

Why not seer stones?

A guide to understanding why the LDS church has obfuscated concerning the translation process since 1830

How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon

- Smith used 'magical spectacles' for an early period of translation prior to the loss of the 116 pages.
- Smith transitions first to putting one lens of the spectacles (probably a whitish rock) into his hat to translate. Later, he uses his brown rock. He makes this transition in methodology while Harris is still his scribe.
- After the 116 pages are lost, Smith continues using his brown rock with Oliver (primarily) as his scribe and translates the rest of the Book of Mormon
 - **All of the current Book of Mormon** was dictated while Joseph looked at his brown rock placed in his top hat, likely with his hands on his knees for support. The rim of the hat was pressed against his face.

Very brief history of deception



By the Urim and the Power of God, by Simon Greenleaf

Mar 2020 New Era

- 1830 – Cowdery testifies under oath that Smith used spectacles to translate the Book of Mormon while he was scribe
- 1831 – Joseph refuses to tell a general conference of the church in Ohio the details of translation
- 1832 – W.W. Phelps speculates that the magical spectacles could be the Old Testament Urim and Thummim
- 1834 – Cowdery expands on Phelps' speculations regarding the Urim and Thummim
- 1838 - Joseph Smith adopts the Urim and Thummim narrative in at least 3 accounts prior to his death
- [1904-1934] B.H. Roberts constructs a narrative which allows for both the seer stone and the Urim and Thummim and teaches it widely
- 1937 – Francis Kirkam denies seer stones used in translation
- 1956 – Joseph Fielding Smith (Q12 and church historian) denies seer stones used in translation of the Book of Mormon. Bruce R. McConkie (Q12) and his son later make similar denials.
- 1974, 1978, 1993, 1997: A few scattered references to the seer stone in church magazines. In all cases, the Urim and Thummim was proclaimed to be at least as important as the seer stone.
- 1976, 1985, 2005: A few references to the seer stone in books (Story of the Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism, Rough Stone Rolling).
- 2013, 2015: Publication of the Gospel topics essays, serious articles about the seer stone, but still maintaining a dual-method translation narrative (i.e. seer stone & Urim and Thummim)
- 2020: LDS church prints (yet again) an inaccurate image of the translation in their world-wide magazine for youth (Mar New Era).

WHY?

- Telling the truth is generally easier than defending a lie or half-truth
- For 190 years the LDS church has maintained multiple false narratives around the Book of Mormon translation.
- In this presentation, we explore why the truth is so damning and the motivations behind maintaining a false narrative

Implication #1: Joseph Smith Lied

- If it can be shown that Joseph Smith translated all of the current Book of Mormon with the seer stone rather than the Urim and Thummim as he described, then it follows that he lied about the translation process
- Oliver and Joseph are the only witnesses to many early events including:
 - Aaronic Priesthood restoration (and angelic appearance of John the Baptist)
 - The first baptisms and laying on of hands (of each other)
 - The Melchizedek Priesthood ordination (under the hands of Peter, James, and John).
- *If they both lied about the translation method, is it possible that they also lied about the much more magical and unlikely spiritual events including the visitation of angels or the true nature of the plates?*

Implication #2: Oliver Lied

- Oliver has an evolving story regarding the translation in his 3 accounts between 1830 and 1834. In one account he speaks Joseph looking at the plates through spectacles and then putting his head in the hat and 'let the inspiration flow'. This differs significantly from his canonized 1834 account of the Nephite interpreters.
- Oliver is one of the 3 witnesses and the only other witness besides Joseph to the priesthood restoration. If he is not reliable, it calls restoration events into serious question.

Implication #3: Lucy Mack Smith Lied

- Lucy is one of only two primary witnesses to the clear spectacles or Urim and Thummim
- However, her description is different from Oliver's
- She also talks about Joseph always keeping the Urim and Thummim on his person. This would have been impractical with the large spectacles attached to a breast-plate, but trivial with his brown seer stone in a pouch.
- By comparing dozens of witnesses, it is clear that Lucy's story is fabricated – at least in parts – and that she is more than willing to lie to protect the legacy of her family.
- *If Joseph's Mother is a liar or story teller, is it possible that he got some of his story-telling abilities from his mother?*

Implication #4: Joseph worked as a money-digger

- From about 1820-1827, Joseph was likely involved in at least 18 treasure digs. This was in addition to finding lost objects for his neighbors using his seer stone.
- Within a one year period Joseph transitioned from digging for money to translating the Book of Mormon.
 - *Why would God choose a person who was breaking the laws of the state by using a common con technique (juggling) to restore his church?*
 - *Why would God use the same tool used for perceived fraud (money digging – i.e. his seer stone) to reveal his most sacred text?*
 - *Why would the “repentance period” if required for Joseph’s illegal acts be less than one year?*

Implication #5: Mechanical Translation method

- David Whitmer described the translation process clearly as follows:

The way it was done was thus: **Joseph would place the seer-stone in a deep hat, and placing his face close to it, would see, not the stone, but what appeared like an oblong piece of parchment, on which the hieroglyphics would appear, and also the translation in the English language, all appearing in bright luminous letters. Joseph would then read it to Oliver, who would write it down as spoken.** Sometimes Joseph could not pronounce the words correctly, having had but little education; and if by any means a mistake was made in the copy, the luminous writing would remain until it was corrected. It sometimes took Oliver several trials to get the right letter to spell correctly some of the more difficult words, but when he had written them correctly the characters and the interpretation would disappear, and be replaced by other characters and their interpretation.

When the seer-stone was not placed in the hat, no characters or writing could be seen therein, but when so placed then the hieroglyphics would appear as before described. Some represented but one word, or name, but some represented several, and some from one to two lines.

Implication #5: Mechanical Translation method, cont.

- If the translation is as Whitmer describes, then all of the grammatical and doctrinal errors which were corrected in later editions of the Book of Mormon must be attributed to God who made the words appear => *but God doesn't make mistakes...*
- If the translation is not as Whitmer describes, then either Joseph lied to Whitmer or Whitmer lied about the translation process. Whitmer is consistent and accurate according to most historians => *that would make Joseph a liar.*

Implication #6: The Gold Plates were not necessary

- *If Joseph received the whole book of Mormon by looking into a rock placed in a hat, why were gold plates necessary?*
- *Why were they given to Joseph Smith at all if they were never used?*
- *Why were they taken away by the angel at the end of the translation process and not sooner?*
- *Why could Joseph not translate when the plates were taken away (after the loss of the 116 pages) if they were not required for the translation in the first place?*

Implication #7: God makes rocks glow, but only for certain people

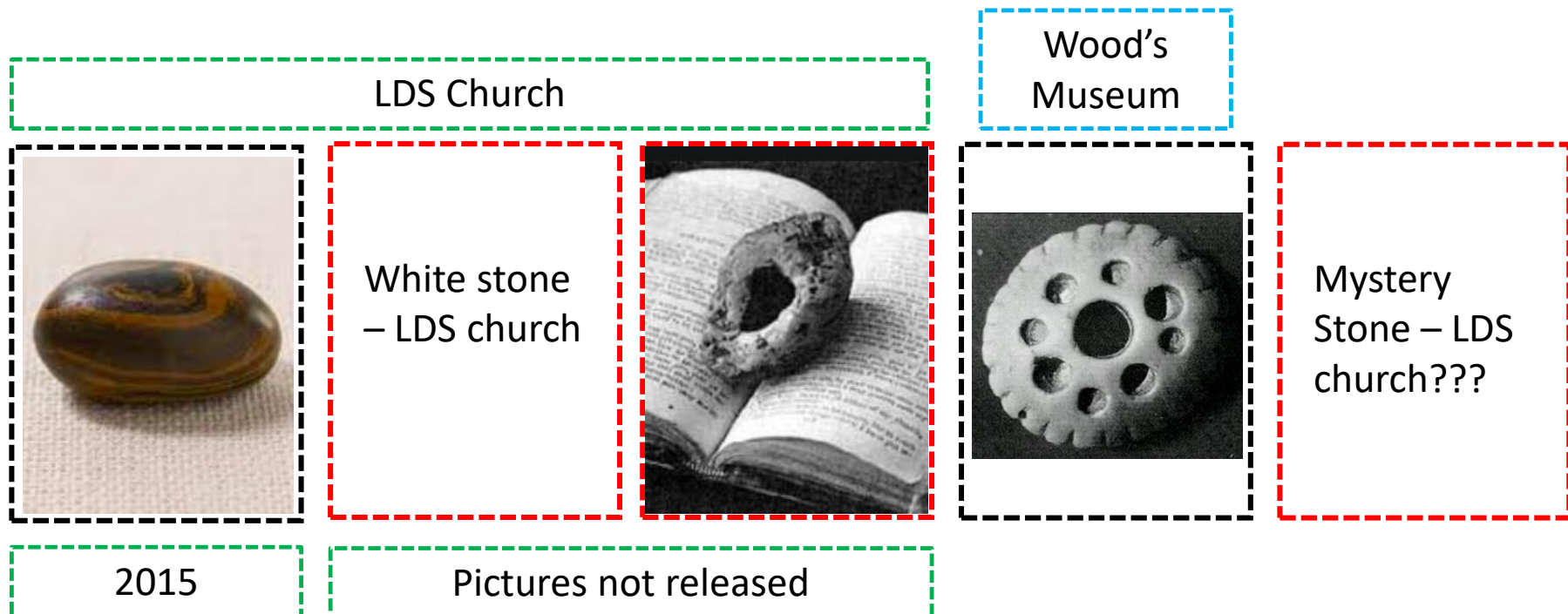
- Joseph claimed that the seer stone would glow, a piece of parchment would appear, and he could read off of the said parchment. This was one way that he received revelation and this was what made him a “seer”
- Modern “seers” in the LDS church claim to be such without the ability to see things in rocks.
- The LDS church teaches that God is constant, but apparently he has changed his primary method for communication with men.

Implication #8: Seer stones teachings

- Joseph taught that there was a seer stone for every person on earth and that they simply needed to find it to be able to see things.
- Brigham Young taught that there were “natural born seers” who could see things in rocks without the power of the priesthood.
- By about 1885, LDS leaders were discouraging the use of seer stones and encouraging members to rely on the priesthood instead
- This appears to be a clear change in doctrine.

Implication #9: Transparency

- Joseph had 5 seer stones according to Brigham Young. It is reported that the LDS church has at least 3 of these in its possession, but has only released pictures of one of them. Why?



Implication #10: Seer stone was borrowed/not returned by Joseph

- Willard Chase, an early witness of the seer stone claimed that he found it while digging a well with Alvin. While it is more likely that they were on a treasure dig, it is possible that Joseph borrowed the rock as Chase claimed and failed to return it. This would mean that the seer stone used to translate the Book of Mormon was stolen.

Feedback

- Please send any feedback to:
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- Sources available upon request