

The Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith, Revelation, and You



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Brothers and Sisters, Aloha! It has been some time since I was able to be here in this wonderful place, and I am so grateful to be back. As much as we absolutely loved our time spent living here, it is during those times we have returned that we have more fully realized how special this place really is. There is an amazing spirit here. While I was teaching here, we had several Egyptologists visit for lectures and an Egyptology conference we hosted here. They all sensed the unique feeling that was present on this campus. One of the most distinguished of our visitors spent some time walking across the campus just thinking. He later told me that he was impressed with how palpable the feeling of peace was that emanated from this place. This feeling of peace was the experience my wife and I had when we came here just after our marriage. It was walking across campus and feeling the spirit of the place that convinced us we would like to come teach here if it were ever possible. I am so very grateful that it did happen because it was while we lived here that I came to understand that, although the very spot does have something special about it, the spirit we feel here is exponentially amplified because of the people here. You are a special people, you radiate the Spirit of Christ, and I rejoice in the chance to associate with all of you for however short a time. I am enriched by being among you. Mahalo.

I have spent more than a decade intensively studying the Book of Abraham and the story that surrounds it. While I will talk about that today, I wish to use the story surrounding the Book of Abraham to emphasize a more important point: the relationship between knowledge and revelation. This is really a discussion of epistemology, or the method of knowing something. While the world has very definite opinions about how we come to “know” something, I would like to contrast the world’s method with what God has to say about how we come to “know” things as they really are.

As I see it, there are at least two ways in which we often confuse the difference between really “knowing” things, as we only can with God’s help, and thinking we “know” things, as we often do using man’s methods. The first way this confusion arises is that we make assumptions without realizing we have done so. Frequently, we create problems for ourselves by making incorrect assumptions about the Church, its policies, and history. For example, members of the Church sometimes make incorrect assumptions about the infallibility of prophets or other church leaders, the reasons behind Church practices, or what principles will never vary as opposed to practices that can and often will change. Most of the time, we do not even realize that we have made such assumptions. We would all be wise if we tried to be more aware of when we were making assumptions. Look for this theme as we discuss the Book of Abraham but realize it applies to more than just this specific example.

Second, we often mistake the academic process for being something it is not. I will explain this further as we go, but I think that it is important from the outset to keep in mind these two obstacles as we contrast two epistemological processes, or in other words, two methods for coming to “know” things.

I have a reason for wanting to talk to you, in particular, regarding this topic of “knowing something.” As I read The Book of Mormon, I see its authors sending up some warning signals. One of these is found in 2 Nephi 9. This chapter is really a sermon about the Atonement. However, in the midst of this sermon, Jacob points out that there are certain groups that will have a difficult time taking advantage of the Atonement. One of these groups is the learned. He says, “O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” ([2 Nephi 9:28-29](#)).

It seems to me that Jacob is saying that by virtue of you being here, by virtue of you being a student at an excellent university, you are in the “at risk” category. You will be more prone to relying on men’s ideas than God’s because of your good education, and thus, you must be aware of the risk and be on guard to ensure that you “hearken unto the counsels of God” rather than the ideas of men. Your teachers, my beloved friends here on this faculty, and I are equally or perhaps even more at risk. It is important that we are all aware of this because of the consequence of falling into the trap of thinking more of man’s ideas than God’s: “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost” ([2 Nephi 28:31](#)).

Please do not misunderstand me. I love education and am heavily invested in the academic process (this is probably pretty obvious because of what I do for a living), yet I am aware that the academic process is only a tool, one with severe limitations. I think it is important that as students you also remain keenly aware of these limitations. Any academician who will think seriously about it realizes that the academic process is predicated on the idea that the knowledge we currently have is limited and faulty and that we need to keep improving it. While we know this is the case, we are usually unwilling to admit it applies to whatever we currently think or are currently working on. Somewhere in the backs of our minds, we know that almost everything we publish today will be overturned within 20-30 years. I have personally refuted myself when I have come to realize that things I was once so certain were correct, were actually wrong, but at the time I taught or wrote them, I was very, very sure they were right. We all know that we do this, but we typically choose to forget it, and we very seldom teach it this way in our classes. This refusal to be transparent and open, with ourselves and with our students, leaves us even more open to the danger of trusting in our own wisdom and man’s precepts. Let me provide some examples from my own studies.

Let us first turn to an examination of Facsimile One from the Book of Abraham. Joseph Smith tells us that this drawing represents a priest of Egypt attempting to sacrifice Abraham. This seems fairly straightforward. The problem is that Egyptologists have long taught that the Egyptians did not engage in human sacrifice. As a graduate student in Egyptology, I believed all the publications that said this. I did not find this paradox particularly troubling because the text which describes the events depicted in Facsimile One speaks of a mingling of Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Egyptian religion, so I ascribed the near sacrifice of Abraham to the Canaanite aspects of religious practice. I taught in Institute classes that the Egyptians did not engage in human sacrifice, and I was quite sure about my answer.

Then, one day, Val Sederholm, a fellow LDS Egyptology graduate student, pointed out to me an example of what seemed to be human sacrifice in ancient Egypt. The event intrigued me, and because I always want to correct anything I have done incorrectly, I looked into it further. As I became convinced that the event Val had pointed out to me was human sacrifice, I wanted to know why the Egyptians did such a thing as well as when

and how it fit into their larger religious views. I became fascinated with the ideas of religious violence in Egypt in general. This study became my dissertation topic.

I did not undertake this study with the intent of defending the Book of Abraham but because I wanted to better understand both ancient Egypt and the world of Abraham as they are presented in our scriptures. In this search, I came to realize that the Egyptians often *did* engage in human sacrifice. This became so clear that my studies were published as a book. I wrote articles about it in respected journals, I was asked to write academic encyclopedia entries about it, and I have been flown all over the country and the world by Egyptological organizations to speak about it. The practice of human sacrifice in Egypt has become generally accepted now by my Egyptological colleagues. I undertook this study because I wanted to understand it in and of itself, but there was also a fascinating byproduct. Interestingly, I learned that the situation described in Abraham Chapter One is exactly the kind of situation in which we would expect a human sacrifice to occur based on the Egyptian evidence. Thus, it became clear that the very thing that had bothered some people about the story of Abraham's near sacrifice was actually a point that supports the authenticity of that story. All we had to do was look at it more closely.

Yet sadly, before we had come to understand that our earlier position on human sacrifice was wrong, some members of the Church lost their testimony over this very issue. They trusted in something they "knew" from the academic process more than that which had been learned by revelation. By the time the academic process began to catch up to revelation, it was too late; they had left the Church and were no longer in a spiritual condition to receive the kind of inspiration that could bring them back. In reality, it is never too late, and I still hold hope that they will one day see their error. As time goes on, it seems less likely that they will because they have put their trust in the arm of flesh rather than God. I wish they had listened to Peter, who cautioned the saints "seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" ([2 Peter 3:17](#)).

To share another example, we must first understand more of the story surrounding the Book of Abraham. It begins, oddly enough, with Napoleon. When he invaded Egypt at the end of the 18th century, he opened the way for European nations to start gathering artifacts from Egypt. It was in the years just after his invasion that most of the great European museums gathered their large Egyptian collections. One of the people who engaged in gathering artifacts from Egypt and shipping them to Europe was an Italian named Antonio Lebolo. One of the many shipments he gathered ended up being sold in America sometime after Lebolo's death. Eventually, a fellow named Michael Chandler ended up in charge of taking this collection of 11 mummies and several portions of papyri around to various cities as a kind of traveling curiosity show. After some time, he began selling some of the antiquities to various people for their own collections. The last person he visited, when he only had four mummies left, was Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio.

The Prophet felt inspired that he needed to acquire the papyri that accompanied these mummies. Chandler was not willing to sell the papyri separately from the mummies, so Joseph Smith raised the funds to buy the entire collection. He soon discovered through inspiration that the papyri contained the writings of Joseph of Egypt and of Abraham. He began work on translation and eventually published what we know as the Book of Abraham in the Church's newspaper the *Times and Seasons*. It was this 1842 serial publication that later became part of the Pearl of Great Price.

After the Prophet's death, his mother retained the mummies and papyri and supported herself by charging people to see the curiosities. When she passed away, Emma Smith and her new husband, Lewis Biddamon, sold the collection to a man named Abel Combs. Combs sold them to a museum, and eventually, they ended up in another museum in Chicago. That museum burned in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and sadly, mummies and papyri burn exceptionally well. Thus, all of Joseph Smith's former Egyptian collection that was in the museum

was lost forever. For a long time, we thought that those were all the antiquities Joseph Smith had owned, but that was not the case.

Combs had given a small portion of the papyri, the fragments that had been mounted on paper and framed, to his housekeeper. Her descendants eventually sold them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The people there recognized the drawing that was the source of Facsimile One and knew they were something of interest to the Church. They waited for the right time to make a connection with the Church, which finally came in 1967 when a visiting scholar from the University of Utah did some research at the Metropolitan Museum. He arranged for a meeting with Church leaders, at which time the Metropolitan Museum gave the papyri to the Church. The Church has maintained possession of these few fragments ever since.

For many, this seemed like it would be a watershed moment. We suddenly had the original papyrus from which Facsimile One was copied, and unlike in Joseph Smith's day, we could now translate the text around that drawing based on our understanding of the ancient Egyptian language. Many members of the Church were sure that we would finally be able to prove that Joseph Smith was an inspired translator. Opponents of the Church were equally sure that they would be able to show that he was not. When we translated the text, it turned out to be a common Egyptian funerary document known as the Book of Breathings. Enemies of the Church were exultant.

However, the problem is that their conclusions were based on faulty methods. Assumptions were made, but most never realized that they had made assumptions, and thus the assumptions were never tested. Let's look at a couple of the problematic assumptions. The first is presuming that we know what Joseph Smith meant when he used the word "translate." Historically, he used this word to mean a number of different things. When Joseph Smith spoke of translating, he sometimes meant he was translating from one ancient language to another, like he did with the Book of Mormon. However, he could use the term differently, such as with the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In this case, his "translation" consisted of looking at an English text and giving us a text that was not present in the first text at all but rather came as pure revelation. Another time, Joseph used the word "translate" to describe a process different from either of those just discussed. This came when he gave a translation from the Parchment of John, as presented in [Doctrine and Covenants Section 7](#). In this case, the "translation" was from a text he never actually saw except in a vision. At least part of what that text said was revealed to him though he never had the actual manuscript. Given the evidence we currently have, we cannot tell what Joseph Smith meant when he said he was "translating" the Book of Abraham. All we know is that he translated by the power of God. Typically, we assume that when he said he was translating from the papyri that he was looking at a text that was on papyrus in one language and giving us that same text in English. We do have decent evidence that he was translating this way from papyrus, but at the same time, some evidence points to his receiving revelation in a manner more similar to the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, meaning he may have been looking at the papyrus and receiving revelation regarding something that was not at all present on that document. It may even have been a mixture of the two. At this point, we cannot tell, and even as we use the evidence we have, any conclusions we draw are only assumptions, even if they are evidence-based assumptions.

Let us be clear that the problem does not lie in making assumptions. That is how the academic process works. We make assumptions and then test whether or not they are false. In the case of the Book of Abraham translation process, most people never realized they had made an assumption and thus never tried to test it.

There is another even more problematic assumption that most have made regarding the Book of Abraham. Almost everyone who pursued the assumption that the Prophet was translating from the papyri also presumed that they knew what part of the papyrus the Prophet was translating from. For these people, it is a given that he was translating the Egyptian text adjacent to Facsimile One. Again, this is a reasonable assumption, but it is an

assumption that requires testing, something that largely did not happen because most people never even realized they had made an assumption at all.

In the recent past, some of us have tried to correct this mistake. There are a few ways we can test this theory or assumption. First, we should look at what the text itself says about its relationship to the picture. Twice the text of Abraham Chapter One refers to Facsimile One as a picture that is at the “commencement” or “beginning” of the record ([Abraham 1:12, 14](#)). These references are so near the beginning of the text that they would be right next to the picture if the text was indeed the text adjacent to the picture. This would make it unnecessary to refer to the picture that was at “the beginning.” Thus, the text suggests that it is some distance from the picture. Therefore, our first way of testing the theory suggests that it is a problematic assumption.

Second, we can look at contemporary papyri and see if texts are typically adjacent to the picture with which they are associated. As we researched this, we learned that very often they are not. At first, this may seem strange to us, but even in our sophisticated publishing world, we often find ourselves reading a text that refers us to something like “Figure 2.3,” which is on another page. It is not easy to align texts and pictures in any era of publication but especially without the technological advances we enjoy. In fact, we know that the owner of the papyrus which contains Facsimile One often did not have text and picture aligned with one another on one of his other papyrus scrolls. Thus, our second way of testing the theory that Joseph Smith translated from the text adjacent to Facsimile One suggests that we are not safe in making this assumption.

Third, we can look at eyewitness accounts. A great number of people saw the papyri during Joseph’s day, and many of these wrote something about what they learned of the Book of Abraham. I have spent four years trying to track down every written account of the mummies and papyri, and I think we are getting close to saying we have found as many as possible. Putting these accounts into a single, electronic document has created something that is over 100 pages long. I have read all of these accounts and have gone through almost all of them very carefully (a few are still awaiting a more rigorous examination). Most of the eyewitness accounts focus on what the mummies and papyri looked like and do not say anything about the source of the Book of Abraham. It is important to examine those that do.

To understand the comments of these eyewitnesses, we must first know that Joseph Smith owned two sizable scrolls, one larger than the other, in addition to a number of papyri fragments. At some point, some of these fragments, and probably a number of pieces of the scrolls that had been cut off, were glued to paper and put under glass. This was probably done in an effort to better preserve them. Facsimile One was one of these mounted fragments. Those eyewitness accounts that speak of the source of the Book of Abraham indicate that the long roll was that source, even after the fragments had been mounted and were kept separately. Thus, our third way of testing the theory, the actual historical sources, demonstrates that the assumption was incorrect.

To summarize, we have been able to test the theory that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham from the text adjacent to Facsimile One by 1) looking at the text of the Book of Abraham itself, 2) looking at contemporary Egyptian papyri, and 3) looking at historical sources. Test one revealed that the theory was unlikely, test two revealed that it was possible but not at the point of probable, and test three demonstrated that the theory was wrong. Hence, while we do not know exactly what the source of the Book of Abraham *was*, we do know what it *was not*. According to the historical sources, it *was not* the text surrounding the original of Facsimile One.

Now think of that. Many people have lost their testimony over issues that arise from this faulty assumption about the source of the Book of Abraham. Some still struggle with it today. Their struggles are based on putting an inordinate amount of trust in a limited method (the academic process) and, in this case, on a faulty application of that limited method. At some point, they had received knowledge through personal revelation that Joseph Smith was an inspired prophet of God, but when they learned of something that seemed contrary through

a different process, through man's process, they abandoned the knowledge gained from God and trusted more in man's limited abilities to learn. As a result, they have done what Paul predicted many would do when he said, "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" ([Galatians 4:9](#)).

I could similarly delve into any number of aspects of the Book of Abraham. I can point out faulty assumptions that both Latter-day Saints and anti-Mormons have made. I can point out all kinds of evidence that supports the Book of Abraham, such as the text providing two place names, Jershon and Olishem, that were unknown in Joseph Smith's day but have since been attested to exist in Abraham's day, and these places lie where the text of the Book of Abraham says they should. It is unreasonable to suppose that Joseph Smith could twice make up names out of thin air and both times come up with places that really did exist at the right place and time. While I could spend the next few hours going through many such issues and examples of supporting evidence, I think we would be missing the larger point. I am not here today just to teach you about the Book of Abraham but to use it as an example of how we can deal with any number of issues that may come up today, next year, or ten years from now.

And so we return to my original point. It has been my experience that one of the greatest struggles young Latter-day Saints are having is being able to discern between God's ideas and man's. As I study the Old Testament, I see that ancient Israel constantly struggled with worshipping false gods. Their struggle was not that they worshipped these gods *instead* of Jehovah but that they worshipped Jehovah *and* other gods *simultaneously*. This seems strange to us, unless we realize that the ideas we subscribe to are a kind of god. Then, we will see that we do this every bit as much as our ancient ancestors by trying to simultaneously follow both the ideas of God and the world.

The problem lies somewhat in how much time we give to various epistemological exercises, or in other words, how much time we dedicate to learning the things of the world through secular learning as opposed to learning the things of God through the Holy Ghost. We spend, hopefully, something like half an hour to an hour every day trying to learn things from revelation. In contrast, from kindergarten on, every day, we dedicate many hours to trying to learn the ideas of man using the methods of man. This is not all bad. We have to learn these things in order to get by in this world. Furthermore, God has charged us to learn about the things of this world. The problem is that in spending so much time soaking in man's precepts using man's methods, we often do not realize that much of how we view the world has been shaped by man rather than God. As a result, we also do not realize how much we are willing to take the things we have learned via revelation and change them in an attempt to fit them into the precepts we have adopted from man.

Let me provide some examples of what I mean. In my biblical studies, I often encountered strong arguments for Isaiah being written by two or three different people. As a Latter-day Saint, I do not have a problem with the idea that someone may have changed or added to the biblical text. In fact, we are sure that they did. Some of these arguments about Isaiah's authorship were based on a refusal to admit that Isaiah could actually foretell the future, which was not at all convincing to me. However, some arguments were based on extensive theories and models intricately built up over years of scholarship based on the ideas of what themes were salient in Israelite culture at various periods of time. These latter ideas seemed quite compelling to me as they tried to demonstrate that the later chapters of Isaiah were actually written after the Jews had been carried captive into Babylon, long after Isaiah had died.

Fortunately, as a Latter-day Saint, I had an additional source of information I could consult regarding this matter. The Book of Mormon quotes Isaiah as written on the Brass Plates, plates that were created *before* the Jews were taken to Babylon. I can still remember opening my Book of Mormon to see if there were any passages from this so called "second Isaiah" in the Book of Mormon. There were. At that point, I found myself

with a choice. I knew, based on revelation I had personally received, that the Book of Mormon was both inspired writing and that it was what it claimed to be — a record of an ancient people who really existed and really did the things they said they did. I could now either continue to believe what I had come to know through revelation, or I could believe what made sense based on an academic model. I decided that revelation was a more trustworthy source of knowledge and that I would need to suspend my judgment on the academic model while I further investigated to see which aspects of it were worthwhile and which were not. It did not take long to see a number of problems with the intricate academic model, which had been based on historical themes, and at this point, I would say that a large share of academia has abandoned at least much of that model. Even recent and compelling scholarship has demonstrated some problems with the assumptions that led to those conclusions about Isaiah. Furthermore, some other very persuasive explanations for why there are some thematic differences between various portions of Isaiah have also come forth. At this point, both my academic avenue of learning and my revelatory avenue of learning are in harmony with each other. If they were not, I would still choose revelation as being more trustworthy.

This kind of thing can happen in any discipline. It is tempting to accept social science views of human nature and then add to it whatever gospel principles happen to agree with those views, rather than holding fast to gospel principles and accepting those academic precepts that agree with the gospel. It is tempting to adopt social theories and models, such as Marxism or social evolution, and to allow these academically constructed models to shape the way we view the Gospel. This is like trying to worship Jehovah and Ba'al at the same time. It will not work. Instead, we must learn an important principle. As President Packer said, "It is an easy thing for a man with extensive academic training to measure the Church using as his standard the principles he has been taught in his professional training. In my mind, it ought to be the other way around. A member of the Church ought always, particularly if he is pursuing extensive academic studies, to judge the professions of man against the revealed word of the Lord" (Boyd K. Packer, "The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," *Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], 101). Thus, we must sift our learning through the gospel rather than sift the gospel through our learning. Let me say that again. We must sift our learning through the gospel rather than sift the gospel through our learning.

Doing this will save us from falling into difficulties caused by things we learn about the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith, polygamy, or anything else we may encounter now or in the future. For example, even if we personally feel that some things Joseph Smith did may not make sense to us, we can still comfortably trust in his prophetic teachings because of revelation we have received that he was a prophet of God (not a perfect man, but a prophet of God). The key is to remember that revelation is our *most* trustworthy source of learning and not abandon that when something doesn't make sense to our limited minds.

The world will deride such a stance. It seems ridiculous to them. There is a reason for this. Those who deride revelation do so because they have not had experience with it, and thus, it makes no sense to them. As Paul taught, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned" ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)). However, we cannot let the world's views on the validity of our revelatory experiences cause us to abandon that most reliable way of learning and knowing. As Paul goes on to say, "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" ([1 Corinthians 2:15](#)). Perhaps I can share an experience from my own life that will demonstrate why we should not let the world devalue that which we have learned through the Spirit.

While I was at UCLA studying for my PhD in Egyptology, I developed a sharp pain in my knee. It became so acute that I could only wear the loosest of pants, I could not kneel, and I flinched whenever my children moved toward my leg for fear that they might touch my knee. Deep within my knee, I could feel a small lump that was grinding against a nerve or something else. I went to see UCLA medical school physicians. They tried to feel this bump themselves but were unable to, so they took various kinds of x-rays and MRIs. Nothing showed up.

Because of this, none of the many doctors who saw me believed there was anything inside my knee; they thought it must be some other problem, such as nerve damage. Some even tried to treat me for these other imagined problems. Because I kept insisting that there really was something inside my knee, I was finally referred to the head of orthopedic medicine, who said he was willing to make an incision and see if he could find anything. Through this incision, he found a piece of cartilage that had been chipped off and had started to gouge the surrounding tissues. Its removal completely cured me.

The point of this story is that according to the best practices and technology available, there was nothing in my knee. Because most of the doctors would only trust what they themselves could feel or see or what technology told them, they did not believe there was an actual, physical object causing me pain. However, using senses available to me but not to them, I could feel there was indeed something inside my knee. That others could not detect it didn't change the fact that it was there nor the fact that I could feel it nor did it lessen the very real effects it had in my life. In the end, my senses, which were not available to empirical processes, were right.

Thus, it is with what I have learned from revelation. I know from revelation that Joseph Smith was an inspired prophet of God. I know that he translated the Book of Abraham by inspiration from God. I know that it is inspired scripture. I know all of this from personal revelation, and that is a real and powerful method of learning that I refuse to forget about or dismiss just because others haven't experienced that same method of learning. That is somewhat like me trying to tell a bat that there is no such thing as ultra-sonic sound just because I have never heard it. How foolish any bat would be to believe me and abandon his best source for finding his way around.

With this in mind, I can tell you that I have found academically satisfactory answers to most questions that have arisen surrounding the Book of Abraham. Some of this has been from better executing the academic method. At the same time, some of this has come from questioning assumptions I have made about Joseph Smith and the revelatory process. There are a number of assumptions I have made as an Egyptologist and a number I have made as a Latter-day Saint that I have found were not good assumptions. Disregarding these assumptions and carefully pursuing knowledge has helped me find answers to those things I have carefully and painstakingly investigated. At the same time, I have a few questions about the Book of Abraham for which I have not yet found an academically satisfying answer based on the current state of Egyptology. I am not concerned about this. I remember what God told Oliver Cowdery: "Behold, I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instances, that the things which you have written [or in my case, read] are true; wherefore *you know* that they are true" ([D&C 18:2](#), emphasis added). Thus, because I *know*, through the same kind of revelation Oliver Cowdery experienced, that the Book of Abraham is inspired, I trust that sooner or later the academic process will catch up, and I will find satisfactory answers. I have seen this happen numerous times throughout my life and have full confidence that it will happen again in the future. I can expect this not only because of my past experience, but also because I trust so fully the revelatory method of learning.

I recommend this as a model in everything you do. Work hard to discern between man's ideas and God's. Trust in what you learn through revelation. If something you learn from the world seems to contradict what you have learned through revelation, carefully question all your assumptions, but never forget the validity of what God has taught you through revelation. Remember that "unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but unto the world it is not given to know them" ([D&C 42:65](#)). Go out and do everything you can to learn about them using every kind of ability you have, but when you do so, remember the limitations of your own mind and the limitations of the academic process, and contrast that with the trustworthy and unvarying nature of that God who speaks to you through the Holy Ghost. Because He does not vary, you can always trust what He tells you. It is my prayer that we may ever have communion with God through the Holy Ghost by the grace of his son, Jesus Christ, amen.