

## *Original Paper*

# Religion and Revolution: Joseph Smith, Abraham Lincoln, and *the Book of Mormon*

Sri Michael Das<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Washington DC, USA

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### **Abstract**

*The name Joseph Smith, b. 23 December 1803, d. 27 June, 1844 invokes words like heretic, false prophet, con artist and fruitcake. No stranger to con artistry or the interior of a prisoner cell, Smith was arrested numerous times on legitimate charges, he also accomplished something no other Prophet did: developed the character and strategies for First Citizen of Humanity, Abraham Lincoln and helped start a War Between the States that enslaved men might be free. Though he never lived to see his Book of Mormon accomplish its ends, he, along with the Latter Day Saints were never given recognition, not even informally for this, humankind's the most important task. The most important in human history. In this paper I detail important elements of Smith's and his Church's work and also illuminate his ties to Mr. Lincoln, and mourn the wayward Church of today. Perhaps revisiting Mister Smith's Vision will reignite all of us and cause us to rise up and wage one more War against tyranny, weaponry, waste, abuse, neglect, and utter ignorance of our innate spiritual principals.*

### **1. A Brief History of Joseph Smith**

Joseph Smith was born to a family of farmers in 1803 in Topsfield, MA, Bushman (N.D.). His father Asael Smith married Lucy Mack and the family moved to Vermont to try farming, but eventually settled in Palmyra, NY after repeated crop failures. Joseph inherited his parents' interest in *Seekerism*, a sect of Christianity that seeks revelations from God as to how to correct Apostasy. Burrage (N.D.) describes them as:

*The Seekers believed that since Antichrist had ruled so long over the Church, no true church and true church-officers existed any longer in all the world, and furthermore that, they could not be secured until God sent new apostles or prophets to ordain new elders and establish entirely new churches. They claimed also that it was undesirable for any man to seek to hasten God's own peculiar business, an*

*opinion, of course, which was particularly distasteful to those English separatists who saw no need of delaying the preaching of the Gospel and the organization of new churches.*

Although the family was pious, only Lucy attended church. The family practiced magic and treasure hunting together, a practice which Joseph maintained his entire life and was the cause of significant trouble in his adult life.

Prior, at age 14 he apparently went into the woods and met with an angel named Moroni, “The Interpreter”, Peterson (n.d.) in order to “restore the Gospels”, Bushman (2,000). Smith claimed he was visited upon by the Father and the Son but left the encounter with little of substance and was said to have had an ecstatic experience that began and ended with naught but little for enthusiasm for the Bible.

The Book of Mormon professes this not in the least, and in fact Joseph Smith appears to not be a fan of the Good Book by any stretch of the imagination:

## **2. Nephi Chapter 29:**

*Many Gentiles will reject the Book of Mormon—They will say, We need no more Bible—The Lord speaks to many nations—He will judge the world out of the books which will be written. About 559–545 B.C.*

1) But behold, there shall be many—at that day when I shall proceed to do a <sup>a</sup>marvelous work among them, that I may remember my <sup>b</sup>covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may set my hand again the <sup>c</sup>second time to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel;

2) And also, that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the <sup>a</sup>words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall <sup>b</sup>hiss forth unto the <sup>c</sup>ends of the earth, for a <sup>d</sup>standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel;

3) And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A <sup>a</sup>Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

4) But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a <sup>a</sup>Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the <sup>b</sup>Jews, mine ancient covenant people. And what <sup>c</sup>thank they the <sup>d</sup>Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles?

5) O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay; but ye have <sup>a</sup>cursed them, and have <sup>b</sup>hated them, and have not sought to recover them. But behold, I will return all these things upon your own heads; for I the Lord have not forgotten my people.

6) Thou fool, that shall say: A <sup>a</sup>Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?

7) Know ye not that there are more <sup>a</sup>nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the <sup>b</sup>isles of the sea; and that I rule in the

heavens above and in the <sup>c</sup>earth beneath; and I bring forth my <sup>d</sup>word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

8) Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the <sup>a</sup>testimony of <sup>b</sup>two nations is a <sup>c</sup>witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one <sup>d</sup>nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two <sup>e</sup>nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

9) And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the <sup>a</sup>same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my <sup>b</sup>words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one <sup>c</sup>word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my <sup>d</sup>work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.

10) Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my <sup>a</sup>words; neither <sup>b</sup>need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.

11) For I command <sup>a</sup>all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall <sup>b</sup>write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the <sup>c</sup>books which shall be written I will <sup>d</sup>judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

12) For behold, I shall speak unto the <sup>a</sup>Jews and they shall <sup>b</sup>write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall <sup>c</sup>write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto <sup>d</sup>all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

13) And it shall come to pass that the <sup>a</sup>Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the <sup>b</sup>lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.

14) And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the <sup>a</sup>house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the <sup>b</sup>lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in <sup>c</sup>one. And I will show unto them that fight against my word and against my <sup>d</sup>people, who are of the <sup>e</sup>house of Israel, that I am God, and that I <sup>f</sup>covenanted with <sup>g</sup>Abraham that I would remember his <sup>h</sup>seed <sup>i</sup>forever.

Verse 9, for my <sup>d</sup>work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever, reveals the nature of the Prophet and his God at the same time. Both wanted time and space and history itself to leave Christianity and its Book behind.

Starting in 1823, the angel Moroni (more-on-eye) began visiting Smith at his bedside. He began making trips a hill not far from the Smiths' house in order to obtain and translate a record of ancient North American prophecies engraved on gold plates. Once a year for four years Smith worked on the translations, and in 1827, returned home with them.

Smith continued to translate the records and enlisted the help of friends and relatives. *The Book of Mormon*, a complete rendition of the translations was published on March 1830. 5,000 copies were

planned, an ambitious project for a work of its size, which had never been published in a quantity this large.

Expertise in printing technology had to advance to accommodate it, and this required consultants and investors beyond the normal scope of publishers of that time, *Printing and Publishing the Book of Mormon*, (n.d.). One of whom was a local newspaper owner and this exposed the Book to the public prematurely, and opposition was instant. Even still the Book sold out.

On April 6, 1830, a short time later, support for Smith and his associates was sufficient to permit the formation of their own church. Widespread appeal and notoriety followed Smith and his pilgrims everywhere. They were invited to expand across the Midwest, and by 1836, established a new temple in Kirtland, MO. In Missouri is where things got interesting.

Smith's Seekerist/*Book of Mormon* ideals which included "resetting" Christianity and re-establishing a Gospel-based way of life in a religion-torn America had broad appeal, namely with Native Americans and others who were disenfranchised from Christianity and its arcane and obtuse arguments against ordinary life.

Smith on the other hand argued the reverse, encouraging a synthesis of sobriety, charity, and a common good that soon brokered him sufficient political power that he and his flock were soon threatened with extinction by a Protestant US Government.

Death threats, bank failures, and growing popularity forced the Latter Day Saints as they were then called to what was hoped would be a permanent home in Nauvoo, IL:

*From Nauvoo Smith launched a renewed missionary effort, and converts soon came flooding in from all over the United States and parts of Europe, especially Great Britain. He organized a female Relief Society and laid plans for another temple. In 1841 he began to teach the doctrine of eternal marriage, including the idea of plural marriage, which he himself practiced. In the temple, faithful Saints would be endowed with a deeper knowledge of the gospel and be sealed as husband and wife for eternity. Living Saints could also be baptized for persons who had died without hearing the gospel of Christ. In March 1844 he organized a Council of Fifty composed of leading Mormons and a few sympathetic non-Mormons to manage the political affairs of the kingdom. All this was more than some of the Saints could accept. -Anb.org (n.d.)*

Soon After, in Spring of 1844, Smith took a hard charge at the White House, which quickly gained momentum and this caused a rival Mormon cult to act in reprisal and imprison him. He was murdered before he could complete his trial.

### **3. The Book of Mormon**

Even though Smith claimed the Book was written in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, and pertained to a rag tag crew of Jews who, fed up with the wickedness of Jerusalem decided to hit the road, there are clues he was writing allegorically about himself, his family and the generally pervading American Condition.

A colleague quoted in *the Church Historian Press*, n.d. said:

*I found, on searching the Scriptures, that from the commencement of time, through every age, God continued to send prophets to the people, and always when God had a message for the people, he chose a special messenger to send it by, and it was always headed with a "thus saith the Lord." . . . If he supplied every other age and people with prophets and special messengers, why not this?*

Smith, wearing the costume of one of his prophets he called Helaman, heal-a-mahn, says it's time for justice, things have gotten too far out of hand.

**Helaman 10:**

The Lord gives Nephi the sealing power—He is empowered to bind and loose on earth and in heaven—He commands the people to repent or perish—The Spirit carries him from multitude to multitude. About 21–20 B.C. *Note, Abraham Lincoln was later said to have this same "sealing power", Harris, D. (N.D.).*

1) *And it came to pass that there arose a division among the people, insomuch that they divided hither and thither and went their ways, leaving Nephi alone, as he was standing in the midst of them.*

2) *And it came to pass that Nephi went his way towards his own house, <sup>a</sup>pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him.*

3) *And it came to pass as he was thus pondering—being much cast down because of the wickedness of the people of the Nephites, their secret works of darkness, and their murderings, and their plunderings, and all manner of iniquities—and it came to pass as he was thus pondering in his heart, behold, a <sup>a</sup>voice came unto him saying:*

4) *<sup>a</sup>Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with <sup>b</sup>unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine <sup>c</sup>own life, but hast sought my <sup>d</sup>will, and to keep my commandments.*

5) *And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that <sup>a</sup>all things shall be <sup>b</sup>done unto thee according to thy <sup>c</sup>word, for thou shalt <sup>d</sup>not ask that which is contrary to my will.*

6) *Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with <sup>a</sup>famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.*

7) *Behold, I give unto you <sup>a</sup>power, that whatsoever ye shall <sup>b</sup>seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people.*

8) *And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.*

9) *And if ye shall say unto this <sup>a</sup>mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.*

10) *And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.*

11) *And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto <sup>a</sup>destruction.*

12) *And behold, now it came to pass that when the Lord had spoken these words unto Nephi, he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent.*

13) *Now behold, <sup>a</sup>notwithstanding that great miracle which Nephi had done in telling them concerning the death of the chief judge, they did harden their hearts and did not hearken unto the words of the Lord.*

14) *Therefore Nephi did declare unto them the word of the Lord, saying: Except ye repent, thus saith the Lord, ye shall be <sup>a</sup>smitten even unto destruction.*

15) *And it came to pass that when Nephi had declared unto them the word, behold, they did still harden their hearts and would not hearken unto his words; therefore they did <sup>a</sup>revile against him, and did seek to lay their hands upon him that they might cast him into prison.*

16) *But behold, the power of God was with him, and they could not take him to cast him into prison, for he was taken by the Spirit and <sup>a</sup>conveyed away out of the midst of them.*

17) *And it came to pass that thus he did go forth in the Spirit, from multitude to multitude, declaring the word of God, even until he had declared it unto them all, or sent it forth among all the people.*

18) *And it came to pass that they would not hearken unto his words; and there began to be contentions, insomuch that they were divided against themselves and began to slay one another with the sword.*

One must read the Book of Mormon with an eye for the details in order to understand exactly what Smith was referring to. The Book is supposed to be a “revelation” a direct communicate between the Spirit of God and His Prophet and indeed it has all the ingredients, but the substratum of the work is deeply temporal and suggests Smith’s horror over his country’s religion, politics and one last little thing: slavery. Joseph Smith hated it and so did the Latter Day Saints who popularized abolition, Bringhurst (2006). Here’s where it all started:

**Alma 48:**

(11) *And Moroni was a <sup>a</sup>strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect <sup>b</sup>understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery.*

(12) *Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the <sup>a</sup>welfare and safety of his people.*

(13) *Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had <sup>a</sup>sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.*

*(14) Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught <sup>a</sup>never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives.*

The Book of Mormon is rife with similar references. Each Chapter alternates war and peace time, the rise and fall of kings, judges, prophets, Interpreters and Sealers, each version and combination very much like the ones before except the salient point changes. Sometimes it is religious freedom, others discuss apostasy, a few discuss the importance of Christ's birth and the Gospel Meaning, there are chapters that discuss disarmament, and a few focus on myth, legend, and mysticism, i.e., the creation, baptism, reincarnation and prophesying.

Slavery and abolition however, that is where the metal hit the whetstone with the Book of Mormon and its first followers, the Latter Day Saints. Smith and his co-authors promise humanity in **Mosiah 7:33** there could be an end: *But if ye will <sup>a</sup>turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all <sup>b</sup>diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.*

And after Delivery, a superlatively optimistic vision for Reconstruction, see Alma 11: 44

*Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but everything shall be <sup>a</sup>restored to its perfect frame.*

*In his campaign book, Smith outlined a six-point path and more for his temporal aims as well, Tapper (2007):*

*“gradually ending slavery; reducing the size of Congress by at least two-thirds; re-establishing a national bank; annexing Texas, California and Oregon; prison reform; and a position near and dear to Mormons at the time -- empowering the federal government to protect the liberties of minorities from “mobocracy.”*

In his letter to Oliver Cowdery, Smith discusses the fact war is coming, and Christianity is not going to get in its way. The love of the South for its slaves was stronger than its beliefs in the Gospels:

*I am aware, that many who profess to preach the gospel, complain against their brethren of the same faith, who reside in the south, and are ready to withdraw the hand of fellowship because they will not renounce the principle of slavery and raise their voice against everything of the kind.<sup>5</sup> This must be a tender point, and one which should call forth the candid reflection of all men, and especially before they advance in an opposition calculated to lay waste the fair States of the South,<sup>6</sup> and set loose, upon the world a community of people who might peradventure, overrun our country and violate the most sacred principles of human society,—chastity and virtue.<sup>7</sup>*

In the same letter, Smith refers to the a Day of Judgement for Slavers and lukewarm Abolitionists alike at Bar of God, which in the Book of Mormon, loosely corelates to the Gate to Eden :

*No one will pretend to say, that the people of the free states are as capable of knowing the evils of slavery as those who hold them. If slavery is an evil, who, could we expect, would first learn it? Would the people*

*of the free states, or would the slave states? All must readily admit, that th[e] latter would first learn this fact. If the fact was learned first by those immediately concerned, who would be more capable than they of prescribing a remedy?*

*And besides, are not those who hold slaves, persons of ability, discernment and candor? Do they not expect to give an account at the bar of God for their conduct in this life? It may, no doubt, with propriety be said, that many who hold slaves live without the fear of God before their eyes, and, the same may be said of many in the free states. Then who is to be the judge in this matter?*

*So long, then, as those of the free states are not interested in the freedom of the slaves, any other than upon the mere principles of equal rights and of the gospel, and are ready to admit that there are men of piety who reside in the South, who are immediately concerned, and until they complain, and call for assistance, why not cease their clamor, and no further urge the slave to acts of murder,<sup>8</sup> and the master to vigorous discipline, rendering both miserable, and unprepared to pursue that course which might otherwise lead them both to better their condition?*

Life after Joseph Smith was not perfect, but it definitely involved diligence, the Mormon sort especially and the Lord, God being of Good Will and Pleased with the Book of Mormon fueled Abraham *did deliver those in bondage out of slavery.*

#### **4. Abraham Lincoln, the Latter Day Saints, and the Road to the White House**

Abraham Lincoln's interest in the Mormon faith and his strategic alliances with Latter Day Saints (LDS) are well documented, as are his apparent desires to avoid them altogether, Nate R. (2014). Lincoln said he wanted to steer clear of the LDS because of the stigma associated with their polygamist practices, which included a kind of a boon he offered, "if they won't bother me, I won't bother them". Still he called them "stubborn logs in the field" that needed to be contended with, and in fact he did a lot more than just contend with them, he was downright fond of them. Candidate for President and President Lincoln's PR wizardry indeed permitted some very close collusion, Hansen (2015).

Misters Lincoln and Smith apparently shared each others' company frequently, Arave (2008): "Winder said Lincoln's association with Mormons predated his presidency by a few decades. He was an Illinois Senator and may have had a connection with Joseph Smith, possibly knowing the Prophet quite well.

Winder said some have speculated that Joseph Smith may have attended a party for Lincoln. He also said Lincoln and Joseph Smith were in the Illinois State Capitol on several occasions at the same time.

Lincoln helped Mormons secure the Nauvoo Charter, but Winder said Lincoln didn't show any special favoritism toward the church and had initially referred to Mormonism as a "strange, new sect."

Abraham Lincoln owned and read the *Book of Mormon*, and maintained a glowing relationship with the Church in spite of his opposition towards polygamy. Support of polygamy caused a schism in the Church and cost Joseph Smith his life, and the growing practice of it among Mormons made it a national crisis. Lincoln was wise to avoid it.



Even still he expected to lose the election and apparently started a campaign involving his cabinet through a secret letter writing campaign in which he insisted they commit to freeing as many slaves as possible, Gopnik (2020).

It is this underground coordination of Abraham Lincoln's all Mormon Cabinet that is believed to be the root driver of our country's freedom from slavery that has apparently lasted till today.

### 5. Conclusions: The Latter Day Saints of Today, and Their Impact on Racism

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has fallen far from the legacy of its Prophet and Abraham Lincoln, Humanity's First Citizen, Green (2021). In recent elections, Mormons have testified to the pristine character of Donald Trump, a racist, bigot, and monster, quite a departure from Mr. Lincoln and helped him to get elected. A fringe group of Mormon women issued a call to action to resist, Gehrke (2020) but the popularity of racists and racism in government persists, and in spite of their heroic origins, the Mormons are proving not to be immune.

There is one ray of hope, however: President Russell J. Nelson has stated openly his Church shall not be a party to hatred of any kind McKenzie Stauffer & Brady McCombs, Associated Press. (2020).

It is never too late for a miracle, as the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith and his finest student, Abraham Lincoln proved. The latest of which is the end of institutionalized bias towards race, and lays in the hands of its current Custodian, Mr. Nelson, is as eagerly awaited as abolition itself.

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