

November 7, 2015

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Centennial, CO 80016-[REDACTED]

Dear Elder [REDACTED],

I was very pleased to receive your letter dated October 1st. I noticed it was addressed to both my wife and me but the content pertained to me alone. My wife is still a believing member. I am the one who no longer believes. Your testimony in the letter is appreciated.

Your letter caused me to search deeply. I wish to convey to you what brought me to my current state of beliefs. My intent is not to preach to you or to dissuade you from your beliefs, but it is my desire to describe my journey and to outline what I've learned as I journeyed. The opinions and views expressed in this letter are my own. Since I am copying my Bishop and Stake President, they too will have a better understanding of where I stand and how I arrived where I am.

I was born to wonderful parents. My lines in the church go back to its beginnings. I am peripherally related to many early church leaders, including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. I am related to almost every member of the current First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has been a personal friend of the family, since he was in our Stake Presidency in the Chicago area many years ago. In fact, his brother-in-law was my Priest Quorum Adviser.

You might say I have been brought up in the nature and nurture of the church. My current state pains me. However, it's not my fault I learned what I learned. My sources were the very same sources used for lesson manuals, church magazine articles, General Conference addresses by General Authorities and more.

Let me explain why I delved into these sources, naming them as I go.

In Texas, I was employed by [REDACTED] as a Software Developer. I progressed to Team Lead and was subsequently moved to a support team for hardware that I had a hand in installing and configuring to support more robust online services. My responsibilities included taking my turn on an "On Call" rotation. Every third week I was the Primary On Call person for the team. After that week, I was Secondary. My third week I was not On Call. Weekends, Holidays and even scheduled vacation time still required a lot of support time from me. This took me away from attendance at church quite a lot. Even so, I still fulfilled some responsible callings, such as Assistant to the High Priest Group Leader. When I couldn't attend, I read and studied. I have a Kindle Fire tablet and I found several resources that were free to download.

In 2013 the position of UniVerse Database Administrator became vacant. One of my responsibilities on the support team I was part of was as the overseer of the UniVerse Database Administrator and I was, therefore, knowledgeable about the position and its duties and responsibilities. I applied for this newly vacated position and was accepted. This changed my On Call rotation from two weeks on, one week off to 24x7x365. This was a high visibility position with a lot of responsibility. The UniVerse database supported all orders placed via our call centers, all fulfillment operations for stores, called in orders and on line orders. The database required close monitoring. The intensity of my workload was increased dramatically!

I was no longer able to attend church, except for once in a great while. Never on a regular basis. However, I still fulfilled my calling as First Assistant to the High Priest Group Leader.

Since the Sunday School course of study in 2013 was the D&C and Church History, I set myself a goal to do something I had wanted to do since my mission. In realizing this goal, I felt I would be able to maintain my levels of spirituality, along with prayer and monthly fasting on Fast Sunday.

What was this goal?

This goal was to read The 7 volume History of the Church, the 6 volume Comprehensive History of the Church, the 26 volume Journal of Discourses and the History of Joseph Smith by his Mother. I also wanted to read a few journals and diaries of ancestors who were prominent members of the church in its early years. One such ancestor is Oliver Boardman Huntington.

This project started in January 2013 and finished March 2014. I'm certain you'll agree it was a major undertaking. I was aided by my talent for reading quickly!

As I was finishing this project I became aware of some "essays" the church was publishing online on the church's web site, lds.org. They were somewhat hidden within the Gospel Topics section but have now become more available by a link placed on the landing page of the Topics section, along with a video by Elder Snow, the Church Historian. These essays deal with what the church now refers to as "troubling history". Here is a link to Elder Snow's video explanation regarding the essays and under whose direction and approval they were written:

<https://www.lds.org/topics/essays?lang=eng#media=what-about-historical-questions>

I advise you to become familiar with these essays! You will be better prepared to deal with people like me if you do!

Now, let's review what my reading and study brought to my attention. It's what I had to deal with and still must to deal with. I am interested to know how you will deal with it.

Tighten your seatbelt. Let's begin.

"We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. No sect or religious denomination [or, I may say, no searcher of truth] in the world possesses a single principle of truth that we do not accept or that we will reject. We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure." - Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine: Sermons and Writings of President Joseph F. Smith

"Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who wilfully [sic] attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false, for the doctrines of an impostor cannot be made to harmonize in all particulars with divine truth. If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions, which would be easy to detect. The doctrines of false teachers will not stand the test when tried by the accepted standards of measurement, the scriptures." - Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, 1954, vol. 1, p. 188

"Well, it's either true or false. If it's false, we're engaged in a great fraud. If it's true, it's the most important thing in the world. Now, that's the whole picture. It is either right or wrong, true or false, fraudulent or true. And that's exactly where we stand, with a conviction in our hearts that it is true: that Joseph went into the Grove; that he saw the Father and the Son; that he talked with them; that Moroni came; that the Book of Mormon was translated from the plates; that the priesthood was restored by those who held it anciently. That's our claim. That's where we stand, and that's where we fall, if we fall. But we don't. We just stand secure in that faith." - Gordon B. Hinckley - Interview "The Mormons" - PBS Documentary, April 2007

"If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed." - J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years. Provo, D. Michael Quinn, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1983, p. 24

The four statements above are clear and unmistakable. Everything rides on Joseph Smith. Everything. If even one claim is provably false, the whole house of cards falls. Let our examination and quest for truth and fact begin.

The Book of Abraham

As Elder Steven E. Snow, Church Historian, explains the essays in the Gospel Topics section of [lds.org](https://www.lds.org) were written and approved under the Direction of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. The essay on the Book of Abraham states:

"The book of Abraham was first published in 1842 and was canonized as part of the Pearl of Great Price in 1880. The book originated with Egyptian papyri that Joseph Smith translated beginning in 1835. **Many people saw the papyri, but no eyewitness account of the translation survives, making it impossible to reconstruct the process. Only small fragments of the long papyrus scrolls once in Joseph Smith's**

possession exist today. The relationship between those fragments and the text we have today is largely a matter of conjecture.”

This is patently false! The last half of that paragraph is loaded with “weasel words”.

Definition: “A weasel word (also, anonymous authority logical fallacy) is an informal term for words and phrases aimed at creating an impression that a specific and/or meaningful statement has been made, when only a vague or ambiguous claim has been communicated, enabling the specific meaning to be denied if the statement is challenged.”

Also, see this: <https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-31-honesty?lang=eng>

The challenge to this statement in the Gospel Topics regarding the Book of Abraham comes from Joseph Smith himself. **There are eyewitness statements claiming Joseph Smith stated the papyri were written by the hand of Abraham and the hand of Joseph.** He only translated the papyrus he said was written by Abraham. He never got the time to tackle the one containing the writings of Joseph.

There are 6 worksheets he created as he was translating that he gave to 6 of his contemporaries. One example, given to Oliver Cowdery, can be found here:

<http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/egyptian-alphabet-oliver-cowdery-scribe-circa-july-circa-december-1835?p=1&highlight=alphabet>

More regarding the Book of Abraham and Egyptian materials can be found here:

<http://josephsmithpapers.org/site/book-of-abraham-and-egyptian-material>

The characters found in the left column of the worksheet correspond to the papyrus recovered in 1967. This same papyrus is described in The Improvement Era, January 1968, a digital copy of which can be found here: <https://archive.org/details/improvementera7101unse>

The translation of each character found in the left column of the worksheet is found in the right column. This means Joseph was equating a character with a translation. Each character in the worksheet can be found on the papyrus extant.

Ever since the Rosetta stone was found, Egyptologists have been able to interpret/translate Egyptian hieroglyphics. When Joseph’s translation is compared to what was learned from the Rosetta stone, we are able to determine Joseph’s ability to translate Egyptian. We find that Joseph could not translate Egyptian. Some in the Church claim Joseph was inspired and received the Book of Abraham by vision or inspiration. This is patently false since Joseph states at the beginning of the Book of Abraham itself, “A Translation of some ancient Records that have fallen into our hands from the catacombs of Egypt. The writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, **written by his own hand, upon papyrus”**.

For more, see:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=32vUAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA188&dq=the+life+of+joseph+smith+by+th+e+hand+of+abraham&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAWoVChMI8OG3icbPyAIVR6w-Ch2vEgix#v=onepage&q=the%20life%20of%20joseph%20smith%20by%20the%20hand%20of%20abraham&f=false> and read the first full paragraph on page 188.

The History of the Church also confirms this. Joseph reports in journal entries the fact that he was working on the translation of the papyri. We find the same characters on the papyrus rediscovered in 1967 that are listed in the worksheet Joseph made and distributed. There is no denying the characters on the worksheet are not contained in the selfsame papyrus. They are.

This definitely confirms that there are “weasel words” used in the Book of Abraham essay found on LDS.org. Knowingly, then, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve lied. I say “lied” because the intent of using weasel words is to deceive, to give a false impression. That constitutes a lie. Again, Elder Snow states the essays were written under the direction of and approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve!

So, we now are able to make a conclusion. The Book of Abraham is a work of fiction. The Church has canonized a work of fiction.

More proof is found in reading the Book of Abraham and focusing on the principles of astronomy it describes. These ideas were ideas common to the American people in Joseph’s time and writings containing these same ideas can be found in many places. Feel free to research this on your own. Of course, these principles have long since been disproven.

Again, the Book of Abraham is a work of fiction. Provably so.

My follow up conclusion is that Joseph Smith was a fraud. Maybe a knowing fraud, maybe not (what’s called a “pious fraud”). A fraud nonetheless.

As for the Book of Mormon, I can provide proof as well, although not so concrete as actually having the plates themselves. It’s more circumstantial, yet just as convincing. Your comments on and testimony of the Book of Mormon are, in essence, a response to a pamphlet called “The Challenge”. At least, if you have not read “The Challenge”, your testimony does indeed follow a pattern you’d expect from one who has. Here are the contents:

<http://www.lds-mormon.com/challenge.shtml>

Ultimately, the fallacy in the line of reasoning outlined in “The Challenge” should be obvious. Even if it seems surprising that a man like young Joseph Smith could have produced the Book of Mormon, it does not mean that we are obligated to accept his explanation of its production. It boils down to his word against ours and that of anyone else. There are rules of evidence and the scientific method. We can use the “Law of Parsimony” and “Occam’s Razor” which require us to prefer any possible natural explanation of an event over a miraculous or divine one. More reasonable explanations might include: he had help (the Spaulding manuscript theory); he based it on other reading (the View of the Hebrews theory as well

as other source materials readily available to young Joseph); he just made it up out of his vivid imagination, etc.

Joseph was, indeed, surrounded by source material! When Joseph Smith, Jr. was only 5 years old, his father had a vivid dream, which was written down and kept in the family. Lucy Mack Smith tells us, referring to her husband:

"I thought," said he, "I was travelling in an open, desolate field, which appeared to be very barren. As I was thus travelling, the thought suddenly came into my mind that I had better stop and reflect upon what I was doing, before I went any further. So I asked myself, 'What motive can I have in travelling here, and what place can this be?' My guide, who was by my side, as before, said, 'This is the desolate world; but travel on.' The road was so broad and barren that I wondered why I should travel in it; for, said I to myself, 'Broad is the road, and wide is the gate that leads to death, and many there be that walk therein; but narrow is the way, and straight is the gate that leads to everlasting life, and few there be that go in thereat [sic].' Travelling a short distance further, I came to a narrow path. This path I entered, and, when I had travelled a little way in it, I beheld a beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west. Of this stream I could see neither the source nor yet the termination; but as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope, running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach, and beyond me was a low, but very pleasant valley, in which stood a tree such as I, had never seen before. It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as white as snow, or, if possible, whiter. I gazed upon the same with considerable interest, and as I was doing so, the burs or shells commenced opening and shedding their particles, or the fruit which they contained, which was of dazzling whiteness. I drew near, and began to eat of it, and I found it delicious beyond description. As I was eating, I said in my heart, 'I cannot eat this alone, I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me.' Accordingly, I went and brought my family, which consisted of a wife and seven children, and we all commenced eating, and praising God for this blessing. We were exceedingly happy, insomuch that our joy could not easily be expressed. While thus engaged, I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley which we were in, and it appeared to reach to the very heavens. It was full of doors and windows, and they were all filled with people, who were very finely dressed. When these people observed us in the low valley, under the tree, they pointed the finger of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt. But their contumely we utterly disregarded. I presently turned to my guide, and inquired of him the meaning of the fruit that was so delicious. He told me it was the pure love of God, shed abroad in the hearts of all those who love him, and keep his commandments. He then commanded me to go and bring the rest of my children. I told him that we were all there. 'No,' he replied, 'look yonder, you have two more, and you must bring them also.' Upon raising my eyes, I saw two small children, standing some distance off. I immediately went to them, and brought them to the tree; upon which they commenced eating with the rest, and we all rejoiced together. The more we eat, the more we seemed to desire, until we even got down upon our knees, and scooped it up, eating it by double handfuls [sic]. After feasting in this manner a short time, I asked my guide what was the meaning of the spacious building which I saw. He replied, 'It is Babylon, it is Babylon, and it must fall. The people in the doors and windows are the inhabitants

thereof, who scorn and despise the Saints of God, because of their humility.' I soon awoke, clapping my hands together for joy." - Lucy's Book, edited by Lavina Fielding Anderson, Chapter 2, pp. 297-98.

Seems familiar, does it not?

Joseph Jr. had a vivid imagination, even as a youth. Again, his mother recounts:

"During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelings [sic], and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them." - Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith The Prophet, Lucy Mack Smith, p. 92.

Joseph certainly had the capability to produce a work such as the Book of Mormon. As an aside, it actually took about two years to complete the work, not "less than 90 days", as you suggested. Research will bear this up.

Church Historian Brigham H. Roberts, also a member of the Council of Seventy at the time, recognized many problems with the Book of Mormon, himself. He included them in a 141-page investigation, which he submitted to President Heber J. Grant and counselors, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his own Council of Seventy in January 1922. This document is referred to as "Book of Mormon Difficulties: A Study." The following year, he presented a 291 page work titled, "A Book of Mormon Study."

141 pages. 291 pages. Was B. H. Roberts on to something? I believe he was. Nearly a century ago, church hierarchy knew of the anachronisms, errors and lack of archeological evidence for the Book of Mormon and its peoples. B. H. Roberts continued to serve as a General Authority but it has been noted that his testimony of the Book of Mormon changed from one of historical and actual truth to one of the value of the principles contained therein. I feel this was his coping mechanism. It is the feeling of others, as well. Your own research will provide the necessary data.

We need not even begin to discuss the method Joseph claimed to use to translate the gold plates. We don't need to wonder about stories of running from evil doers who chased Joseph, from whom he ran for three miles, carrying the plates of gold 4 inches by 6 inches by 8 inches, weighing between 100 and 200 pounds, depending on how close the plates lay against each other. Even at half the lowest estimate, or 50 pounds, can you imagine outrunning evil doers, intent on grabbing the gold for themselves, for a full three miles? 50 pounds. Imagine a large bag of dog food. This was claimed by Joseph.

Then there is DNA.

The Church believes in DNA for genealogical work, tying families together and as a research aid. But as proof of the Book of Mormon peoples? Not so much. You may have read about DNA studies with regard to Native American ancestry. No Jewish ancestry has been found. No Middle Eastern ancestry has been found.

In view of the great number of anachronisms in the book, its dependence on the King James Version of the Bible (**including its incorrect translations from the 1769 KJV**), its complete lack of confirmation by archaeology, and other problems with its claims, one should have no problem in recognizing it as not what it claims to be.

To be blunt, and I apologize for being so, your testimony is, to my view, simplistic and not based on a foundation of fact. It relies wholly on faith. Knowledge is swept aside. Evidence is ignored. You deny the existence of the sun at noon day!

The Holy Ghost.

So we now come to the witness of the spirit. In my meeting with Bishop [REDACTED] a week or two before your visit with President [REDACTED], I mentioned two personal experiences that I pushed aside mentally at the time but which I understand more fully now. My third daughter was very young when her mother and I divorced many years ago. Her stepfather is a man of high caliber. I, myself, highly respect him. At age 17, my daughter wanted to honor her stepfather by legally changing her surname to his. While laudable, I didn't want her to turn her back on her family name and many great ancestors. We talked and agreed to pray about it individually.

She and I received opposing answers. Both of us were quite sincere! How can this be?

After returning from a successful mission to Argentina, my eldest daughter was proposed to by several young men, also returned missionaries. Each claimed a firm witness that she was to his bride. Again, how can this be? She was very confused. We talked and figured that although each was sincere, they may have been influenced more by their emotions than by the spirit.

Well, science has been investigating spiritual feelings. Psychologically, some of these feelings, especially those we could label spiritual confirmation, can be attributed to something called a state of "elevation." No spirit. Spiritual confirmation in response to desires by an individual have been tied more closely to the ideology of the individual and their desires than to a supreme being or a spirit. This tracks precisely with my own experiences.

So, these experiences and many others have taught me that no "spiritual feeling of truth" can overcome provable, factual knowledge. If, after you read this last statement you feel I just need more faith, I refer you to Alma 32:34. Alma explains that faith is used to obtain knowledge of a thing (idea, hypothesis) and once knowledge is obtained, faith is dormant with regards to that one thing. This is essentially the scientific method (simplified but comparable). This means the facts (repetitively provable truths) I have obtained renders any further faith regarding that same thing to be dormant/moot.

My last point regarding spiritual feelings is contained in this video. Please review it. Don't discount it.

https://youtu.be/lwkh_alif3E

Conclusion.

All this brings us to the bottom line, that Joseph was a fraud, maybe a pious fraud or maybe an intentional one. As wholesome and uplifting as many (or most) of the teachings of the Church are, they are nevertheless founded upon a fraud. Once again, I quote:

"Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who wilfully [sic] attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false, for the doctrines of an impostor cannot be made to harmonize in all particulars with divine truth. If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions, which would be easy to detect. The doctrines of false teachers will not stand the test when tried by the accepted standards of measurement, the scriptures." - Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1954, vol. 1, p. 188

This is just a fraction of a mass of evidence I have accumulated. The reading project I undertook from January 2013 to March 2014 has opened my eyes to myriad problems the church really needs to address. The essays are a beginning. Some issues it has addressed already by way of policy and procedural changes.

I now come to the close of my response. In summary, my hope is that this will help you understand how I arrived where I am now. I am certain none of this will dissuade you from your beliefs, unless you follow suit and read what I have read, and it is not my intent to dissuade! But you do need to know all this to understand that, having this burden of knowledge, I can never, ever be active in the Church again. I cannot "un-know" what I know. I cannot look past the lies and deceptions.

That said, I do not need nor want to "resign" my membership. **My wife fears this** and so, out of love and respect, I do not seek to "upset the apple cart". **I do not promote nor teach my views.** I fully support my wife in her beliefs, short of following her faith. I support all my family members in their beliefs, as well. **This complies with the thought behind Article of Faith 11, which states:**

"We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may."

I appreciate your patience in reading this letter. As I stated at the conclusion of your visit, you are always welcome in our home. I am open to your comments, opinions and views.

Thanks for your concern.

Best regards,

Bruce A. Holt

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

CC: President [REDACTED]
Bishop [REDACTED] (to whom I included a copy of your letter)