Type: Magazine Article

An Offshoot of the Spalding Argument

Author(s): Frederick J. Pack
Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 16, No. 8 (June 1913), pp. 778–779
Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

credibility from the fact that they are placed in a world which has passed away."

And yet, in spite of this scholarly opinion, Amraphel has been identified with Hammurabi; Chedorlaomer, with Kudur-Lagamar; Tidal, with Tudghula; and Arioch with Eri-Aku who at one time reigned over Ur and Larsa, in Chaldea. The historicity of that remarkable part of Genesis has been vindicated notwithstanding the attitude of skepticism. Is there, in the mistakes of eminent scholars regarding the Bible no lesson to us regarding the Book of Abraham? We think there is. The truth of the Book of Abraham will also be demonstrated by further research. This, if nothing more, has, we believe, been made sufficiently clear during the present discussion.

An Offshoot of the Spalding Argument

BY FREDERICK J. PACK, DESERET PROFESSOR OF GEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

On page 28 of the pamphlet "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator," an article appears over the name of Dr. John Peters, purported to be of the University of Pennsylvania. The present writer found it quite impossible to obtain any specific meaning from several statements of the article, and with a view of clearing the matter up sent out the following letter:

Jan. 16, 1913.

Dr. John Peters,
University of Pennsylvania.
Dear Sir:

I have read with great interest your communication to Dr. Spalding which he recently published in a small pamphlet dealing with the claims of Joseph Smith the "Mormon" prophet.

The last paragraph of your letter closes thus: "The text of the chapter, as also the interpretation of the plates, displays an amusing ignorance. Chaldeans and Egyptians are hopelessly mixed together, although as dissimilar and remote in language, religion and locality as are today American and Chinese. In addition to which the writer knows nothing of either of them."

I confess that I do not know just what you mean by this statement. Perhaps you would be good enough to outline your meaning in greater detail for me.

Kindly permit me to thank you for your courtesy.

Very truly yours,
(Signed.) F. J. PACK.

In course of a few days a reply came from Dr. Peters addressed from St. Michael's Church, 225 West Ninety-ninth street, New York City. It was subsequently learned that Dr. Peters is not connected with the University of Pennsylvania and has not been for the past 20 years. These and other facts were set forth in an article over the signature of the present writer published in the Deseret News of March 15.

The following letter has just been received fom Dr. Peters requesting that his reply to my letter be published:

St. Michael's Church,
New York, March 25, 1913.

Dear Sir:

Under date of March 15,you published a letter from Prof. Pack to me. When I received it, I was quite unaware who the person was who had written me,the reply was written in haste and not for publication. Nevertheless, as Prof. Pack has published his letter, I think my answer to him had better be published also, and as a matter of courtesy and fairness I am sure you will be glad to do so.

Yours very truly,
(Signed) JOHN P. PETERS.

Editor of the Deseret Evening News, Deseret, Utah.

Following is the letter which Dr. Peters requests the Deseret News to publish:

St. Michael's Church,
New York, Jan. 28, 1913.

Prof. F. J. Pack,
Salt Lake City, Utah.
My Dear Professor Pack:

Turn to the "Pearl of Great Price," page 52, paragraph 8; "it was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea, for the offering unto these strange gods, men, women and children."

Page 53, verse 13: Where the bed pictured in the cut No. 1, which is taken from Egyptian sources is described as an altar "after the form of a bedstead, such as was had among the Chaldeans." Section 14, 20 and 23 are also specific examples of this same confusion of Chaldean and Egyptian, which runs through the whole chapter —indeed the whole of the Book of Abraham. Each individual passage referred

to exhibits the lack of knowledge with regard to Chaldeans and Egyptians independently, as well as the hopeless confusion of the two, which are, as stated, dissimilar and remote in language, religion and locality.

I do not know in what other way to answer your letter, or what specifications you want. I thought I had made my statement quite plain.

Yours very truly,

(Signed.)

JOHN P. PETERS.

P. S. For information about the Chaldeans, turn to any modern encyclopedia, as for instance, the Encyclopedia Britannica, and look up the article under that heading. Their habitat was Babylonia. According to ancient methods of locomotion, and even today, that is from one to two months' journey from Egypt.

Many duties have prevented the present writer from replying to Dr. Peters' letter until very recently. Copy of reply is herewith appended:

April 3, 1913.

Rev. Dr. John P. Peters,
St. Michael's Church,
New York City.

My Dear Dr. Peters:

There are several things which I desire to say concerning your statement to Dr. Spalding which he published in his pamphlet dealing with the Book of Abraham, and also concerning your letter to me under date of Jan. 28, 1913.

I desire to be very frank with you and trust that in case you care to reply you will assume the same attitude.

In the first place your letter to Dr. Spalding does not appeal to me as having the ring of mature thought. Such expressions as "apparently" and "if I forget not" are usually used as safeguards behind which one may seek protection in case of detected error. They are never used when one is sure of his ground.

Your opening statement concerning the "comical" nature of the plates does not convince one that you have given the matter serious consideration. The statement flavors of flippancy or prejudgment.

Again, the closing lines of the last paragraph are unworthy of you. You here say something that you either do not mean or cannot prove. Do you mean to say that the Chaldeans and Egyptians were as "dissimilar and remote in language, religion and locality as are today American and Chinese?" I urge you, dear doctor, fully to consider the meaning of your statement and then to give me your answer. We have school boys who can successfully controvert your present attitude.

Your closing statement "In addition to which the writer knows nothing of either of them" is a very confusing one. Whom do you mean by "the writer?" Do you allude to Joseph Smith or are you making a confession?

I had hoped to get some further insight into your meaning and in consequence wrote you on the 16th of January last, but your reply of Jan. 28, only tended to convince me the further of the superficiality of your examination.

The references you make are correct, but to me your conclusions are wholly unwarranted. And further, dear Doctor Peters, do you really mean to state that this alleged confusion "runs through the whole chapter— indeed the whole of the Book of Abraham?" Your statement would almost lead one to believe that you had not read the book.

The post script to your letter is discouraging. (I wonder why it was omitted from the copy forwarded to The Deseret News for publication?) Out here in Utah we do not rely upon encyclopedic articles as ultimate sources of information. We usually seek something slightly beyond that to which our school boys have access.

The information you furnish me concerning the habitat of the Chaldeans is profound, almost beyond human comprehension.

And again, will you kindly explain what you mean in your letter to The Deseret News by stating that when you received my letter you were "quite unaware who the person was who had written?" Did I not write you upon my professorial letter heads, and did you not in turn address me accordingly?

Now, my dear Doctor Peters, I want you seriously to reconsider your statement concerning the Book of Abraham, and then to give me your mature conclusions. I would like you to go back into Chaldean and Egyptian history for your information. I would be glad to receive references (not encyclopedic) upon which you base your conclusions. In other words, work out the history of Abraham's time, the conditions under which the records were made and the long line of modifying conditions through which they probably passed in being transferred to us, and then tell me whether the "plates contained in the Pearl of Great Price are rather comical."

Above all things let me urge upon you the following: Firstly, nothing short of thoroughness will satisfy us, secondly, we must have proof for statements made and, thirdly, the farther you go into the matter the better we shall be pleased.

Very truly yours,

(Signed.) F. J. PACK.

I trust that in the very near future Dr. Peters will see his way clear further to explain his attitude in this matter.

FREDERICK J. PACK.