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The Role of the Book of Abraham in Latter-day Saint Scripture

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Left: **Joseph Smith Papyrus VI**. Right: **Joseph Smith Papyrus V** (both in current condition). These fragments, from a papyrus originally owned by Semminis (a woman from the third century B.C.), contain text and vignettes from Book of the Dead chapters 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89.



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The Role of the Book of Abraham in Latter-day Saint Scripture

When discussing the Book of Abraham, non-Latter-day Saints generally take no cognizance of the role the Book of Abraham plays in the tradition of Latter-day Saint scripture. They ignore why Latter-day Saints think the Book of Abraham is important and concentrate on aspects that have little or no relevance to Latter-day Saints.

For example, one of the claims is that the Book of Abraham is used primarily to sanction bigotry. A close reading of the text, however, does not sustain such contentions. Furthermore, Latter-day Saints do not use the text in this fashion.

One of the important uses of the Book of Abraham by Latter-day Saints is its particular





wording of the Abrahamic covenant. This wording clarifies how Abraham’s seed will bless “all the families of the earth” (Abraham 2:11).

The largest effect that the Book of Abraham has had on Latter-day Saint thought is its concept of the premortal existence and the purpose of life. Although other Latter-day Saint scriptures discuss the premortal existence, the Book of Abraham provides the clearest explanation of this key Latter-day Saint doctrine. The Book of Abraham explains that God organized all the spirits of this world “before this world was” (Abraham 3:22), explained its purpose (see Abraham 3:24), and stated that this earthly existence was to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

The issues discussed in this guide have little if any relevance to most Latter-day Saints in their acceptance or use of the Book of Abraham. To Latter-day Saints, the contents of the Book of Abraham are far more important than the contents of the remaining fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri.



