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INFLUENTIAL ANTI-MORMON CAUGHT SPREADING LIES ABOUT LDS CHURCH

JULY 17, 2017 | IN FAITH & DOUBT | BY DUSTINANDBRITTNEY@HAPPINESS-SEEKERS.COM

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For many generations, Latter-day Saints have insisted that anti-Mormon literature isn't worth reading. This attitude appears to be validated by on-going discoveries that the most influential anti-Mormon leader of recent years has been caught spreading blatant lies and misinformation about the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.**

This is big.

If you know someone who has struggled with doubt, chances are that they happened upon this man's work. His infamous 80-page document has been downloaded nearly 1 million times—primarily, it would appear, by Latter-day Saints and former members.[1]

Many ex-Mormons use this document as a "missionary tool" in the hopes that it will lead their friends and family members away from the LDS Church.[2]

The author's success has a lot to do with the way he constructed the document.

He frames himself as a well-intentioned Latter-day Saint who merely has a few innocent questions about the Church—questions that he genuinely wants answers to. He puts LDS readers at ease by beginning with a quote from President J. Reuben Clark who said, "If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed."

By using this seemingly innocent narrative the author has successfully persuaded countless members to trust the information he provides. As a result, many unsuspecting Latter-day Saints have found his claims to be so damaging that they either find themselves stuck in a crisis of faith or they abandon their faith altogether.

But it's time for this house of cards to come tumbling down.

I normally don't bother responding to individual claims by anti-Mormons—because for every claim you debunk, another will be invented or repackaged.

However, a heart-felt letter from a mother made me change my mind.

She helped me realize that by taking the most popular piece of anti-Mormon literature (which summarizes just about all the claims against the Church) and exposing several blatant lies, I could prove an important point:

> "If these supposedly honest and sincere authors have misled you about this, how do you know that they haven't misled you about other things as well?"

So, let's get to it:

Below you will find a list of 5 outright deceptions that this author declares about the LDS Church, and at the bottom of the article you will find a link to a page that provides answers to the rest of his claims.

As you will see, a shred of truth can be used to misrepresent the whole truth.

And please consider sharing this article. Anti-Mormon claims have been popularized in recent years. We've got to provide resources to help.

False claim #1: "…there were major [changes to the Book of Mormon that] reflect Joseph's evolved view of the Godhead."

As you are probably already aware, the Book of Mormon we read today is slightly different from the original manuscript that was dictated by Joseph Smith. While there are no important differences between the original manuscript and the current edition of the Book of Mormon, many insignificant modifications have been made over the years.[3]

For example, as Joseph dictated the Book of Mormon, his scribes didn't include punctuation—this was added just before the first printing of the Book of Mormon. On top of these punctuation edits, the spelling eventually had to be standardized, grammar had to be adjusted, chapter headings were added, and the text was split up into verses.[4]

As part of these changes, Joseph prepared an 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon that fixed some typos and included a few clarifications.

One of those minor adjustments has really excited anti-Mormons over the years. Why? Because if you remove the relevant context and place it in just the right light, it appears much more controversial than it really is.

So, here's the change: There are four places where Joseph Smith added "Son of" to the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon. These are places where Jesus Christ was initially referred to as "God" or "the Eternal Father" but were adjusted to read "Son of God" and "Son of the Eternal Father."[5]

The author claims that this is proof that Joseph Smith used to see Jesus and Heavenly Father as one personage. He claims that this change to the text was an attempt by Joseph to hide his "evolving" views. He further argues that Joseph's other early teachings and revelations also reflect this Trinitarian view of the Godhead.

But he is dead wrong. This is how we know:

#1 The first edition of the Book of Mormon—the 1830 edition—already referred to Jesus as the "Son of God" and the "Son of the Most High" **all throughout**.[6]

Not to mention that Lehi's dream—in the very first chapter of the Book of Mormon—clearly distinguishes God, the Father, and Christ, the Son as separate personages.

#2 If the author had actually bothered to look through the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, he might have also noticed that Alma and Amulek spend almost 30 verses explaining that the Zoramite view of a singular God is incorrect.

It's actually one of the most masterful sermons in the Book of Mormon. They use stunning clarity to teach that Jesus is the Son of God and is distinct from the Father.

After quoting the prophet Zenos, Alma asks the Zoramites if they noticed that when Zenos was praying to God he said the following:

> "**And it is because of thy Son** that thou hast been merciful unto me…"

Alma and Amulek use that scripture as a launching pad for an impassioned sermon about how boldly their scriptures testify that Jesus is the Son of God (Alma 33:11–23; 34:1–15).

The following quote from Amulek clearly states the Book of Mormon's doctrine of the Godhead. **And, ironically it has a message for many of the Church's critics:**

> "My brethren…it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, **who is taught by us to be the Son of God**; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us."

Still not convinced? How about 3 Nephi 11 where God introduces Christ by saying:

> "**This is my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—**hear ye him**."

Or, better yet, Mosiah 15:7 where the Book of Mormon introduces a striking delineation between the Father and the Son:

> "Yea, he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, **the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.**"

Those 4 little clarifications Joseph made were just that—clarifications. They certainly don't equate a doctrinal transformation. Our doctrine of the Godhead was already there.

At this point, you may be wondering…Why didn't people verify the author's wild claims by looking at the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon for themselves? After all, the Church has photocopied every page of the 1830 edition and placed it on-line.

> The reason is perhaps because the author deceptively uses an "LDS Scholar" to make the claim seem unquestionable. **As it turns out, however, that "LDS Scholar" is a cartoon movie director whose profession and education provide no academic expertise.**[7]

#3 As for claims that Joseph's other early teachings are Trinitarian, click here for stunning proof to the contrary. **Just another made up claim.**

Bottom line: It's not the Church we should be skeptical about.

Quick Side Note: There are a few Book of Mormon scriptures that, if taken out of context, can give the impression of Trinitarianism. To learn more about how those verses actually fit in with the LDS view of the Godhead, click here.

False Claim #2: "Many Book of Mormon names and places are strikingly similar to local names and places of the region [where] Joseph Smith lived."

The author of this infamous anti-Mormon document provides a map of the cities and towns where Joseph grew up and then compares them to a proposed map of Book of Mormon geography.

He also compares these place names in a table.

He argues that the similarities are too powerful to ascribe to mere coincidence. And it's not just that he's telling people to think that. The way he constructs the comparisons makes it seem as though that is the natural conclusion.

But here's what countless misled readers do not know:

Several of the towns on this author's list were not even in existence at the printing of the Book of Mormon. Other locations were remote villages hundreds of miles away in places like Canada—hardly the land of Joseph's youth.[8]

Plus, almost half of the names or locations are also found in the Bible—including Biblical names that few are aware of such as Lehi, Boaz, Ramah, and Sidon.

But you know what? As ridiculous as this claim may seem, it is also one of the most emotionally impactful parts of the whole document. Why? Because it starts to paint a picture in your mind of how Joseph Smith might have invented the Book of Mormon.

> The author is trying to achieve the impossible: make a Book of Mormon fraud seem believable.

But explaining the coming forth of the Book of Mormon at the hands of a 23-year-old farm boy will continue to elude even the most devoted anti-Mormons.

False Claim #3: Joseph Smith's Polygamy is "Warren Jeffs territory"

Let's cut right to the chase on this one. Polygamy is not what really bothers anyone. What bothers people is the possibility that Joseph introduced polygamy—not because of revelation but out of a desire to satisfy lustful feelings. They worry that maybe Joseph practiced polygamy in the same way that Warren Jeffs did: with unrestrained lust and insatiable sexual appetite.

This insinuation is common in anti-Mormon literature. And the particular document that we are discussing explicitly claims that Joseph Smith's history is "Warren Jeffs territory."

But is that claim at all true?

No. It is demonstrably false.

Here's the easiest way to tell.

Although Joseph was unimaginably busy with civil, business, and ecclesiastical responsibilities (as well as spending time on the run or in jail), Emma gave birth to 9 children over the course of their marriage.[10] So, even though Joseph had very limited time for sexual relations, the intimate interactions he had with his wife were sufficient to result in quite a few pregnancies.

This tells us that Joseph was definitely fertile.

And yet, in an era before birth control, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith ever fathered a child with a woman other than Emma.

And that's despite all the desperate efforts of anti-Mormons in the early days of the Church to obtain exactly such evidence. All sorts of accusations have been made, but DNA testing and other evidence has now been able to rule them out.[11]

On the other hand, several of Joseph's plural wives remarried after his death and became immediately pregnant.[12]

Wow. So, a man who has incredible loyalty from fellow Latter-day Saints and who could indulge in as much sex as he would like from his plural wives…clearly chose not to.

The evidence is very clear that whatever intimate relations may have occurred—they were pretty close to non-existent.[13]

Here's why all this matters:

> Once you establish that whatever the reasons for polygamy, lust was clearly not one of them—basically every other claim that anti-Mormons make in regard to polygamy falls apart.

There is just so much information about polygamy in the early days of the Restoration that you never get from anti-Mormons. Like that almost half of Joseph's "wives" were really just "eternity only" dealings.[14] Or that the evidence indicates that Joseph's more controversial "marriages" never involved intimate relations.[15]

The more complex history behind polygamy reveals a trial of faith that was a refining experience like no other for early Latter-day Saints.[16] It also reveals a tender husband who is torn between a commandment from the Lord and a desire to cause his wife no pain.[17] Based on the evidence, it seems that Joseph tried many ways to half-way keep the commandment in an attempt to balance his affection for Emma with the Lord's command.[18] It reveals a man who is very human but also very good.

The Lord commanded that there would be a "restitution of all things" and indicated that a central purpose of polygamy was to raise up seed unto the Lord.[19] Even though Joseph had neither the time nor, it would seem, the will to make good on the latter purpose, his obedience made possible the polygamy that was practiced in Utah. If Joseph hadn't practiced it first, it is possible that few would have accepted it from Brigham Young.[20]

And the polygamy that was practiced in Utah not only bound the Saints together perhaps more than anything else could;[21] but it also allowed the Lord to multiply the posterity of the most righteous priesthood holders—ensuring a boom of children born into faith-filled families.[22]

Click here for extraordinary resources on every aspect of Joseph's polygamy.

False Claim #4: Joseph wrote four contradicting versions of the First Vision

This claim is completely untrue.

Here are the facts:

First, as we would expect, Joseph told the story of the 1st vision on multiple occasions. Second, because each account is conveyed to a different audience and for a different purpose, Joseph focuses on different details of the experience in each account.

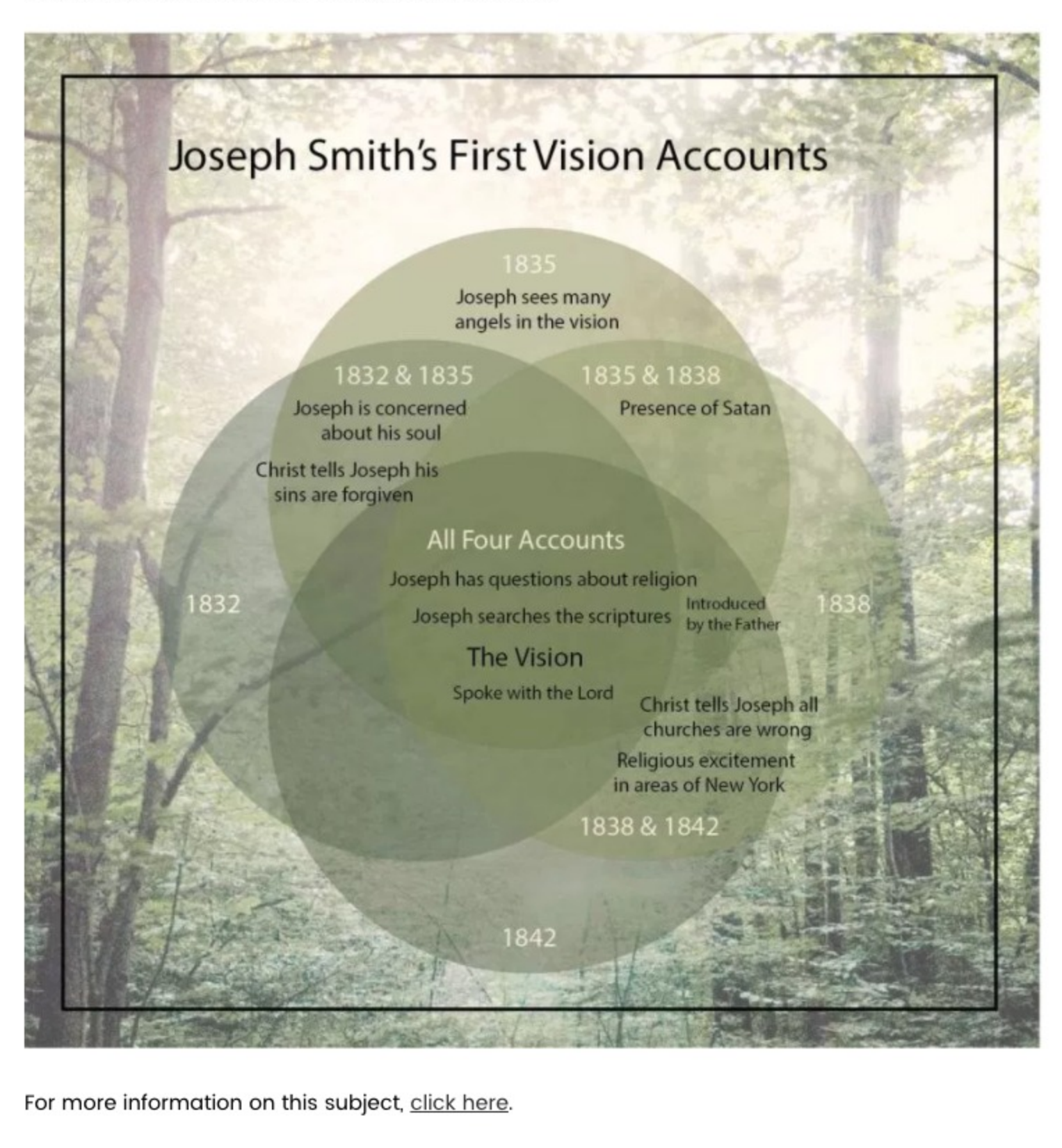
What would *really* be weird is if he robotically gave the exact same, seemingly rehearsed account, every time he was asked. Instead, every time he tells of the First Vision experience, it is from a new angle, revealing an experience that is panoramic and authentic.

Contrary to the author's assertion, the accounts do not contradict each other—they enrich one another. And they are on display in the Church's history museum and were published by the Church over 50 years ago (shortly after the History Department discovered them). Click here to study each account for yourself on the Church's website.

And consider the following:

Paul and Alma the Younger also retell their transformative spiritual experiences on multiple occasions—to different audiences and with different purposes. Each of their accounts differ on what they emphasize and include new details, but ultimately they in no way contradict each other. Just like with Joseph's First Vision accounts, each perspective adds rich depth and power to their experiences.

Mormon Hub has a great Venn diagram that powerfully puts the similarities and differences of the First Vision accounts into beautiful perspective:


Joseph Smith's First Vision Accounts
1835
Joseph sees many angels in the vision
1832 & 1835
Joseph is concerned about his soul
1835 & 1838
Presence of Satan
Christ tells Joseph his sins are forgiven
All Four Accounts
Joseph has questions about religion
Joseph searches the scriptures
Introduced by the Father
1832
1838
The Vision
Spoke with the Lord
Christ tells Joseph all churches are wrong
Religious excitement in areas of New York
1838 & 1842
1842

For more information on this subject, click here.

False Claim #5: There are striking parallels between the Book of Mormon and several other books

The author claims evidence that three books were the inspiration for the Book of Mormon. He gives the reader the impression that whole stories, themes, and word choices were lifted from these texts and placed in the Book of Mormon.

The purpose, once again, is to make it seem plausible that the Book of Mormon could have been a fraud by trying to provide evidence of the source material Joseph "must have used" for the BoM.

There are many misleading parts of the author's document, but this may be the most misleading of all.

Let's start with the Book of Napoleon. You won't believe this one.

The author of the anti-Mormon document we are discussing shows a couple of verses from the Book of Mormon and then compares them with a "paragraph" from the Book of Napoleon. What he doesn't tell the reader is that this "paragraph" is actually a combination of words and phrases over the course of 25 pages.[23]

How convenient. Using that approach, I might just be able to make the argument that the Book of Mormon was really plagiarized from the Quran. Or that it was retroactively plagiarized from some book written a decade after the Book of Mormon was first printed.

If you actually read through the Book of Napoleon, you will quickly realize how baseless the author's claim is.

Next, The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain.

Let me first say that no one should be surprised to learn that books other than the BoM use KJV style English or other terminology associated with Joseph's day. **The English language is in a state of constant flux, so what style of English should the Lord have chosen? Which style would satisfy the critics?**

An article completely debunking the "parallels" between the BoM and the Late War can be found here.

Lastly, let's deal with perhaps the most evocative claim of source material for the BoM: a book titled "View of the Hebrews."

This book was written by Ethan Smith who was the pastor of a congregation which Oliver Cowdery attended for several years. An early Church critic, Woodbridge Riley, was perhaps the first to claim that the book's similarities with the Book of Mormon had to be more than "mere coincidence."

The anti-Mormon document we are discussing lists 36 parallels between Ethan Smith's book and the Book of Mormon. Almost all of them are silly or completely disingenuous. When you actually go and read the View of the Hebrews, you realize what a stretch the author is making. I discuss this in more detail, here.

There is really only one parallel that initially seems striking—if you remove all of the necessary context (read more about that, here).

But once again, to bolster his claim, the author tries to create a false feeling of support from LDS sources.

He repeatedly implies that a former General Authority and Church Historian, BH Roberts, agrees with his theory and even quotes him to that effect.

The problem? The author is drawing from a series of unfinished essays, wherein BH Roberts is not making his own arguments—he is summarizing unfounded anti-Mormon claims (which had already been made or might be made in the future) which he thought the Church may want to consider answering.

What B.H. Roberts actually said about the essays is this:

> "Let me say once and for all, so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation, that what is herein set forth **does not represent any conclusions of mine.**"

And years later in 1933…

> "Ethan Smith played no part in the formation of the Book of Mormon."

To learn more about the clear evidence that View of the Hebrews had no influence on the Book of Mormon, click here.

Answers to the rest of the author's claims

Answers to the rest of the author's claims can be found here.

An Important Conclusion

I can't tell you how many people have come to me gloating about the claims discussed above.

The critics ask why we call it "anti-Mormon information". They say it's just the plain facts. They argue that Latter-day Saints are afraid of the truth and that we are just brainwashed.

Not so.

We call it anti-Mormon information because it consists of twisting "the facts", fabricating "the facts", and decontextualizing "the facts".

We're not afraid of the truth, but we *are* cautious about the way that anti-Mormons have shamelessly misrepresented the truth since day 1 of the Restoration.

What we know is that…"calumny may defame, mobs may assemble, and persecutions may rage. But the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done."

Dustin Phelps

(Click on citations for the source)

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