The Role of the Book of Abraham in Latter-day Saint Scripture

When discussing the Book of Abraham, non–Latter-day Saints generally take no cognizance of the role the Book of Abraham plays in the tradition of Latter-day Saint scripture. They ignore why Latter-day Saints think the Book of Abraham is important and concentrate on aspects that have little or no relevance to Latter-day Saints.

For example, one of the claims is that the Book of Abraham is used primarily to sanction bigotry. A close reading of the text, however, does not sustain such contentions. Furthermore, Latter-day Saints do not use the text in this fashion.

One of the important uses of the Book of Abraham by Latter-day Saints is its particular
wording of the Abrahamic covenant. This wording clarifies how Abraham’s seed will bless “all the families of the earth” (Abraham 2:11).

The largest effect that the Book of Abraham has had on Latter-day Saint thought is its concept of the premortal existence and the purpose of life. Although other Latter-day Saint scriptures discuss the premortal existence, the Book of Abraham provides the clearest explanation of this key Latter-day Saint doctrine. The Book of Abraham explains that God organized all the spirits of this world “before this world was” (Abraham 3:22), explained its purpose (see Abraham 3:24), and stated that this earthly existence was to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

The issues discussed in this guide have little if any relevance to most Latter-day Saints in their acceptance or use of the Book of Abraham. To Latter-day Saints, the contents of the Book of Abraham are far more important than the contents of the remaining fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri.
Above: *Joseph Smith Papyrus VII*. Below: *Joseph Smith Papyrus VIII* (both in current condition). These fragments, from a papyrus originally belonging to a woman named Semminis, contain text and vignettes from Book of the Dead chapters 53, 54, 57, 63, 65, 67, 70.