

Dear Elder Oaks:

Individuals disaffiliate or distance themselves from the LDS Church for a variety of reasons, but multiple formal and informal studies suggest it is most often because they cannot reconcile certain truth-claim data with orthodox or apologetic models, or they feel that certain harms facilitated by the Church or its culture are too great to ignore.

Those who leave sometimes face a harsh stigma which is probably undergirded by attitudes of LDS leaders and scripture towards those who leave and/or antagonize the Church. The characterization of those who leave the LDS Church by its officials and manuals is dramatic and almost entirely negative. As documented here <http://tiny.cc/apostates>, LDS leaders and manuals currently teach or have taught that those who leave the LDS Church:

- were better off not ever having known God or Jesus
- lost light and truth through disobedience
- are servants of sin and children of disobedience
- may not have forgiveness of sins here or in the world to come
- have been listening to the promptings of Satan
- become servants of Satan
- become darkened and will be burned
- did not know the truth or live in tune with the Spirit
- will feel guilt and bitterness
- left because they transgressed
- left because they get into darkness
- left because they listen to the enemy, listen to wisdom of man, and become confused
- will experience darkness and unhappiness
- will become grayhaired, wrinkled, and black, just like the Devil
- become darkened in their minds like a drunk
- go into darkness like a blind person
- will go to final destruction
- make friends with the wicked and are Anti-Christ
- may have been deceived by false prophets
- will have no forgiveness and seek or consent to shed innocent

- blood
- began to stray because of trifling affairs
  - are deceived because of their pride
  - are deceived because they are critical of leaders' imperfections
  - were offended
  - rationalize disobedience
  - are deceived by the false teachings of the world
  - may have left because they had unrepented sin
  - may have left because a leader did not treat them well and they become offended
  - may have left because of faultfinding
  - have become entangled in the mists of darkness
  - if bitter, have a presence of darkness
  - may have taken on Satanic premises which are poisonous
  - were not righteous (implied)
  - had an immature testimony and shallow commitment to Jesus Christ (implied)
  - engage in the highest form of larceny if they cause others to lose testimony
  - should be shunned if they tear down faith
  - should be shunned if they associate with subcultures
  - generally left for trivial reasons
  - should not be listened to if they attempt to proselytize
  - may cause members to need to cease relationship, support, and tolerance
  - may require adjustments to avoid endorsing behavior
  - are not loved by the Lord, Angels, or Saints and are despised by Satan
  - should clear out or risk being knifed
  - are despicable, are traitors, are not respected, have little honesty, and betrayed their friends
  - will never reach the promised land (implied)
  - have no place to go and will incur an unforeseen impact (implied)
  - experience negative long-term consequences (implied)
  - may be put out of existence (implied)
  - should fear for their safety (implied)

- will die spiritually (implied)
- had a patty-cake, taffy-pull conviction (implied)
- may not have eternal objectives and hence shouldn't be associations (implied)
- are not honest or sincere (implied)
- may not have learned to listen to the Holy Ghost
- should not be supported, affiliated with, or agreed with (implied)

And those who experience a faith transition often experience the following reaction from friends and family (again, documented here <http://tiny.cc/apostates>):

- told they were better off dying or adulterating than losing their faith
- are mourned as if they had died
- are removed from any inheritance they might have received
- may be disowned
- told they will never find true happiness
- may be shunned to some degree
- are thought to be worse to work with than adulterers
- are told terrible things will happen to them
- may be called out for writing about their new understanding
- may be avoided during their faith crisis
- may have family members' temple recommends threatened
- told they may be working for Satan
- are told they are literally possessed by Satan and an attempt to cast Satan out is made

## **Potential consequence: divorce**

Unfortunately, many marriages that might otherwise be healthy and happy are destroyed by the tension that ensues as a believing spouse sometimes begins to view their non-believing spouse as a possible servant of Satan or ensnared by darkness or wickedness (obvious conclusions based on the preponderance of LDS statements characterizing those who leave).

At least two individuals have spoken with or written directly to members of the Quorum of the Twelve about this issue. John Dehlin met with Elder Holland ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_52cMf5yg0k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_52cMf5yg0k) at about 1:22:15). Apparently, Elder Holland refused to take action, stating that the Church was not mature enough to tolerate such action. And Scott Duke recently wrote a letter to Elder Uchtdorf on the topic ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_52cMf5yg0k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_52cMf5yg0k) at 1:19:00). Elder Uchtdorf avoided the topic in his reply letter.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians states (1 Corinthians 7:13–14):

And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

1 Corinthians 7:13 has never been quoted by a general authority in the history of the Church, and it is not quoted in any lesson manual or Church resource outside the New Testament scripture itself.

## **Potential consequence: suicide**

Many who experience a faith transition go through an excruciating experience as their family views them and their motives with new or heightened suspicion. Families that might be more supportive of their faith transition are often driven by the preponderance of statements directed at former members to shun their family member in various ways. For some, this is too much to take, and they end up taking their own life.

## **To Consider**

There is some precedent for dialing back some of the more inflammatory rhetoric in the LDS Church's history. Elder Renlund recently labeled a

former LDS teaching about suicide “an old sectarian notion”, and the Race and the Priesthood Essay disavows theories that were once considered doctrine (distributed in 1949 and 1951 First Presidency Statements). Furthermore, much of the inflammatory rhetoric that was once aimed at other churches has been dialed back in the last few decades in favor of a more ecumenical approach with those of other faiths.

Given the above, it seems reasonable to:

- Consider addressing the issue of mixed-faith marriages and divorce directly in General Conference or the Ensign. Might leaders suggest to members that an otherwise moral and committed spouse ought not be divorced simply because they no longer believe in LDS truth-claims or have chosen to disaffiliate?
- Consider discussing the worth and goodness of former members. What can members learn from former members? How can we work together to make the world a better place and find joy in one another's journeys?
- Consider quoting 1 Corinthians 7:13–14 in General Conference or other Church material.
- Consider disavowing the harshest rhetoric directed at former members.

Such actions would almost certainly cut down on unnecessary divorce in mixed-faith marriages and needless suicide.

Thank you for your consideration,

Faenrandir

faenrandir@gmail.com

(A former BYU Professor—happy to share my identity if we end up corresponding)

# Bill Reel and Stake President ask five questions to LDS leadership

faenrandir@gmail.com (former BYU Professor)

Will you please answer Bill Reel's five questions?

*From Bill Reel's Facebook page, 2018-09-19*

---

Here are the five Questions to my stake president for which we unitedly agreed to pass up the chain and for which they sent back down to him and said these should be answered by him to me and not answered by them. And for which he responded by admitting he is unable to answer them but is stuck not able to get answers from up the chain.

1. If Homosexual members of the church didn't choose their homosexuality as the Church now acknowledges at least in the case of most homosexual members, is it realistic to expect them to be celibate their entire lives? Before answering please consider the following. It is simply human to be connected intimately with another human being. It is "not good for man to be alone". Even our Church leaders in the case of when their first wife dies, most of them soon marry again. There is a recognition that being alone is not desirable and even prophets and apostles after having checked all the boxes of the gospel plan still find themselves not wanting to be lonely and marry again for the sake of not being alone. And yet we ask our gay brothers and sisters to be alone. To intentionally not date, not hold hands, not kiss, not marry, not have companionship. Can you help me understand

why the very people who no longer need to check any box in the gospel plan and yet are uncomfortable with their loneliness that they again seek to enter into a new relationship, how these same folks who think our homosexual brothers and sisters should confidently be able to go their entire lives being void of the very thing Church leaders could not be without? Is it in fact possible our homophobia is getting in the way of seeing these folks as Jesus would see them?

2. By what source do Church leaders know that the past doctrines of race (such as those of color being less valiant, or having a curse, or that interracial marriage was sin) are false theories? In other words past leaders confidently taught such theories as Doctrine (see the 1947 correspondence with Dr. Lowry Nelson & 1949 First Presidency Letter). By what source did current leaders received word that those past doctrines are false? It seems confusing that if we claim the Holy Ghost or god as the source, is it not the Holy Ghost that confirmed those past false theories taught as doctrine to those past leaders? In other words is not both sides claiming spiritual certainty? Did not those past leaders speak by the spirit? Did they not also have confidence from God when they stated such things? And if we are sure they were wrong, could not we in the exact same way be wrong about the things we impose about Homosexuality? Could not our current leaders interpret their bigotry and bias as from God just as past leaders did?
3. We now [k]now that Joseph Smith's 5 translation productions contain direct borrowing from sources not within things the Nephites and Lamanites had access to. The Book of Mormon has too much 19th century material, phrases, and theology that even our scholars say we need to re-frame how we see that book. The Book of Moses borrows so heavily from the New Testament Books of Mathew and Luke (written long after Moses). The Book of Abraham certainly was not translated from the Egyptian papyri and also has source concerns, the Inspired Translation of the Bible borrowed heavily from a contemporary source, Clarke's commen-

- tary, and the Kinderhook plates were a fraud to trick Joseph. Is the Church prepared to honor the data and make space for people to be both not convinced by historicity and also to be fully seen as faithful and fully participating? Or at the least to be open to completely reframing the narrative of what these “translations” are and how they came about?
4. Joseph Smith had a relationship with Fanny Alger a maid in the Smith household 2 years before sealing keys were restored. Joseph Smith proposed to 16 year old Lucy Walker after sending her father on a mission and essentially adopting her and a few of her siblings as his children. There are other cases of young people as well including telling 9 year old Mary Elizabeth Rolling Lightner that some day she would be his wife. Today we recognize how vulnerable young children are. Their minds not fully developed. We grasp how easily a child can be coerced. Can we acknowledge or at least make space that Joseph Smith may have operated in ways with young girls that is understood as unhealthy, predatory behavior, and that these young girls were in a vulnerable state and that pressure of one kind or another used on young people when they are vulnerable and susceptible to coercion is not appropriate or healthy. In light of the data of such can we make space for Joseph Smith to be have at times possibly acted in ways unbecoming of a priesthood holder and unethical behavior towards children? Or is he untouchable even when the data points to deep unhealthiness and unethical behavior?
  5. There seems to be a tension in Mormonism for how a member can express serious concerns of unhealthiness in the Church. The acceptable method seems to talk to your file leader and if he takes the concern seriously, to pass it up the chain. The flaw in this system is the pressure through things said and unsaid for those leaders up the chain to be loyal and it becomes easy for those higher to make the messenger passing the concern to feel shame and guilt for doing so. Elder Packer for instance stated “Either you represent the teachers and students and champion their causes or you represent the Brethren who appointed you”.



Such teachings make it difficult for serious concerns of systemic issues to be heard and validated and addressed. So with that said, could you lay out an effective way for serious concerns to be heard, validated, and addressed?

# Recent LDS Scholar observations favoring a modern origin for the Book of Mormon

faenrandir@gmail.com (a former BYU professor)

*This document contains a short compilation of scholarship by prominent LDS and BYU scholars that collectively may be viewed as supporting a modern origin for the Book of Mormon. It is intended to give you a glimpse at some of the research that former members find convincing in support of alternative models of LDS truth-claims. The document with hyperlinks may be found at <http://tiny.cc/lds-bom-modern>.*

*A comprehensive collection of Book of Mormon parallels with early 1800s thought may be found at <http://tiny.cc/bom-1800s-parallels>. The one page “echoes” document which immediately follows this document is a small glimpse into the hundreds of parallels which have convinced many devoted students of the Book of Mormon to seriously consider the modern origin hypothesis.*

---

While most of these are likely to explain their individual observations in other ways, the following work or observations by believing LDS scholars—especially when viewed collectively—appear to lend weight to the modern origin hypothesis for the existence of the Book of Mormon:

1. Nick Frederick, [BYU Religion Professor](#) — The Book of Mormon contains at least 650 phrases that can be convincingly be shown to be from the New Testament (i.e., not accidental). Language and themes from the New Testament are deliberately used in the Book of Mormon.

what we have here is **a conscious attempt to bring the language of the Book of Revelation into the Book of Mormon.**

other times the sequence of those proximity phrases will **follow the same sequence in both the New Testament and in the Book of Mormon**, which, again, suggests to me that we have a conscious attempt to draw upon the language of the New Testament in the Book of Mormon.

**Significance:** We do not expect ancient authors to be pulling extensively from New Testament phraseology and themes in such a manner since the NT had not even been written at the time ancient authors were first engraving the plates and the books being pulled from were not transmitted by Jesus in the New World, at least based on the record of what was transmitted.

2. Thomas Wayment, [BYU Religion Professor](#) — Joseph Smith plagiarised from Adam Clarke's famous commentary on the Bible in producing the JST.

Our research has revealed that the number of direct parallels between Smith's translation and Adam Clarke's biblical commentary are simply too numerous and explicit to posit happenstance or coincidental overlap. **The parallels between the two texts number into the hundreds**, a number that is well beyond the limits of this paper to discuss. A few of them, however, **demonstrate Smith's open reliance upon Clarke and establish that he was inclined to lean on Clarke's commentary for matters of history, textual questions, clarification of wording, and theological nuance.**

**Significance:** Joseph Smith was both willing and able to weave external works from his time into religious documents, and he relied on Clarke without drawing mention from any of his scribes.

3. Grant Hardy, [a foremost LDS Scholar on the Book of Mormon](#) — The Isaiah we see in the Book of Mormon is [not what we would expect to see from someone who came from Jerusalem in 600BC](#).

Latter-day Saints sometimes brush such criticism [that the Book of Mormon pulls from deutero-Isaiah] aside, asserting that such interpretations are simply the work of academics who do not believe in prophecy, but **this is clearly an inadequate (and inaccurate) response to a significant body of detailed historical and literary analysis**.

Recent Isaiah scholarship has moved ... in favor of seeing the book of Isaiah as the product of several centuries of intensive redaction and accretion. In other words, **even Isaiah 2–14 would have looked very different in Nephi’s time than it did four hundred years later at the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls**, when it was quite similar to what we have today.

**Significance:** We do not expect KJV Isaiah (even in its slightly modified form) to be in the Book of Mormon as it is represented were it a representation of an ancient text.

4. David Bokovoy, [LDS Scholar at USU](#) — The idea that Deutero-Isaiah chapters were composed after the Babylonian exile (which occurred after Lehi left Jerusalem) is [very well supported](#).

We might wonder how is it possible that Sparks can write to an evangelical audience and express such confidence in the accuracy of the mainstream scholarly perspective concerning Deutero-Isaiah. Perhaps it is because **the evidence for the mainstream view is so compelling**. And this evidence simply has to be accommodated for by people of faith, including Latter-day Saints.

**Significance:** The Book of Mormon [pulls fairly extensively from](#)

Deutero-Isaiah and we don't expect that the Nephites would have had Deutero-Isaiah available in the form it's found in the KJV Bible.

5. Lincoln Blummell, [BYU Religion Professor](#) — notes that the end of Mark, which is quoted in the Book of Mormon by Moroni, is of dubious origin.

Mark 16:8 is currently the earliest attested ending for Mark's gospel (appearing in Codex Sinaiticus [ ] and Codex Vaticanus [B] [the earliest complete manuscripts of Mark]), its abruptness is problematic ...

... others [of the early Christian fathers] seem not to have known about them [Mark 16:9–20] or were unsure of their authenticity ...

**Significance:** Moroni states that Jesus spoke to the disciples in the New World using [the exact verbiage from a section of Mark that is almost certainly a later addition](#) to the book of Mark.

6. Royal Skousen, [BYU linguistics and English Professor](#) — the BoM grapples with [nuances in late 1600s theology](#).

there is considerable evidence that the issues and the cultural milieu of the text date more from the late 1600s than the early 1800s

**Significance:** We do not expect ancient authors to have the context by which to weigh in on these debates with any sophistication. [However, there are numerous reasons we might expect reference to older theological debates from someone writing in the 1800s about religious matters, though.]

7. Richard Bushman, famous LDS Historian and [advisor of the Joseph Smith Papers Project](#) made [two public observations about the early 1800s literature in the Book of Mormon](#):

... there is phrasing everywhere—**long phrases that if you google them you will find them in 19th**

century writings. The theology of the Book of Mormon is very much 19th century theology, and it reads like a 19th century understanding of the Hebrew Bible as an Old Testament.

The Book of Mormon has a lot of nineteenth-century Protestant material in it, both in terms of theology and of wording. I am looking for an explanation of how and why it is there.

## Conclusion

Most of the above scholars seem unaware of [the vast body of evidence suggesting a modern origin](#) and are likely to explain their observations using other models (for example, [an expansionist model](#) or [to expect anachronisms](#)); still, many of their honest observations lend significant credence to the possibility that the Book of Mormon was not produced by ancient minds.

Regardless, anyone who parses the early 1800s literature will observe that many, if not all, theological doctrines and themes advanced in the Book of Mormon had [close precursors, variants, or a deep foundation in, the theology and thought of the early 1800s](#).

# The Book of Mormon echoes the early 1800s theological milieu

“... there is phrasing everywhere—long phrases that if you google them you will find them in 19th century writings. The theology of the Book of Mormon is very much 19th century theology, and it reads like a 19th century understanding of the Hebrew Bible as an Old Testament ...” — Mormon Historian Richard Bushman

any of them. **If there be moral good in any of those tempers or actions, there must be moral evil in the directly opposite**; and if there be no moral evil in the latter, there is no moral good in the former; as if there were no natural evil in pain there would be no natural good in pleasure.

(compare *The Necessity of the Belief of Christianity*, by Jonathon Edwards, delivered in Hartford, CT, May 8, 1794, with **2Ne 2:11**)

To satisfy the demands of justice, it pleased the Father to send his own Son in the likeness of sinful

(compare *The Christian Observer* v15, Boston, MA, 1816, pg 149 with **Mosiah 15:8-9**)

1. It is argued from the probationary state of man throughout the present life. By a state of probation “we mean,” (in the words of Mr. H.) “a time in which we are allowed to act on trial for the retributions of a future world.” “It is a time in which we may choose life or death; with the assurance that according to our choice will be our future condition.” p. 183. This is perhaps a good definition of a pro-

(compare *The Christian's Instructor Instructed* ..., Middlebury, VT, 1827, pg 219 with **2Ne 2:21, Alma 12:24**)

acceptable to Christ; at a time when it is not only said, but preached; and not only preached, but printed, that **infant baptism is an abomination to the Lord**, and the administrator takes his name in vain, every time he administers it.

(compare *Four Sermons, on the Mode and Subjects of Christian Baptism*..., Utica, NY, 1811 pg 4 with **Moroni 8**)

scourge of God? **If he has been an instrument in the hands of God, why do you blame him for executing his**

(compare many at <http://tiny.cc/instrument-hands-of-God> with **Mosiah 27:36** etc.)

tion with fear and trembling, denying yourself of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteous-

(compare *The Washington Theological Repository* v11, Washington city, 1820-21, pg 194 with **Moroni 10:32**)

A. True repentance is a saving grace, whereby a sinner turneth from his sins, and returns to God; with full purpose of heart, and sincere endeavour to walk in newness of life.

(compare *The works of the late reverend and pious Mr. Thomas Gouge, Minister of the Gospel, St. Sepulchres, London*, Albany, NY 1815, pg 459 with **Mosiah 7:33** and **Jacob 6:5**)

sent? Faith apprehends and submits to the gospel plan of salvation, by the obedience and sufferings of the Son of God; yea, it not only submits to it, but

(compare many at <http://tiny.cc/plan-of-salvation> with **Jarom 1:2** etc.)

the Lord, or to become truly pious, until the mystery of God shall be finished. So we see the folly of procrastinating the day of repentance and of turning to the Lord. The present time and opportunity

(compare *A Treatise on The Millennium, or Latter-Day Glory of the Church* ..., Providence, RI, 1824, pg 293 with **Alma 13:27**)

Faith cometh of the word of God, **hope cometh of faith, and charity springeth of them both.**

(compare John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* [widely available in the early 1800s], with **Ether 12:4, 20**)

cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God's fear? **Will God dwell in an unholy temple? Will**

(compare *Selections from the Works of Isaac Pennington*..., New-Bedford, MA, 1818, pg 105 with **Mosiah 2:37**)

the character of the Saviour, that the same infinite atonement, which is necessary for the pardon of one sinner, will answer for the salva-

(compare *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* v3, Hartford, CT, 1802-03, pg 338 with **2Ne 9:7, 2Ne 25:16** etc.)

you? Even because then God would not be infinitely holy: now, holiness is his being: therefore, if he should cease to be infinitely holy, he would cease to be God: so opposite is sin to God, that if he did not hate sin as much as he does, he would cease to be God. If his

(compare *Sermons by the Late Reverend and Learned Mr. Ralph Erskine, Minister of the Gospel at Dunfermlin* v1, Pittsburgh, PA, 1815, pg 12 with **Alma 42:13, 22, 25**)

come to an end: when he looks forward, he beholds an angry God that cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance: when he looks behind him, he beholds Satan with all his

(compare *A compendium of the travels of the children of Israel*, Albany, NY 1823, pg 11 with **Alma 45:16**)

of our Zion with utempered mortar. **O let these plain and simple, but precious truths take hold upon your hearts: 'That**

(compare *The Washington Theological Repository* v2, Washington City, 1820-21, pg 58 with **1Ne 13:26, 28**)

as it would gratify that vile spirit that is so much like the spirit of the devil, who, because he is miserable himself, is unwilling that others should be happy.

(compare *The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners*, Newark, NJ, 1814, pg 43 with **2 Ne 2:27**)