

Father Figure

(January 23, 2007)

Before Joseph Smith Jr. was born in the winter of 1805, the foundation for Mormonism was well in place . . . in part by his grandparents and parents.

His father, Joseph Smith Senior and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, had eleven children, nine of which survived.

“Joseph Junior” was in the middle.

His father, Joseph Smith Senior, came from a family of eleven children and had an accomplished father whose name was Asael.

Asael was successful and extremely opinionated on the subject of religion, God, liberty, and individual freedom.

Asael did not like organized religion much, was a staunch in his Universalist opinions, but at the same time longed for a time when a restoration of the “primitive church” would occur on earth.

Contrary to what Jesus and the Bible state, Universalist’s believed that everyone will be saved.

Everyone.

This doctrine, which was passed down from Grandfather Asael to Joseph Smith Senior and then to Joseph Junior would play an enormous role in the thinking and theology that Joseph Junior would present by way of Mormonism in the years to come.

According to public records of

December 6th 1797 – many years before Joseph Junior was born – grandfather Asael, his father Joseph Senior, and His uncle, Jesse – attached their names to the founding charter of the Universalist Society of Tunbridge, Vermont.

This was the only organized religion Joseph Smith Senior would ever join – except his sons a few decades later.

Universalism was in essence an anti-sectarian position because if everyone goes to heaven then all religions – and no religions – are correct.

Universalism would be the only religion Joseph Juniors father would ever join – besides his own sons.

This is important because Joseph Smith father REFUSED – REFUSED to touch any religion that did not meet his specifications.

And guess what his middle, large-in-stature son provided him? The religion with which he could agree.

In addition to being a Universalist, Joseph Smith's grandfather Asael also believed, like many early Americans, that America was "set apart" by God as a land of liberty, peace, and a place free of religion oppression.

Later, this theme would appear in the pages of the Book of Mormon as well.

In 1st Nephi 2:20, Nephi, who was in Jerusalem at the time, is told by God that

"ye shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared

I propose that these attitudes came not by way of revelation but by way of fulfilling and satisfying paternal and grand-parental influence.

In the teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith, it quotes Joseph Smith as saying:

"It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul – civil and religious liberty to the whole of the human race. Love of liberty was diffused into my soul by my grandfathers while they dandled me on their knees."

Hand in hand with the Smith patriarchs "universalist attitudes" and belief that America was chosen by God as a land of liberty, they also believed that the "Church of Jesus Christ" would some day soon be restored to the earth.

These people – who were not a few at this time and place - were known as "restorationists" or "primitivists."

But even before Joseph Junior was born, the Smith men believed that it would be through their family that the truth would be restored.

George Q. Cannon, Church Apostle, writes in his book, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, that Joseph's grandfather Asael said:

"It has been bourne (sic) upon my soul that one of my descendents (sic) will promulgate a work to revolutionize the world of religious faith."

The last time young Joseph Smith Jr. saw his paternal grandmother, Asael's

for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands."

wife, she communicated to him that he was “a special boy who had a special work that he must do for God” and that he “must always follow the teachings of his father and mother” so he would be prepared when the time came “for God to call him to accomplish the work he was destined to perform.”

From a very young age, Joseph junior had it instilled in him that he was destined to perform something for God.

After Joseph Smith was assassinated, Brigham Young glorified the Smith family’s patriarchal directives in Journal of Discourses 7:289

“The Lord had his eye upon him, and upon his father, and upon his father’s father, and upon the progenitors clear back to Abraham, and from Abraham to the flood, from the flood to Enoch, and from Enoch to Adam. He watched that family and that blood as it circulated from its foundation to the birth of that man.”

BH Roberts, Church Historian wrote that Joseph Juniors grandfather Asael told the would be prophet as a boy that

God “has brought us into the land of peace and liberty.” He then went on: “I believe He [God] is about to bring all the world into the same beatitude in his own time and way. And I believe that the stone is now cut out of the mountain, without hands, spoken of by the Prophet Daniel, and has smitten the image upon his feet, by which all monarchical and ecclesiastical tyranny will be broken to pieces that there shall be no place found for them.”

Later, as the prophet for the Church,

Joseph Smith himself echoed these sentiments taught to him by his grandfather when he said:

*“I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the Kingdom of Daniel by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world. It will not be by the sword or gun that this Kingdom will roll on: the power of truth is such that **all nations will be under the necessity of obeying the Gospel.**”*

From a child, Joseph was taught that

1. The primitive religion of God had been taken from the earth (meaning the gates of hell did in fact prevail against what Jesus set up)
2. that America was a sacred place of freedom set apart for the restored gospel to come forth
3. and that he would, in fact, be the one who would initiate this religious event.

The impact and influence from Joseph Juniors paternal side on his views was powerful and obvious.

What else do we know about Joseph's father?

In 1802, three years before Joseph Junior was born, Joseph Smith Senior invested most of the money the family had into an overseas ginseng business.

This business failed mostly because of

the unscrupulous business practices of a trusted friend.

This left the family financially destitute.

For at least the next twenty years, the Smith's struggled greatly to even exist.

Two years after the ginseng debacle, Joseph Smith Junior was born.

In my studies, I believe that Joseph and his siblings were loved by their parents.

I think they were a close family.

I don't see them as lacking attention or being treated with indifference.

In fact I think their family unit played a significant role in the theological ideas Joseph Junior presented to the world.

With the exception of his early years with wife Emma in Pennsylvania and the time he spent in liberty jail, Joseph Junior was always in close proximity to his father and mother.

After the ginseng affair history tends to indicate that Joseph Smith's father entered a long period of self-doubt which included alcohol abuse and a penchant for get rich quick schemes.

He also passed on the unfortunate legacy of treasure seeking and a reliance on magic to his middle son who was later introduced himself as "the Prophet."

In addition to seeking buried treasure,

alcohol problems, and a passionate attitude against all organized religion of the day, Joseph Smith Senior was also a visionary man.

His wife Lucy reports that her husband experienced seven impactful dream-visions well before his son experienced his “first vision” at around the age of fourteen.

Because of time constraints, I won't share all of these dreams with you. But I will share one of them – the second – which Father Smith had when Joseph Junior was just six years old.

Now try and imagine the setting:

Here is a large poor family crowded into a small home in the country.

It's snowing outside and Joseph Senior has probably by this point tied one on.

But the children want a story!

Now Joseph and Lucy are very mystical and religious people – but in their own respective ways.

Father Joseph dreamed dreams and Mother Lucy sees visions.

There's no television.

There's no radio.

And father and mother are actually smiling and getting along together as the story telling begins.

“Share one of Daddy dreams!” the children plead.

So they draw the children in a little closer and in a memorable moment of

happiness Father Joseph convincingly recite a dream.

According to Lucy, the second dream, went like this:



*Father Smith finds himself in a **deserted field that represented the world.***

*He follows a path that takes him to a crystal stream of water. He walks up to find the source and found the **most beautiful tree** he had ever seen in the midst of a valley.*

*The tree bore fruit **whiter than snow.** Its taste was delicious beyond description.*

*He said to himself, "I can't eat all alone. **I must get my wife and children;** that they might partake with me."*

*And he brought his wife and seven children and **they ate the fruit** and praised God.*

*On the other side of the valley was a **spacious building** with many doors and windows, filled with people who were dressed in fine clothes. They began **to point at Joseph and his family with great contempt.** At this time, he understood that the fruit they were eating was the pure love of God*

(COMPARATIVE)

Those of you familiar with the Book of Mormon know that in the story, Father Lehi, also being a visionary man, has a dream-vision which he shares with his large-in-stature middle son named Nephi.

Now turn to
1st Nephi 8:9-10

Vs. 11

Vs. 12

Vs. 16

Vs. 26 -27

that fills the hearts of all those who love and keep His commandments. His guide told him to get all of his children because not all of them were there.

He went a short distance and got two small children. They all ate more fruit, using both hands.

In conclusion, the guide told him that the spacious building represented Babylon and its scorn, and those that pointed despised the true saints of God for their humility.

We cannot legitimately conclude our short study of the paternal influences on Joseph Junior without speaking of magic.

Before we do, I'd like to read a couple passages from the Bible - which was around and known perhaps better than any other book during Joseph Smith's life - about the practice of magic, sorcery, or enchantments.

Isaiah 8:19 *And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a*

Remember, according to Lucy, Father Joseph had this dream almost twelve years before the first vision even occurred!

And yet we find his personal dream included in the text of the Book of Mormon!

I'd call this some real parental influence over the visionary and revelatory experiences of a son.

people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?

Isaiah 19:3 *And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmors, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.*

Isaiah 47:12-13 *Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.
Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.*

Leviticus 19:26 *Ye shall not eat any thing with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times.*

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 *There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.*

There seems to be a lot of justification for the Smith family's use of magic in the LDS apologetic today.

Many say it was a common practice of the time.

Others say it was innocent and just a cultural activity.

I've even presented this opinion at times.

But there is a very important thing to consider regarding the subject of "treasure seeking" as it relates to the Smith family and Mormon history.

How did Bible believing Christians respond to the practice of money digging, amulets, and magic parchments at this time?

The answer is an absolute "They rejected them!"

Why? Because they trusted the Word

(THOUGHT? Just what kinds of "treasures" would Father Joseph and Joseph Junior actually have been searching for, anyway?)

(Jeopardy Sound)

Ah ha! They would have been looking for buried money from the revolution OR buried Indian treasures wouldn't they?

This certainly adds some insight into where their minds were and the conversations they could have been having, doesn't it?

Okay!

Father Joseph was quoted as saying in 1837:

"I know more about money-digging than any man in this generation for I have been in the business for more than thirty years!"

Money digging the term used to divine or seek for buried treasure using seer

<p>Fact:</p> <p>Before Joseph Junior was born, the Smith men believed that the true Church of Jesus Christ was lost from the earth.</p>	<p>stones, rods, or visions.</p> <p>It was a fairly common practice among folk in the rural areas of the country.</p> <p>But there was also a certain shame that often associated it with laziness – I guess it would be similar to the suspicions we have for the character of people who read palms, play the lotto, or live at the race track.</p> <p>In an effort to paint a better portrait of her family, Lucy Mack Smith wrote in her Biographical Sketches:</p> <p>“Let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopped our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac, drawing magic circles, or soothsaying to the neglect of all kinds of business. We never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation.”</p> <p>In other words, Lucy did not want people to think that just because her family dabbled in the arts of “Abrac, drawing magic circles, and soothsaying” that they stopped doing other things that were important.”</p> <p>It is no surprise that the quote I just read was taken out of her final narrative draft.</p>
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The grandparents and parents believed this church would come through the Smith family.

Joseph's father rejected all organized religion – all of them – except the one his son presented later – this pleased him.

His father taught Joseph to trust in magic practices. These practices became a part of his methods of operation.

His father was a visionary man, who dreamed dreams, passed those dreams on to his son, and at least one of these dreams made its way into the Book of Mormon.