The Book of Abraham - Its Genuineness Established, Chapter I

Author(s): George Reynolds
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"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.


THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM—ITS GENUINENESS ESTABLISHED.

BY ELDER GEORGE REYNOLDS

(Permission granted to re-publish."

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 styled 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 decompo-
sition. M. Sebolo obtained eleven of
the best preserved mummies; and
started with them for Paris, the capi-
tal 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 vicis-
situdes, 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 mean-
time 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, satu-
rated 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 know-
ledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, jun., in
deciphering the ancient Egyptian
hieroglyphic characters in my posses-
sion, 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 hierogly-
phics, 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 dif-
gently 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 desira-
ble that these dates and facts should
be remembered, as they have an im-
portant bearing on our future in-
quiries. 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

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 idolaters 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.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]