

Podcast Episode 54: Abraham, Part 1

This is the first part of a special series on Abraham.

QUESTION: What do we need to understand about Abraham in order to understand our place in the last-days events? What is God's view of the book of Abraham, and what ought we to take from it as we look towards a continuation of the Restoration?

DENVER: There's a great gulf separating us from the first Fathers of mankind. At the very beginning, a book of remembrance was kept in the language of Adam. Enoch taught repentance and knowledge of God using that book of remembrance. Those records were passed down for generations until Abraham. He learned of the first Fathers, the Patriarchs, from those records. Abraham wrote: *But the records of the Fathers, even the Patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood, the Lord, my God, preserved in mine own hands* (Abraham 2:4).

At the time of Abraham, Egypt was the greatest civilization on earth. Egypt was great because it imitated the original religion of the first Fathers. Abraham explained:

Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Zeptah, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was Patriarchal. Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first Patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood. (Abraham 2:3)

Egypt began by imitating the pattern Adam, Seth, Enos, and their direct descendants through Noah used to organize the family of the faithful. Abraham calls it a "government," but it was a family. The title "Pharaoh" originally meant "great house" or "great family," because Pharaoh was the "father" over Egypt who taught and led them. Over time, however, the title "Pharaoh" came to mean "king" or "tyrant who controlled people."

The first Pharaoh—or founding father of Egypt—imitated the first Fathers of mankind. He could only imitate because he did not have the right to act as the patriarchal head of

mankind. He nevertheless tried to be a shepherd who led by righteous example. Abraham knew more about the first Fathers than did the Egyptians because Abraham had the original book of remembrance written by the Fathers in the language of Adam.

Today, scholars are trying to understand ancient Egypt. The earlier or farther back in time you look, the closer Egypt's imitation is to the government of Adam and the Patriarchs down to Noah.

The records of Egypt from the very earliest time are lost. But we have some records. The oldest are the *Pyramid Texts*. Then a few centuries later there are *Coffin Texts*. Then much later are the *Book of the Dead* texts. Near the end, we have the *Book of Breathings* texts. There are thousands of years between the first *Pyramid Texts* and the last *Book of Breathings* texts. Within those thousands of years, the religion and knowledge of Egypt became more and more corrupted.

The earliest records of the Egyptian religion carved in the *Pyramid Texts* date from 2500 BC. That was before Abraham, before Joseph was sold into Egypt, before Moses, and before the exodus from Egypt. It was long before King David, King Solomon, and Elijah. These are their earliest records.

More than 2000 years later we have the last records, the *Book of Breathings* texts. These were written at about 300 years before Christ. They were written during the time when Greece and Rome controlled Egypt. After Alexander the Great subdued western Persia, Syria, and Tyre, he conquered Egypt and became an Egyptian Pharaoh. When he died, one of Alexander's generals, named Ptolemy, replaced Alexander as Pharaoh. The descendants of Ptolemy followed him as Pharaohs in what is called the Ptolemaic Dynasty of Egypt.

You've probably heard of Cleopatra. She was a descendant of Ptolemy and was Queen of Egypt at the time when Rome controlled Egypt. Rome fell into a civil war during Cleopatra's lifetime, and Mark Antony, one of the generals of Rome, fought against Octavian, hoping to become Emperor. Cleopatra sided with Mark Antony. Cleopatra and Mark Antony both died by suicide when Octavian defeated the Roman-Egyptian military controlled by Mark Antony. When Octavian won, he became the undisputed Roman Emperor and Egyptian ruler, and his name was changed to Caesar Augustus. Jesus was born while Caesar Augustus was the Roman Emperor and ruler of Egypt.

Beginning long before Abraham and ending just before Christ was born, the records of Egypt were carved, painted, or written. The religion of Egypt changed and became more elaborate in places and more vague in others over those thousands of years. The very first

Pyramid Texts date from the 4th Dynasty. The next records, the *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, date from the 7th and 8th Dynasties. They show changes in the religion of Egypt from the earlier *Pyramid Texts*.

Abraham lived during the 9th or 10th Dynasty, at a time called the “First Intermediate Period.” This was a period of significant change (or apostasy) for the Egyptian religion. But even before Abraham, the order established by the first Fathers (despite efforts to keep the faith) had been poorly preserved. The *Pyramid Texts* are the oldest records, but they were carved during the 4th and 5th Dynasties. By the time these records had been carved, six or more centuries had passed between the original and their preservation. This would be like us composing the history from the time Robert the Bruce gained Scottish independence through the death of Joan the Arc for the first time today.

After the First Intermediate Period came the Middle Kingdom, during the 11th and through the 14th Dynasties. It was during the First Intermediate Period that Joseph was sold into Egypt. The *Book of the Dead* dates from the New Kingdom or 18th Dynasty. Moses lived during the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, and Josephus dates the exodus from Egypt at that point.

Over the long time period of their history, Egyptian religion changed. It began emphasizing ascending to heaven following this life. But it later emphasized navigating the dangers of the underworld where the dead face perils, tests, and judgments. It’s more accurate to say Egypt had “religions” rather than “a religion,” because so much changed over their history.

Solomon dedicated the temple at Jerusalem during the 20th Dynasty, a little over 1000 years BC. An attempt to reconstruct the religions of Egypt requires the study of materials that date over nearly 3000 years. Over that time, a great deal of change, uncertainty, apostasy, and error crept in. Much was lost, but also much was added. Some things were amplified or extended and represent uninspired efforts to improve on the original. Even the most meticulous scholar, using the most inspired approach, will never be able to reconstruct the original religion, or *that order established by the Fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first Patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam* (Abraham 2:3).

Yet God demands that our hearts turn to the Fathers, or we will be wasted at His return. This requirement is not to turn to them in just a figurative way, where we do genealogical work to connect ourselves with our recently deceased forbearers. That work is a wrong-headed effort to seal people to those kept in prison. The return of our hearts will

require us to have the same religion and the same beliefs in our hearts that the original Fathers had beginning with Adam. Only in that way will our hearts turn to the Fathers.

God declared to Abraham that the chosen descendants, the people of God, would call Abraham their father. They would need to have that same religion belonging to the first Fathers. God explained: *For as many as receive this gospel shall be called after thy name and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as unto their Father* (Abraham 3:1).

The term used by God, *this gospel*, is the original Holy Order the first Fathers, including Adam, possessed at the beginning. Our hearts must turn to the Fathers because their religion—not apostate Christianity or Judaism or apostate Mormonism or some remnant or relic of Adam’s religion but the order of the first Fathers—must be fully restored before we have *this gospel* possessed by Abraham, who had the records of the Fathers and, therefore, knew the original.

Adam still presides and still holds the keys. Joseph Smith said: *Adam holds the keys of the dispensation of the fullness of times; i.e., the dispensation of all the times have been, and will be revealed through him, from the beginning to Christ, and from Christ to the end of all the dispensations that are to be revealed* (T&C 140:3).

Though the Egyptians tried to preserve the things that came down from the beginning, as we read in the book of Abraham, the Pharaoh sought earnestly to imitate the order that came down from the beginning. And the Pharaoh succeeded in large measure in doing that. And he was a righteous man. *Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father* (Abraham 2:3). Pharaoh was not out there freelancing; he was trying to imitate something. And Egypt did a good job of preserving some things that have fallen into decay elsewhere.

But the Restoration through Joseph Smith and the promises that were made to the Fathers and the statement that was made by Moroni to Joseph on the evening that he came to him and talked about and reworded the promise given through Malachi—all of these are pointing to something that is, at this moment, still incomplete; a work that is, at this moment, still undone; a project that remains for us, if we will receive it, to finally receive.

Joseph Smith was doing something which did not just put together a man and a wife. He was doing something that put together families. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints is a mockup of a family. It is a mockup of the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with the First Presidency, and the 12 sons of Jacob in the Quorum of the Twelve, and the 70 descendents that went into Egypt when they migrated into Egypt when Joseph was counselor to Pharaoh (that you can read in [Exodus 1:1]). That's the church. It is a mockup; it is an imitation; it is a facsimile of the family of Abraham. It is not the family of Abraham, but it is a powerful evidence that the family of Abraham is, in fact, something Joseph Smith was interested in restoring. Eventually, that which is a mockery is going to give way that which *is* the family. First, you have a schoolmaster, and then you have the reality. Joseph was headed to the reality, but he didn't get there in his day.

The Book of Mormon begins with a title page that was on the very last plate of the plates that Joseph Smith translated, and it appears as the first page of the Book of Mormon.

AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF MORMON UPON PLATES TAKEN FROM THE PLATES OF NEPHI Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites who are a remnant of the house of Israel and also to Jew and gentile....

The Book of Mormon was written for three groups. Three targeted audiences are identified right at the outset—the Lamanites, the Jews, and the gentiles. That's who the Book of Mormon was sent to.

In the Teachings and Commandments section 158, there is a covenant offered to the gentiles, to the remnant of the Lamanites, and to the remnant of the Jews. These are the words of that covenant:

Do you have faith in these things and receive the scriptures approved by the Lord as a standard to govern you in your daily walk in life, to accept the obligations established by the Book of Mormon as a covenant, and to use the scriptures to correct yourselves and to guide your words, thoughts and deeds? (T&C 158:3)

It also goes on to say: *But if you do not honor me, nor seek to recover my people Israel...then you have no promise (T&C 158:19).*

The people that the Book of Mormon established as the target audience are the Lamanites, the Jews, and the gentiles. We have an obligation to try and reach out to the Lamanites, the Jews, and the gentiles.

The title page goes on to say:

...written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. Written, and sealed, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof; sealed up by the hand of Moroni and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of gentile; the interpretation thereof by the gift and power of God.

Did you get that? Almost in rapid succession, twice we're told *to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof*, and the *interpretation thereof by the gift and power of God*. Joseph Smith did not translate the Book of Mormon; God translated the Book of Mormon and told Joseph Smith what He wanted that interpretation to say.

I've read as many source documents as are currently available to review in print. There are some source materials I haven't looked at because they're in private collections, and you have to travel to see those. But we have this fanciful narrative about how the Book of Mormon was translated.

One of the things that went on in Kirtland was a Shouting Methodist tradition. People would go into the woods, and they would shout praises to God in hopes that they obtain some kind of spiritual manifestation. The typical manifestation that they were able to create in this tradition was to be seized upon, bound up, and unable to move, which was considered a sign of God's grace and redemption, because they were seized upon by some unseen power that had such marvelous power as to bind them up so they could not move. One of the other things that the Shouting Methodist tradition in Kirtland, Ohio encountered was the idea that as you're out and shouting praises, oftentimes standing on the stump of a tree that's been cut down, there would be a scroll or parchment that would flutter down from heaven, and when arrived, on the parchment there would be words written. And you would read the words, and after you'd read the words, the parchment would disappear. It would disintegrate. These were the kinds of manifestations that were the Shouting Methodist tradition, which (when Mormonism came to Kirtland) some of the Kirtland Mormon converts had similar experiences.

Well, one of the stories that gets told about the translation of the Book of Mormon is that Joseph Smith would look in a hat, a parchment would appear, he would read the words off the parchment, and then the parchment would disintegrate as soon as the translation was written up, and then a new parchment would appear. Okay?

At a conference in Kirtland, Hyrum Smith introduced his brother, Joseph, and as Joseph was coming up to talk, Hyrum said, "And Joseph is going to tell us about how the translation of

the Book of Mormon took place.” Joseph got up in front of the people, and he said, “It’s not appropriate. It was translated by the gift and power of God.” And then he went on. He refused to describe the process.

If you want to know how the Book of Mormon was translated, the Book of Mormon tells you how: by the gift and power of God. When pressed, after Joseph is dead and gone, and you want to sound like you know something, and you think back about the experiences of the Shouting Methodist tradition in the early days in Kirtland, well, why not say scrolls would appear, and then when you read them, they’d disintegrate?

There is so much that has crept into the reconstruction of events that are accepted by the LDS church, that are accepted by historians, that are accepted by the scholars. There’s only two people— (I was going to say one person that knows how it was done, and that was Joseph, but there are two: the second one is God). How did God interpret the Book of Mormon? And, by the way, would— If you took only the etchings that are on the plates of the Book of Mormon and you rendered a word-for-word translation of that set of inscriptions, would it read exactly like the Book of Mormon that we have? Or did God, in His mercy, understanding the weaknesses of our day, give us an interpretation that helps us to understand things in our language maybe a little more clearly than if we had simply a word-for-word translation from the plates? These are things that Joseph may know, or he may not. But certainly God would know.

When people pretend to know everything there is to know about the translation of the Book of Mormon and then to mock the process, they’re really inviting— They’re putting their own foolishness on display, and they’re inviting the ire of God. The fact is that the witness to how that process unfolded confined what he had to say to “It was translated by the gift and power of God.” And the source of these other fanciful tales—Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris (two of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon)—they were commanded to bear testimony, and their testimony was to consist of “the interpretation thereof was by the gift and power of God.” So when they go beyond that to give details that they probably have no way of knowing a thing about, they’re actually violating the restriction that God put upon it for a wise purpose.

Well, Joseph Smith was not the translator; it plainly states that God was the translator. It does not mean that what was composed by Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Omni, and others on the small plates and by Mormon and Moroni on the rest (and their abridgement) is necessarily—exactly—what was composed by them, because God used the interpretation of the text that He provided to state what He intended, by His gift and power, to be the

message that we receive today. It is literally God's statement to us about the content He wants us to understand, adapted to our needs.

It goes on to say in this title page:

An abridgment taken from the book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language...which is to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever. And also to the convincing of the Jew and gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. And now if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.

What are the covenants of the Lord that are supposed to be made known unto the remnant of the house of Israel that comes through the Book of Mormon? Well, the Book of Mormon tells you what they are: *And it shall also be of worth unto the gentiles, and not only unto the gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of Heaven unto Abraham, saying, In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed* (1 Nephi 7:3).

So the purpose of the Book of Mormon is to alert the gentiles and the Jews of the covenants that were made—specifically the covenants that were made with Abraham. Okay?

One of the great things about the new set of scriptures is that the Teachings and Commandments are laid out chronologically. There's this tradition that the last great revelation that Joseph Smith received was in January of 1841 in which the Lord outlined the commandment to build the temple and the signs that would be given if the temple were completed in sufficient time and how the church would be accepted with their kindred dead or rejected with their kindred dead depending upon how they pursued this. That's supposedly his last great revelation. In the Teachings and Commandments, however, what you see in the layout of Joseph's revelations chronologically is that in 1842, the first installment of the Book of Abraham was published. And it appears in the Teachings and Commandments in its chronological layout. And then a few months later, the next installment of the Book of Abraham appears. And so the last, largest revelation given to Joseph, although there are others that are included in this same timeframe, is the text of the Book of Abraham.

The Book of Mormon points to a recovery of knowledge and understanding about the covenants God made with Abraham. The Book of Abraham had to be revealed! It *had* to come forward! In order for us to understand the covenants that God made with Abraham, we had to get the Book of Abraham, which did not roll out until the 1842-and-beyond time period. Joseph's work culminated in attempting to get on the ground ordinances that would have reflected more fully the covenants made with Abraham. But the Book of Abraham is part of vindicating the promises that were made in the Book of Mormon.

So, as you read the Teachings and Commandments and you see it unfolding chronologically, you see where the Lectures on Faith fit in. You see where the Book of Abraham fit in. You see how Joseph's ministry was taking on a trajectory that, literally, fits the pattern of what the Book of Mormon was promising would come forth and be vindicated.

In the Book of Abraham: *I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name* [this is God's great gift to Abraham; He's going to make of him a minister to bear His name] *in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession*. Okay, this is cumbersome language, but I want you to ask yourself if the great gift that God gives to Abraham is to make of him a minister to bear His name, and then He mentions he's going to bear His name in a strange land, followed with *which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession*. Is the gift that He's giving to his descendants the land or the ministry? *I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, when they hearken to my voice* (Abraham 3:1). Does that sound like land, or does that sound like the ministry relating to hearkening to God's voice?

As He goes on to explain what his descendants are going to inherit:

...thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and priesthood unto all nations. And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this gospel shall be called after thy name and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as unto their Father. And I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee. And in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed, (that is, thy Priesthood) — for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee and in thy seed after thee. (Abraham 3:1)

The seed of Abraham are the people that hearken to the same God that Abraham hearkened to. If you hearken to that same God, you're the seed of Abraham. And the ministry that you're supposed to bear is the testimony that *that God* lives, and that *that God* is *the God* over the whole earth, that His work began with Adam and won't wrap up until the second coming of Christ in judgment on the world, to save and redeem those that look for Him.

We have to have the record of Abraham in order to understand the covenant that God made with Abraham, in order to vindicate the promise that's made in the Book of Mormon.

One of the sharp edges of criticism of Mormonism is directed specifically at the Book of Abraham. There are a lot of intellectual arguments that are being made out there, a lot of challenges for why the Book of Abraham ought to be thrown out, and how the Joseph Smith papyrus that got recovered is really simply Egyptian *Book of Breathings* material that has very little to do with a record written by the hand of Abraham on papyrus, and so on. Well, if the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, the Book of Abraham was translated no differently, except by the gift and power of God. And it includes information that's vital for us to understand—in order for us to know what the covenants were that were made with Abraham, in order for us to inherit the same gospel that was given to Abraham, so that we can lay hold upon the same blessings that were given to Abraham—so that the covenants that were made with the Fathers can be understood, activated, realized, and we can obtain the blessings of those here in the last days. All this stuff fits together, and Joseph's work had to necessarily include recovery of the covenants made with Abraham.

Now, you may regard yourself as a gentile, but the covenant that was made with Abraham makes you a descendant of Abraham if you hearken to that same God and receive that same gospel. And Nephi explains who the gentiles are in relation to the family of Father Abraham, also. This is Nephi:

And it shall come to pass that if the gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks, and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father. Yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land for ever. They shall be no more brought down into captivity. (1 Nephi 3:25)

Nephi is telling you, "If you are willing to receive what God has offered, then you're numbered among the house of Israel."

Jacob, the brother of Nephi, wrote about the gentiles. He said:

He that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God, for he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish. For I the Lord [God], the King of Heaven, will be their king, and

I will be a light unto them for ever... Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations. Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; ...the gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel. Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto [them and] thy seed. (2 Nephi 7:2-4)

So Jacob, likewise, says gentiles who are willing to receive this as their covenant—numbered among the house of Israel; no longer numbered among gentiles—they change identities, just like the promise that was made to Abraham. You receive it? You're his seed.

Christ picked up the same thing in 3 Nephi: *that the gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel (3 Nephi 9:11).*

The purpose of the Book of Mormon is to reveal that God made a covenant with Abraham in the beginning. And at the end, God intends to vindicate the covenant that God made with Abraham by changing gentiles into the house of Israel by covenant.

When the Restoration began, the people from the first publication in 1830 until September of 2015 in Boise—no one accepted the Book of Mormon as a covenant. It had not been done. The Lectures on Faith got accepted; the Doctrine and Covenants got accepted; the church leaders got accepted; a First Presidency, a High Council—all kinds of things got accepted; but *not* the Book of Mormon, as a covenant, until September... was it— what year was that?

MAN: 2017

DENVER: 2017. It was— It was an odd year. (But not '15). September of 2017—it was the very first time in history that the Book of Mormon was received as a covenant. And in the words that I read you just a moment ago, Nephi mentions covenant people. You have to receive it as a covenant. God only works to bring people into His good graces by covenants. They have to be made. Without covenants you cannot— You cannot participate in what the Lord sets out.

Well, the Book of Mormon was intended as a record for our day to restore our knowledge to make it possible for us to enter back into a covenant relationship with God, in order for the promises that were made to the Fathers to be vindicated. Abraham looked forward to having seed that would be countless. He had one son. But God told him, “Don’t worry about that. The time will come when everyone who receives this gospel...” — That is the gospel that Abraham had in his possession, the gospel that is unfolding in front of your eyes today, that will continue to unfold until all of its covenants, rights, obligations, privileges, understandings will all roll out.

The Restoration will be completed. But the promise was made to Abraham that whenever *that* is on the earth, those who receive it will acknowledge him, Abraham, as their covenant Father—the Father of the righteous.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver’s remarks entitled “Keep the Covenant: Do the Work,” given at the Remembering the Covenants Conference in Layton, UT on August 4, 2018;
- Denver’s *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #4 entitled “Covenants,” given in Centerville, UT on October 6, 2013;
- A fireside talk on “Plural Marriage,” given in Sandy, UT on March 22, 2015; and
- Denver’s remarks entitled “Book of Mormon as Covenant,” given at the Book of Mormon Covenant Conference in Columbia, SC on January 13, 2019.

In addition to the foregoing, Denver has addressed this topic extensively in several blog posts, including:

[“Ignorance Enshrined” posted February 22, 2013](#)

[“Questions from This Week” posted February 23, 2013](#)

[“Book of Abraham” posted February 24, 2011](#)

[“Egypt and Egyptian” posted April 18, 2010](#)

[“Book of Mormon” posted December 3, 2015](#)