

JOSEPH SMITH AS A STUDENT OF HEBREW

Louis C. Zucker

Louis C. Zucker, Professor Emeritus of English and Lecturer in Hebrew at the University of Utah, has long been interested in Mormon-Jewish relations. He is a member of Temple B'nai Israel in Salt Lake City.

During the winter of 1835-1836, the Mormon leaders in Kirtland — and none more diligently than Joseph Smith — devoted much of their attention to the formal study of Hebrew, under a competent scholar who was also an impressive teacher. They sat in a schoolroom and did their homework. This brief association with Professor Seixas had effects, immediate and permanent, which are to be seen, or may be conjectured, in places in the Mormon Scriptures and in at least one memorable apologia for a Mormon doctrine.

The fall and winter of 1835-1836 were a plateau of pleasantness and peace at the center of the Church. In a kind of symmetry, accomplishment and tribulation were intertwined before, and harder times would be intertwined with accomplishment on the farther side. By the summer of 1835, the Church was founded, several general Church conferences had been held, and the Church had its permanent name. The Church had acquired its own Scriptures, virtually full rounded now; its theology had found its main directions; a new ecclesiastical polity was slowly growing into its permanent form — Joseph

Smith, the creator and architect, revelation in constant attendance on him. A mission to Canada was fruitful; converts, as has been said, were streaming into Kirtland; men of stature, of varied gifts, diverted their lives to Joseph Smith's service. A Temple was building in Kirtland, and Zion was preparing in Missouri. Such were the accomplishments of this young man of thirty, in his imagination but the beginnings. Tribulation, too, he had experienced in plenty. But, for the present, Church finance seemed to be well in hand, and the United Orders were a dead issue; in Missouri, Zion's Camp had been a forlorn hope, but the Mormons who survived the frontier programs had taken refuge on Zion's border. Internal discord was dormant. Joseph was staying home, and so were the leading brethren. A deceptive tranquillity, but tranquillity.

The sun that shone on the pleasant and peaceful plateau rose to its zenith with the dedication of the Kirtland Temple early in 1836. Then, from June, 1836, for three years, the American frontier in both Ohio and Missouri would permit Joseph no peace, menacing the very existence of the Mormon Church and of Joseph himself. Mormon Kirtland, except for the admirable Temple, would be wiped out. The rejection of the Mormons from Missouri would be inhumanly consummated; in a few short months, Far West would fall from grandeur to misery; Carthage jail would be foreshadowed in Liberty jail. Internal dissension would reach enormous proportions. Then, resurrection from the ashes, Nauvoo would be built up, only to fit ultimately into a general doom: "Every Zion that Joseph planted was rooted up before it flowered" (Fawn Brodie). More than once, to the end, Joseph Smith and his work seemed to be "through."

But, on the plateau was there a prescience that the troubles known before would return? By dint of his genius, Joseph had gained the preeminence in his Church: he reigned *primus supra pares*, and was sure of his powers and his destiny. He was now, in every historical sense of the Hebrew word, a *nabi*. In keeping with revelations in December, 1832, and after (Doctrine and Covenants 88-97), the School of the Prophets was established in Kirtland early in 1833, eventually to be housed in the Temple; it was to be a holy place for teaching doctrine and principle "by study, and also by faith." The next year, Joseph was studying English grammar, avidly and ably, and was teaching it at the School. Early in 1835, he superimposed on the non-rational spiritual exercises the formal teaching of theology in his series of seven Lectures on Faith. This was not just Joseph Smith's theology, but the principles which an orthodox Christian would derive from the Bible. So this was a genuine effort. His mind was now free and ripe for sustained intellectual activity. As an obligation upon the Church, it was seen as essential for the fulfillment of the divine purpose; and, to the leadership, it offered besides a retreat enticing and delightful. Such seem to have been the beginnings of intellectualism as "a personal ideal" of Joseph and as a force in the Mormon Church. Had Mormon theology been open to the place of reason and learning as adjuncts to revelation before 1833-1834?

An interested person may wonder how it happened that, for that one all-

too-brief interval when those first Church leaders pursued formal academic studies, the Hebrew language became the subject studied. Then, how much did they accomplish that winter? And to what use in the Church did they put the Hebrew they learned? Did the Hebrew he had newly acquired enter into Joseph's reading of the hieroglyphics out of which arose the Book of Abraham?

THE CHOICE OF HEBREW

Until 1835, Joseph had been content to translate by transcendental intuition. The Book of Mormon was translated from an ancient Oriental language "through the mercy of God, by the power of God" (D. & C. 1:29, November 1, 1831). In June, 1830, came The Book of Moses, revelation which Joseph wrote down. On the wings of this momentum, Joseph then desired to translate the Bible. From late 1830, he tried to arrange his affairs so as to make oases of time for this work. From April, 1831, on into the winter of 1832-1833, Joseph persevered, translating and "reviewing" — "with laborious care" (B. H. Roberts). The "New Translation" of the New Testament was finished in February, 1833, and, five months later, the Old Testament also.

Joseph never laid claim to having in those years a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek. His translation purported to be no other than a "revision": "What he did was to revise the English text of the Bible under the inspiration of God" (B. H. Roberts). However, if he altered the reading in numerous places and, in the Bible as well as in the new Mormon Scriptures, restored, as Joseph himself said, "many important points touching the salvation of man which had been taken from the Bible or lost before it was compiled," this was partial translation certainly. In doing this, and in supplying missing ancient books supplementary to the Bible, Joseph seems to have kept a paramount object before him, namely, to provide the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times with a Word of God complete and harmoniously one. In carrying out this grand design, he obtained from the Holy Ghost the necessary power. For skill in the school-learned languages he had no need. So he was content to believe at that time.

But, in November, 1835, the Mormon high Elders were determined to study Hebrew in the coming months. Why was it Hebrew and not Greek? No revelation had chosen Hebrew, and a knowledge of Greek was required to translate the New Testament correctly by learned means. Is not Mormonism, above all, a Christ-centered religion? Was it the lucky chance that, on November 2, 1835 — just as he was reorganizing the School — Joseph, with Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon and others drove over to the infant Willoughby University, four miles from Kirtland, to hear "Dr. Piexotto" lecture at the medical college and that, in talking with the Jewish physician, they learned that he could and would teach them Hebrew in Kirtland? Apparently, when Oliver Cowdery left for New York, within days of that encounter, he was charged to purchase the best textbooks he could find for the coming winter's study of Hebrew. When he returned to Kirtland on November 20, he brought home, Joseph Smith tells in his Journal, "a quantity of Hebrew books, for the benefit of the school," which included a Hebrew Bible, Lexicon and Grammar — and,

let us notice, a Greek Lexicon (so they were not unaware of the importance of Greek) and Webster's English Dictionary; all of which he presented to Joseph. In New York, seeking help in selecting the best books for Hebrew, Oliver had made the acquaintance of a "learned Jew," to whom the bookseller had referred him. The "learned Jew" and he became "intimately acquainted," he wrote his brother Warren.

Very likely, it was the availability of a Jewish teacher that inclined the choice of languages, or even of studies, to Hebrew. A Jew was exceedingly rare in northeastern Ohio in those days; before November 9, 1835, few of the Mormons had ever knowingly beheld a Jew. A teacher of Hebrew who was a Jew was what the Mormons came to want — Dr. Peixotto or another Jew, even if they had to send, over 600 miles, to New York for one. Providentially, the teacher they desired appeared at the right time, in their neighborhood.

For some days the Mormon leaders were happy at the prospect of having Dr. Peixotto for their Hebrew teacher. And indeed, Daniel Levy Madura Peixotto, M.D., was no ordinary person. The family were Spanish-Dutch Jews; his father Moses, formerly of Curaçao, was a Jewishly learned merchant. Daniel was graduated from Columbia College and Medical School. Becoming a medical lecturer and editor, he helped found the Academy of Medicine and (1830-1832) was President of the New York County Medical Society. The Mormons found him teaching at the Willoughby College (John C. Bennett was the Dean). After two years there, Dr. Peixotto returned to New York.

OBTAINING A TEACHER

The Mormons were counting on Dr. Peixotto, but the Professor had an infant medical school on the frontier to strengthen, and the roads were muddy in the rainy season. Although by November 21 the wearied Elders voted to seek another teacher of Hebrew in New York, they were still looking for him to begin teaching on January 4. Only when he disappointed them yet again did they notify him, sharply, that his services were not wanted. They were, nevertheless, resolved to stay with the Hebrew. It was clear that only a resident, full time teacher would do. Providence had placed such a teacher and a Jew before their eyes, at not far distant Hudson Seminary. This was Professor Seixas. On January 6 he was interviewed and "hired" for a term of seven weeks, to teach "forty scholars," beginning in about fifteen days. He proposed, it was reported, "to give us sufficient knowledge during this term to start us in reading and translating the language." He did not actually arrive from Hudson until January 26, fully two months after the first encounter with Dr. Peixotto at the college.

Joshua Seixas (and it seems probable that the "James Seixas" of the 1833 edition of the *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* and the "J. Seixas" of the 1834 edition of this book were Joshua Seixas) bore another of the proud names of American Jewry. The Seixas family were Portuguese-English Jews. The most illustrious American Seixas was Rabbi Gershom Mendez Seixas, the minister of Shearith Israel (the Remnant of Israel) in New York, the first Jewish congregation in North America, traditionalist to this

day, the one with which the Peixotto family also were affiliated. The "patriot Rabbi of the American Revolution," one of the thirteen clergymen to participate in the inauguration of Washington as President in 1789, a charter Board member of Columbia College, etc., he was for forty years the outstanding Jew in the nation. He was a good Hebraist. He died in 1816.

The term before the Mormons found Joshua Seixas at Hudson Seminary he had been for a short time the first teacher of Hebrew at Oberlin College, where Lorenzo Snow was one of his students. From Kirtland he disappears into the mists. What was he doing in northern Ohio teaching his Hebrew Manual at these various Christian schools in his own early thirties? Was it because he and his wife, who came of a good Jewish family in Richmond, Virginia, had apostatized to Christianity? He does not act like a new convert, self-assertively. Apparently, during 1835-1836, he never identified himself with Christianity in public, and Joseph Smith's not modest Mormon hintings he met with a graciously polite reserve. Of his vocation as Hebrew teacher he only said, "I humbly hope, through divine favor, that the time devoted to preparing this Manual [several year's labor] will not prove to have been spent in vain. A desire to benefit others and promote the best of all studies, the study of the Bible, has been my strongest inducement to undertake it." He was genuinely a devout man, who shunned all theological controversy. He prepared himself for his work by "carefully and frequently reading the Bible," critically studying the Hebrew Grammar of Moses Stuart and learning Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic. Moses Stuart, his friendly correspondent, was Professor of Sacred Literature at the Theological Seminary in Andover, Congregationalist, and the first great modern-type Christian Hebraist to arise in America.

Whether Joshua Seixas returned to Shearith Israel and taught Hebrew to Christian clergy there remains uncertain. Pretty certain it is that, although his Manual was printed in Andover, he was never on the faculty of the Seminary there. Even so, there is little doubt that Joshua Seixas was the ablest Hebraist, Jew or no, whom Kirtland could have hoped to attract in the 1830's. The rekindled high hopes of the men of Kirtland would not be disappointed.

THE WINTER'S WORK

During the two months they were waiting for a teacher, was the Hebrew left waiting, too? On Friday night, November 20, Oliver Cowdery presented to Joseph the Hebrew and other textbooks he had selected in New York. The next day, Joseph spent at home in a Jewish-Sabbath way, "examining my books and studying the Hebrew alphabet." That evening the Hebrew circle met and decided to send for a teacher in New York. Frequent entries in his Journal tell us that Joseph studied Hebrew whether well or ill, at home or at the council room, alone or in the company of others (Warren Parrish his scribe, Hyrum his brother, Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, Orson Pratt). On January 5, the day after Dr. Peixotto's "dismissal," Joseph divided the Hebrew students into classes and got into a heated argument with Orson Pratt "over the sounding of a Hebrew letter." On January 13, a solemn assembly was held, which he felt was "one of the best days that I ever spent."

The next day he conferred with the students at the schoolroom about the coming of Professor Seixas. After a month of study, Joseph prays: "O may God give me learning, even language; and endow me with qualifications to magnify His name while I live." During the latter part of January, ecclesiastical business and sacramental occasions are constantly taking Joseph's time, but he manages to keep the school running. On the 19th, in the schoolroom, in the Temple which is being finished, the students commence "reading in our Hebrew Bibles with much success." "It seems," writes Joseph, "as if the Lord opens our minds in a marvelous manner, to understand His word in the original language; and my prayer is that God will speedily endow us with a knowledge of all languages . . . , that His servants may go forth for the last time the better prepared to bind up the law, and seal up the testimony." No wonder he breaks away from a visitor when the hour for school has arrived. The moving ardor is obviously Joseph's.

At last, on January 26, "Mr. Joshua Seixas, of Hudson, Ohio" arrived, and, at his first meeting with the students, Joseph helped him to organize the school. There were to be hour-long sessions at 10 and at 2, five days a week for the seven weeks. Pleased and optimistic from the first, Joseph attended the sessions faithfully, although his duties in the Church did not diminish and spiritual and other preparations were in progress for "the solemn assembly which is to be called when the house of the Lord is finished." He mentions the "continual anxiety and labor [of] putting all the authorities in order and [of] striving to purify them for the solemn assembly" At the end of the first week, thirty more students wished to form a class. By mid-February, Professor Seixas was teaching four classes. Consequently, the shortage of books became serious. They were forced to divide a Bible into many parts. Already on February 4, Joseph writes in his Journal: "We have a great want of books, but are determined to do the best we can. May the Lord help us to obtain this language, that we may read the Scriptures in the language in which they were given." On the 13th, the Professor, going home for a week-end visit, took to his wife a letter signed by Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick Williams, and Oliver Cowdery, appealing to her, for the love of God and Righteousness, to sell them a Lexicon of hers which was sorely needed by "this Institution in our present and future studies." From the Journal her answer is not clear; but, on the 29th, Professor Seixas brought with him from Hudson a few more Bibles and another copy of his Manual, "second edition enlarged and improved" (Andover, 1834).

Despite the difficulties, on February 15 — not yet three weeks — Joseph's section began to translate from the Hebrew Bible; the Professor was gratified with their progress. They continued to translate, "[Joseph's] soul delighting in reading the word of the Lord in the original." On the 19th, ten men, including Joseph Smith, Orson Hyde, Sidney Rigdon, and Orson Pratt, were promoted above the rest — "the first class" the Journal names them. One blizzardy March night, Joseph, who was working diligently on the Hebrew daily and frequently in the evening, went alone to the Professor's room for instruction in Hebrew. He returned the next night, March 7, to the meeting of

the first class. There was a lesson, and then the students talked with the Professor about extending the term and bringing his family to live in Kirtland. Joseph had been lending him his own horse and sleigh to visit his family fortnightly.

We reach now the climax of the holiday with Hebrew and the beginning of the end. They translated Genesis 17 that night. The next day, they translated most of Genesis 22; then Joseph, alone in the printing office, did ten verses of Exodus 3, which, with Psalms 1 and 2, was the next lesson. The Professor had agreed to extend the seven weeks to ten. So, the next weekend, he went home to Hudson and returned with his family and possessions. Professor Seixas continued to teach and Joseph to attend class up to the last day before Sunday, March 27, 1836, the day of the solemn assembly for the dedication of the Temple. This was a full day for body and spirit — from the point of view of the Mormons, it could not have been more wondrously complete; and, of similar degree of heaven and earth communion were the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday which followed. And yet, on Monday and early Tuesday morning, teacher and students went right on. Then, all at once, silence about the Seixas family and silence about Hebrew. Hebrew was never taught again to the Mormons in Kirtland. Joseph had an opportunity to refresh his knowledge of Hebrew when Alexander Neibaur, the first Jewish convert to Mormonism, remembered for his Jewish-Mormon hymn "Come, Thou Glorious Day," settled in Nauvoo in April, 1841, and they became friends. Only in his early thirties at the time, Neibaur probably retained much of the Jewish learning he acquired as a youth in Germany, when he prepared for rabbinical seminary. *Times and Seasons* (June, 1843) carried an article by him on the Resurrection, in which he quotes from the medieval Jewish philosophers and commentators and the Zohar. From him Joseph learned some German.

In the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania there is a letter written by Orson Hyde on Thursday, March 31, 1836, to "Professor J. Seixas" thanking him for the skillful and wholehearted teaching which "advanced us in the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures" even beyond "our expectations." A century later, Leroi C. Snow and Joseph Fielding Smith paid tribute to the Seixas school in Kirtland, as an auxiliary to divine illumination. At all events, Joseph Smith and his fellow students did not (until the latter were at home in Utah) study any subject as long and as hard as they did Hebrew.

THE RESULTS

How did the study of Hebrew affect Joseph Smith as leader and as theologian of the Mormon Church? In attitude, Joseph Smith remained unchanged by Joshua Seixas, assuming that when Seixas commented on the Bible he did so according to Judaism. Joseph did not look kindlier on the Abolition movement nor did he bring his conception of Zion Redeemed closer to the Jewish, by taking his Messianic vision back to the Old Testament vision of an ultimate Golden Age on this earth. Nor did Seixas teach him where not to take the society of the Patriarchs of Israel as a pattern for the nineteenth century, or to Judaize his conception of the Ten Lost Tribes or of the place of the New

Jerusalem. In theology, Mormonism, like Christianity, derives in part from the Jewish Apocalyptic literature; but apocalypse is a fitful, minor force in normative Judaism. The apocalyptic Christianizing of the early chapters of Genesis in the Book of Moses (1830) was a habitual direction of interpretation by 1835-1836. Indeed, Joseph's theology was too fruitfully self-realized by now to be alterable even by a more outspoken Professor Seixas. On the other hand, the precisely scholarly Professor did not, as we shall see, confirm Joseph Smith in the ways of scholarship.

In Joseph's use of Hebrew outside of the Mormon Scriptures, we find a tiny, little sentence, like those in Seixas's Manual (1834, pp. 87 ff.) but simpler — Ahtau ail rauey, Thou O God seest [me] — and the name "Nauvoo." Now, in April, 1839, Joseph Smith, surveying from a hill the wild prospect around Commerce, imagining what he could do with it, thought, "It is a beautiful site, and it shall be called Nauvoo, which means in Hebrew a beautiful plantation." B. H. Roberts comments: "The word Nauvoo comes from the Hebrew, and signifies beautiful location: 'carrying with it also,' says Joseph Smith, 'the idea of rest.'" Many have scoffed at the assertion that the name is Hebrew, but it is. In Seixas's Manual (1834, p. 111), in a List of Peculiar and Anomalous Forms Found in the Hebrew Bible, the first words under the letter Nun are *na-avauh* and *nauwoo* — verb forms whose anomalous "voice" is designated, without translation. The first word the Authorized Version renders "becometh" (Psalms 93:5), and the word *nauwoo* is rendered "are beautiful" (Isaiah 52:7), "are comely" (Song of Solomon 1:10). This verb may be used of person, thing, or place. The idea of rest may have stolen in from idyllic verse two of the Twenty-Third Psalm, where a homonymous root is used meaning "pastures" (ne-ot or ne-oth).

We come now to our main subject: the use made of Hebrew — Hebrew from the Bible, of course — within the Mormon Scriptures and in authoritative statements by Joseph Smith and Orson Pratt. I say "Hebrew of the Bible"; Joseph had no idea of post-biblical Hebrew literature: so far as he was aware, the Hebrew of the Jewish Scriptures was all the Hebrew there was. The Book of Moses, in existence five years before the Elders turned to Hebrew, does not show any knowledge of the sacred tongue. The true biblical names it employs, and the off-biblical names like Mahujah and Mahijah (which resemble "Mehujael" in Genesis 4:18), were available to Joseph in his English Bible. The personal names Kainan (from Cainan), Hananiah, and Shem become the names of lands, as, in the Book of Mormon, the place name Lehi (Le-khee) was made a personal name. How does "Adam" come to mean "many" (Moses 1:34)? This is an interpretation which may be a subconscious reflection of Moses 4:26b: "for thus have I, the Lord God, called the first of all women, which are many."

The Doctrine and Covenants, first edition (1835), carried some new off-biblical names, like Shalemanasseh (section 82), Shederlaomach (112 and 104), and Tahhanhes (104) — names which have a familiar ring, sounding like Shalmaneser and Manasseh, Chedorlaomer and Tahpanhes. "Ahman," part of the name Adam-on-di-Ahman, closely resembles in sound and idea the name

Amen in Revelation 3:14 ("These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God"). Other invented names found in 82 and 104, such as Shinehah and Laneshine house and Olihah, Pelagoram, and Gazelam, are hardly biblical in sound. When Joseph had reason to use pseudonyms, he could have borrowed from the Bible names like Hananeel, Hadoram, Ahiman, Aholiab, Argob, Tirzah. He uses the biblical "Mahalaleel" both as a real name and as an oblique name. "Cainhannoch" for "New York" is a linkage of Cain and Hanoch (the "Hanoch" of Genesis 4, not the good Jaredite Enoch of Genesis 5) which is both closely biblical and strangely different. All this assorted invention might spring from the exercise of the restored gift of tongues and a related taste for the tonality of the "pure Adamic language." A note (1914 ed.) on "Ahman" in 78:20, "your Redeemer, even the Son Ahman," says the name signifies God "in the pure language." Also a taste for florid romance could have entered in. At all events, dependent on a knowledge of Hebrew this invention is not.

But, in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, two revelations (1914: 103 and 105) appeared for the first time, containing invented names which did require a knowledge of Hebrew. And this despite the fact that they are concerned with Zion's Camp and are dated April and June, 1834! In 103, Joseph obtains another pseudonym besides "Gazelam": namely, Baurak Ale, repeated in 105:16 and 27. Orson Pratt translates Baurak Ale: "God bless you," and "The Lord blesses." The form "baurak" is not actually found in the Bible but is a perfectly valid hypothetical form; Seixas gives it as one of the Roots "of common occurrence" and meaning "he blessed, knelt down" (Manual, p. 77). The Bible prefers, for "he blessed," another form: ba- (like "bay") rak (Manual, p. 29). Either form could say, "having blessed from aforetime, He continues to do so." "Ale" or El is more fittingly a part of the name than "Jehovah" would be because 103 is the Lord's proclamation, to "the strength of my house," of His purpose now to join forces with them as they go up to possess Zion in Missouri, even as He supported the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. Zion's Camp was to redeem Zion chiefly by divine power, and El, like Elohim, means God as power. 105:27, acknowledging the failure of Zion's Camp for the present, reaffirms the appointment of Baurak Ale and Baneemy as the keepers of "the strength of my house." The personal name Berechiah or Berachiah — "The Lord blesses" — appears several times in the late historical books of the Bible.

In 105:27, Baurak Ale is to be assisted by Baneemy, identified as "mine elders." The form "Baneemy," not valid even hypothetically, is unknown to the Bible. It resembles a word contained in Psalms 16:6 (A. V. "in pleasant places") and in Job 36:11 (A. V. "in pleasures") — the word, as pronounced the academic way, *bon-ne-eemeem*, but, in Seixas's Sephardic or Spanish-Portuguese way, *bon-ne-gneemeem* (gn sounded like the n in "senior"). The first syllable says "in"; the word itself is, let us say, *ne-eemeem*, and "my" pleasant places or fortunes would be *ne-eemai*; with the "in" syllable retained, this virtually becomes "Baneemy." Or, could this name have been invented by giving the suffix for "my" which goes with a noun in the singular — *ee* — to

bau-neem, sons or faithful servants (the Book of Moses: "my son, Enoch")? This would make Bau-neem-ee, or almost "Baneemy."

HEBREW IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Joseph's most ambitious use of Hebrew is found in the Book of Abraham and in the King Follett Discourse. We look first into the Book of Abraham. From July, 1835, into the winter of 1836, the Journal keeps referring to Egyptian mummies and papyri. The full story of how Michael Chandler's Egyptian mummies, rolls, and papyri came into the possession of the Mormons is related by Oliver Cowdery in the *Messenger and Advocate* for December, 1835, in an article entitled "Egyptian Mummies," and in the Journal (II:235, 348-351). Suffice it to say here that, according to these accounts, when Joseph Smith identified some of the symbols at sight, Mr. Chandler was satisfied that he had at last come to the one person able to decipher, translate, and interpret his hieroglyphics. The Saints, for their part, were happy to purchase "the mummies and papyrus." "With W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery as scribes," Joseph writes, "I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy, found that one of the scrolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc. . . . Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth." So, from October, 1835, through the winter of 1835-1836, while diligently studying Hebrew, as we have seen, Joseph was also working on these papyri. On January 30, 1836, Joseph notes in his Journal: "Mr. Seixas, our Hebrew teacher, examined the record, and pronounced it to be original beyond all doubt." Finally, in the spring of 1842, in *Times and Seasons*, appeared the Book of Abraham. In Cowdery's words, it utters knowledge about "the history of the creation, the fall of man, and more or less the correct ideas of the Deity."

When Joseph Smith was educing the Book of Abraham from the papyri, he could not possibly have made use of Jean Champollion's *Précis* (1823, 1828), and there was no other comparable teacher of Egyptology in print in 1835-1836. Accordingly, Robert C. Webb, in his book *Joseph Smith as a Translator* (1936), attributes Joseph's Book to divine illumination and postulates the infallibility of Joseph's knowledge of "reformed Egyptian" and of Hebrew in this Book as well as in the Book of Mormon. "Reformed Egyptian," Webb is sure, is later Egyptian written by an Israelite who, while writing in it, "must have been thinking in the forms of a language purely Semitic, and using Egyptian words precisely as he would have used corresponding words in his own vernacular" (p. 79). And by ingenious zigzag from form to form, Webb unflinchingly attains the preestablished outcome. Unprecedented words and idioms, however linguistically dubious, are shown to be linguistically authentic, in the very nature of things. The particular assumption *a priori* behind Webb's method, I think, is clear. Is it obligatory for the faithful to validate every writing which Joseph Smith presented to them *ex cathedra*? Today, learned specialists in the Church are confidently employing their science to verify the far reaches of Joseph's revelations in the eyes of the world's science.

Now I don't know anything about Egyptology; but, when I think of how much preparation it took for Champollion to come the short distance he did with all his perceptiveness, I am skeptical, *a priori*, of Joseph's competence in it. Perhaps, it all comes down finally to one *a priori* thesis and its train of consequences as against another. At all events, frankly, I am thinking about Joseph Smith from the point of view of one who regards him with respect and admiration as a genius, but as one inspired only as all geniuses of the spirit are. I wish not to be dogmatic — candidly surmising where I can't be certain.

We continue with the search for effects of Joseph's Hebrew study discernible in astronomical and cosmological names, names of "strange gods" and Facsimiles 1 and 2, all of which are found in the first three chapters of the Book of Abraham. As we know, this Book, in Webb's opinion "is an actual translation from the Egyptian as written by an Israelite" (pp. 75-76); and he moves the Hyksos rule higher, to 2250-1750, so as to place Abraham in the middle of it. Names like Korash, Mahmackrah, and Shagreel, he states, are Hebrew. Of the three, only Korash sounds Hebrewish. The "Hebrew" which Webb transliterates as "Shagreel," a pupil of Seixas would transliterate as "Sha-gna-ra (ray)-el"; "el," of course, is Hebrew. Webb asserts, too, that Shinehah, Olea, and Kolob are Hebrew as truly as are Kokaubeam, Hah-ko-kau-beam, Kokob, and Raukeyang. Three of these last four words are transliterated virtually in the Seixas way. All four are given their Hebrew meanings: stars, the stars, a star, firmament or expanse. Another such word is Shaumahyeem (exactly the Seixas pronunciation), heavens, in the sense of Genesis I; Shaumau is an invented singular, unknown to the Bible. Kolob, the name of the greatest of all the Kokaubeam, may be a variant of Kokob. Olea, a name for the moon, may be an invented variant for a Hebrew word for "moon," yau-ra-akh, the same as the vowels of Adonai were transposed into the word Jehovah. The more poetical word for "moon," le-vanah, the White One, turns into the name Libnah for one of the idolatrous gods. The name Jah-oh-eh for the earth ("Explanation," Facsimile 2), which applies literally the time-idea of Psalm 90:4, could be an inversion of the vowels of Ye-ho-vau (Jehovah) in Seixas' translation (p. 15). This inversion has theological significance. One word remains: gnolaum (3:18) — "Yet these two spirits . . . shall have no beginning . . . no end, for they are gnolaum, or eternal." This, again, is an exact Seixas transliteration; however, the Hebrew word is not an adjective but a noun, which in the plural may act as an adverb. The phrase "an everlasting covenant" (Doctrine and Covenants 45:9) is taken from Genesis 17:13, where gnolaum, in the English idiom "everlasting," is, in the Hebrew idiom, a noun, "eternity."

How does Joseph use the Hebrew term-name Elohim or Eloheem, God? In translating "Elohim" in Exodus 22:28, he changed the King James "the gods" to "God." The Revised Version (R. V.), followed by the standard Jewish translation of 1917, changed "the gods" to "the judges." Joseph was a strict monotheist then. Likewise, in the Book of Moses, he positively, militantly makes "God" singular in recounting the creation of the universe and does not at all depart from monotheism in the first three chapters of the Book of

Abraham nor in the Explanations of the three Facsimiles. But, in the fourth and fifth chapters of this later book, Joseph is triumphantly positive that Eloheem means "the Gods." "The Gods organized the lights in the expanse of the heaven"; "the Gods took counsel among themselves and said, Let us go down and form man in our image." Now, in the Hebrew we find: "And God said [singular], Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . And God created [singular] man in His image." With the exception of "let us make," the verbs which go with "God" (Eloheem) are singular throughout Genesis 1. The same is the situation in Genesis 3:22: "And the Lord God said [singular], Behold the man is become as one of us . . ."; and in Genesis 11:6-8: "Go to, let us go down," says the Lord (singular). "The gods" (plural) in Genesis 35:7 (A. V. "God") are the same as "the angels of God" (so A. V.) in 28:12. Seixas's Manual invariably treats the Eloheem of the Israelites as singular, although the word is plural in form; and he explains the plural form as "a pluralis excellentiae, used by way of eminence" (pp. 85, 94). Professor Seixas was not to blame if, on learning that Eloheem is plural, Joseph "concluded that the Bible had been carelessly translated," even though Parley Pratt thought so. It is also doubtful that the Professor led Joseph to "conclude that God must have made the heavens and the earth out of materials He had on hand." (See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 171.)

USING HEBREW AS AN ARTIST

At the Annual Conference of the Church held in Nauvoo in early April, 1844, Joseph once more theologized with Hebrew, in the funeral sermon famous as the King Follett Discourse. In hindsight, this sermon is seen to have been his own last testament as *nabi*, earnestly and triumphantly spoken to 20,000 followers in the shadow of his own cross. The sermon was taken down by four faithful and trained reporters, but their composite record was not free from errors. Ira N. Hayward has pointed out that the recorded statement "The mind or intelligence which man possesses is coequal with God himself" should probably read ". . . coeval with God himself." For the purpose of the observations which follow, however we may take the text as we have it, on the authority of B. H. Roberts. He was speaking, he told the assembled multitude, with infallibility, by virtue of book-learning but more by virtue of transcendental intuition, of immediate illumination by the Holy Ghost. "I have got the oldest book in the world; but I have got the oldest book in my heart, even the gift of the Holy Ghost." The basis of his argument would be the Bible, strictly, he said. Arguing for the eternity of the human spirit, soul, or mind and for the eternal progression to which the human spirit is summoned, Joseph makes the first three words of Genesis 1:1 into statements as follows: "The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods"; in other words, "The head God brought forth the Gods in the Grand Council." Seixas's Manual (p. 85) translates the whole verse, word for word: "In the beginning, he created, God [God created], the heavens, and the earth," But Joseph, with audacious independence, changes the meaning of the first word, and takes the third word "Eloheem" as literally plural. He ignores the rest of the verse, and the syntax

he imposes on his artificial three-word statement is impossible. The second word, the verb, could mean "to form or constitute beings from pre-existent materials" as a strikingly new event — Joseph will let it mean only this; it could also mean "to create something out of nothing." Jewish thought favors the latter view; Maimonides in his *Creed* and "Guide" allows the verb to remain ambiguous.

In his peroration, Joseph said. "Those who commit the unpardonable sin are doomed to Gnohom — to dwell in hell, worlds without end." This Hebrew word from the *Book of Abraham* is still made to mean "eternal," but now in order to inspire the fear of hellfire.

It has not been my intention to imply that Joseph Smith's free-handling of Hebrew grammar and the language of the Hebrew Bible shows ineptitude. Professor Seixas was undoubtedly well pleased with him as a Hebrew student. I simply do not think he cared to appear before the world as a meticulous Hebraist. He used the Hebrew as he chose, as an artist, inside his frame of reference, in accordance with his taste, according to the effect he wanted to produce, as a foundation for theological innovations. Take, as final illustrations, Joseph's use of "Zion" and "the Lord of Sabaoth." The Hebrew word for "Zion" is believed to have signified "stronghold, citadel"; in particular, it became a synonym not merely for "the City of David" but for the city of Jerusalem as a whole; in the course of time, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Psalms especially, it was used poetically to mean the Kingdom of Judah, the land, the nation, the Temple Mount. In the early 1830's before he studied Hebrew, Joseph made "Zion" mean "the Pure in Heart" and "the City of Holiness." "The Lord of Sabaoth," in earlier biblical usage, meant "the Lord of Armies," "the Lord who assures our forces Victory." Later, the sun, moon and stars were thought of as the "hosts" of the heavens, and "the Lord of Hosts" became a poetic name for the Creator and Ruler of the magnificent, orderly universe. Joseph interprets the name as meaning "the Creator of the first day, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega." In both instances, Joseph starts from the connotation, because it, and not the denotation, is useful to him.

Joseph's freedom was extended to ignoble purpose by Charles B. Thompson, author in 1841 of one of the first books to defend the divine inspiration of the *Book of Mormon*, although a dissident in 1838. After Joseph's death, he joined James Strang, and in 1848 announced his own divinely authorized cult. When he founded Preparation in Iowa, he declared himself "Baneemy, Patriarch of Zion" (Baurak Ale's rightful successor, obviously). His several hundred followers were the "Baneemyites." As Mormonism was Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible and Christianity, so Thompson's theology, ecclesiastical order, and ritual were a revision of Mormonism, at the stage to which Joseph Smith had brought it at his death. On the eve of the Civil War, having been expelled as a tyrant from his Eden, Thompson hoped to recapture authority with a tract, "The Nachash Origin of the Black and Mixed Races." The Hebrew word "nachash" (*Genesis 3*), he says, does not mean "serpent" but "Cush," Hebrew for Ethiopian or Negro. The Negroes are not children of Adam. In his ideal community or Zion, the Negroes, indeed all the colored races,

will be slaves. "Ha-nachash" (The Black Man) appears in Hebrew letters at the top of the title page. There is a bit more Hebrew in this 84-page book. Apparently, "Baneemy-Ephraim" was the only would-be heir of Joseph Smith who employed Hebrew, hanging on words from Genesis 1-3 his own far from Old Testament theology. (Genesis 1:1: "With the first begotten Elohim was the heavens and the earth.") Perhaps, this involvement of Hebrew was another way of trying to measure up to Joseph Smith. Did he begin Hebrew study with Joshua Seixas or with Alexander Neibaur? His pronunciation is the academic, not the Sephardic.

USING HEBREW TO DEFEND THE FAITH

Orson Pratt was different in both mentality and purpose from Joseph Smith and Joseph's imitator, Baneemy Thompson. Pratt, as annotator of Mormon Scripture, never questions the interpretations which were taught him of "Zion" or "the God of Sabaoth" or any other point of doctrine. However, he was also the polymath of the Mormon Church in the nineteenth century, an exact scientist where he thought it proper to be one. So when the need arose to employ Hebrew grammar with technical rigor, he, a member of Professor Seixas's "First Class," could do it. This was thirty-four years later, in 1870, when he made a triumphant application of the relevant fundamentals in his public debate with Dr. John P. Newman, the formidable chaplain of the United States Senate.

Newman came self-invited to Salt Lake City, sure he could bait Brigham Young into joining with him in debate before the world on the question, Does the Bible sanction Polygamy? It was finally agreed that the Church would meet the challenger, but in person of the erudite, adroit, and eloquent Orson Pratt. Orson Whitney (*History of Utah*, Vol. 2) presents a full, factual, dramatic account of this tournament. It was held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, during three days of August. The attendance increased from 3,000 to 11,000. The *New York Herald* published a verbatim report of each day's discussion. Many other journals printed a daily summary. It was an international drama. To Orson Pratt the palm of victory was almost universally accorded.

The three days' debate narrowed down to the question of how Leviticus 18:18 should be understood. Should the Hebrew clause, Ve-ishah el ahotah lo tikkah (Seixas: akhotah, tikkakh), be translated, "Neither shalt thou take one wife to another, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, besides the other in her lifetime" and, accordingly, be understood as removing polygamy from biblical permission? Or should this Hebrew clause be translated the way it is in the King James Bible: "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her" and so forth, and, accordingly, be understood as prohibiting the marriage of two sisters at the same time — otherwise leaving polygamy permissible? The standard modern Jewish and Christian translators and commentators — such as the Revised Standard Version, Isaac Leeser, Joseph H. Hertz, the *New Commentary on Holy Scripture* by Gore, Goudge, and Guillaume (1926) — agree with the King James Bible and with Orson Pratt on the sense and intent of the Hebrew. He did not, of course, prove that Leviticus

18:18 commands polygamy. (In fact, no rabbi of the Talmud is known to have had more than one wife, and polygamy had ceased in Israel centuries before. Formally and forever, polygamy was prohibited by a decree of Rabbi Gershom, Light of the Exile, about 1000 A. D.) No more could Dr. Newman establish that the Pentateuch never, in the legislation, accepts it. But Pratt did demonstrate the correctness of his interpretation of the Hebrew clause in question beyond a doubt with logical analysis and massive comparison, done carefully, of all the syntactic parallels in the Old Testament. He proved that the marginal reading on which Dr. Newman relied was superimposed on the Hebrew, in violation of Hebrew grammar. It had been put there by someone who placed his aversion to polygamy above fidelity to the Hebrew text.

If Joseph Smith had been alive and well in 1870, in what style and with what method would he have defended his doctrine against the prince of the church from Washington? No, for that challenge, First Classman Orson Pratt was the preordained man. First Classman Joseph Smith was the artist-creator of a new religion.

If there has been another artist of religion in modern times who, excepting his blatant imitator "Baneemy," transformed the Hebrew of the Bible to suit his own purposes as freely as did Joseph Smith, who would he be?