

## The Truth About the Book of Abraham

Perhaps the most concrete evidence against the Mormon faith, the Joseph Smith papyrus, the source document for Joseph Smith's translation of the alleged Book of Abraham, was rediscovered in 1966 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. At the time of Joseph Smith's work in translating the ancient Egyptian papyrus, between 1835 and 1844, Egyptian hieroglyphics had not been deciphered, and thus, Smith's translation went unchallenged. With the discovery and cracking of the Rosetta Stone and the later rediscovery of the papyrus, Egyptologists have translated the actual text of the papyrus and found it to be an Egyptian funerary text. The actual text is from the Egyptian Book of Breathings and contains prayers for the mummy with whom the papyrus was entombed, named Hor. Despite this clear evidence showing that Joseph Smith was a fraud, Mormon apologists have concocted numerous theories to explain away the discrepancies. The rest of this article will disprove these theories point for point.

*LDS POSITION: Joseph Smith did not "translate" the Book of Abraham in the traditional sense, it was revealed to him. Part of the discussion around translation involves the Kirtland Egyptian Papers (KEP), which contains the work of Joseph Smith and some of his scribes in developing an Egyptian alphabet and grammar. LDS scholars suggest that these papers are the result of backwards translation. "Joseph translated the Book of Abraham prior to the creation of the KEP and then he, and other early LDS brethren, tried to match the translated text to what they believed were the characters that were used to elicit the translation." (1)*

This theory is easily debunked using Joseph Smith's own words from his journal entries and the History of the Church:

1. *"I 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." (History of the Church, Vol 2:236)*
2. *"The remainder of this month, I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients." (DHC Vol. 2:238 for July 1835; written in the year 1843)*
3. *"This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with bro. O. Cowdery and W. W. Phelps: the System of astronomy was unfolded." (Diary of Joseph Smith, October 1, 1835, p.3; also in DHC Vol. 2:286)*
4. *"exhibited the alphabet of the ancient records to Mr Holmes and some others" (Diary of Joseph Smith, November 17, 1835, p. 45; DHC Vol. 2:316)*

(Note: these quotes were taken from the [Tanner's website](#))

(1)[http://www.fairwiki.org/index.php/Book\\_of\\_Abraham\\_papyri\\_%28long%29#Evidence\\_for\\_the\\_Antiquity\\_of\\_Joseph.27s](http://www.fairwiki.org/index.php/Book_of_Abraham_papyri_%28long%29#Evidence_for_the_Antiquity_of_Joseph.27s)

Note that Joseph Smith acquired the papyrus in July of 1835 and that the Book of Abraham was not published until the "early 1840s in serial fashion in the LDS newspaper *Times and Seasons*." (2) His comments above were dated to within months of receiving the papyrus. In the first statement, Smith made it clear that he could translate hieroglyphics with enough skill to recognize the writings of Abraham and Joseph of Egypt. Smith also makes it clear that "the System of astronomy was unfolded" as a result of his and his scribes' work on the Egyptian alphabet, and not the other way around.

Clearly, Joseph Smith's efforts were dedicated toward translating an alphabet and grammar from which he could later translate the Book of Abraham.

*LDS Position: The extant papyri were not used in the translation and the actual Book of Abraham text most likely is in the missing portions.*

Since Facsimiles 2 and 3 are not among the extant papyri, it is clear that not all of the original papyri survived. However, all of the evidence demonstrates that Joseph Smith clearly believed that the extant portion of the papyrus was the commencement of the Book of Abraham. He claimed he was able to identify which rolls contained the writings of Abraham, as stated in quote 1 above. He then described Facsimile 1, depicted below next to the extant papyrus, as a scene showing the attempted human sacrifice of Abraham by the "idolatrous priest of Elkenah." Egyptologists say that it is actually a typical scene depicting the embalming process, with canopic jars beneath the lion-couch to store the mummy's organs.



Very near to the beginning of the Book of Abraham, Chapter 1, verse 12, we see this same scene referenced: "And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might 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." If these were actually Abraham's words, then Abraham is saying that the Book of Breathing is part of his record, even though none of it appears in Joseph Smith's translation.

(2)[http://www.fairwiki.org/index.php/Book\\_of\\_Abraham\\_papyri\\_%28long%29#Evidence\\_for\\_the\\_Antiquity\\_of\\_Joseph.27s](http://www.fairwiki.org/index.php/Book_of_Abraham_papyri_%28long%29#Evidence_for_the_Antiquity_of_Joseph.27s)

Further evidence that Joseph Smith considered the extant papyrus to be the actual Book of Abraham is found in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, where hieratic symbols immediately following Facsimile 1 are sequentially listed next to English translations of the Book of Abraham. This clearly demonstrates that, regardless of Smith's method of translation, he considered this text to be from the Book of Abraham.

Remember that Smith quickly recognized the writings of Abraham and Joseph of Egypt in the papyrus, so to suggest that he was mistaken in their location in the papyrus would completely undermine his initial assertion that the papyrus contained their writings at all.

Finally, consider how Egyptologists view Facsimiles 2 and 3. Facsimile 2, which Smith claims depicts scenes of Kolob, the celestial residence of God, among other things, is actually a hypocephalus. "In ancient Egyptian burials, it is placed under the head of the deceased in case he forgot some of the personalized detail needed to know what to say and how to behave in relation to 'gods' and trials after death." (3)



(3) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book\\_of\\_Abraham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Abraham)

Facsimile 3, according to Smith, depicts “Abraham sitting upon Pharaoh’s throne, by the politeness of the king, with a crown upon his head, representing the Priesthood, as emblematical of the grand Presidency in Heaven; with the scepter of justice and judgment in his hand.” (4) Smith’s interpretation that a Pharaoh, someone who considered himself to be a god on earth, would allow someone else, especially a Hebrew, to sit on his throne is absurd. To betray his ignorance even further, Smith claims that the woman standing behind the throne is actually Pharaoh.



“Egyptologists interpret this as the judgment of the dead before the occupied throne of the Egyptian god, Osiris.” (5) According to Egyptologists, this scene is commonly found at the end of the Book of Breathing.

## CONCLUSION

What does all of this add up to? I have shown that the extant papyrus was deemed by Joseph Smith to be, in the very least, the beginning of the Book of Abraham. Facsimiles 2 and 3, which have not survived, clearly demonstrate that other parts of the alleged Book of Abraham were actually from the Book of Breathing as well. Not a single piece of Joseph Smith’s papyrus, either replicated in the facsimiles, or contained in the extant papyrus, contains a single reference to Abraham. Every piece, however, does have a proper place and translation in the Egyptian Book of Breathing, as one would expect given that it was found with a set of Egyptian mummies.

Clearly, the Joseph Smith papyrus had nothing at all to do with Abraham, as Smith claimed. The only rational explanation is that he used the facsimiles as visual cues to fabricate the Book of Abraham. He is, therefore, a false prophet.

(4) [http://scriptures.lds.org/en/abr/fac\\_3](http://scriptures.lds.org/en/abr/fac_3)

(5) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book\\_of\\_Abraham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Abraham)