointed to as a license to secretly marry other living men’s wives and young girls and teenagers?

Wrong. Sealings, not marriages. No sex.

That this god actually threatened Joseph’s life with one of his angels with a sword if a newly married pregnant woman didn’t agree to Joseph’s marriage proposal?

Completely wrong. Joseph never once used the angel as a drawn sword as leverage to get anyone to marry him.

I’m supposed to believe in a god who was against polygamy before He was for polygamy but decided in 1890 that He was again against it?

You're supposed to believe in a god who announced in the Book of Mormon that monogamy is the standard but polygamy is the occasional exception.

I'm told to put these foundational problems on the shelf and wait until I die to get answers?

Who has told you to do that?

To stop looking at the Church intellectually even though the "glory of God is intelligence"?

No one has told you to do that. Your problem stems from the fact that you didn't bother to intellectually engage with the Church to any degree until you were 31 years old.

Ignore and have faith anyway?

Nobody has told you to do that.

I'm sorry, but faith is believing and hoping when there is little evidence for or against something .

It is not. Every action you take in life is an act of faith, and it is not only believers in the supernatural who exercise faith.

Sting has a song called "If I Ever Lose My Faith in You" where he renounces his faith in everything but the person to whom he's singing, presumably a friend or a lover. In order to have faith in that friend, Sting has had to have experience with them, and he likely has plentiful evidence that the person is reliable. Most of us only exercise faith in people or institutions where such evidence already exists. We deposit our money in reputable banks because we have faith that our savings will be safe there. We don't deposit money in JoJo The Monkey Boy's Savings, Loan, and Bait Shop because the evidence suggests that it might not be there for us when we come back to get it.

Notice that in each instance, no supernatural entity is involved. Faith is not simply a religious principle. If you don't have faith in God, then you have faith in something else. Militant atheists a la Richard Dawkins have enough faith in Darwinian processes that they insist random chance could have created the majesty of the universe. On that count, I remain a skeptic.

Delusion is believing when there is an abundance of evidence against something.

You have deliberately ignored an abundance of evidence, not just of the Church's truth claims, but of God Himself and his great love for you. That's not just a delusion; it's a heartbreaking delusion.

To me, it is absolute insanity to bet my life, my precious time, my money, my heart, and my mind on an organization that has so many serious problematic challenges to its foundational truth claims.

How were you betting your life? You are now betting that the universe is a product of random chance, and that you need not make any effort to connect to a God who created everything, including you. Isn't that a much riskier bet? You are also betting that God will not hold you accountable for the faith of others that you are working diligently to destroy. That's about as risky a bet as I can imagine.

There are just way too many problems. We're not just talking about one issue here. We're talking about dozens of serious issues that undermine the very foundation of the LDS Church and its truth claims.

Except that we're really not. We're talking about one fundamental assumption - that the Church was supposed to be perfect - that was incorrect. Your basic assumption has colored your perception of everything to the point where the Church can do no right.

The past year was the worst year of my life.

This version of your letter was written in 2017. Are you saying 2016 was the worst year of your life? Or are you trying to perpetuate the illusion that this weaponized assault on the faith of millions is really just an organic representation of your 2013 faith crisis?

I experienced a betrayal, loss, and sadness unlike anything I've ever known.

That was then; this is now. Now you are experiencing financial wealth built on the broken faith of others.

"Do what is right; let the consequence follow" now holds a completely different meaning for me.

Apparently it does. The consequences that have followed have been disastrous for many, and not because you are doing what is right.

I desperately searched for answers to all of the problems. To me, the answer eventually came but it was not what I expected...or hoped for.

And what do you hope for now? Do you hope that there really is a God? Or do you hope that more and more people will use the CES Letter as a catalyst to abandon their faith and pay you for the privilege?

You are not anxiously engaged in a good cause here, Jeremy. You now make a living by destroying faith, destroying families, and destroying lives.

As a child, it seemed so simple; Every step was clearly marked.
So you clung to childish errors that you never thought to doubt
Priesthood, mission, sweetheart, temple; Bright with hope I soon embarked.
But the first clear sign of trouble's when you quickly bailed out.

But now I have become a man,
As error runs you wild
And doubt the promise of the plan.
Still thinking like a child.

For the path is growing steeper,
So you push others down to hell
And a slip could mean my death.
“If others die, it’s just as well.”

Plunging upward, ever deeper,
Celebrating faith that dies
I can barely catch my breath.
As you make money from your lies

Oh, where within this untamed wild
A mercenary plan
Is the star that led me as a child?
You sold it as a man.

As I crest the shadowed mountain,
And break the promise of your youth
I embrace the endless sky;
While you’re abandoning the truth.
The expanse of heaven’s fountain
In which you really don’t believe
Now unfolds before my eye
As you continue to deceive.
A thousand stars shine on the land
Not one of them is true
The chart drafted by my own hand.
Yes. Your only God is you.

– THE JOURNEY (TO HELL) –

An unwilling poetic collaboration between Jeremy Runnells and Jim Bennett

That seems like a rather harsh way to leave things, so perhaps I should take this opportunity to thank you for a great gift you have given me.

In my last conversation with Dad prior to his stroke, he told me he had read my reply to you from beginning to end. It may, in fact, be the last thing of any length that he read in his lifetime. So, Jeremy, this was probably not your intent, but your letter gave me a precious and sacred bond with my father in the final days of his life that I will always cherish. I cannot thank you enough for that. I mean that without a hint of sarcasm or irony.

I often wonder if I would be an active Latter-day Saint if it weren’t for the patience and

wisdom of my father. When I found troubling questions, I would always bring them to him, and he usually had a solid answer. If he didn't, he would find one together with me. I learned from him that the Church's claims could withstand scrutiny, and he never made me feel as if my doubts were signs of unworthiness or evil.

To me, the most troubling part of the CES Letter is not any of its challenges to Latter-day Saint truth claims. Rather, it's in the basic and fundamental way you, Jeremy, have misunderstood or completely missed what the Holy Spirit is.

I can recall quite vividly one of the first experiences I had that was an undeniable witness of the Spirit. I was in a pageant at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles called III Nephi, which dramatized Christ's visit to the New World after His resurrection. I was nine or ten years old, I think. I played one of the children who greets the Savior, and we were taught two songs to sing on that occasion – one was “I Feel My Savior's Love,” and the other was “The Love of God.” I can recall feeling a very powerful witness that Jesus was real; that He loved me, and that He knew me by name. I can remember a testimony meeting right after the dress rehearsal, where one of the men stood up and said “That which you feel right now is the love of God.” He was right. I knew he was telling the truth, just as surely and plainly as I knew I existed.

The song “I Feel My Savior's Love” was written for that pageant, and it has since become something of a staple among Mormon children. I've heard it a billion times. But I hadn't heard the song “The Love of God” since the day I last sang it on the stage of the Shrine. That is, until one Easter stake conference, when the stake choir sang it as a counterpoint to “I Know that My Redeemer Lives.” And instantly, I felt that same sweet assurance, the power of the Spirit reminding me of the certainty I learned so long ago.

That which I felt was the love of God.

Maybe that means I'm damned for all eternity, but that's a bet I'm willing to take. There are some things that sink too deeply into your soul to deny them. You never seem to have had that experience, and that makes me deeply sad.

I would also concede that the best point you make in your letter has to do with the idea of prophetic infallibility. We do a massive disservice to people by implying that the Church is perfect, that prophets never err, and that it's faithless to recognize that nobody gets their agency extracted, not even prophets.

Discipleship required us to be patient enough with an imperfect church that we were willing to endure error in order to sustain leaders who, unlike a perfect Christ, have weaknesses and blind spots and therefore actually need to be sustained.

And isn't that a better story anyway? Isn't it better to imagine a church that develops and grows and learns from its mistakes?

That's the story, incidentally, that the Lord has always expected us to tell. I don't think that people who stand up in a testimony meeting to praise this as “the only true church” realize that they're misquoting the Lord, who never actually said that. What he did say was this was

the only true and living church. (See D&C 1:30)

Plenty of other churches have truth in them. Some have gobs of it. But this church is both true *and* living. It is more than just correct principles; it is the living people doing everything in their power to apply them. And the Church, like all living things, develops, grows, and learns from its mistakes.

I don't say that to be critical. I love the Church. I love its doctrines, which provide a cohesive and glorious vision of the universe that has no equal in the other religions and philosophies of the world. But I also love the Church in practice, which has repeatedly come to my rescue, temporally and spiritually.

I will always be grateful for a ward that rallied around my family when my oldest daughter injured her spinal cord in a skiing accident and was left partially paralyzed. They organized a massive, successful fundraiser that covered most of our more-than-significant medical expenses, and they assembled a team of thirty-or-so people who came into our house and scrubbed it from top to bottom. They also fixed broken cabinets, replaced damaged electrical wiring, and installed a new kitchen sink, three new toilets, an entire handicapped-accessible bathroom, and double railings on two stairwells and in our front and back entrances.

Their main focus, however, was completely redecorating my daughter's bedroom, which now includes an entirely new bedframe and bedding, new furniture, a fresh coat of paint, and a beautiful mural of a flowering tree just above her bed. And just to make sure that my other daughter didn't feel left out, they entirely redid her room just for good measure, installing a built-in new window seat at the base of her bed.

None of that has any bearing on whether the Book of Abraham is an accurate translation or not, but I think it's important not to lose sight of what the Church really is on a practical, day-to-day level. On the whole, it makes bad people good and good people better.

More importantly, this church is also transformative because people have had a genuine, powerful experience with Jesus Christ, often through the Book of Mormon. I have seen, firsthand, what the power of Christ can do, and I have encountered God in this Church in an intimate, personal, and undeniable way. I don't think those kinds of spiritual experiences require me to abandon reason or stop asking questions, but they keep me from panicking the next time I hear an accusation against Joseph Smith or the Church that I've never heard before.

I have found God in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I wrote this with the hope that, despite your best efforts, other find Him there, too.
