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The Book of Abraham - Its Genuineness Established, Chapter I

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THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

MILLENNIAL STAR.

"HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD, O YE NATIONS, AND DECLARE IT IN THE ISLES AFAR OFF, AND SAY, HE THAT SCATTERETH ISRAEL WILL GATHER HIM, AND KEEP HIM, AS A SHEPHERD DOTH HIS FLOCK."—*Jeremiah xxxi, 10.*

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THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM—ITS GENUINENESS ESTABLISHED.

BY ELDER GEORGE REYNOLDS. (*In Book Form*)

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CHAP. I.

Introductory. The Discovery and subsequent history of the Mummies. Translation of the Papyrus by the Prophet Joseph.

The late republication of the Pearl of Great Price has drawn renewed attention to the Book of Abraham, which forms a portion of its contents. And as but very little has ever been said by the Elders of the Church in advocacy of its claims as an inspired record, written by one Prophet of God in the infancy of the earth's history, and translated by another Prophet of the Most High in the dispensation of the fullness of times, we think that a few chapters written to prove its genuineness and divine origin, will not be without value to the Latter-day Saints and to the world at the present time. For while the people of God have said or written little in its defense, there have been those opposed to the revelations of

God in these days, who have vigorously attacked it, who have stiled its language "gibberish," and classed it among the "pious frauds" that have so often disgraced the history of religion, Christian and heathen. We hold, and we have confidence that we can prove, by history, science, and in various other ways, that the Book of Abraham is exactly what it claims to be, and that it was translated by the wisdom and power of God for the benefit of the human family, by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Before entering into the discussion of its contents, we deem it advisable to say a few words with regard to the manner in which it fell into the possession of our martyred Prophet. The account he gives of this incident in his history, is to be found under date of Dec. 30, 1835, (Vol. XV MILLENNIAL STAR,) from which we condense: He states that the records from which the Book of Abraham was translated, were found in one of the catacombs, near the city of Thebes in

Egypt, in the year 1831, by a French traveler named Antonio Sebolo, who had received permission from Mehemet Ali, the then ruler of Egypt, to open it. After vast labor, an entrance was effected on the 7th of July, 1831, and several hundred mummies discovered therein, in various stages of decomposition. M. Sebolo obtained eleven of the best preserved mummies, and started with them for Paris, the capital of France. On the way he was taken sick, and, after an illness of ten days, died at Trieste. In his will he left these valued remains of ancient Egyptian art to his nephew, Mr. M. H. Chandler, and, after various vicissitudes, they came into this latter gentleman's possession in April, 1833. He proceeded to make a living by their exhibition, and traveled about the country for that purpose, reaching Kirtland July 3, 1835. In the meantime he had opened the coffins, and found "that in connection with two of the bodies, was something rolled up with the same kind of linen, saturated with the same bitumen, which, when examined, proved to be two rolls of papyrus." "Two or three other small pieces of papyrus, with astronomical calculations, epitaphs, etc., were found with others of the mummies." In Joseph's history is the following account of Mr. C.'s visit to Kirtland:

"On the 3rd July, Michael H. Chandler came to Kirtland to exhibit some Egyptian mummies. There were four human figures, together with some two or more rolls of papyrus covered with hieroglyphic figures and devices. As Mr. Chandler had been told I could translate them, he brought me some of the characters, and I gave him the interpretation, and, like a gentleman, he gave me the following certificate:

'Kirtland, July 6, 1835.

'This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, jun., in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, showed to the most learned; and, from the information that I could ever learn, or meet with, I find

that of Mr. Joseph Smith, jun., to correspond in the most minute matters.

MICHAEL H. CHANDLER.

Traveling with, and proprietor of Egyptian mummies."*

The Prophet, a few days later, writes: "Soon after this some of the Saints in Kirtland purchased the mummies and papyrus, and I, with W. W. Phelps and O. Cowdery as scribes, commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc., a more full account of which will appear in their place as I proceed to examine and unfold them. Truly we can say the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth."

From this time it appears from the history that Joseph set himself diligently to work to translate the records as often as his other important duties permitted. Under date of October 1st he records in his journal: "This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brothers O. Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy, as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients, unfolded to our understandings." It is desirable that these dates and facts should be remembered, as they have an important bearing on our future inquiries. Under date of October 7th, November 24th, and in other places, he refers to his labors in translating the papyrus. He also makes frequent reference to showing his friends these records, and explaining to them their contents, not only to those in the Church, but to numbers who were not members. We will simply cite one instance: "December 16, 1835. Elders McLellin, B. Young, and J. Carter, called and paid me a visit, with which I was much gratified. I exhibited and explained the Egyptian records to them, and explained many things concerning the dealings of God with the ancients, and the formation of the planetary system."†

* History of Joseph Smith, MILLENNIAL STAR, Vol. XV, page 285.

† MILLENNIAL STAR, Vol. XV, page 519.

The next thing we deem in order is to give the Prophet's description of the appearance of the papyrus, which description, we may remark in passing, is identical with that of President John Taylor's, who frequently saw them when in brother Joseph's possession. The latter writes :*

"The record of Abraham and Joseph, found with the mummies, is beautifully written on papyrus, with black, and a small part with red, ink or paint, in perfect preservation. The characters are such as you find upon the coffins of mummies, hieroglyphics, etc., with many characters or letters like the present (though probably not quite so square) form of Hebrew without points."

Before proceeding further, it will doubtless be desirable to give a slight sketch of the contents of those portions of the Book of Abraham already translated and published. It opens with a short account of his early life at the home of his father in Ur, of Chaldea, of the persecutions he suffered for righteousness sake from his idolatrous kindred, and of the causes that led him to leave Chaldea for Canaan. It gives at greater length than does the Bible, the covenants made with him by the Almighty, and affords some exceedingly interesting details with regard to the history of the Priesthood in that early day. Further on an account of Abraham's visit to Egypt is given, and the revelations of God to him with regard to the order of the planetary worlds, the condition of the spirits of mankind in their pre-existent state, and a history of the creation of this earth, are laid before the reader in plain and simple, but inspired and soul-inspiring language. No short synopsis can give any idea of the beauty, grandeur, and value of the truths made manifest by the Most High to his friend and servant, Abraham; truths which the world, to-day, in part ignores, and partly comprehends. We suggest to our readers the study of this important, though brief fragment, feeling assured that they will arise from its perusal with a more exalted and more comprehensive realization of the power, the

glory, and the love of God, than the study of any uninspired treatise could ever give, no matter how beautiful its language, or how sublime its thoughts.

It is our intention, as we pass along, to take up the various subjects treated in the Book of Abraham, and demonstrate the exact truthfulness of the record by the writings of historians, ancient and modern, by the discoveries of archeologists, Egyptologists, astronomers, and other scientists, and prove, we believe, beyond the possibility of successful contradiction, that no element of fraud enters into its composition. So remarkable have been the confirmatory evidences that we have met in our investigations into this subject, that we are of the opinion that there is not a book in existence whose genuineness can be more easily proven than can that of this record of the Father of the faithful. Being thus fully assured, we shall lay the forthcoming chapters before our readers with the joyful assurance that they will add to the already incontrovertible testimonies that Joseph Smith was a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and servant of the Most High God.

We make this last statement advisedly, because it must be evident to all who seriously consider the matter, that if the Book of Abraham, as given to us by Joseph Smith, be true, it must have been translated by a greater than human power. We well know, that so far as the wisdom of this world is concerned, Joseph Smith was an unlearned man, unskilled in the higher branches of science, with little other knowledge than that which heaven conferred; but had he been a scientist of the highest order, the production of the Book of Abraham would be but little less remarkable, as many of the truths taught therein (as we shall presently see) are in advance of the times, and were as unknown to the sage as to the simpleton, in the year that the papyrus was translated, and indeed for many years afterwards. Consequently, human learning and human wisdom could not give them to the world. By some other power, which we claim was divine, they must have been revealed and made manifest.

* MILLENNIAL STAR, Vol: XV, page 550.