

Questions to Ask

Introduction

These questions are designed to probe various aspects of the LDS Church's history and truth-claims.¹ The list was made for 1) investigators to ask the missionaries, 2) active members to ask themselves, or 3) for those experiencing a faith transition to ask their parents or ecclesiastical leaders.

The majority of links provided are to [LDS approved sources](#) or to relatively neutral information repositories (such as wikipedia).

If any question contains incorrect information or is misleading in any way, please contact me, and I will fix it.

A House of Order

Perhaps answers to these questions should be measured by the yardstick set forth [in scripture](#):

Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.

Joseph Smith's Polygamy

1. If sealing is such an important principle,² why did Joseph never seal himself to his parents or children during his lifetime?³
2. If sealing is such an important principle, why was Emma sealed to Joseph after so many others ([more than 16 well documented sealings](#))?
3. LDS Historian Brian Hales [wrote of Joseph's relationship with Fanny](#) "it is obvious Emma did not believe the ceremony was valid and concluded the relationship was adulterous. Ironically, Oliver Cowdery, who Joseph summoned to diffuse the situation, sided with Emma, discounting the validity of the

¹The LDS Church is capable of answering many questions about its history and truth-claims, and many of the answers cast the Church in a positive light. Those questions are important—and missionaries and ecclesiastical leaders will be quick to ask and answer them—but difficult questions are similarly important for exploring the boundaries and potential contradictions found within LDS theology, history, and epistemology. In science, at least, it is the question that is not easily answered that often motivates truth-seekers to find new—or refine existing—models describing reality.

²Latter-day Saints view the temple sealing ceremony as having the utmost significance. Here are some examples: [The sealing ordinance links families eternally](#), [Marriage in the Lord's Way](#), "The Sealing Power").

³In [a reddit comment](#), Brian Hales, LDS Historian (and likely primary author of the [Nauvoo Polygamy lds.org essay](#)), stated: "Keep in mind Joseph died without being sealed to his children or parents."

polygamous marriage.” Why did Joseph (apparently) not get permission for his relationship with Fanny as suggested by [D&C 132:61](#)?

4. For what purpose did Joseph Smith get sealed to other righteous men’s wives (e.g., [Zina Huntington](#) and [Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde](#))? In particular, what justified Joseph’s sealing to [Zina Huntington](#), a happily newlywed, pregnant mother?
5. To whom will [Zina Huntington](#)’s first children (those fathered by her first husband, Jacob) belong in the eternities?
6. Why did [Zina Huntington](#) become Brigham Young’s wife after Joseph died and not Jacob’s wife (especially considering that Jacob already had children with Zina)?
7. What made it okay for Joseph Smith to re-seal himself to the Partridge sisters [in order to hide the first sealings from Emma](#)?
8. Joseph Smith directly or implicitly denied practicing polygamy 5 times in his own words and was responsible for 3 additional direct denials. What made it okay for [Joseph Smith](#) (and [other early leaders](#)) to repeatedly lie about their practice of polygamy?⁴
9. What was the point of a union with [14 year old Helen Mar Kimball](#)? Specifically, if polyandrous unions with Joseph were good enough for the Huntington and Hyde families, why would a potential polyandrous union with Vilate be inadequate for sealing to the Kimball family?
10. According to his daughter Helen, Heber C. Kimball was instructed by Joseph Smith [not to tell his first wife](#), Vilate, when he married his first *plural* wife, Sarah Noon. Why did [D&C 132:61](#) not apply to this union?
11. If Joseph was pressured into polygamy by [an angel with a drawn sword](#), why did the angel not give sufficient instructions to ensure that polygamy and/or sealings were done “correctly”?
12. As alluded to before, [D&C 132:61](#) outlines three requirements for plural marriage to be “justified” and not adultery: 1) permission of first wife, 2) additional wives must be virgins, 3) additional wives not already married. Why didn’t Joseph follow these guidelines? Did that make his relationships adulterous according to this revelation?

The Book of Abraham

In his translation of the facsimiles, Joseph pointed to [specific characters and gave a specific translation](#). However, the characters on the facsimiles (*not* the vignettes,

⁴LDS apologist Brian Hales has attempted to argue that Joseph Smith wasn’t lying about polygamy but using “carefully worded denials” instead (so he was “technically” honest). I have examined that argument in great depth [here](#).

but the characters describing the vignettes) have been translated by both [BYU](#) and non-Mormon scholars. [The Book of Abraham lds.org essay](#) concedes: “the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham.”

Why do the translations of the facsimile characters not match up?⁵

The Book of Mormon

Richard Bushman, well-known Mormon historian, [recently stated](#):

... there is phrasing everywhere—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 as an Old Testament ...

The number of [similarities with early 1800s thought](#) is *extensive*.

1. If the Book of Mormon is a historical record, and if we accept as accurate the stories of how it was translated (i.e., [words appeared on the stone in a hat until they were written correctly](#)) why does it bear such a strong imprint of having been composed in the early 19th century?
2. Why are there errors in the Book of Mormon [unique to the 1769 King James edition of the Bible](#) that Joseph Smith’s family owned?
3. If the book is ancient in origin, why did the author of the Book of Mormon [quote or paraphrase New Testament scripture more often than Old Testament scripture](#), even before the New Testament was written?

Spiritual Confirmation and Priesthood Guidance

1. Why do members of other religions receive strong spiritual experiences confirming to them that their religion is the correct religion? (See [Spiritual Witnesses](#) and additional discussion in [Testimony, Spiritual Experiences, and Truth: A Careful Examination](#))

⁵Consider that God apparently guided prophets thousands of years in advance to prepare additional records to go with the golden plates in order to prevent people from losing faith over minor translation errors were Joseph to have re-translated the lost 116 pages and his initial translation were altered. [D&C 10:31-33](#) makes this clear:

31 For, behold, if you should bring forth the same words they will say that you have lied and that you have pretended to translate, but that you have contradicted yourself.

32 And, behold, they will publish this, and Satan will harden the hearts of the people to stir them up to anger against you, that they will not believe my words.

33 Thus Satan thinketh to overpower your testimony in this generation, that the work may not come forth in this generation.

2. Given [how missionaries instruct members to pray about the Book of Mormon](#), in what fashion could a person arrive at the conclusion that the Book of Mormon is *not* true? If a person persistently followed Moroni's promise with *any* sufficiently inspiring book, what would be the end result?
3. Elder Holland shared "[the missionary speech of all time](#)" at a New Mission President Seminar. It was shared by many others,⁶ who also found it to be very powerful. Ultimately, key parts of the story were [found to be in error](#), calling into question [the validity of the entire story](#). Why did people report feeling so touched (e.g., "the most powerful message to my heart...") by a story that was deeply flawed factually? Is it possible that the Book of Mormon is also factually flawed while still being able to elicit powerful spiritual feelings in its readers?
4. [Over 60 individuals](#) have received patriarchal blessings indicating that they will "remain until the second coming" or "not taste of death."⁷ Why should priesthood or patriarchal blessings be considered reliable given these failures?
5. President George Albert Smith stated [in a 1949 First Presidency Statement](#): "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. . . ." The [Lowry Nelson letters](#) and the [Stewart Udall letters](#) further underscore the unwavering confidence Church leaders of that time had in the divinity of the Black Priesthood/Temple ban and the doctrines and teachings offering it support.⁸ Given the level of confidence leaders at that time had in the Priesthood/Temple ban, why should we have confidence in Church leaders' position today on homosexuality (i.e., that homosexual same-sex married couples are in "apostasy" and the children of homosexuals may not be baptized without 1st presidency approval)? Is it possible that leaders today are "speaking as men" influenced by their upbringing and culture?⁹

⁶Elder Holland's story (also told by Kim B. Clark) was shared by many others (all last retrieved 2017-09-06): [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), and [6](#). The story profoundly influenced many hearers:

- "The most powerful message to my heart was a story from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland addressed to new mission presidents and their wives."
- "really awesome story"
- "then he ended with a powerful story. . . This was a powerful story for me. One about love and about how God shows his love. There are no lost causes, we are all of infinite worth to God and He will put us exactly where he needs us to be."
- "I want to tell an amazing story we were told at the devotional last night. . . HOW AMAZING IS THAT?! God sure works in mysterious and amazing ways."
- "How amazing is that? Think about how many people had to be prompted by the Holy Ghost for all of that to happen! We are where we are for a reason!"

⁷All these individuals are now dead as far as I'm aware—these are all from patriarchal blessings given before the 1900s, and I'm assuming we would likely know if any of them had somehow escaped death.

⁸Confidence in the underlying teaching about the curse of Cain and "black" blood is also manifest in the practice of LDS hospitals segregating "black" blood from "white" blood [for many years](#).

⁹Additionally, consider [the arguments outlined by Bryce Cook](#).

Joseph Smith and the Restoration

1. The Joseph Smith Papers Project [historical introduction to the 1832 First Vision](#) states, “In the early 1830s, when this history was written, it appears that Joseph Smith had not broadcast the details of his first vision of Deity. The history of the church, as it was then generally understood, began with the gold plates.” Why does it appear that Joseph Smith did not tell anyone about the First Vision until well after the founding of the Church?
2. Why does it appear that Joseph Smith did not tell anyone about the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood [for several years](#)? And why did Joseph Smith [retro-fit Book of Commandment revelations with Priesthood restoration stories](#)?

Adam and Eve

The Church teaches [in 8 current manuals](#) that Adam lived at approximately 4000 BC; Joseph Smith claimed that [Adam and Eve walked out of the Garden of Eden into Missouri, USA](#), and modern leaders [affirm the physical, literal reality of Adam and Eve](#). In addition, restored LDS scripture describes Adam and Eve tilling the ground immediately upon their expulsion from the Garden of Eden (see [Moses 4:29](#)). Given that agriculture was not invented [until about 10,000 years ago](#), it appears that all accounts of Adam and Eve from LDS prophetic sources place them somewhere between 4,000 BCE and 10,000 BCE (in Missouri, USA).

However, many data points [support a migration out of Africa beginning about 70,000 years ago](#). Aboriginal Australians likely migrated to Australia about *50,000* years ago, and extensive evidence shows migrations into the Pacific islands [around 20,000 years ago](#).¹⁰ In addition, all human genetic sequence data and inferences about viable population size suggest that there was never a time when there were only two humans on earth ([example 1](#), [example 2](#)).

1. In what fashion was Adam “the first man of all men” (Moses 1:34) and the “primal parent of our race” (according to [the 1909 First Presidency Statement](#)) respective to the Australian Aborigines and Pacific Islanders? Are those people descendants of Adam and Eve? If not, what makes Adam and Eve their “parent”?
2. If Adam and Eve were literal people, what is one possible time or place they could have lived that is also compatible with our understanding of the human migration data?
3. FairMormon acknowledges that there [was likely not a global flood 4,400 years ago](#). If the Garden of Eden really was in Missouri, how did Adam and Eve

¹⁰The various methods used to date these events are accepted as generally accurate by every BYU scientist who operates within these domains ([for example](#)). In part, that’s because these methods are verified and calibrated by highly orthogonal measures of the passage of time (position of the stars relative to Stonehenge, varve layers, speleothem deposition, tree-rings, etc).

migrate to the Middle East? If Adam never actually lived in Missouri, then what are we to make of [Adam-ondi-Ahman](#)?