

# Non-Biblical Criticisms of Mormonism

By Monte Benson

## **Doesn't "upward" in Hebrew mean north and "downward" mean south? Isn't the Book of Mormon geography full of problems when applied to the proposed area in Mesoamerica using such a system of reference?**

One critic of the Book of Mormon attacked the use of "upward" and "downward" in the Book of Mormon. He maintained that 'upward' in Hebrew meant north and 'downward' meant south. Then analyzing these terms in the Book of Mormon he showed that the geography doesn't make geographic sense when applied to Mesoamerica. Actually though when "upward" and "downward" are taken literally as a change in altitude, the geography makes perfect sense.

## **How could the Nephites and Lamanites have multiplied so quickly?**

Well, there had to have been other population groups involved. While it is true that Mormons used to think there were no other people in the Promised Land when the family of Lehi arrived, it is now becoming more clear that there had to be natives there beforehand. It is true that the Book of Mormon does not directly mention them, but this is because the record is a spiritual lineage history. But surely there were other Nephite records that did mention them directly. It may be that the Lamanites absorbed another culture after Nephi and his people fled into the land to the north, across the narrow strip of wilderness. Thus the Nephites would not have much to say about these people and they probably would have just called them all Lamanites.

## **If Joseph is a prophet why did he give so many false prophecies?**

### **The Grease Spot Prophecy:**

I have carefully read "To Moroni with Love" by Ed Decker. The truth is that it is inaccurate, for it distorts and ignores much of the available evidence. Decker needs to remember the advice of 2 Peter 1:20 that prophecy is not of private interpretation but must be understood by the Holy Ghost. An example of a prophecy that Decker distorts is the Grease Spot Prophecy. The prophet Joseph Smith said that if the United States Congress did not follow the saints' advice "they shall be broken up as a government." Decker claims this prophecy is saying that the United States government would be destroyed. Actually, this prophecy is referring to those in office who would be "broken up" or in other words removed from office; it does not refer to the U.S. government, which Joseph clearly stated was of God. A few years from the giving of this prophecy the party that had control of Congress did indeed lose its power, as did those who voted against the Saints; thus, not even a "grease spot" of those who voted against the Saints was left. This party lost its control to such an extent that it did not return to power until a quarter of a century had passed. But it came back greatly changed so as not to lay claim to being the same party Joseph Smith condemned in this prophecy.

## **Didn't Joseph falsely prophesy that Christ would return in 1890?**

It is true that Joseph Smith said: "I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when I heard a voice repeat the following: Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore let this suffice, and trouble me no more on this matter" (D&C 130:14-15). Since I deal with this prophecy in Chapter 10 of my book, suffice it to say that this prophecy was fulfilled when the Christ Spirit returned through a Great Prophet called Bahá'u'lláh in 1890.

## **Book of Mormon Geography: the Zelph Story, the City of Manti, and the Opinions of Early Mormon Leaders:**

The account of Zelph found in the *History of the Church* turns out to be the product of the poor state of journalism that existed in the 1800's. At that time, journalists took accounts stated by others and attributed them to Joseph Smith (i.e., "I Joseph Smith"). The truth is that Joseph Smith never made a written statement regarding Zelph. And the seven people who did leave statements did not agree on what happened. Most sources agree that Zelph was a white Lamanite who fought under a leader named Onandagus. (The accounts differ on the spelling of his name.) Those opposed to the church claim that the limited geography of Mesoamerica is wrong because the final battles of the Nephites occurred in Illinois according to these accounts of Zelph the Lamanite.

Actually, the accounts do not specify the battle was the last battle of the Nephites against the Lamanites, nor do they specify that Nephites were even involved. It may have been a Lamanite battle against other Lamanites hundreds of years after the Nephites were destroyed. Thus the accounts of Zelph do no harm to the Mesoamerican limited geography theory. [Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What is the Significance of Zelph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, (F.A.R.M.S.), vol. 8, no. 2, 1999, pp. 70-79]

A *Millennial Star* article published in England (The Latter-day Saints' *Millennial Star*, "History of Joseph Smith," vol. 16, page 296, May 13, 1854) said that Manti was in Missouri far away from the best proposed location of the Book of Mormon lands (i.e., Mesoamerica). However, nothing I saw in a paper written by an anti-Mormon on this subject demanded that his sources were reliable for absolute information regarding Book of Mormon geography. It turns out that Joseph Smith may not have even been directly involved with this particular issue of the *Millennial Star*. Statements by Joseph Smith and other leaders concerning the location of Book of Mormon lands appear to be just opinions or educated guesses.

## **Archaeological evidences for the Pearl of Great Price**

### **Historical Accounts Concerning the Number and Nature of the Papyri:**

In the 1830's, Joseph Smith purchased four mummies along with the ancient Egyptian records that came with them. Among these records was a copy of the Book of Abraham, a scripture originally written by the great patriarch Abraham. Joseph translated this record, and today it is in the scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Today, there is considerable debate as to whether Joseph accurately translated the papyri found with these

mummies. Unfortunately, some of the original artifacts (records) are missing, for instance facsimile number two and three and also the papyri from which Joseph translated the Book of Abraham.

Contrary to the claims of anti-Mormons, the Book of Breathings (Sensen Text) [papyri X and XI] is not the source of the Book of Abraham. The original Scroll was actually probably burned at a Museum in Chicago in 1871. There are some papers which have been attributed to Joseph that have some of the Book of Breathing [J.S. Papyrus No. XI] characters written in the margins next to text from the Book of Abraham. But these so called Kirtland Papers were simply an attempt at translation by some of the brethren of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They never even got beyond the second line of Egyptian characters, and Joseph himself was not involved.

### **The Book of Breathings and the Book of the Dead were not the only writings:**

Today we have only one of the three facsimiles. For the other two were lost or destroyed. Evidence indicates there were at least two scrolls along with the Book of the Dead and the Book of Breathings papyri fragments. Also, some evidence indicates there may have been three or more scrolls with the mummies. A local newspaper of the time, the Painesville Telegraph, March 27, 1835 entitled "Mummies" mentioned three scrolls found with the three mummies (Peterson, 1995, pp. 116-117). *The Daily Intelligencer*, April 9, 1833 p. 2, also refers to several rolls of papyrus. Several usually means more than two.

### **The fate of the mummies, scrolls, and papyri:**

After Joseph died, the Egyptian artifacts in question were held principally by his mother, who then sold them to Mr. Abel Combs (*Improvement Era*, Jan. 1968, pp. 12-16). Then pioneers brought one fragment west. Combs, however, sold two of the mummies and some of the papyri. They ended up at the St. Louis Museum in 1856. Next, the two mummies and papyri were taken to the Chicago Museum in 1863. These artifacts and writings were all destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. The fate of the other two mummies and any papyri that may have been with them is unknown. Today we have only 11 fragments remaining. Fragments X and XI are parts of the Book of Breathings. (See LDS FAQ "The Book of Abraham, Part 1," by Jeff Lindsay, p. 4)

The Book of Breathings could not have been the source of the Book of Abraham for the following reasons (these facts come from Joseph Smith's journal, Dec. 31, 1835) [Nelson, 1979, p. 88]:

- 1) The Scroll the Book of Abraham came from was beautifully written. The Book of Breathings text is not.
- 2) The Book of Abraham scroll contained rubrics or brief notations in red ink common to Egyptian manuscripts. The Book of Breathings text did not.
- 3) The Scroll was in perfect preservation. The Book of Breathings was not.

The fact is that it is not out of the ordinary for Egyptian documents to contain an illustration from one story with the text of another, as is the case with Facsimile no. 1 from the Book of Abraham, which was connected with the same scroll as the Book of Breathings (Book of Breathings Pap. Louvre N. 3279 by J.C. Goyon). The Book of Abraham 1:12 & 14 states that

facsimile no. 1 is to be found at the commencement of the record. This implies that the facsimile was not near the part of the papyri that had verses 1:12 & 14 written upon it. The Book of Abraham text was probably on the same Scroll as the Book of Breathings, with facsimile no. 1 at the very beginning of the Scroll. It is possible that someone who gained possession of these writings of Abraham in ancient times put the scroll together in this way when they edited and compiled it.

### **Translation of the Papyri:**

Anti-Mormons claim true Egyptologists have proven that Joseph falsely translated the facsimiles in the Book of Abraham. This is simply not so. There is now much support for Joseph's inspired translation. Kerry A. Shirts has brought forth and cataloged much of this evidence.

**Facsimile #1** This facsimile shows a crocodile on it, which Joseph translated as the idolatrous god of Pharaoh. Although this god was most associated with the Egyptian Middle Kingdom, it may have also been associated with the First Intermediate Period, the period when Abraham lived according to the details in Chapter 7 of my book. Above the crocodile god are four canopic jars, which from right to left are: a Falcon Head (Duamutef); Jackal Head (Qebehseuef); Baboon Head (Hapi); and a Human Head (Imseti or Mesta). Joseph translates these four jars, in the same order, as the Idolatrous God of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, and Korash. In the next paragraph and section, it will be seen that these four gods also represent "the earth in its four quarters." Dr. Hugh Nibley comments (giving them in reverse order) that:

“‘Korash’ indicates Koash which is the people from Nubia (*Nhsy*) to the south of Egypt; ‘Mahmackrah’ indicates the people from Palestine and Syria (*Retjnu*) to the north of Egypt. ‘Libnah’ indicates the people from Libya (*Temhiland*) to the west of Egypt; and ‘Elkenah’ (*Elkkener*) indicates the desert people (‘Amu) to the east of Egypt.” (*Improvement Era*, August 1969, p. 86)

This makes it clear that Joseph's translation is correct since the god over each of these territories is the god over that particular direction (see the following paragraph).

**Facsimile #2** Figure 6 of this facsimile shows the four sons of Horus. Joseph translated this as representing the "earth in its four quarters." Two non-Mormon Egyptologists support this translation as follows: Dr. Klaus Baer of Oriental Institute, Univ. of Chicago, identifies these same four mumiform figures as south- Imseti; north- Hapi; west- Qebehseuef; east- Duamutef; and Louis Herbert Gray, ed. *The Mythology of All Races*, "Egyptian," by W. Max Mueller, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 112, 388, stated, "The four sons of Horus represent the four cardinal points of the compass." Joseph Smith was actually the first person in the 1800's to translate this correctly!

According to Joseph Smith, this facsimile shows Abraham about to be sacrificed by an idolatrous priest of Pharaoh. What support is there for this interpretation? Some experts insist it is a funerary scene in which a dead person is being embalmed, yet why are his hands raised if he is dead? This and other elements make this facsimile unique from others like it. A third-century A.D. Egyptian papyrus even has the name Abraham on it with a lion-couch scene like that in

facsimile no. 1. (John Gee, "References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts," *Insights: An Ancient Window*, September 1991, pp. 1, 3; John Gee, *Ensign*, July 1990, pp. 60-62)

**Facsimile #3** This facsimile depicts Abraham teaching the principles of Astronomy in Pharaoh's court. The Bible does not mention anything like this.

There is support for this though in many post biblical texts. Josephus tells of Abraham teaching astronomy in Egypt (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1.8.1-2; 1.7.2.). Also, the *Testament of Abraham* 9-10 (OTP, 1:886-88), which is from the first or second century and is also of Egyptian origins teaches that Abraham was caught up into heaven and given a view of the earth and all of it's peoples. The Jubilees and the Koran also support Abraham as one who studied the stars. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* (of the 1st or 2nd century) tells how he was taken into heaven and shown the orders of the heavens and the elements of the earth obeying them. The great Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who lived in the late third and fourth centuries, preserves an even earlier account in *Praeparatio Evangelica*; it has Abraham going into Egypt and there teaching astronomy or astrology both to the priests of Heliopolis and the Egyptian King himself. [Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 9.17.8; 9.18.1-2 (OTP, 1:881-882). The original author is generally called PseudoEupolemus. R. Doran, in OTP, 2:873, dates his activity to sometime prior to the first century B.C. The apocryphal Book of Jasher, 15:22, also has Abraham invited to the palace of the king of Egypt and treated with great honor.]

For more extensive and impressive information read:

- 1) Daniel C. Peterson, "News from Antiquity," *Ensign*, January 1994.
- 2) LDS Frequently Asked Questions, "The Book of Abraham part 1 and 2": by Jeff Lindsay (on the Internet)
- 3) Mormonism Researched Page, by Kerry A. Shirts (on the Internet)

### **Changes to the Doctrine and Covenants (Book of Commandments):**

I have studied many of these changes that were made. I testify that they are all minor and demonstrate the flexibility in rendering God's speech into man's English tongue. Also, later revelation can be inserted where it fits the context in the middle of an earlier revelation. No doctrines have been compromised by the changes to the Book of Commandments, as they now stand in the Doctrine and Covenants.

### **Evidence for the Historicity and Truth of the First Vision: Differing Accounts Harmonized and Analyzed:**

I have examined LDS and anti-LDS literature and documents on the First Vision's historicity or lack thereof. The LDS documents come out ahead in all respects and vindicate the accounts Joseph and others have left us. The timing of revivals and the location of the Smith family at key points in the story are actually all accurate historically. I don't want to devote a lot of space here to document these claims when they have already been dealt with quite well in papers by various LDS scholars.<sup>1 2</sup> The following section just gives a few examples of anti-Mormon attacks on the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Lindsay, *LDS FAQ: Joseph and His Accounts of the First Vision: Fatal Contradictions?* Available: [http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ\\_first\\_vision.shtml](http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_first_vision.shtml) 3 August 2007

truthfulness of the First Vision story. I present only a small sampling of evidence that shows those attacks to be false. A thorough review of the overall evidence (far beyond what I can even begin to examine here) makes it clear that the anti-Mormon arguments are false.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Claim that Joseph's First Vision Occurred in 1823 When He was 17:**

According to Oliver Cowdery, "While this excitement continued, [Joseph] continued to call upon the Lord in secret for a full manifestation of divine approbation and for, to him, the all important information, if a supreme being did exist [this is a parenthetical aside and not a question Joseph was asking], to have an assurance that he was accepted of Him . . . On the evening of the 21st of September, 1823, previous to retiring to rest, our brother's mind was unusually wrought upon the subject which had so long agitated his mind- his heart was drawn out in fervent prayer . . . while continuing in prayer for a manifestation in some way that his sins were forgiven; endeavoring to exercise faith in the Scriptures, on a sudden a light like that of day, only of purer and far more glorious appearance and brightness, burst into the room . . . and in a moment a personage stood before him . . . he heard him declare himself to be a messenger sent by the commandment of the Lord, to deliver a special message, and to witness to him that his sins were forgiven." [*Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1, pp. 78, 79. Quoted in Tanner, *The First Vision Examined* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1969), p. 15.]

Oliver Cowdery is claimed to have stated that Joseph wondered what church was true in 1823 after some religious excitement which occurred in Palmyra and the nearby area. Oliver said, "You will recollect that I mentioned the time of a religious excitement in Palmyra and vicinity to have been in the 15th year of our brother J. Smith Jrs., age - that was an error in the type - it should have been in the 17th - you will please remember this correction as it will be necessary for the full understanding of what will follow in time. This would bring the date down to the year 1823." (*Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 5, February 1835, p. 78)

The above quotes poses no real problems. It is clear, as with the next quote, that Moroni's visit, which we know occurred on this exact date, was simply confused by the authors with the occurrence of the first vision. [see also *Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1834, pg. 13 & *Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 1834, p. 42] "Joseph Smith, when the great designs of heaven were first made known to him, was not far from the age of seventeen." (*Millennial Star*, vol. 4, p. 37) This is probably referring to Moroni's visit when Joseph was a few months from seventeen years old.

The great designs of heaven were probably not revealed to him in the First Vision. God the Father and Jesus Christ simply stated that all of the churches were not completely true and that Joseph should join none of them. We do not have a record of what else Jesus said to young Joseph. When Moroni came to him in 1823 he revealed many of the great designs of heaven concerning Joseph and the coming restoration of the church.

### **Was the Smith family in Farmington in 1820 at the time of the First Vision?**

Lucy Smith wrote, "So that in 2 years from the time we entered Palmyra [the Smiths entered Palmyra in 1816], strangers destitute of friends, home or employment we were able to settle

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<sup>2</sup> See the whole series of papers listed by topic at the right of the following page: "First Vision Accounts," FAIR, Retrieved from: [http://en.fairmormon.org/First\\_Vision\\_accounts](http://en.fairmormon.org/First_Vision_accounts) 25 April 2008

<sup>3</sup> "First Vision," FAIR, Retrieved from: [http://en.fairmormon.org/First\\_Vision](http://en.fairmormon.org/First_Vision) 6 April 2010

ourselves upon our own land a snug comfortable though humble habitation built and neatly furnished by our industry.” (*Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, Salt Lake City, Utah: Smith Research Associates, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, 1994, p. 12)

According to Pomeroy Tucker, “In 1818 they [the Smith Family] settled upon a nearly wild or unimproved piece of land, mostly covered with standing timber, situated about two miles south of Palmyra, being on the north border of the town of Manchester, Ontario County. . . . occupying as their dwelling-place, in the first instance, a small, one story, smoky log-house, which they built prior to removing there.” (*Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism...* New York: D. Appleton and company, 1867, pp. 12-13.) The two quotes above seem to say the Smith family was in their cabin in 1818 whereas other evidence puts them living in it in 1819. Perhaps Lucy and Pomeroy didn’t remember their dates perfectly. These two quotes, though, still give support to the claim that the Smith family was on the farm in Farmington (Joseph inadvertently calls it Manchester, which it did not become till later) before the First Vision.

#### **Further facts to consider:**

- 1) Joseph Sr. is first found in Palmyra on the road tax list for April 1817 as a resident on Main Street.
- 2) His name appears again in 1818 and 1819.
- 3) In April 1820 Alvin appears for the first time on the road tax list as a merchant on Main Street.
- 4) In April 1820, Joseph Smith Sr.’s name appears at the end of the list, which shows he lives near the Palmyra-Farmington town line. This would be in the log cabin on Jennings’ land 50 feet away from the Farmington town line.
- 5) In June 1820 the Smith home is mentioned about two miles south of Palmyra and used as a reference for a road survey.
- 6) Orsamus Turner recalls their “rude log house,” in the winter of 1819 and 1820.

(The facts above were taken from *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Smith Research Associates, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, 1994; as cited by Historicity of the First Vision, from the Internet) Confusion is only brought about because they didn’t actually build their log cabin in Farmington, but it was located 50 feet north of the Farmington-Palmyra line, on Samuel Jennings’ property. This mistake was probably due to the fact that they did not have a surveyor. Nevertheless, this actually turned out to be advantageous to Jennings. For he got a cabin out of it and the Smith’s also cleared the trees that were upon his land. This was in fact not an unusual practice for land owners to allow. I believe that the reason the tax records don’t show the Smith’s sooner is because they started clearing land and building the cabin in preparation for the Spring of 1820 before they could legally purchase the land. The Smiths were also waiting for the power of attorney to be transmitted before closing the deal. The Evertson agent would not have complained because cleared land was more valuable than forested land.

So, confusion is brought about because Joseph Sr. was listed on the 1821 and 1822 tax list as living in Palmyra because that was where the cabin was located. Yet, in 1820 he appears on the U.S. Census as a resident of Manchester because that was where the farm was located. Thus for a

few years the Smiths were technically in two towns. (*Just the Facts Please*, reviewed by Richard L. Bushman, 1994 by F.A.R.M.S.)

### **Was there religious excitement in 1820 as Joseph stated in “Joseph Smith History”?**

- 1816** (Joseph is 10) The Smith family moved to Palmyra; the family was in Vermont Mar. 15, 1816 (the date of Don Carlos’ birth)
- 1817** (Joseph is 11) Revival activity in Palmyra; Joseph’s mind became seriously impressed
- 1819** (Joseph is 13) Smith family moved within 50 feet from Farmington; religious excitement commences with the Methodists
- 1820** (Joseph is 14) Religious excitement continues; the First Vision occurs in the Spring
- 1824-25** (Joseph is 18) Palmyra revivals

**“Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion [1820]. It commenced [in 1819] with the Methodists . . .”**

The Methodists in 1819 began this religious activity probably with the Genesee Conference twelve miles from the Smiths’ home at the village of Vienna (now Phelps). A Palmyra printer said that Joseph caught “a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods on the Vienna road.” [O. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, (Rochester, New York: William Alling, 1852), p. 214. For background on Turner as a responsible editor, see Richard L. Anderson, “Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences,” *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 376-79.]

The Methodists of the area actually tripled in growth during 1819. Methodist circuits of Canandaigua and Seneca, both near the Smith family grew by a third, adding together 400 new members from mid-1818 to mid-1819 [Compare Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church... for the Year 1818 (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1818), pp. 30-31, with Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church...for the Year 1819 (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1819), pp. 36-37. Publication was at midyear, announcing coming conferences for August.)]

Farmington Baptists in 1819 grew about 20%. [Farmington membership was eighty-seven in the Minutes of the Ontario Baptist Association for 1818 (Canandaigua: J.A. Stevens, 1818), September 23 session; baptisms indicated are from the Minutes of the Ontario Baptist Association for the year of 1819 (n.d., n.p.), September 22 session, which gives new total membership as 108. BYU Professor Milton V. Backman, Jr., studied regional Quaker records for Farmington and reported consistent additions, peaking in 1817 and then again in 1819. See *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, pp. 37-38 (Feb. 1-4, 1820).]

**“... but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country.”**

There were several spectacular revivals in upstate New York during 1819 and 1820, and perhaps Joseph verbally glanced at this broad picture. Accounts of the enlivenments which occurred in New York in 1819 and 1820 were advertised in Palmyra, and the number of



conversions occurring in the area east of Lake Cayuga and in the region of Albany was enumerated in the local newspaper, the Palmyra Register. [See Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), p. 198]

The Prophet correctly stated that he was in the midst of an intense religious outreach during 1819 and early 1820. (Evidences here come from the 1818 and 1819 reports (see note 32). Comparisons also involve the Minutes of the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. [(New York: Joshua Soule and Thomas Mason, 1817), pp. 29-30.]

In May 1820, the Presbytery of Geneva reported 271 new members. In February of 1820, reports indicate the church at Phelps gained 10 new members, at Lyons 14, Geneva 82, at Junius 27 (as a result of “a very considerable refreshing” that came “during the spring and summer past.”). Camp meetings often met in the New York woods where preachers preached to scores or even hundreds. These were so common they were rarely noticed by the press. For instance, On 28 June 1820, the Palmyra Register reported a death from overexertion after the victim bought liquor at a “Camp-ground”; a clarification on 5 July 1820 explained that intoxicants were available nearby but not “within the enclosure of their place of worship.” [See: Comparative Images: Mormonism and Contemporary Religions as Seen by Village Newspapermen in Western New York and Northeastern Ohio, 1820-33, (Ph.D. Diss., Brigham Young University, 1991), 255. From: Ensign, April 1996, p. 16] [See also: LDS FAQ: “Joseph Smith’s First Vision Accounts,” by Jeff Lindsay, on the Internet, and “Joseph Smith’s Testimony of the First Vision,” by Richard L. Anderson; April 1996 Ensign pp. 10-21]

### **The 1838 and 1832 accounts: contradictions?**

The 1838 account of the First Vision mentions that a revival started religious contentions. It says “sometime in the second year after our removal to Palmyra,” rather than “after our removal to Manchester [1832 account].” There was revival activity both in 1817 (sometime in the second year after the Smith’s removal to Palmyra) and in 1819-20 (sometime in the second year after Joseph’s removal to Manchester). For more information see: FAQ “Joseph Smith’s First Accounts,” by Jeff Lindsay on the Internet.

### **Did God tell Joseph Smith that Christian Worship is unacceptable and even loathsome?**

What God actually told Joseph was that the creeds of the churches he was considering joining were an abomination in His sight and that those professors Joseph specifically had on his mind during the First Vision (remember God can read thoughts) were all corrupt.

### **Didn’t Joseph Smith teach that the Moon was inhabited?**

This accusation came from Oliver B. Huntington’s journal in 1881 and in 1892 from the Young Women’s Journal. Actually this recollection comes from Oliver’s patriarchal blessing given when he was 10 years old. He claimed it was Joseph’s father who gave the blessing when actually it was his own father. If Joseph himself speculated upon this, it would not have been strange. But, the account of the blessing remembered by Oliver B. Huntington first written thirty seven years after Joseph Smith, Jr.’s death is not reliable.

## **Didn't the early Mormon leaders lie and say they weren't practicing polygamy when they actually were?**

Polygamy actually involves having both plural husbands and plural wives. Thus, technically speaking, the early saints practiced polygyny (having plural wives only) not polygamy. Also, the leaders denials that the church as a whole was practicing polygamy were essentially correct since it was only the leaders who were at first practicing it. The early church was already severely persecuted and to announce plural marriage at that time would have made this persecution only worse. The public viewed polygamy as adultery. The early church leaders were thus also partly denying accusations of adultery. [*The Truth About the God Makers*, by Gilbert W. Scharffs pp. 209-210]

## **Necromancy, Alvin Smith, and the Salamander Letter:**

I have examined both sides of this issue and the anti-Mormons again have no case. Necromancy was not used by Joseph Smith as the following makes clear: The problem arose in part when Mark Hofmann forged some documents regarding church history, which were referred to as the Salamander Letter. This letter was supposed to be an early and before that point unknown Oliver Cowdery history. It states some strange things regarding the visits of Joseph with Moroni. It, along with earlier false documents, was used to attack the Church by claiming that Joseph used necromancy.

Some claim Joseph was involved with necromancy because of evidence that the Angel Moroni told Joseph to bring Alvin with him during his next and final visit before he received the plates. However, Joseph's brother Alvin died two months prior to the appointed time for the next meeting. In the Salamander Letter though Moroni tells Joseph to bring Alvin after he was already dead, whereas the historical account has the request being given while Alvin is still alive. Apparently, Joseph was supposed to have someone with him, for after Alvin's death, he was told to bring Emma along with him to receive the plates. Because of this request to bring Alvin, it was rumored that Joseph exhumed his body in order to bring a portion of his corpse with him to the Hill Cumorah.

Because of these rumors, Joseph's father had to run an ad in the Palmyra weekly five times, which said: "To the public: Whereas reports have been industriously put into circulation that my son Alvin had been removed from the place of his interment and dissected . . . therefore, for the purpose of ascertaining the truth of such reports, I, with some of my neighbors this morning, repaired to the grave, and removing the earth, found the body, which had not been disturbed. This method is taken for the purpose of satisfying the minds of those who have put it in circulation, that it is earnestly requested they desist therefrom."

## **Wasn't the Smith family Lazy?**

What does the Historical record say about the Smiths? Philastus Hurlburt collected affidavits in 1833 that contained attacks on the early church. (These were proven false in Chapter 14 of my book.) A common theme against the Smith family was that their principle employment was "digging for money." The Smiths did do some treasure searching as was common for people of the time, but their main employment was clearing 100 acres of forested land, building first a cabin and then a nice home, fencing in the land and then planting and/or tending a wheat and maple sugar crop. Thus these facts prove that

they were far from lazy.

### **Sidney Rigdon's testimony of seeing the Savior Jesus Christ in the Kirtland temple:**

In the Doctrine and Covenants, Sidney Rigdon added his testimony of the Church by saying he saw Jesus Christ in a glorious vision. Joseph and the three witnesses also testified of divine visions of God, Jesus, or an angel. These are eyewitness testimonies of the reality of Jesus Christ (and to the truth and authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), just as the New Testament contains eyewitness testimonies of Jesus Christ.

### **Did Brigham Young say all his sermons were scripture?**

Here is what he actually said: "I have never preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture. Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and it is as good Scripture as they deserve. . . . Let this [discourse] go to the people with "Thus saith the Lord," and if they do not obey it, you will see the chastening hand of the Lord upon them." (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 13, p. 95)

". . . Brigham Young has said 'when he sends forth his discourses to the world they may call them Scripture.' I [Brigham Young] say now, when they are copied and approved by me they are as good Scripture as is couched in this Bible . . ." (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 13, p. 264)

Brigham thus had to send out a sermon after first correcting it for it to be as good as scripture. Yet very few of the recorded sermons of Brigham Young were reviewed for correctness by him. The fact that Brigham Young wanted to review and correct his sermons before calling them as good as scripture presupposes errors being present in them, and proves he did not consider the *Journal of Discourses* to be scripture although his original discourses in their purity were as good as scripture. However, just because a document is scripture does not mean it is inerrant. The Bible certainly is not.

### **Blood Atonement**

The official teaching of the Church has always been that adulterers should not be killed for their sin; only murderers should suffer capital punishment. Let's look at what President Young taught on the matter:

"Suppose you found your brother in bed with your wife, and put a javelin through both of them, you would be justified, and they would atone for their sins, and be received into the kingdom of God. I would at once do so in such a case; and under such circumstances, I have no wife whom I love so well that I would not put a javelin through her heart, and I would do it with clean hands." (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 3 p. 247).

While this is shocking even to me, it is actually a scriptural statement. Under the Law of Moses an adulterer was also condemned to death. Yet, Brigham Young never taught that it should be

implemented except under a fully instituted Theocracy, and it would only apply to fully endowed members of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Also, being that this pronouncement was given on March 16, 1856, it had not yet been abrogated by Bahá'u'lláh, who founded the Bahá'í Faith in 1863.

The following statements made by Brigham Young are found in the *Journal of Discourses*:

“Again, if a pure Gentile firmly believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and yields obedience to it, in such a case I will give you the words of the Prophet Joseph: ‘The effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to **purge out the old blood**, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham.’” 2:269.

“There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. **The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it**; and the judgments of the Almighty will come, sooner or later, and every man and woman will have to atone for breaking their covenants. To what degree? Will they have to go to hell? They are in hell enough now. . . . Let compassion reign in our bosoms. Try to comprehend how weak we are, how we are organized, how the spirit and the flesh are continually at war.” 3:247.

What are the scriptural meanings of the word “blood” as given in these quotes? In John 6:51, 53, Jesus says:

“. . . Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”

After Jesus said this without even bothering to explain the symbolism:

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” . . . From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” (John 6:60, 66)

This is actually exactly what has happened with President Young’s inspired words on “blood atonement.” He was in fact teaching a doctrine without giving the inner meaning. Many who have heard his “blood atonement” doctrines (and other doctrines that are hard to hear) have left the Church and helped to lead many others astray, as well. But once the inner meaning of his sayings on such matters are understood, they are no longer hard to hear.

The reason President Young did not explain the inner meaning is two-fold: First, the outer meaning would give a stronger warning to the Saints concerning things such as adultery or the breaking of temple covenants. And secondly, the outer meaning would test the Saints. Those

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Parker, “Did Brigham Young Say that He Would Kill an Adulterous Wife with a Javelin?” June 12, 2006, Retrieved from: [http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Did\\_Brigham\\_Young\\_Say\\_He\\_Would\\_Kill\\_an\\_Adulterous\\_Wife\\_with\\_a\\_Javelin.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Did_Brigham_Young_Say_He_Would_Kill_an_Adulterous_Wife_with_a_Javelin.html) 21 December 2007

who had an inner spirit of rebellion and apostasy, those without the Spirit and without a true testimony, would cease upon such sayings as an excuse to leave the Church.

Yet, those with a true testimony who had an inner Spirit of obedience and faith in God's Church would remain faithful despite the shocking sounding doctrines which Brigham was teaching—just as Abraham was tested when God commanded him to offer his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-12). If only anti-Mormons had such faith.

I have already explained how Bahá'u'lláh abrogated God's law that required a literal blood atonement for adultery. The other references to blood atonement, though, still beg explanation:

The reference to purging out the "old blood" simply refers to purging out the spirit of wickedness and sin. After this, one becomes the "seed of Abraham." The statement that: "The blood of Christ will never wipe" certain serious sins out on behalf of those who commit them, but that, their "own blood must atone for it," refers to the spilling of ones tears and emotions before God in the true Spirit of repentance. Without that, Christ's atonement cannot cover those sins. As I have already explained, this Spirit of true repentance is not simply a desire to stop sinning, coupled with belief in Christ; it must be accompanied by immediate and consistent obedience in order to be an atonement for our sins (repentant prayer is an atoning incense that rises unto God).

This harmonizes the blood atonement doctrine with 1 John 1:7, which says, ". . . the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." This verse does point out that Christ's atonement "cleanseth us from all sin." It does not, though, tell us how. In order to access the atonement we must offer a sacrifice (atonement) ourselves. It is "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20). This is always accompanied by tears, faith, and obedience; for "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). But don't forget that some sins are unforgivable and are thus beyond the redeeming power of the atonement (Matthew 12:31-32).

### **The Adam-God theory**

What follows are all of the quotes most pertinent to the Adam-God issue. As shown above, Brigham most likely never reviewed his "Adam-God" statements, and thus, he never certified that they were correct (although there are enough Adam-God statements to indicate they were). The question must also be asked what constitutes the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Official doctrines are those doctrines clearly taught in the Standard Works of the Church, or those clearly ratified by the First Presidency of the Church. Any doctrine that does not agree with these two sources is false; this is true even when a prophet states it (without clearly claiming it as a God given revelation). It is certainly possible that some incorrect doctrines are found in earlier LDS publications due to transcription errors on the part of scribes who recorded the speeches of general authorities (i.e., the *Journal of Discourses*).<sup>5</sup>

Brigham Young's Adam God teachings were not official doctrine. It is clear that in at least one instance Brigham's teachings concerning Adam may have been recorded incorrectly due to a scribal error. I come to this conclusion due to the abundance of instances where Brigham Young clearly taught the correct and official LDS teaching concerning Adam. The vast majority of Brigham's sermons concerning Adam teach the following: Adam is the god we answer most directly to and he presides over the human family under Jesus Christ, with Jesus under Elohim. Adam created the earth with Jehovah and under Jehovah's direction. And finally, Adam is the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael R. Ash, *Declaring the Word of God*, Available: <http://www.mormonfortress.com/wordg2.html> 4 July 2006

Father of the Human race, including Jesus Christ according to the flesh, being that Christ was born into Adam's family. [Note: Based on Brigham Young's teachings, I believe that God the Father's name is Yahweh Elohim. Chapter 13 of my book makes it clear that Jesus' name is Yahu Yahweh. Brigham Young, therefore, calls God the Father "Elohim" and Jesus "Jehovah" (another modern spelling for Yahweh) to distinguish between them.]

"Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden [i.e., Spirit Paradise], he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world [Adam helped Jehovah]. He is Michael, the Archangel, the Ancient of Days, about whom holy men have written and spoken—He is our father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do [that we most directly answer to and who is our creator in the second degree after Jesus Christ]." (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, p. 50) Thus the human family is immediately subject to Adam and Adam to Jesus Christ.

In this very same discourse, quoted directly above (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1., near, or on, page 50), Brigham Young declared:

"It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael." [Adam is third on the list and hence the least important of the three] "Father Adam came here and helped to make the earth. . . . it was said to him by Elohim. 'Go ye and make an earth [thus Adam is subordinate to Elohim].'" (*Deseret News*, June 18, 1873)

"We are all the children of Adam and Eve, and they are the offspring of Him who dwells in the heavens, the Highest Intelligence that dwells anywhere that we have any knowledge of." (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13, p. 312)

". . . When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by his Father in heaven [thus God the Father had a father]. . . Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the Garden of Eden [Elohim walked and talked with Adam and so was in the Garden of Eden], and who is our Father in Heaven [Elohim] . . ." (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pp. 50-51)

". . . Adam was as conversant with his Father who placed him upon this earth as we are conversant with our earthly parents. The Father frequently came to visit his son Adam, and talked and walked with him . . ." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 2nd ed., p. 159)

"[Adam and Eve] . . . transgressed a command of the Lord . . ." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 2nd ed., p. 157)

“. . . man was formed precisely in the image of God [Elohim] . . . We are the children of our Father—his offspring, of the same family . . .” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 14 p. 280)

“How did Adam and Eve sin? Did they come out in direct opposition to God [Elohim] and to his government? No. But they transgressed a command of the Lord . . . The Lord knew they would do this . . .” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 10 p. 312)

“Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden . . .” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 10 p. 324)

“Mankind are here because they are the offspring of parents who were first brought [inferring an authority who brought them—namely Elohim] here from another planet, and power was given them to propagate their species, and they were commanded to multiply and replenish the earth.” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7 pp. 285-286)

“The Lord sent forth his Gospel to the people; he said, I will give it to my son Adam . . .” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3 p. 94)

“He [Adam] with the help of his brethren [those who helped him were not his “sons”; they were brothers] brought it [the earth] into existence. Then he said, ‘I want my children who are in the spirit world to come and live here. I once dwelt upon an earth something like this, in a mortal state. I was faithful; I received my crown and exaltation. I have the privilege of extending my work, and to its increase there will be no end. I want my children that were born to me in the spirit world to come and take tabernacles of flesh, that their spirits may have a house, a tabernacle or a dwelling place as mine has . . .’” (*The Deseret News*, June 18, 1873)

“Who did beget him [Jesus]? His Father, and his father is our God, and the Father of our spirits, and he is the framer of the body, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is he? He is Father Adam.” [*Brigham Young Papers*, Feb. 19, 1854, call number Ms F 219 #81, Church Historians' Office, Salt Lake City. Quoted from Chris A. Vlachos, *Adam Is God???* (Clearwater, FL: Ex-Mormons for Jesus, 1979), p. 9.]

This may refer to the fact that since all Manifestations of God have God within them that God the Father, through Adam, created Jesus after the manner of the flesh. Another possibility is that “Adam” here is a scribal error that should read “Elohim.” It might also be a reference to the fact that God the Father was also an “Adam,” for Moses 1:34 states that there are “many” Adams and Brigham Young taught that we all may become “Adams and Eves” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pp. 50-51, vol. 5, p. 331, *Deseret News*, June 18, 1873). A final possibility, similar to the first, is that it is referring to Adam as the Father of Jesus only in the sense that he was born into the family of our Sun. How Adam could be the “Father of our spirits” will be explained later.

The Scriptures (the Standard Works) and Brigham Young always taught that Michael (Adam) was under Elohim and Jehovah's authority and separate from them. (Moses 2:26-30; 3:4-25; 4:5-31; 5:1-12)

Joseph Smith also taught the official LDS teaching. (Remember, Brigham Young was well versed in all of Joseph Smith's teachings and would not have taught anything that disagreed with them.) Being a man of exceptional intelligence, he never would have compromised the Church's credibility by teaching anything that contradicted Joseph Smith or the Standard Works:

“In the beginning God called Adam by His own voice. And the Lord called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou? . . . Adam received commandments and instructions from God [Elohim].” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* p. 168. See also pp. 158, 169, & 301)

D&C 29:34 states:

“Wherefore, verily I [God the Father] say . . . Not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal . . . neither Adam, your father, whom I created.”

Thus, according to Joseph Smith, the prophet whom Brigham Young believed in completely, God the Father (Elohim) created Adam. Again, Brigham would have known better than to teach in one place that Adam was created by Elohim and in another place teach that Adam was entirely God the Father himself.

What about the reference to Adam achieving exaltation before coming to earth? What about the reference to him begetting our spirits?

In answer to the first question: It must be understood that all the Manifestations of God lived before they were conceived on earth. It seems apparent that they all received their exaltation and then were sent back to earth to raise the consciousness of the planet and to serve mankind. They sacrificed their exaltation on behalf of humanity.

In answer to the second question: The Spirit Realm operates under different laws than our “fallen” world. A “goddess” could hold the entire planet within her womb as a loving mother. If such concepts are understood, it is clear that God the Father and Adam both are the fathers of our spirits.