

Building Bridges Series III

Tentative Schedule

1. 10/17 God
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4. 11/7 Video: Bible vs. the Book of Mormon
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9. 12/19 Prophet, Bishop & Pastor
10. 1/2 Faith vs. Works
- 11. 1/9 Video: Lost Book of Abraham**
12. 1/16 The Temple - Purpose & Role

The Heart of the Series

2 Peter 1:5–8 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, **6** to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, **7** to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. **8** For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lost Book of Abraham (Investigating a Remarkable Mormon Claim)

Introduction

- * The Book of Abraham is found in the Pearl of Great Price and is considered scripture by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- * Joseph Smith claims to have translated it from an ancient Egyptian scroll he purchased from a traveling antiquities dealer in 1835.
- * He claimed it contained a lost book of Abraham, an original text nearly 4,000 years old.
- * At the time no one could read ancient Egyptian, but today, Egyptologists know exactly what it says.

Rediscovery of the Lost Book of Abraham

- * Joseph Smith and his followers came to Kirtland, Ohio in 1831.
- * A traveling antiquities dealer named Michael H. Chandler came to town with exhibits including 4 Egyptian mummies.
- * Five years prior Joseph Smith said that he translated gold plates with a mysterious language inscribed on them called “Reformed Egyptian.”
- * The publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830 established Joseph Smith as a prophet and “seer” in the eyes of his followers.
- * When seeing the Egyptian papyrus with the mysterious writing on them, the people thought that Joseph Smith could translate them also.
- * Joseph Smith said that he could indeed decipher the scrolls. And said that they were more than just ancient Egyptian artifacts, they were in fact none other than the writings of Abraham and Joseph.
- * This would place these writings more than 2,000 years before Jesus Christ.

1833-1835 From Thebes to Cleveland

- * 1833 – Michael H. Chandler was commissioned to sell ancient Egyptian antiquities, which included: 11 mummies, two papyrus scrolls and several scroll fragments.
- * They were originally exhumed by a tomb raider named Antonio LeBolo in the early 1820’s from a burial site along the Nile River, near the Egyptian city of Thebes.
- * After his death his estate shipped the artifacts to New York City.
- * Chandler arrived in Cleveland, Ohio, in March of 1835, documented by an article in the Cleveland Advertiser Newspaper, March 26, 1835.
- * William H. Phelps, a member of the Mormon Church, verified Chandler’s arrival in Kirtland in a letter to his wife. He wrote to her that Joseph Smith said that the papyrus scrolls contained the sacred record of Joseph in Pharaoh’s court in Egypt, and the teachings of Father Abraham, and that God ordered that these writings should be brought into the church. July 20, 1835.
- * Joseph Smith said that he could translate a few of the characters immediately to Chandler, and Chandler wrote an affidavit endorsing Smith’s scholarship.

* “I have commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics and much to our joy have found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another with the writings of Joseph of Egypt – a more full account of which will appear in place, as I proceed to examine or unfold them. Truly we can say, the lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth. July 5, 1835

Translating Ancient Egyptian

* Joseph’s recorded in his diary that he began by developing an alphabet and grammar of the Egyptian language.

* In 1835 in America, there was no one who could read ancient Egyptian.

* The Rosetta Stone a tri-lingual inscription in Greek, Egyptian Hieroglyphics and demotic was the key that had recently allowed Jean-Francois Champollion to unlock ancient Egyptian.

* Joseph Smith’s diary records him as being able to do what no scholar in the America’s could do at that time.

* “This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brothers Oliver Cowdery and W.W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding, the particulars of which will appear hereafter. October 1, 1835.”

* “This afternoon I re-commenced translating from the ancient records. October 7, 1835.”

* “I returned home and spent the day in translating the Egyptian records. A warm and pleasant day. November 19, 1835.”

* “Spent the forenoon instructing those that called to inquire concerning the things of God in the last days. And in the afternoon we translated some of the Egyptian records. November 24, 1835.”

* We have the original documents of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery’s and W.W. Phelps notes on the alphabet while translating the Egyptian records and additional comments by Autumn Parish.

* Mummies and translation was then moved to the Temple and tapered off.

* Joseph Smith established a bank and issued his own currency, but in 1838 when the venture went bankrupt, he fled Kirtland on horseback in the middle of the night and never returned.

* In 1839 the Mormon community relocated to Commerce, Illinois. Joseph Smith renamed the town Nauvoo, a Hebrew word meaning “beautiful.”

* Joseph Smith became the mayor of the town and had his own militia of 3,000 men. At the time the total U.S. military totaled less than 9,000. There was even a movement underway to nominate him for the presidency of the United States.

1842 Publication

* Joseph Smith first published his translation of the Abraham scroll in 1842 in three installments of a Mormon newspaper called the “Times and Seasons.”

* It was called “The Book of Abraham.” A note at the beginning introduced it as “A translation of some ancient records that have fallen into our hands, from the catacombs of Egypt, purporting to be to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.”

* Today the Book of Abraham is included in a volume of Mormon Scripture called The Pearl of Great Price. It is considered inspired scripture by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of equal authority to the Bible.

* The Book of Abraham includes a creation story with some different information than the Bible. “And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.” (Book of Abraham 4:1)

* “And the Gods said among themselves, on the seventh time we will end our work which we counseled; and we will rest on the seventh time from all our work which we have counseled. And the Gods concluded on the seventh time, because that on the seventh time they would rest from all their works which they (the Gods) counseled among themselves to form; and sanctified it. And thus were their decisions at the time that they counseled among themselves to form the heavens and the earth.” Book of Abraham 5:2-3)

* Judaism and Christianity have always been monotheistic religions, there is one God and one Creator.

* Joseph Smith announced that he would publish additional installments of his Book of Abraham, but he never did. In June 1844 he was assassinated.

1846-1856 The Papyri Are Lost to The Church

* In 1846, under the leadership of Brigham Young, the Mormons made their historic trek from Nauvoo to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

* The Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants and the Book of Abraham all became canon, inspired scripture on par with the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

* The scroll Joseph Smith identified as a Book of Abraham stayed in Illinois in the possession of his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, and his widow, Emma.

* In 1856, 12 days after Lucy’s death, Emma Smith, who now seemed to have ambivalent feelings about her late husband sold the papyri to a man named Able Combs.

* Emma, now remarried to a man named Lewis C. Bidamon, provided an affidavit attesting that the antiquities had belonged to Joseph.

* Two of the mummies sold to Able Combs were later acquired by a Chicago museum that was destroyed in the Great Chicago fire of 1871. It was assumed that the Joseph Smith papyri had also been destroyed – lost forever to the emerging knowledge of Egyptology.

Early Suspicious

* In 1859 a French Egyptologist named Theodule Deveria provided the first scholarly evaluation of Book of Abraham. The focus of Deveria’s critique was three illustrations, or facsimiles, that Joseph Smith copied from his Egyptian scrolls and published as part of the Book of Abraham. Below each of the facsimiles, Joseph provided his explanation of their meanings.

* According to Facsimile 1 depicts an idolatrous priest about to slay Abraham on an altar. And in the text of the book itself, this scene is described and specifically referred to:

“And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they may 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.” Book of Abraham 1:12

* But Deveria noticed there was something wrong with the pictures – they closely resembled scenes he had come across numerous times in common Egyptian burial documents, but Smith, according to Deveria, had completely misidentified the characters and the scenes.

* In Facsimile 1, Smith labeled the standing figure on the left as a priest, knife in hand, attempting to slay Abraham. In reality, said Deveria, this is the Egyptian god Anubis assisting the resurrection of a deceased Egyptian. Anubis was also drawn incorrectly. He should have been pictured with the head of a jackal – not the head of a man.

* “The god Anubis (who should have a jackal’s head) effecting the resurrection of Osiris.” Theodore Deveria, 1859.

* Egyptologists would never expect anything other than a jackal’s head on this figure, that is just normal.

* Joseph Smith had explained another of the illustrations in the Book of Abraham – called Facsimile 3 as Abraham sitting on Pharaoh’s throne, lecturing the royal court on matters of astronomy. But again, Deveria said Joseph’s explanation was completely wrong. Facsimile 3 was also a rendition of a common scene from Egyptian burial documents depicting a deceased man being led into the presence of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld.

* The deceased led by Maat into the presence of Osiris – his name is Horus, as my be scene in the prayer which is addressed to the divinities of the of the four cardinal points.” Theodore Deveria, 1859

* Joseph said the characters, above the man’s hand, spelled his name – “Shulem.” In actuality, the hieroglyphics give his name - “Horus.” There is no mention of “Shulem” at all.

* “Deveria’s initial analysis of Facsimile 3 is accurate. It is the result of the judgment scene in which the deceased Horus is being brought into the presence of Osirus by Anubis who is mis-described in Facsimile 3 as being a slave.” Dr. Robert Ritner

* In 1912, Franklin S. Spalding, the Episcopal Bishop of Utah, brought a new round of scrutiny to the Book of Abraham when he asked eight noted scholars of Egyptology to evaluate the three Facsimiles. To a man, they agreed that Joseph Smith’s explanations were erroneous.

* “It is difficult to deal seriously with Joseph Smith’s impudent fraud... Smith has turned the goddess Isis into a King, and Osirus into Abraham.” A. H. Sayce, Oxford University.

* “These three facsimiles of Egyptian documents in the “Pearl of Great Price” depict the most common in the mortuary religion of Egypt. Joseph Smith’s interpretation 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,

* “The Egyptian papyrus which Smith declared to be the “Book of Abraham” and “translated” or explained in his fantastical way, and of which three specimens are published in the “Pearl of Great Price,” are parts of the well known “Book of the Dead.” And although the reproductions are very bad, one can easily recognize (these) familiar scenes.” Dr. Eduard Meyer, University of Berlin.

* The New York Times issued a two page expose of the “Book of Abraham” in its December 29, 1912 edition. The Mormon church could not remain silent in the face of this withering

attack on the credibility of Joseph Smith and the Book of Abraham. It offered assurances to the faithful in a 1913 article in its monthly magazine, the 'Improvement Era.'

* The author, Professor John Henry Evans, argued it wasn't fair to judge the credibility of Joseph's book by only evaluating the reproduced facsimiles. Evans insisted that to do any reasonable critique would require access to the original documents themselves.

* "Now, as a matter of fact, the hieroglyphics submitted to the scholars constitute less than one seventh of the Book of Abraham, and that only in an accompaniment of the text. The question therefore, becomes, Is anyone justified in drawing a conclusion respecting an entire manuscript from a statement which was made with respect to only a very small part of that manuscript? Before they would be warranted in saying that the entire Book of Abraham was not properly translated, they would have to examine the original papyrus, or a copy of it, from which the Book of Abraham was translated." John Henry Evans, Improvement Era, February 1913.

1966 A Dramatic Discovery

* In the spring of 1966, a dramatic discovery was made in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

* Dr. Aziz S. Atiya from the University of Utah was there doing research when he was approached by the curator of the museum's department of Egyptian antiquities, Dr. Henry G. Fisher. The museum had in its archives 11 papyrus fragments that had once belonged to Mormon Founder Joseph Smith.

* Dr. Fisher asked Dr. Atiya if he would approach the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to see if they would be interested in acquiring the papyri.

* On November 27, 1967, the museum presented the ancient scrolls to the church.

* An article in the Desert News of Salt Lake City announced the gift of 11 papyrus fragments, long believed to have been destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. With the papyri was the original 1856 letter signed by the Mormon prophet's widow, Emma Smith, certifying that the documents had belonged to Joseph Smith.

The Critical Link

* The torn picture found in one of the fragments was an identical match to the familiar picture in the beginning of the Book of Abraham. In fact the tears on the original corresponded exactly to where the Book of Abraham drawing seemed to go awry.

* "When you have the modern state of the papyrus today, in front of you today, or the photographs of it, or whatever, and you compare it to Facsimile 1 you can see that where Facsimile 1 starts to become un-Egyptological, unexpected from Egyptological point of view, is pretty much along the line that the present break, or destruction of the papyrus. So there is every reason from that point of view to believe that the present condition of the papyrus is as it was in the time of Joseph Smith. Dr. Lanny Bell

* "If you took a painting of Madonna and child and tore off the heads of both figures and you replaced them with a dog and cat, it would be as obvious to us now that this was wrong as the replacing of the clearly a jackal head with a human head on this Egyptian piece because we know what these images should actually look like. In the same way, we know that those figures would never, under any circumstance, hold a knife. And that's critical to the text

because it's not merely decoration for this text, it goes to the core of the supported story that accompanies it. And if you take the knife away, you have taken the story away as well. And clearly the knife had no reason to be there." Dr. Robert Ritner

* The Book of Abraham itself mentions that this scene appeared "at the commencement of the record" – in other words, at the beginning of the scroll. Egyptian reads from right to left, and Joseph Smith, who was at the time studying Hebrew, which also reads from right to left, must have surmised this. It seemed certain that this piece was the beginning of the scroll used by Joseph Smith.

* Another discovery. A sequence of characters on a second piece of papyrus matched exactly a string of characters written in the left column of the translation manuscripts. It appeared that at Joseph's direction, his scribes copied these characters from the papyrus one by one. Joseph then dictated the meaning, or translation of each one – often whole paragraphs from a single hieratic character.

* When Dr. Klaus Baer, Professor of Egyptology, at the University of Chicago, examined the papyrus fragments, he determined that this same piece had at one time been attached to the piece containing Facsimile 1 – the fibers and edges matched exactly.

* A third piece was found which included, the same name – "Horus" written in the published version of Facsimile 3. Although the Facsimile 3 picture was never found, it also mentions the name "Horus." Together these four pieces form virtually the entire scroll in its original form.

* In 2001, Dr. Robert Ritner, Associate Professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, was commissioned to do a complete translation of the Book of Abraham scroll.

* "What this document really is, is an extended prayer on behalf of a deceased Egyptian priest which begins with an invocation to the god of mummification probably. Certainly with a picture of the god of mummification to ensure his continued existence, to ensure the priest's existence in the next world. Then followed up by a series of statements where, "Oh, deified Horus. May you walk as you had done in life, may your ears function, may the gods receive you." Long series of invocations on this. Essentially insuring that this dead priest is able to function in death as he had in life, but now a part of a company of the ancient Egyptian gods. Abraham is not mentioned once.

Mormon Defenders

* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints declined a request for an interview to get their perspective on the Book of Abraham scrolls.

* Michael Purdy of the church's public affairs department did refer us to this book by Mormon Egyptologist John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000).

* Dr. Gee puts forth the position that other than the original of Facsimile 1, the Joseph Smith papyrus fragments given to the church in 1967 were, "not the portion of the papyri that contained the text of the Book of Abraham. He claims the scroll that Joseph Smith used originally was 10 feet long, and that there was a large section that is now missing, that may have contained the lost book."

* "The most that is missing from this text is simply two columns worth of Egyptian hieratic. And possibly a small vignette. But other than that, there would be nothing more that would

inflate its length much beyond its current size. It is both unprecedented and unreasonable to assume an intrusive text about a completely different matter – a narrative history of Abraham and his descendants – would have been inserted into a document whose beginning, middle and end is devoted specifically to the resurrection of an Egyptian priest. It would disrupt the document. It would have nothing to do with its content. It would be unprecedented and no other document would have such a thing. And the narrative style of the Book of Abraham does not correspond to Egyptian verbiage. It's not the kind of things Egyptians would say and they would not say it in that way. And it certainly would never appear in such a context as this. It couldn't possibly be more out of place. Dr. Robert Ritner

* Mormon scholar, Michael D. Rhodes, Brigham Young University, writing in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, argues that Joseph Smith may have received the Book of Abraham by direct revelation from God and only used the papyri to illustrate what he learned from revelation.

* Rhodes writes, "...when studying the Egyptian papyri purchased from Michael Chandler, Joseph Smith sought revelation from the Lord concerning them and received in that process the Book of Abraham. He might then have searched through the papyri in his possession to find illustrations similar to those he had learned by revelation."

* Rhodes also writes in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism that Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles are accurate. "...the prophet's explanations of each these facsimiles accord with present understanding of Egyptian religious practices."

* "I want to be absolutely clear on this. There simply is no justification for the kind of interpretations that appear in Facsimile 1 or Facsimile 3. They are wrong in regards to hieroglyphics. They are wrong with regard to the gender. They are wrong with regard to the understanding of what the scene actually represents. And where they are used in the body of the text, they are wrong there as well. In short there is no historical validity for the interpretations in that book. None whatsoever." Dr. Robert Ritner

Every Day Understanding

* It clearly states that is written from Abraham, by Abraham and in the perspective of Abraham's life and times.

* It is written by the prophet Abraham, in his time, and it was recovered by Joseph Smith, and then translated it.

* In the Book of Abraham are words directly from Abraham, translated by Joseph Smith.

* It's the only source in all four of the standard works that really delves into some key doctrines that become pivotal to the LDS faith. Chief of these is the concept of pre-existence, and the nature of man, and our relationship to God...

Troublesome Questions

* In the face of this mountain of evidence, how are faithful Mormons to stand?

* How does one reconcile the words of the prophet with the evidence of history?