

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Joseph Smith's Translation: The Book of Abraham

(Jerry Fite)

Five years after Joseph Smith published his Book of Mormon (1830), another opportunity to translate ancient Egyptian came his way. Michael Chandler, a proprietor with Egyptian mummies, visited Joseph Smith's town of Kirkland, Ohio. Four mummies and two interesting papyrus scrolls were purchased by Joseph Smith and his associates for \$2,400.

Joseph Smith eagerly began his translating work. After all, he claimed to have translated the golden plates of “*Reformed Egyptian*” producing the Book of Mormon. Surely the empowered “Seer” of God should be able to accomplish this task. He identified one scroll as “*The Book of Abraham*,” written “*by his own hand upon papyrus*.” The other scroll was identified as The Book of Joseph, which apparently was never translated. Joseph Smith was shot to death in a jail in 1844.

“*The Book of Abraham*” appeared publicly in installments through the Mormon Church publication, *Times and Seasons*, beginning on March 1, 1842. Then,

its second publication occurred in 1851 in London, England as part of a publication called *The Pearl of Great Price*.

In 1856, the French Egyptologist M. Theodule Deveria examined the three facsimiles accompanying Joseph Smith's interpretations and translation of The Book of Abraham. He quickly identified them as Egyptian funeral documents, manifesting Egyptian mythology, and used in preparing a body for interment.

Following Joseph Smith's death, his papyrus manuscripts passed on to family members until housed in a museum in Chicago. They were thought to have been destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. However, in 1966 a researching Utah professor discovered them in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. They were presented to the Church of Latter-day Saints in November of 1967.

The perfect storm regarding the credibility of Joseph Smith as a true prophet of God had now occurred. Unlike the golden plates, which Joseph Smith

claimed he returned to the angel Moroni, the papyrus originals were available for examination. A clearer understanding of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics had developed after a century of studying the Egyptian Rosetta Stone. Expert Egyptologist, Dr. Klaus Baer of the University of Chicago, identified the facsimiles as from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, and the more recent *Book of Breathings*. They were dated from 50 B.C. to A.D. 50, not the time of Abraham.

Joseph Smith apparently filled in some missing portions from his torn scrolls that revealed his ignorance of Egyptian hieroglyphics. What should have been the face of the jackal-headed god, Anubis, was drawn as a face of a man. The body lying on a supposed altar is Osiris, the god of the underworld, not Abraham. In fact, Abraham is not even mentioned in any of the papyrus. How can it be the Book of Abraham?

If Joseph Smith failed at this translation, how can the Book of Mormon be trusted? “*The Book of Abraham*” is not Scripture!