

OLD TESTAMENT GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

Green Mountain 1st Ward, Lakewood, Colorado

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Page 1

The Pearl of Great Price: The Fairest Gem; Pearl of Great Price Introductory Note; Review the Books of Moses & Abraham.

Introduction

The **Pearl of Great Price** is a collection of sacred writings and one of the four standard works that are accepted as scripture by the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Pearl of Great Price includes these individual books:

- The Book of Moses
- The Book of Abraham
- Joseph Smith-Matthew
- Joseph Smith-History
- The Articles of Faith

Elder Milton R. Hunter, who was a member of the Seventy, said that the Pearl of Great Price is “a pearl indeed.” He then explained the uniqueness of its sacred writings: “**They are compacted in approximately sixty pages, but every page is dynamic and powerful. It is a wonderful book.**

“**The Pearl of Great Price . . . contains revelations on certain subjects superior to any other scriptures or writings on those subjects found in the world; for example, Abraham’s vision of pre-mortal life in which he learned of the eternal nature of things;**



of the grand council in heaven; and of the plan of salvation as presented there constitutes one of the greatest of God’s revelations to his holy prophets. And the knowledge obtained by Moses in his vision of Lucifer and the part he played at the grand council, added to Abraham’s vision, gives us the most complete understanding found in any literature regarding man’s pre-mortal life and God’s purposes for the good of man. “The Pearl of Great Price

also helps to clarify some of the difficult passages in the other scriptures” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1955, 67).

The **Book of Moses** and the **Book of Abraham** are important to our study of the Old Testament. This lesson is an introduction to those two books in the Pearl of Great Price.

Title Page. Why Is It Called the “Pearl of Great Price”?

“**A merchant man, seeking goodly pearls . . . , when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it”** (Matthew 13:45–46).

In 1851 there were over 32,000 members of the Church in England. Elder Franklin D. Richards, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who

was presiding over the mission and the Church there, published a compilation of several revelations and texts of scripture by the Prophet Joseph Smith and

Lesson Highlights

- Title Page. Why Is It Called the “Pearl of Great Price”?
- The Book of Moses
- The Book of Abraham

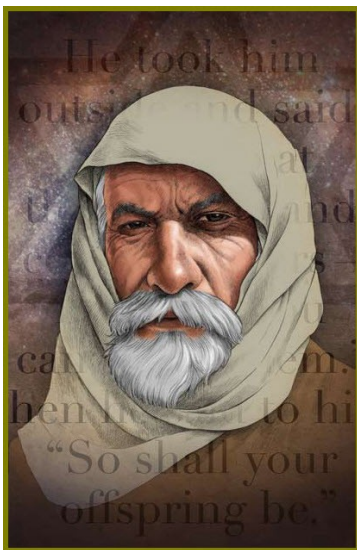
A study of this lesson will help us understand the origins of the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham and their importance in our study of the Old Testament.

Next Week

#1: “*This Is My Work and My Glory*” (Moses 1:1–39)



Elder Mark E. Petersen, member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, testified that the Pearl of Great Price “contains some of the greatest revelations of God to man” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1952, 107).



called this collection the Pearl of Great Price. He said it would be “**a source of much instruction and edification to many thousands of the Saints, who will by an acquaintance with its precious contents, be more abundantly qualified to set forth and defend the principles of our Holy Faith before all men**” (*Millennial Star*, 15 July 1851, 217).

On 10 October 1880, by action of the First Presidency

The Book of Moses

Title Page: An Extract from the Translation of the Bible

Soon after the Church was organized on 6 April 1830, the Lord commanded the Prophet Joseph Smith to begin an inspired translation, or revision, of the King James Version of the Bible. Today this inspired revision, which the Prophet worked on until the time of his death, is known as the Joseph Smith Translation. The Prophet Joseph Smith restored to the Bible “**many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord [which were] taken away**” (1 Nephi 13:26; see

The Book of Abraham

Who is Abraham and When Did He Live?

Adam and Eve and the Fall (approximately 4000 B.C.), Enoch (approximately 3000 B.C.), Noah and the Flood (approximately 2400 B.C.), and the tower of Babel (approximately 2200 B.C.) preceded Abraham’s time. Abraham, who was born in about 2000 B.C., was the father of Isaac and the grandfather of Jacob, whose name was changed to *Israel*. (See Bible Dictionary, “chronology,” 635–36.)

and the general conference, the Pearl of Great Price became a standard work of the Church. “**Several revisions have been made in the contents as the needs of the Church have required. In 1878 portions of the Book of Moses not contained in the first edition were added.**

In 1902 certain parts of the Pearl of Great Price that duplicated material also pub-

also 1 Nephi 13:39–40). Between June 1830 and February 1831, the Prophet completed Genesis 1:1 through 6:13, which is now contained in the Pearl of Great Price as Moses 1–8. The book of Moses may be divided into two major sections: Moses 1, which relates experiences from Moses’ life that are not found in the book of Genesis, and Moses 2–8, which contains the inspired and restored account of events described in the Bible, including the Creation of the earth; the Fall of Adam and Eve; the story of Cain and Abel; the ministry,

How Did the Church Obtain the Book of Abraham?

On 3 July 1835 a man named Michael Chandler brought four Egyptian mummies and several papyrus scrolls of ancient Egyptian writings to Kirtland, Ohio. The mummies and papyri had been discovered in Egypt several years earlier by Antonio Lebolo. Kirtland was one of many stops in the eastern United States for Chandler’s mummy exhibition. Chandler was offering the mummies and rolls of papyrus for sale and, at the

lished in the Doctrine and Covenants were omitted. . . . [In 1976] two items of revelation were added. In 1979 these two items were removed from the Pearl of Great Price and placed in the Doctrine and Covenants, where they now appear as sections 137 and 138” (Pearl of Great Price, introductory note).

teachings, and visions of Enoch; and the story of Noah up to the time the Lord decreed the destruction of all flesh by the Flood. At this point, one must return to Genesis 6:14 for a continuation of the scriptural record. In an introduction to Moses 1, the **Prophet Joseph Smith** wrote: “**The Lord, who well knew our infantile and delicate situation, vouchsafed for us a supply of strength, and granted us ‘line upon line of knowledge—here a little and there a little,’ of which the following was a precious morsel**” (*History of the Church*, 1:98).

urging of the Prophet Joseph Smith, several members of the Church donated money to purchase them. In a statement dated 5 July 1835, **Joseph Smith**, declaring the importance of these ancient Egyptian writings, recorded: “**I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham. . . . Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth**” (*History of the Church*, 2:236).

How Did the Prophet Translate the Ancient Writings?

The Prophet Joseph Smith never communicated his method of translating these records. As with all other scriptures, a testimony of the truthfulness of these writings is primarily a matter of faith. The greatest evidence of the truthfulness of the book of Abraham is not found in an analysis of physical evidence nor historical background, but in prayerful consideration of its content and power.

Why Did the Prophet Joseph Smith Say He Translated the Writings of Abraham When the Manuscripts Do Not Date to Abraham's Time?

In 1966 eleven fragments of papyri once possessed by the Prophet Joseph Smith were discovered in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. They were given to the Church and have been analyzed by scholars who date them between about 100 B.C. and A.D. 100. A common objection to the authenticity of the book of Abraham is that the manuscripts are not old enough to have been written by Abraham, who lived almost two

thousand years before Christ. Joseph Smith never claimed that the papyri were autographic (written by Abraham himself), nor that they dated from the time of Abraham. It is common to refer to an author's works as "his" writings, whether he penned them himself, dictated them to others, or others copied his writings later.

What Did the Prophet Joseph Smith Do with His Translation?

The book of Abraham was originally published a few excerpts at a time in *Times and Seasons*, a Church publication, beginning in March 1842 at Nauvoo, Illinois (see Introductory Note at the beginning of the Pearl of Great Price). The Prophet Joseph Smith indicated that he would publish more of the book of Abraham later, but he was martyred before he was able to do so. Concerning the potential length of the completed translation, Oliver Cowdery once said that "volumes" would be necessary to contain it (see *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, 236).

In addition to hieroglyphic writings, the manuscript also contained Egyptian drawings. On 23 February 1842,

the Prophet Joseph Smith asked Reuben Hedlock, a professional wood engraver and member of the Church, to prepare woodcuts of three of those drawings so they could be printed. Hedlock finished the engravings in one week, and Joseph Smith published the copies (facsimiles) along with the book of Abraham. Joseph Smith's explanations of the drawings accompany the facsimiles.

What Is the Significance of the Book of Abraham?

The book of Abraham is an evidence of the inspired calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It came forth at a time when the study of the ancient Egyptian language and culture was just beginning. The scholars of the 1800s had scarcely begun to explore the field of Egyptology, and yet, with no formal training in ancient languages and no knowledge of ancient Egypt (except his work with the Book of Mormon), Joseph Smith began his translation of the ancient manuscripts. His knowledge and ability came through the power and gift of God, together with his own determination and faith.



The Pearl of Great Price displays the unity of the dispensations, available to all men according to their willingness to receive its light and truth. This little book spans millennia of divine intervention and condescension to bless the societies and strivings of man. It is finally and unequivocally, a book with a unique mission. It contains specialized truths and an advanced course in revealed theology.

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- What are your feelings about the Pearl of Great Price and in particular the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham?
- What truths have you learned from your study of the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham?

Conclusion

As we seek the influence of the Holy Ghost in our study of this choice book of scripture, we will gain greater understanding and appreciation for the Lord's work with His children—from the premortal life, the great dispensations of the Old Testament, the teachings of the Savior, and into this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. As our knowledge increases, so will our love for the Lord and our commitment to His great latter-day work.