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Charles and Steven Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph: Mormon Foundations Crumble*

Lelsle Jacobson

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Author(s)  LeIsle Jacobson


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Reviewed by LeIsle Jacobson

There are so many errors that are readily demonstrated and without a great investment of time and research.

Charles Crane

*Ashamed of Joseph* begins with an experience the author had in Salt Lake City, Utah. In brief, the author¹ visited Temple Square and noticed that

there was not one word mentioned about Joseph Smith. We were not taken to his statue; the large paintings were gone; and the diorama of Joseph receiving his first vision had vanished (it had been transformed into a meeting room) . . . . This prompted me to ask several questions of the young lady who was our guide; . . . when I began to ask questions about Joseph Smith, she seemed reticent to answer. Finally, I pressed her to tell why nothing was said about their founding prophet during the whole length of the tour. Her reply shocked us! “We are told not to talk about Joseph Smith.” . . . I asked “why?” She replied, “We are sort of embarrassed by him today.” (p. 22)

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¹ Steven Crane, the son of Charles Crane, assisted in the preparation of *Ashamed of Joseph* (p. 261) and is listed as one of the authors. But the book is written in the first person singular, presumably by Charles Crane, so for the purpose of this review, the author and Crane will refer to him.
Soon after I began reading *Ashamed of Joseph*, I had the opportunity to visit Temple Square in Salt Lake City in June 1995. With this review in mind, I joined one of the tours that began near a flagpole across from the entrance to the Tabernacle. I believe this would have been the tour in which the author of *Ashamed of Joseph* participated. While some changes may have been made in the tour in the two or more years since Crane visited the temple grounds, I found that some points of Crane’s story were verifiable. The tour took us over the grounds of Temple Square and focused on the history of the temple, the purpose of the temple, and the early pioneer’s faith in the Lord. A brief mention was also made of Moroni and the Book of Mormon, and, in answer to a few queries, some of the symbols on the temple were explained. No information concerning Joseph Smith was actively volunteered during the course of the tour.

About twenty minutes into the tour, I asked Sister McCombs, one of our guides, why nothing had been said about Joseph Smith. She smiled and told me that Joseph Smith wasn’t covered in that tour, but I could learn more about him in the Restoration or Basic Beliefs tour at the North Visitors’ Center. The tour ended on the lower floor of the North Visitors’ Center in front of a large group of video displays. Sister McCombs demonstrated their use by selecting (purely by coincidence, I’m sure) “Who was Joseph Smith?” After suggesting that we all make use of the video displays, Sister McCombs brought the tour to a close with the reminder that other tours were available inside the Visitors’ Center, and she gave directions to the various tours available, including the aforementioned Basic Beliefs tour.

Sister McCombs, who noticed that I had been taking notes during the course of the tour, asked me what the notes were for. I explained that I was reviewing a book. Brother Anderson, the second tour guide, overheard our conversation, rejoined us and asked me about the book I was reviewing. I told them the title of the book and explained that the author of the book said that his Temple Square tour guide had told him that the guides were instructed not to talk about Joseph Smith. I mentioned that the author of *Ashamed of Joseph* said that the reason his tour guide had told him she wasn’t supposed to talk about Joseph Smith was because
the Church is embarrassed by Joseph Smith. Brother Anderson exclaimed, “Why, that’s absurd!”

After following their suggestion to take the Basic Beliefs tour, I would have to say that I agree with Brother Anderson’s assessment of Charles Crane’s account of his experience at Temple Square. It’s absurd. Crane assumes that if one tour guide says the Church is embarrassed by Joseph Smith, it must indeed be true that the Church is embarrassed by Joseph Smith. And yet a minimum of time and research could have shown him numerous errors in his assumption.

Information on Joseph Smith is readily available on the video displays, which visitors are encouraged to use. The First Vision and Joseph Smith’s role as a prophet are covered in the Basic Beliefs tour (which started on the main level of the North Visitors’ Center right above the video displays)? Two guides gave me what appeared to be a trained response to questions about Joseph Smith, i.e., “You can learn about him on the Basic Beliefs tour.” And the guides on the Basic Beliefs tour (Sister Bevans and Sister Miller) did talk quite readily and easily about Joseph Smith, the prophet and founder of the Latter-day Saint religion.

I’ve recounted Crane’s Temple Square story because it illustrates a problem I found throughout the text of Ashamed of Joseph. Crane does not take the minimum amount of time and research to verify the conclusions and accusations he makes in his book.

**Failure to Examine Pertinent Data**

One problem Crane has in his book is a tendency to jump to conclusions based on very poor or limited evidence. For instance, Crane resurrects the Solomon Spaulding Manuscript theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon, using as evidence the letters of Henry Lake, John Spaulding, and John N. Miller. These letters claim that the Book of Mormon contains passages and names drawn directly from Solomon Spaulding’s Manuscript Found. Had Crane bothered to research his sources more carefully he would have discovered that these letters, collected by Philastus Hurlbut and sold to Eber D. Howe, are believed to have been written in whole, or in part, by Hurlbut himself and are not a true
reflection of the words of any of these men. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that Joseph Smith or any of his associates ever had access to Spaulding’s manuscript. And finally, the manuscript believed to be the one referenced by the letters failed to live up to the claims of the letters and did not contain names and passages that were identical (or even markedly similar) to those found in the Book of Mormon.  

Crane relies on the report of “one Mormon scholar, whose name I do not recall” (p. 218), to determine whether or not an account of Joseph Smith carrying the golden plates for three miles is believable. According to this unnamed “Mormon scholar,” the golden plates would have weighed 750 pounds. Crane’s argument based on this estimated weight is that Joseph Smith couldn’t have carried 750 pounds three miles while running, jumping, and fighting off attackers. Crane’s failure to research the topic leads him to an invalid argument. Reports from Joseph Smith’s contemporaries who actually lifted the plates suggest that the plates weighed between 40 to 60 pounds.  

For a strong man, carrying 60 pounds for three miles would be a difficult, but far from impossible.

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2 Lester E. Bush, Jr., “The Spaulding Theory: Then and Now,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 10/4 (1977): 40–69. To round off the accusation that the text of the Book of Mormon was lifted from other sources, Crane writes, “Solomon Spaulding was not the only person to have preceded Joseph in writing an account of the Ancient Americans” (p. 127) and continues by saying that Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews contains eighteen parallels to the Book of Mormon “so striking that one must conclude that information was shared between the Book of Mormon and View of the Hebrews.” One must apparently take the author’s word for all these parallels as well as the conclusion because Crane failed to provide references or examples to support his statement. Crane then lists yet another eight books which “bear a resemblance” to the Book of Mormon, and “seven of these eight books predate the Book of Mormon” (p. 128). The implication behind this list is apparently that since the “major thesis” of the Book of Mormon was discussed before the publication of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Mormon must be false. However, Crane fails to provide any support for the idea that a thesis must be unique or original to be true.

3 Martin Harris declared, “I hefted the plates many times, and should think they weighed forty or fifty pounds.” Tiffany’s Monthly, May 1859, 166. William Smith asserts that he “was permitted to lift them as they laid in a pillow case. . . . They weighed about 60 pounds according to the best of my judgment.” William Smith on Mormonism (Lamoni, 10: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), 12, as quoted in A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 50–52.
ble, task. It would be interesting to know how the unnamed "Mormon scholar" managed to reach the figure of 750 pounds for the theoretical weight of the plates. The two estimates I was able to discover for the weight of the plates (if they were made of 24 karat gold)\(^4\) ranged from 123 pounds, suggested by a supporter of the Church, to 200 pounds, suggested by a critic of the Church.\(^5\)

Turning to page 51 of *Ashamed of Joseph*, we find another example of Crane's tendency to jump to conclusions based on the opinions of others, opinions that are not properly supported by any kind of conclusive evidence. Crane repeats the idea, advanced by Wesley P. Walters, that a court document discovered by Walters is "positive proof . . . that Joseph Smith was involved in money digging and other questionable practices" (p. 51). The author writes, "I know Wesley P. Walters personally and have inserted here a copy of the court document in which Joseph Smith was tried and convicted" (pp. 52–53). Crane apparently would have his readers believe that the document discovered by Walters declares that Joseph Smith was tried and convicted of "money digging and other questionable practices." In point of fact, the document makes no such claim. The document specifies that fees were paid for the examination of an accusation of glass-looking. No mention is made in this document of a conviction or even a trial in the glass-looking case, although some evidence does suggest that a trial might possibly have taken place. At least one study of Walters's evidence, considered within the context of the legal setting of 1826, concludes that "in 1826 Joseph Smith was indeed

\(^4\) It has been suggested that the plates were not made of pure gold, but rather a copper/gold alloy. Reed Putnam, "Were the Golden Plates Made of Tumbaga?" *Improvement Era* (September 1966): 788–89, 828–31. The copper/gold alloy theory has also met its share of opposition, as I covered in a previous article in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 166.

charged and tried for being a disorderly person and that he was acquitted.”

Inconsistent Standards

Crane also makes numerous statements that indicate his research of the Bible could have been more thorough. A great deal of the book’s material is devoted to a comparison of Joseph Smith to Christ and other biblical leaders, yet Crane’s comparisons fail to take in a full spectrum of biblical prophets and leaders and ignore many of the actions of those biblical leaders he does mention.

For instance, Crane writes, “I can hardly stomach even one more person comparing Joseph Smith to Jesus Christ, or for that matter to Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist. They were good, honest, nonviolent people” (p. 237). Joseph Smith on the other hand was a “liar, sex fiend, brawler, boaster,” and “thief” (p. 176). He was also “not a prophet of God, but a liar, fornicator, impostor and false prophet” (p. 249).

Crane comes to the conclusion that Joseph Smith was a sex fiend and fornicator because he practiced plural marriage (pp. 67–77). By this argument, Abraham and Jacob would also be considered “sex fiends” and “fornicators.” Yet God saw fit to bless these two “sex fiends” with visions and prophetic inspiration.

Crane believes that Joseph Smith could not be a prophet because the Bible teaches (in 1 Timothy 3:3) that a Church leader is not to be “a brawler” (p. 79). Crane repeats several stories to support the idea that Joseph was a “brawler.” The activities reported included wrestling, delivering a blow to another man’s head, and using a whip on several men (pp. 79–80). Crane then asks “Was Jesus a brawler? How about Stephen? Paul? Peter?” Given Crane’s apparent definition of a brawler, i.e., a person who whipped several men (John 2:13–17), or delivered a blow to a man’s head (John 18:10), Christ and Peter, at least, were brawlers.

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7 For example, Genesis 13:14–17; 31:11; 32:24–30; and 35:9.

8 For example, Genesis 17:1–27; 18:16–33; and 49:1–28.
In addition, Jacob was a brawler for engaging in a wrestling match (Genesis 32:24–30), and Moses was definitely a brawler since he not only fought with, but actually killed, a man (Exodus 2:11–14). By Crane’s standards, Christ, Peter, Jacob, and Moses should not have been Church leaders.

Crane calls Joseph Smith a liar many times. For example, “Was this a real encounter with God, or is it possible that Joseph Smith fabricated the whole story?” (p. 64). Crane chooses to doubt the story of the First Vision because, supposedly, no known written account was made of the event until nearly two decades after the vision occurred. Crane says, “If, in truth, Joseph Smith had this memorable experience in 1820, it passed totally unnoticed by all for twenty-two years” (p. 59). In addition, Crane rejects the story of the First Vision because there are different versions of the First Vision story in existence. By Crane’s standards, the resurrection of Christ is also a false story since research indicates that the gospel writers did not make the first written records of this momentous event until some twenty years after the resurrection and variances exist in the reports surrounding the occasion.

Crane asks, “Doesn’t it speak to Joseph’s true nature when we realize that he died because people from within his own ranks rose up in dismay and disgust against him” (p. 249)? Perhaps Crane also feels that Judas’s role in the death of Christ indicates that there was something wrong with Christ (Matthew 26:14–25, 47–50). Crane’s judgments would, when applied equally to men in the Bible, condemn his own beliefs.

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9 The earliest known written record of the First Vision is believed to have been written in 1832. Paul R. Cheesman, The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Provo, UT: Eagle Systems, 1988), 160. However, Crane sets his date from the officially published First Vision account.


11 For example, consider the variances in the four Gospel accounts of the women going to Jesus’ empty tomb early in the morning after the resurrection, as recorded in Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, and John 20:1.
Negativism

Crane consistently accepts any and every negative report of Joseph Smith’s actions as absolute truth and proof of Joseph’s poor character. In no case does Crane indicate that some of the stories about Joseph could be misrepresentations or even lies. In fact, Crane seems to feel that it is a black mark against Joseph that people even said negative things about him. For instance, “Let’s continue with our comparison of Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ. ... Jesus was not depicted as a mischievous young boy who went promenading about the countryside in search of buried treasure. Jesus was never accused of stealing money from the unsuspecting. Jesus was never questioned for having made up an unbelievable story” (pp. 64–65).12 Crane gives the impression on one hand that Jesus was never accused of anything of a negative nature, yet admits earlier that, in fact, Christ was accused of many things. “When Jesus stood before Pilate there had been many accusations brought against Him. Some people were saying that He was misleading the nation. Others were claiming that He was refusing to pay taxes to Caesar. Some were calling Him an insurrectionist. Still others called Him a blasphemer” (p. 45). The difference, then, between Joseph Smith and Christ is only a matter of specific accusations, unless one is viewing Mormon history through Crane’s dark-colored glasses.

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12 Jesus, however, did have false stories written about him in which as a child he uses his miraculous powers to perform frivolous feats like making clay birds come to life in order to impress his young friends (1 Infancy 15:2–7, in The Lost Books of the Bible and The Forgotten Book of Eden [New York: World Bible, 1926]), or to fix up poorly made furniture in his father’s carpentry shop, which Joseph then sold (1 Infancy 16:1–16). He supposedly played at being a king and had his followers force others to bow to him (1 Infancy 18:1–4), cursed a boy who knocked him down so that the boy died (1 Infancy 19:22–24), and in a fit of temper caused another boy to wither and die (2 Infancy 2:1–7), and the dead boy’s parents to go blind (2 Infancy 2:11–16). He was accused of accomplishing his miracles by sorcery (Origen, Against Celsus 1, 6, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956], vol. 4); he was accused of being an illegitimate son fathered by a Roman soldier named Panthera (ibid., 1, 32); and he is accused of learning his miraculous powers from the Egyptians for whom he worked as a poor young child (ibid., 1, 28).
Crane continues his policy of viewing all Latter-day Saint history in a negative light in his treatment of the biography by Lucy Mack Smith. Crane claims that Joseph’s “mother and father repeatedly had spiritual or occult experiences that seem more fitting for a spiritualist medium than a godly family” (p. 199). What were some of these “occult” experiences cited by Crane? First, the miraculous cure of Lucy’s sister, Lovisa. When Lovisa recovers from a lengthy illness, she attributes her recovery to the Lord. Lucy also tells about an illness in which she feared dying and made a covenant with God that if he would let her live, she would endeavor to serve him according to the best of her abilities. After that point, she begins to get better. Again, Lucy attributes her healing to the Lord. Lucy also recounts a dream she had when asking for the Lord’s help in getting her husband to believe the gospel, and she tells of a dream given to Joseph Smith, Sr., regarding a special blessing for which he had been chosen. Crane finds these experiences suspect and concludes, “Like her son later, Lucy was going into the woods and praying and having personal revelations from God in answer to her prayers. We should not be surprised that her son Joseph would do similarly later” (p. 200).

One wonders what Crane would have to say of a child raised in an environment in which mother, father, and another relative all claimed to have been visited by an angel. At the point that these visitations occurred, none of the members of this child’s family were part of an organized Christian religion. In addition, these family members felt they had been called of God for a special blessing, and not only was an old woman cured of barrenness and an old man struck dumb (surely absurd occurrences in a normal everyday life), but the child’s mother, a virgin, believed she would give birth to the Son of God. Would not any miraculous or godly thing experienced by the child of this couple be considered suspect, in Crane’s view, since the child would certainly have been reared in an environment with a strong belief in the supernatural?

14 Ibid., 33–34.
15 Ibid., 43–44.
16 Ibid., 64–65.
Contradictions

Crane tells his readers that “We must be careful that our study be for the purpose of building people up, not putting them down” (p. 28). Yet one quickly loses track of the number of times Crane manages to insult members of the Church. For example:

- One page away from his statement to avoid put downs, Crane proclaims, “Our goal must be to share truth in love with the hope that we are able to start a person on the path to clear thinking,” and “When a person starts thinking logically, they are on their way out of Mormonism and are on their way to biblical Christianity” (p. 29).

- “The result (to the more perceptive Mormon) is despair” (p. 17). (So, if you aren’t in despair, you must be imperceptive!) Crane follows up this interesting tidbit by informing us that the suicide rate is disproportionately high among Mormons, and especially among teens in Utah (making teens the most perceptive individuals in Utah?).

It is difficult to understand how Crane can admonish his readers to avoid putting down the members of the Church when he himself puts down Mormons with repeated accusations of negative behavior and with insults.

More Contradictions

Crane’s title thesis is that the Mormon Church is “ashamed of Joseph” and attempting to de-emphasize Joseph Smith’s role in the Church (pp. 25, 37, 259). On this subject Crane admits, “It is not suggested that every Mormon feels this way about Joseph Smith nor that this is the official Church position” (p. 37), and again, “I am not suggesting that every Mormon is ashamed of Joseph Smith, or even that this feeling is widespread” (p. 38), yet Crane continually generalizes his statements concerning the

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17 Crane apparently draws his statistics on this point from the same source as The Godmakers, a source which has been shown to be unreliable in Gilbert W. Scharffs, The Truth about "The Godmakers" (Salt Lake City: Publishers, 1989), 40–47, 75, 76.
Church’s feelings about Joseph Smith and writes as if this proposed “embarrassment” is a proven fact.

- “Herein lies the proposition of this book—what has caused the Mormon Church to deemphasize the role of their founder and prophet? Why is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ‘ashamed of Joseph’?” (p. 25)?
  - “Yes, it is easy to see why the Mormons are ‘ashamed of Joseph’” (p. 65).
  - “I wonder what Jesus would think of Joseph Smith’s theatrics? No wonder the Mormons are ‘ashamed of Joseph’” (p. 81).
  - “When a person carefully examines the character of Joseph Smith, there is little doubt as to why the Mormon church is ‘ashamed of Joseph’” (p. 102).
  - “Are the Mormons ashamed of Joseph Smith? Yes, and well they should be!” (p. 256)

In several other instances, Crane claims that the Mormons, the Mormon Church, the Mormon leaders (p. 37), and even the Mormon apologists (p. 214) are ashamed of Joseph, yet he provides no statistical or even testimonial evidence to back up any of his claims beyond a single statement reported to have been made by an unnamed Temple Square tour guide.

**Sensationalism**

Crane tells his readers, “It is only an attitude of love that gives us the right to speak with a Mormon neighbor or friend. If love does not shine through this book, then it will do little lasting good” (p. 28). Yet the overall tone of *Ashamed of Joseph* is far from loving.

For example, eight pages of the book are devoted to gory excerpts from the tabloid-styled biography of Bill Hickman (pp. 88–96).\(^1\)

We are also treated to a story about an abusive

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18 As a passing note, I was not able to discover whom Crane is quoting when he applies quotation marks to the phrase “ashamed of Joseph” unless he is simply quoting himself.
19 Crane attempts to tie Bill Hickman to Joseph Smith, implying that Hickman's violence can be blamed on Joseph Smith, even though Joseph Smith never had contact with Hickman.
polygamist husband (pp. 72–76), an account of a foul-mouthed service station attendant who objected to Church proselyting at the Carthage Jail exhibit (pp. 221–22), and a tale about a divorcee from Crane’s congregation who joined the Mormon Church and proceeded to sleep with her ward teacher and each of the missionaries (pp. 253–54). In case such stories did not provide his readers with enough titillating material, Crane also informs us that Joseph Smith had “concubines” (p. 246), and “violated” a sixteen-year-old girl (p. 77). Indeed, Crane seems to take an inordinate interest in Joseph Smith’s supposedly lustful, womanizing, fiendish sexual proclivities and repeatedly returns to the subject throughout the book (pp. 34, 69, 76–77, 176, 187, 227–28, 237, 246, 249). We also find Crane implying that Satan is responsible for two miraculous occurrences in Church history (pp. 206, 209).

Conclusion

At the beginning of this review, I quoted from Crane’s book: “There are so many errors that are readily demonstrated and without a great investment of time and research” (p. 254). It appears to me that the author has followed to precision this stated philosophy and taken very little time, research, or even thought in the preparation of this book. He reassures his readers that they needn’t be experts on Mormonism in order to become missionaries to the Mormons. He has, he claims, won converts out of Mormonism “consistently from the very beginning when my knowledge was very inadequate” (p. 255). I would suggest that the author has not come as far as he thinks in his pursuit of expertise on the topic of Mormonism. I hope, if he plans another foray into anti-Mormon publishing, that he will take a few hours to visit a local library, read more than a few paragraphs of a book quoted by another anti-Mormon author, or at the very least climb the stairs of the North Visitors’ Center at Temple Square before applying ink to paper.