

This is a very short summary of what I view as the 5 most important facts in understanding alternative models for LDS truth claims. To the best of my knowledge, every point made in this document is accepted as factual by both LDS and non-LDS scholars (please correct me if I am mistaken and I will alter the document).¹

1. The 3rd facsimile is incorrectly translated

Joseph Smith mis-translated [the characters above the heads of the figures](#) in the third facsimile.

Joseph refers to Egyptian characters in specific locations on facsimile 3 and [he gives a translation](#). This translation does not match the translation [made by BYU scholars](#). The [Book of Abraham lds.org essay](#) generally admits “the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham.”

More:

- [The Joseph Smith Papyri \(youtube\)](#)
- [The Book of Abraham: Criticisms, Defenses, and Implications](#)
- [LDS Essay - “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham” \(lds.org\)](#)
- [A response to “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham” \(Dr. Robert Ritner\)](#)

2. The Book of Mormon is packed with 19th century ideas

[In a recent interview](#), the well-known Mormon historian Richard Bushman stated:

... there is phrasing everywhere [in the Book of Mormon], long phrases, that if you google them you will find them in 19th century writings. The theology of the Book of Mormon is very much 19th century theology, and it reads like a 19th century understanding of the Hebrew Bible ...

By any measure the Book of Mormon contains an immense number of ideas, phrases, and theology common to the early nineteenth century. Here are two examples of many:

- There are many points of similarity [with the sermons of Jonathon Edwards Jr. and Sr.](#)
- The book “The Late War”, by Gilbert Hunt, is [very similar to the Book of Mormon in style and content](#). It contains [extensive chiastic structures](#), like the Book of Mormon, and it also contains many [similar Hebraisms](#).

More:

[See Book of Mormon parallels to 1800s thought](#)

¹Brian Hales very cursorily responded to this document; Here is [my response to his cursory thoughts](#). I have altered the presentation of a few points based on this and other exchanges and appreciate his feedback.

3. Spiritual confirmations are common to members of many religions

Members interpret spiritual experiences as a confirmation that their faith is true. But [these confirmations are common to members of many faiths](#) (e.g., Judaism, Catholicism, Seventh Day Adventist, Scientology, Islam, and Divine Truth), many of which hold central tenets that flatly contradict core LDS doctrines.

More:

- [Testimony, Spiritual Experiences, and Truth: A Careful Examination](#) (bwv549)
- [Testimonies of Other Faiths](#)
- [Spiritual feelings appear to confirm contradictory positions](#)

4. LDS leaders taught that the Priesthood/Temple ban was divine

A [1949 First Presidency statement](#) declared²:

The attitude of the Church with reference to Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord...

And a [1969 First Presidency letter](#) stated:

Our living prophet, President David O. McKay, has said, "The seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro is not something which originated with man; but goes back into the beginning with God...Revelation assures us that this plan antedates man's mortal existence, extending back to man's preexistent state."

The [Lowry Nelson letters](#) and the [Stewart Udall letters](#) demonstrate the unwavering confidence Church leaders of that time had in the divinity of the Black Priesthood/Temple ban and the doctrines and teachings supporting it as well as the manner in which dissent may be treated in the Church.

More:

²For documentation on the promulgation of the 1949 First Presidency letter, see PhD dissertation by Douglas Marty Trank, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Rhetoric Emerging from the Mormon - Black Controversy" (August 1973), p.110-111:

The First Presidency of the LDS Church set forth the position of the Church in a statement in August of 1949. The same statement was re-issued in 1951 after the accession of David O. McKay as President. After the surge of interest in civil rights in the 1960's, the Church issued a modified and expanded statement on December 15, 1969. This statement is presently the only official statement of the position of the Church with regard to the Negro. [21]

[21] Interview with Henry Smith, spokesman for the LDS Church Offices, Salt Lake City, July 13, 1972. [22] The statement issued in 1949 and again in 1951 was issued prior to any serious criticism of the Negro policy of the Church and is assumed to have been directed primarily for instruction within the Church.

- [LDS Essay - “Race and the Priesthood” \(lds.org\)](#)
- [Race and the Priesthood - Response to LDS.org](#)
- [thoughtsonthingsandstuff.com response to 3 Mormons “Blacks and the Priesthood”](#)

5. Joseph Smith’s polygamy is ethically problematic

Nearly all LDS scholars acknowledge that Joseph Smith was married to [at least 33 wives](#), 11 of whom were already legally married to other men. The manner in which Joseph Smith practiced and spoke about polygamy was deceptive³ and at least some of his proposals would likely be viewed as involving undue influence according to modern ethical standards.⁴

In [a recent interview](#), the most faithful LDS apologists on polygamy recounted the feelings of reviewers of their recent book on the topic: “At the end of the book [the book reviewer] didn’t get a warm fuzzy feeling and that’s not really something we think we can deliver with this topic.”

- [According to Brian Hales](#), Joseph’s first polygamous relationship (with the teenage maid, Fanny Alger) was viewed as adulterous by his first wife, Emma, and close friend Oliver Cowdery.
- After the death of the Walker family’s mother, Joseph Smith volunteered to act as foster parent to the four oldest Walker children, [encouraging the father to leave on a two year mission to the eastern states](#). While the father was away, [he married the 17 year old, Lucy](#).
- Joseph [frequently misled others about practicing polygamy](#).
- Joseph was [sealed twice to the Partridge sisters](#) in order to hide the first sealing from Emma.
- Joseph promised a 14 year old girl—one [who said](#) “I hated polygamy with my heart”—that, [in her own words](#), “If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation & that of your father’s household & all of your kindred.”
- After other failed marriage proposals to Zina Huntington, Joseph Smith proposed again to the [happily newlywed, seven month pregnant mother](#): “I [Joseph] have put it off and put it off until an angel with a drawn sword has stood before me and told me if I did not establish that principle [plurality of wives] and live it, I would lose my position and my life and the Church could progress no further.” ([source](#))

More:

- [Year of Polygamy](#) (Lindsay Hansen Park)
- [Mormon Polygamy Documents](#) (all documents on Joseph Smith’s polygamy)

³The word “deceptive” was chosen because it is the most precise word to describe Joseph Smith’s polygamy denials.

⁴See The Belmont Report on Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research for a discussion of what typically constitutes “undue influence.”

- [Joseph Smith's Polygamy](#) (LDS polygamy apologist)
- [LDS Essay - "Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo"](#) (lds.org)
- [Plural Marriage in Kirtland & Nauvoo - Response to LDS.org](#)

More Complete Analyses

See [Problem Summaries](#): resources discussing LDS-truth claims