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JOSEPH SMITH'S  
STUDY OF BIBLICAL  
LANGUAGES



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# “THE WORD OF THE LORD IN THE ORIGINAL”

JOSEPH SMITH’S STUDY OF HEBREW IN KIRTLAND

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As Samuel Brown and Richard Bushman have recently noted, Joseph Smith viewed ancient languages as a primary resource for accessing and communing with the sacred past.<sup>1</sup> Joseph seemed to believe, along with many of his contemporaries, that biblical, classical, and other languages possessed keys for unlocking the earliest divine truths revealed to humanity. As such, his work with languages—encouraged by his earliest official titles of “seer, *translator*, [and] prophet” (D&C 21:1; emphasis added)—was a significant source of inspiration in his efforts to revive the “Ancient order of things.”<sup>2</sup> For Joseph Smith, interaction with ancient texts and languages took various forms, including supernatural translation projects (facilitated by seer stones and divine inspiration), academic attempts at reconstructing undeciphered scripts (such as his work with the Egyptian

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documents and Kinderhook plates), and studying biblical languages in the traditional manner.

Within this third category, the most formal, well-documented, and influential exercise was Joseph's study of Hebrew in Kirtland, Ohio, between the fall of 1835 and the spring of 1836. Scholars of Mormon history and scripture have long known of Joseph's efforts to learn Hebrew and have observed numerous instances in which his Hebrew studies influenced his subsequent prophetic development. Over the last several decades, a small number of articles have provided valuable insights into various aspects of this topic, including the logistics of the Hebrew class in Kirtland,<sup>3</sup> the personal background of Joshua Seixas (Joseph's Hebrew instructor),<sup>4</sup> and Joseph's use of Hebrew in the Book of Abraham and the King Follett discourse.<sup>5</sup> To date, the fullest attempt at synthesizing this material is a study by Louis Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," which has been the classic treatment of the topic for over forty years.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these resources, recent research into the status of Hebrew in early America, new information from the Joseph Smith Papers project, and previously overlooked documents now allow us to further refine our understanding of Joseph's Hebrew study and the impact it had on his thinking. In this paper, I will provide an updated overview of the topic, both by summarizing previously known sources and conclusions and by offering new insights based on more current research. Because the present volume deals with the study of antiquity among early Latter-day Saints, I will focus particularly on Joseph Smith's formal study of Hebrew in Kirtland; this will include a consideration of the cultural context of Hebrew studies in early America, the motivations for Joseph and his associates to begin learning Hebrew in the fall of 1835, the content and methodology of their studies, and some concluding observations regarding the influence these studies had on Joseph's subsequent attempts to recover ancient texts, doctrines, and practices.

## The Perceptions and Study of Hebrew in Early America

In many ways, Joseph Smith and the early Latter-day Saints were products of their time, being influenced in their Hebrew studies by the current intellectual and religious culture, and sharing commonly held assumptions about the nature and value of the language. In other ways, Joseph and his associates were quite unique in their motivations to learn Hebrew and their subsequent use of it. Therefore, before we can effectively evaluate the study of Hebrew among early Mormons, it is first necessary to contextualize their efforts in light of the academic climate in the 1820s–1840s. Recent research into the study of Hebrew in the New World and its role in shaping “the American imagination” allows us to briefly survey early American views of the language and to situate Joseph Smith’s Hebrew study within the religious landscape of his day.

Early American interest in Hebrew naturally had its roots in the European Protestant Reformation. Throughout the Middle Ages, western Christians largely ignored Hebrew as a biblical language and instead relied on the Latin translations of the Bible and commentaries provided by the Church. Beginning in the sixteenth century, however, early Reformers (including Martin Luther) argued for the notion of *sola scriptura*—that the Bible is the only acceptable source of religious authority—and fostered a Protestant form of scholarship which sought to improve understanding of the biblical text through the translation of its original languages, Hebrew and Greek. In 1540, this impulse led Henry VIII to endow professorships in Hebrew at Oxford and Cambridge. Other universities soon made similar arrangements, thus placing a high premium on Hebrew studies among Christian clergymen and scholars. These developments established an intellectual atmosphere in Europe that would greatly influence academies in the New World.<sup>7</sup>

From the arrival of the Pilgrims through the establishment of colleges in the colonies, Hebrew studies in early America largely reflected the values and methodologies of European scholarship. The Puritan emphasis on the Old Testament also shaped early American intellectual life in many ways, including by fostering a sense of religious obligation to study the biblical text in its original Hebrew.<sup>8</sup> This legacy continued in pre-Revolution educational ideals, with all ten colonial colleges teaching Hebrew as a core part of their curriculum in an effort to train the clergy in the fundamentals of biblical translation. Some of the more prominent institutions—including Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth—patterned themselves on the Old Testament model of Elijah’s “School of the Prophets” and used Hebrew in their school seals as a reflection of their Christian commitment to acquiring “light and truth.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to adopting European views of Hebrew study, many early Americans endowed Hebrew with religious significance unique to the New World. For example, writers often attempted to find biblical explanations for the discoveries of new peoples and languages throughout the Western Hemisphere, leading many to speculate on the genealogical connections between Native Americans and the lost tribes of Israel, as well as the possible relationship between Hebrew and various Indian dialects.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, some prominent clergymen, including Jonathan Edwards and Ezra Stiles, also speculated on the mystical significance of Hebrew and came to believe that it represented the closest known language to the original tongue of Adam; as the language that supposedly suffered the least corruption at the Tower of Babel, Hebrew was seen as a window of insight into humanity’s Edenic origins.<sup>11</sup> These and similar notions resulted in a distinctly Americanized view of Hebrew and its religious significance.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, enthusiasm for Hebrew studies in American colleges had slightly declined in deference to the study of the classical languages (Greek and Latin),

but there was a significant revival of Hebrew interest in the 1820s through 1840s. This revival resulted, in large part, from the efforts of Moses Stuart, a popular Christian Hebraist who turned Andover Theological Seminary into a prominent center for Hebrew studies. To facilitate his revival, Stuart used the Andover printing press for the publication of Hebrew course materials, including his own grammar textbook and chrestomathy, and promoted the wide circulation of these resources. Stuart’s work was particularly well received among theologically conservative clergymen who resisted the new Unitarian leanings of Harvard, and led to a flourishing of scholarship that blossomed into the field of modern American biblical studies.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, ministers throughout New England and on the frontier studied Hebrew to inform their reading of the Bible and to prepare themselves for missions to convert Jews to Christianity. It was in this setting of renewed Hebrew enthusiasm that Joseph Smith and the early Latter-day Saints developed their own fascination with Hebrew and found themselves in a region where the resources necessary to learn it were becoming increasingly available at a popular level. Furthermore, many of the distinct early American perceptions of Hebrew resonated with Mormon theological claims, thus creating an environment in which Latter-day Saint interest in the language could flourish in unique and creative ways.

### **Hebrew among the Latter-day Saints before 1835**

Joseph Smith did not begin his Hebrew studies until the fall of 1835, but it is clear that he and his followers had an interest in the language from the beginning of the movement. This interest often reflected common views of Hebrew’s religious significance, but it was also encouraged by Joseph’s unique scriptural productions. The earliest revelations in the late 1820s to early 1830s show that, to Joseph and his associates, his prophetic authority was bound to his ability to uncover divine mysteries through his translation of ancient records.<sup>13</sup>

Many of his contemporaries also viewed languages as the key to unlocking the secrets of human origins, but Joseph's supernatural gift was to reveal these secrets despite his lack of linguistic training.<sup>14</sup> The first such project was the translation of the Book of Mormon from gold plates, which attracted individuals who shared Joseph's interest in obtaining divine truth through the decipherment of ancient languages and who hoped to participate in his translation activities.<sup>15</sup>

Although the plates were reportedly written in "reformed Egyptian" (a writing system understood to be an amalgamation of Egyptian and Hebrew), the Book of Mormon confirmed common perceptions of Hebrew among Joseph's earliest followers. For example, the Book of Mormon claimed that Hebrew was spoken in the Western Hemisphere among ancient Israelites who viewed the language as their most pristine form of communication,<sup>16</sup> thus reinforcing the popular American notion that Hebrew was somehow associated with Indian origins and dialects. In addition, the book's account of an Israelite colony in the New World placed the story of the engraved gold plates alongside other nineteenth-century reports which claimed that Hebrew was found written on Indian artifacts (including pieces of parchment and inscribed stones), lending further support to contemporary theories of Jewish-Indian descent.<sup>17</sup>

Modern apologists and critics debate the extent to which Hebrew terms and phraseology actually exist in the Book of Mormon text, but there is no evidence that the gold plates included Hebrew script.<sup>18</sup> Rumors that the plates were written in "Hebrew [and] reformed Egyptian" were fostered by some of the participants in translation events;<sup>19</sup> this included a creative attempt by Oliver Cowdery to reproduce lines of original "Hebrew" text from the Book of Jacob,<sup>20</sup> and Charles Anthon's claim that the plates' characters shown to him by Martin Harris contained "a most singular medley . . . [of] Greek, Hebrew, and all sorts of letters, more or less distorted."<sup>21</sup> Joseph Smith, however, never claimed that the plates contained Hebrew writing.<sup>22</sup>



Furthermore, of the numerous Book of Mormon character manuscripts now available (including the “Character” document produced by John Whitmer), none contain material that resembles Hebrew letters or words.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that early references to “Hebrew” on the plates were simply impressions of the artifact’s ancient and sacred nature, rather than an accurate description of its paleography.

Following the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, Joseph Smith did not directly refer to Hebrew for over five years. His prophetic role as a “translator” continued in his next ambitious project of producing a revision of the Bible (1830–33), but Joseph still had no formal instruction in the Bible’s original languages, indicating that his translation would again be supernatural and not traditional. Joseph’s writings in the early 1830s did include some Hebrew words and phrases such as *Zion* and “Lord of Sabaoth,” but he often attached to them unconventional meanings.<sup>24</sup> While he likely learned these words from his reading of the King James Bible, it is not clear how he formed his unique ideas of their significance. Nevertheless, they seem to represent the extremely limited (almost nonexistent) extent of Joseph’s interaction with the language before 1835. During this same period, a few other Latter-day Saints, W. W. Phelps in particular, were interested in Hebrew and occasionally used Hebrew words in their newspaper editorials, but none had the academic training necessary to use it well or extensively.<sup>25</sup>

### **Joseph Smith’s Motivations for Learning Hebrew**

Unfortunately, records produced by Joseph Smith and his associates do not explicitly discuss their motivations for beginning a formal study of Hebrew in late 1835 or explain why they did not do so earlier. Once into his Hebrew studies, Joseph frequently expressed common Protestant sentiments that extolled the ideal of reading the Bible in the original languages; reading the Old Testament in Hebrew, he felt, would enable him to uncover the pristine teachings of the text and

empower him to preach God's revelations: "reading in our hebrew bibles . . . it seems 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 indue us with a knowledge of all languages and touns, that his servants may go forth for this last time, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, a supplemental textbook published by the Church for the use of the Hebrew school stated that the study of Hebrew would "serve to facilitate the acquisition of a perfect knowledge of one of the best of books—the *Scriptures*—the introduction of which has served to dispel darkness, and disperse light into every clime."<sup>27</sup>

Reading the original text of the Bible and preparing for missionary preaching were persuasive reasons for Joseph to study Hebrew (as they were for others in this period), but his personal motivations for doing so must have been more complicated. Unlike many of his Protestant contemporaries, Joseph never incorporated Hebrew into Mormon proselytizing efforts, even when he sent fellow Apostle and Hebrew student Orson Hyde to Jerusalem to dedicate Palestine for a Jewish return. Furthermore, Joseph did not attempt to study Hebrew until years *after* he had completed his translations of the Book of Mormon and Bible, both supernatural projects that relied on divine inspiration. Yet, by October 1835 Joseph felt that it was necessary to learn Hebrew in the traditional manner. Since there is no extant revelation that singled out Hebrew as a course of study, it is likely that a confluence of developments (rather than a single event) prompted Joseph and his associates to begin learning the language at that time.

Although Joseph never turned to biblical languages in his revision of the Bible, a series of revelations he received toward the end of that project (between late 1832 and early 1833) provided theological motivation for Mormon leaders and missionaries to go beyond their supernatural gifts and "seek out of the best books," "become

acquainted . . . with languages, tongues, and people,” and “obtain a knowledge of history.” This new emphasis on academic learning was meant to prepare the lay ministers of the Church “to magnify their calling,” “receive revelations to unfold the mysteries of the kingdom,” and “set in order all the affairs of this church.” “All this,” the revelations stated, would be “for the salvation of Zion.”<sup>28</sup> As a result, Joseph came to view the acquisition of languages as a vital part of Mormon spirituality, a necessary contribution to the Zion project, and an educational ideal among the Latter-day Saints.<sup>29</sup> In 1833, these revelations led to the establishment of an ecclesiastical school system in Kirtland, Ohio.

The first “class” organized was the exclusive “School of the Prophets” in which select Church leaders could discuss theology, perform biblical rituals, and experience divine manifestations. This school was later joined by the more inclusive “School for the Elders,” a larger group of classes designed to instruct Mormon missionaries in theology, history, and grammar.<sup>30</sup> The title of the flagship class—the “School of the Prophets”—seems to allude to Elijah’s gathering of prophetic figures in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 2:5–7, 15–18), and Joseph may have viewed the activities of the Kirtland elders in that light.<sup>31</sup> However, it is also interesting to note that prominent academic institutions throughout the northeast (including Yale, Harvard, and Dartmouth) similarly based the training of their clergy on Elijah’s “school of the prophets” and required the acquisition of biblical languages as a core component of their curriculum.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, while Joseph may have envisioned a restoration of an Old Testament prophetic institution in the form of his school system, he was also showing an interest in training his own clergy along the same lines as more prominent denominations.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the imperatives to study languages in the school’s founding revelations, the only language courses offered in the Kirtland schools between 1833 and 1835 were classes in English grammar.

Hebrew—the first foreign language to be taught in the school system—was not added to the curriculum until the fall of 1835. Once the decision was made to study biblical languages, Hebrew seems to have been the most natural choice. Like other restorationists, early Latter-day Saints revered the New Testament and saw themselves as restoring the first-century Church of Christ. However, Mormons were also heirs to the Puritan tradition and from the beginning had more frequently identified themselves with Old Testament concepts and institutions such as Zion, the twelve tribes of Israel, the priesthood, and the temple. This tendency likely created a natural preference for Hebrew over Greek among Church leaders.<sup>34</sup> The references to Hebrew in the Book of Mormon may have provided additional fascination for early Latter-day Saints.<sup>35</sup>

While the seeds that created the Mormons' desire to learn Hebrew might have been planted as early as 1830, the impetus to actually do so in late 1835 seems to have come with a confluence of developments earlier that year. Foremost among these was the arrival of Egyptian mummies and papyri in Kirtland in July. These artifacts greatly aroused the inherent Mormon interest in ancient texts and languages, and simultaneously intensified Joseph's desire to forge a bond of fellowship between his community and the patriarchs of biblical antiquity. Joseph believed that this fellowship with the ancients would come as the Saints uncovered "hid[d]en things of old times" to be found through the decipherment of the "hid[d]en languages" contained in the papyri.<sup>36</sup> This conviction led to an academic attempt to decode the Egyptian alphabet, the preparation of an Egyptian grammar, and early work on the Book of Abraham during the summer and fall of 1835. For several reasons, it also may have prompted Joseph to begin studying Hebrew that winter.

In retrospect, the language of the Egyptian papyri was clearly a form of hieratic, but the documents' antiquity initially made some Latter-day Saints wonder (as they did with the gold plates) about

the possibility that Hebrew was somehow involved: Oliver Cowdery thought that the “hieroglyphics” on the papyri looked “exactly like the present, (though probably not quite so square,) form of the Hebrew without points”;<sup>37</sup> Joseph and his scribes (probably inspired by the extremely limited Hebrew knowledge of W. W. Phelps) transliterated variations of Hebrew letters as part of the “Egyptian Alphabet” they were deciphering from the manuscripts;<sup>38</sup> and late reminiscences list Hebrew as one of the languages contained on the papyri.<sup>39</sup> However, all of these statements came from individuals who knew little or no Hebrew at the time they made their observations. Therefore, as with the gold plates, references to “Hebrew” on the papyri appear to have been impressions of the documents’ ancient and sacred nature, rather than accurate paleographic descriptions.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian project might have been a major impetus for Joseph to begin learning Hebrew; if he and his associates initially believed that the papyri contained Hebrew writing (which seems to have been the case), perhaps they felt that Hebrew could aid their translation of the manuscripts. Furthermore, by 1835 Joseph had been identified in the revelations as a “translator” for over seven years, yet his English grammar and previous translations of ancient texts were sharply criticized by his opponents, possibly encouraging him to attain formal training in biblical languages as he proceeded in his next translation project.<sup>40</sup> Joseph and his associates also may have felt optimistic that the papyri could assist them in another linguistic project in which they had been interested for several years—their attempt to reconstruct the language of Adam. Many Christians in this period believed that Hebrew held a key to Eden’s pure and undefiled language, a sentiment shared by some early Latter-day Saints.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the Kirtland elders might have seen the decipherment of Egyptian and the study of Hebrew as complementary resources in their quest to uncover the earliest divine truths revealed to humanity.

With the arrival of the Egyptian papyri in the summer of 1835, Joseph also intensified his efforts to forge a bond of fellowship between his community and the patriarchs of the Old Testament, possibly adding further motivations to learn Hebrew later that year. In subsequent months, Joseph's desire to commune with the ancients led to a crescendo of spiritual manifestations that were facilitated by ancient rituals. In preparation for the dedication of the Kirtland Temple the following spring, Joseph and his associates attempted to revive the activities of Old Testament priests through ritual washings and anointings.<sup>42</sup> These rituals were often accompanied by visions of antiquity (including the appearance of biblical personalities) that closed the gap between ancient and modern saints.<sup>43</sup> When the school session began in November 1835, Joseph stated that course instruction that year (which was to include the study of Hebrew) would prepare the Church for the "glorious endowment" attending the temple's completion.<sup>44</sup> In association with these biblical visions and rituals, the study of Hebrew among early Latter-day Saints can be viewed as a part of their effort to connect with the sacred past.

It is also interesting to note that the Mormons' desire for formal Hebrew study came at a time when supernatural experience with ancient languages was resurging in the community. When the Egyptian papyri appeared, Joseph again turned to his seer stones and divine inspiration for assistance in translating the ancient documents.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the gift of speaking in unknown (and presumably ancient) tongues was becoming a frequent occurrence among Mormons in the months leading up to the dedication of the Kirtland temple during the spring of 1836.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, it was during this very period that Joseph and his associates supplemented their supernatural interaction with languages with traditional academic learning in the form of the Hebrew school, a paradox that perplexed Joseph's contemporary critics and later biographers.<sup>47</sup>

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With this confluence of developments, Church leaders decided to add a Hebrew course to the school’s curriculum and formed an organizing committee for the course by early October 1835. The first mention of this effort is a correspondence between Oliver Cowdery and Lucius Parker, a cousin of Brigham Young whom the Mormons asked to teach the class. Parker indicated that he could only teach the basics of the language, to which Cowdery replied, “We have those who could teach us the rudiments of the Hebrew, but we wished an accomplished scholar.”<sup>48</sup> It is not clear who in the Mormon community Cowdery felt was qualified to teach “the rudiments,” but the correspondence with Parker might have led Church leaders to inquire after Daniel Peixotto, a Jewish doctor who taught at nearby Willoughby Medical College.<sup>49</sup>

On November 2, Joseph and others who attended a physics lecture by Dr. Peixotto were impressed by his intellectual abilities and invited him to teach their Hebrew class in Kirtland.<sup>50</sup> Peixotto agreed and requested that the Mormons first acquire the necessary course materials.<sup>51</sup> Joseph immediately sent Oliver Cowdery to New York to purchase Hebrew books for the school.<sup>52</sup> This arrangement with a Jewish doctor who was willing to teach Hebrew to the Mormons further heightened Joseph’s excitement to learn the language and convinced him that he now had the resources to do so. In the week following the Peixotto lecture, excitement about Judaism also seemed to have spread throughout the Mormon community, prompted by a brief and mysterious visit in Kirtland from “Joshua the Jewish Minister”<sup>53</sup> and a stimulating encounter between Oliver Cowdery and an elderly Jewish scholar he met on his trip to New York City.<sup>54</sup> These encounters, the ongoing Egyptian project, efforts to recover the language of Adam, and an increased desire to commune with the sacred past all converged in Kirtland in late 1835, apparently combining to persuade Joseph that the time was right for the Saints to learn Hebrew.

## The Mormon Study of Hebrew in Kirtland, Ohio (1835–36)

With Dr. Peixotto's agreement to teach the Mormons, Joseph Smith and his colleagues made preparations to begin learning Hebrew in November 1835. Other classes in the Elders' School had begun on November 3, but the Hebrew class had to wait for Oliver Cowdery to return from New York with the necessary books. Cowdery returned to Kirtland on November 20 with "a quantity of Hebrew book's for the benefit of the school . . . [including] a Hebrew bible, lexicon & Grammar."<sup>55</sup> His selection of books appears to have been influenced by recommendations from Lucius Parker, Daniel Peixotto, and the elderly Jewish scholar he met in New York.<sup>56</sup> The historical records do not indicate which books he purchased, but the artifact holdings in the LDS Church History Library, Community of Christ, and Brigham Young University archives show that he brought back copies of an 1833 edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*,<sup>57</sup> the 1835 edition of Moses Stuart's *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language*,<sup>58</sup> and the 1832 edition of Josiah Gibbs's *A Manual Hebrew and English Lexicon*,<sup>59</sup> all some of the highest quality resources available at that time.

Despite plans to begin studies immediately, the class did not have a proper instructor for almost two months after obtaining their Hebrew materials. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the arrangement with Peixotto fell through.<sup>60</sup> To replace him, the Mormons considered inviting the elderly Jewish scholar whom Oliver Cowdery had recently met in New York City, but that alternative arrangement never materialized.<sup>61</sup> Without an instructor, Joseph spent much of December conducting his own personal study of his new resources, spending days rotating between studying his new Hebrew books, examining his new Greek lexicon, and continuing work with the Egyptian papyri.<sup>62</sup> It is unlikely that Joseph learned much beyond the various alphabets in his personal study, but he expressed a yearning "to treasure up know[ledge] for the



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be[n]efit of my Calling.” During his self-guided studies he prayed for divine assistance in his language acquisition, which he believed was necessary for him to fulfill his prophetic role: “O may God give me learning even Language and indo [endue] me with qualifications to magnify his name while I live.”<sup>63</sup>

The day after Christmas, Joseph and some of his associates “commenced regularly, & systematically, to study the venerable Hebrew language,” whereas they had only “paid some little attention to it before.”<sup>64</sup> Less than two weeks later, on January 4, 1836, Joseph took it upon himself to teach the newly formed Hebrew school despite the fact that his only exposure to Hebrew at this point was his personal reading of his books during thirteen days within the previous two months.<sup>65</sup> After the first day of class, Joseph became aware of his own limitations and commissioned another search for a proper teacher.<sup>66</sup> In the meantime, Joseph would read material from his books and then attempt to teach lessons to the class. An examination of Moses Stuart’s highly sophisticated textbook—the main grammatical resource available to the Mormons in their self-instruction—suggests that they could not have learned much on their own. Joseph and his fellow classmates may have learned the alphabet from its opening pages, but the volume was not designed to teach students grammar or even basic vocabulary without a knowledgeable instructor.<sup>67</sup> The frustrations of this situation were reflected in a tense debate that broke out on the second day of class between Joseph Smith and Orson Pratt regarding the pronunciation of a Hebrew letter. Joseph claims to have won the argument, but in reality neither probably knew enough to be certain.<sup>68</sup>

The next day, the class welcomed the news that a “highly celebrated Hebrew schollar” would arrive in two weeks to instruct the class formally.<sup>69</sup> During those two weeks the class’s success ebbed and flowed. On one day, Joseph reported that the class “commenced reading in our Hebrew bibles with much success”; he does

not indicate what portion of the Bible they read (presumably they would not have been able to comprehend much at this point), but he felt confident that they were making progress.<sup>70</sup> On other days, Joseph dismissed class early to attend social events, cancelled class, or admitted that the students “did not feel like studying,” preferring instead to discuss the spiritual outpouring and visions they were experiencing outside of class.<sup>71</sup>

On January 26, a proper teacher arrived to organize and instruct the class formally. This “highly celebrated” teacher was Joshua Seixas, a respected scholar from a prominent Sephardic Jewish family in New York’s most famous synagogue congregation (*Shearith Israel*) who was earning a reputation for his skills with ancient lan-

guages, including Hebrew, Aramaic (“Chaldean”), Syriac, and Arabic.<sup>72</sup> Seixas was a young man of thirty-two or thirty-three—only two or three years older than Joseph—who had been teaching Hebrew as an adjunct professor at various academic institutions in the northeast. Early in his career he became acquainted with the eminent Christian Hebraist Moses Stuart and even collaborated on the edition of Stuart’s textbook which the Mormons had been reading in Kirtland. Louis Zucker noted that “Joshua Seixas was the ablest Hebraist . . . whom Kirtland could have hoped to attract in the 1830’s.”<sup>73</sup>



*The first chapter of Genesis in Hyrum Smith’s copy of the Biblia Hebraica, likely obtained in Kirtland. Photo taken by permission of the LDS Church History Library.*

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It is unclear how the Mormons first heard of Seixas, made contact with him, or persuaded him to teach their class. They might have noticed that Moses Stuart, who was considered by many to be the “dean of biblical studies in America,” had paid a high compliment by acknowledging Seixas’s skills and assistance in the introduction to his textbook.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Joshua Seixas and Daniel Peixotto were cousins through marriage and as children attended the same synagogue congregation in New York, raising the possibility that the Mormons became acquainted with Seixas *via* Peixotto.<sup>75</sup> In the fall of 1835, Seixas was teaching Hebrew at nearby Oberlin College, where Lorenzo Snow (then a non-Mormon) received instruction from him, adding the possibility that Joseph learned of Seixas’s skills, proximity, and availability through Lorenzo’s sister Eliza R. Snow, who had converted to Mormonism in Kirtland.<sup>76</sup> However the arrangements were made, by early January Seixas accepted an offer to instruct the “Kirtland Theological Institution” and Joseph was thrilled to have a minor Jewish celebrity agree to teach them Hebrew.

Joseph also seemed excited about having his own “native informant” of Judaism. This was a desired commodity among Christian Hebraists in this period, who believed that Jews inherently possessed access to biblical mysteries and secrets not available to Christian scholars.<sup>77</sup> Joseph noted in his journal that Church leaders hoped for “a Jew to teach us the language” and he saw Seixas as the ideal candidate for that role.<sup>78</sup> However, recent research has shown that Seixas might have actually converted to Christianity—possibly Unitarianism—in 1832, four years before his arrival in Kirtland.<sup>79</sup> The details of his conversion, including his motivation for doing so, are uncertain and it seems that he only discussed his faith with a small circle of Protestant colleagues, among whom he used his Christian name of James.<sup>80</sup>

To everyone outside of this intimate circle, though, Joshua Seixas was seen as Jewish.<sup>81</sup> Joseph Smith gave little indication that he was

aware of Seixas's conversion.<sup>82</sup> If he was, he clearly preferred to say that he was learning Hebrew from a Jewish scholar. Regardless, Joseph and his associates quickly came to appreciate Seixas's talents and personal qualities. Joseph described him as "a man of excellent understanding [who] has a knowledge of many languages which were spoken by the Antints [ancients]—he is an honorabl man so far as I can judge."<sup>83</sup> Occasionally Joseph discussed Mormonism with Seixas (who graciously listened to recitals of Joseph's visionary experiences), but he did not openly pressure Seixas to join the Church.<sup>84</sup> In private, however, Joseph and his fellow students prayed that Seixas would convert to Mormonism and contribute his expertise in ancient languages to the cause of the kingdom.<sup>85</sup>

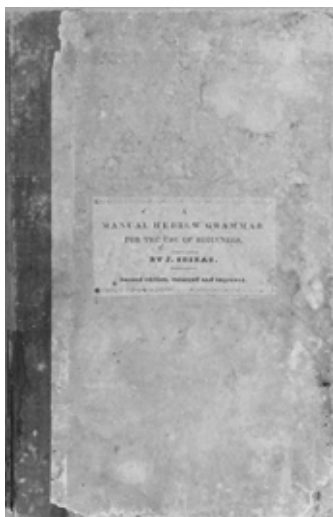
At first Seixas was paid \$320 to teach forty students in two daily one-hour sessions over the course of seven weeks.<sup>86</sup> After a week of class, Joseph Smith—convinced that "the hand of God" was at work in this opportunity—requested that some elders delay their missionary journeys to attend the Hebrew school,<sup>87</sup> and insisted that some leave their other classes to study Hebrew instead.<sup>88</sup> This seems to have resulted in an additional three classes with a total of about one hundred and twenty students studying in concurrent sessions throughout the spring.<sup>89</sup> Along with the other elders and missionaries, Church leaders in Kirtland (including the Twelve Apostles) were expected to attend.<sup>90</sup> Some showed more potential than others. Joseph was proud to be in a group of advanced students including W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, Orson Hyde, and Orson Pratt who were singled out by Seixas to receive additional instruction.<sup>91</sup> Others, such as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Joseph Bates Noble, struggled academically.<sup>92</sup>

Classes were held on the third floor of the Kirtland Temple, which was still under construction and being prepared for dedication. The main classroom (the "translation room") was dedicated by Joseph Smith for the study of Hebrew, continuing work on the Egyptian

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project, and the performance of biblical anointing rituals, showing that Joseph envisioned Hebrew instruction to be a part of his larger program to bond his community with the ancients.<sup>93</sup> Smaller tutorials, study sessions, and recitations were also held in the printing office and private residences.<sup>94</sup> The Hebrew classes consisted mostly of Mormon elders, but occasionally non-Mormons attended the classes as well, both as enrolled students (such as Lorenzo Snow) and as visiting guests.<sup>95</sup> One visitor to Kirtland observed that “women and children” were also studying Hebrew among the Mormons.<sup>96</sup> While they did not make up a large segment of the Hebrew school, there are accounts of women and young boys attending classes. Persis Goodall Young, a thirty-year-old mother of four, enrolled and was commended by Seixas as consistently being the class’s best prepared student.<sup>97</sup> Caroline Barnes Crosby was also interested in learning Hebrew and, though not able to take the class herself, studied her husband’s textbooks at home.<sup>98</sup> The youngest student in the class may have been Horace Kimball Whitney, the twelve-year-old son of Newel K. Whitney, who was known for his exceptional linguistic abilities as a youth.<sup>99</sup>

The course was designed by Seixas to work through the 1833 and revised 1834 editions of his own textbook, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners*.<sup>100</sup> Because the number of students in the school far exceeded the number of available textbooks, the Church published a supplement under Seixas’s supervision which contained abbreviated summaries of the lessons in the 1834 edition of Seixas’s textbook.<sup>101</sup> These materials contained an intensive introduction to Hebrew letters, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, with instructions to students that large portions of the lessons “be thoroughly committed to memory.”<sup>102</sup> Seixas’s textbook had the advantage over Stuart’s in its utility for beginning students. Its preface stated that the book was intended “to give an easy and rapid insight into the general formation of the language,” enabling students “in a short time and with little trouble, to read [Hebrew] with much pleasure and satisfaction.”<sup>103</sup>



HEBREW ALPHABET.	
LIST OF THE LETTERS AND VOWELS.	
1	א (aleph) not sounded; if it have a vowel, sound the vowel.
2	ב beth
3	ג gimel
4	ד dalet
5	ה he
6	ו vau
7	ז zayin
8	ח heth
9	ט tet
10	י yod
11	כ kaf
12	ל lamed
13	מ mem
14	נ nun
15	ס samekh
16	ע ayin
17	פ pe
18	צ tsay
19	ק kaph
20	ר resh
21	ס samekh
22	ט tet
23	י yod
24	כ kaf
25	ל lamed
26	מ mem
27	נ nun
28	ס samekh
29	ע ayin
30	פ pe
31	צ tsay
32	ק kaph
33	ר resh
34	ש shin
35	ט tet
36	י yod
37	כ kaf
38	ל lamed
39	מ mem
40	נ nun
41	ס samekh
42	ע ayin
43	פ pe
44	צ tsay
45	ק kaph
46	ר resh
47	ש shin
48	ט tet
49	י yod
50	כ kaf
51	ל lamed
52	מ mem
53	נ nun
54	ס samekh
55	ע ayin
56	פ pe
57	צ tsay
58	ק kaph
59	ר resh
60	ש shin
61	ט tet
62	י yod
63	כ kaf
64	ל lamed
65	מ mem
66	נ nun
67	ס samekh
68	ע ayin
69	פ pe
70	צ tsay
71	ק kaph
72	ר resh
73	ש shin
74	ט tet
75	י yod
76	כ kaf
77	ל lamed
78	מ mem
79	נ nun
80	ס samekh
81	ע ayin
82	פ pe
83	צ tsay
84	ק kaph
85	ר resh
86	ש shin
87	ט tet
88	י yod
89	כ kaf
90	ל lamed
91	מ mem
92	נ nun
93	ס samekh
94	ע ayin
95	פ pe
96	צ tsay
97	ק kaph
98	ר resh
99	ש shin
100	ט tet
101	י yod
102	כ kaf
103	ל lamed
104	מ mem
105	נ nun
106	ס samekh
107	ע ayin
108	פ pe
109	צ tsay
110	ק kaph
111	ר resh
112	ש shin
113	ט tet
114	י yod
115	כ kaf
116	ל lamed
117	מ mem
118	נ nun
119	ס samekh
120	ע ayin
121	פ pe
122	צ tsay
123	ק kaph
124	ר resh
125	ש shin
126	ט tet
127	י yod
128	כ kaf
129	ל lamed
130	מ mem
131	נ nun
132	ס samekh
133	ע ayin
134	פ pe
135	צ tsay
136	ק kaph
137	ר resh
138	ש shin
139	ט tet
140	י yod
141	כ kaf
142	ל lamed
143	מ mem
144	נ nun
145	ס samekh
146	ע ayin
147	פ pe
148	צ tsay
149	ק kaph
150	ר resh
151	ש shin
152	ט tet
153	י yod
154	כ kaf
155	ל lamed
156	מ mem
157	נ nun
158	ס samekh
159	ע ayin
160	פ pe
161	צ tsay
162	ק kaph
163	ר resh
164	ש shin
165	ט tet
166	י yod
167	כ kaf
168	ל lamed
169	מ mem
170	נ nun
171	ס samekh
172	ע ayin
173	פ pe
174	צ tsay
175	ק kaph
176	ר resh
177	ש shin
178	ט tet
179	י yod
180	כ kaf
181	ל lamed
182	מ mem
183	נ nun
184	ס samekh
185	ע ayin
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197	ס samekh
198	ע ayin
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204	ט tet
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207	ל lamed
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210	ס samekh
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214	ק kaph
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251	פ pe
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253	ק kaph
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256	ט tet
257	י yod
258	כ kaf
259	ל lamed
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280	ר resh
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284	כ kaf
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289	ע ayin
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293	ר resh
294	ש shin
295	ט tet
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306	ר resh
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363	ל lamed
364	מ mem
365	נ nun
366	ס samekh
367	ע ayin
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369	צ tsay
370	ק kaph
371	ר resh
372	ש shin
373	ט tet
374	י yod
375	כ kaf
376	ל lamed
377	מ mem
378	נ nun
379	ס samekh
380	ע ayin
381	פ pe
382	צ tsay
383	ק kaph
384	ר resh
385	ש shin
386	ט tet
387	י yod
388	כ kaf
389	ל lamed
390	מ mem
391	נ nun
392	ס samekh
393	ע ayin
394	פ pe
395	צ tsay
396	ק kaph
397	ר resh
398	ש shin
399	ט tet
400	י yod

The front cover (left) and Sephardic pronunciation guide of the 1834 revised edition of Joshua Seixas's, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (right), studied by Joseph Smith and his associates in Kirtland. Photos taken by permission of the LDS Church History Library.

The textbook's peculiarity, however, was its presentation of ancient Hebrew with a Sephardic transliteration system which differed from the standard pronunciation of biblical Hebrew then crystallizing in European universities. As seen in Seixas's pronunciation guide, his transliterations were most distinct in the vowels and gutturals, using "au" to represent a *qametz*, "oo" to represent a *sureq*, "ee" to represent a *hireq* and a *yod*, "gn" to represent an *ayin* at the beginning of a word, and "ng" to represent an *ayin* at the end of a word.<sup>104</sup> This system would not necessarily have lessened the quality of Hebrew learned by the Mormons in Kirtland, but the Sephardic transliterations would leave their distinct mark on Joseph Smith's subsequent use of the language (see below).

The contents of Seixas's textbook, student journal entries, and other extant documents allow for a modest reconstruction of how Joseph and his associates learned Hebrew throughout the seven week

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course.<sup>105</sup> During the first week of the course, students learned the Hebrew alphabet, spelling, pronunciation, Seixas’s transliteration system, and practiced a vocalized reading of Psalm 29.<sup>106</sup> Grammar lessons began in the second week, with large units focusing on Hebrew prefixes, nouns, pronouns, verbs, participles, other grammatical principles, and vocabulary lists which were studied and reviewed throughout subsequent weeks.<sup>107</sup> In class, students were apparently instructed to copy some of Seixas’s lecture notes into their textbooks, as indicated by consistent annotations in surviving copies.<sup>108</sup> In some instances, Seixas instructed students who were using the 1833 edition of his textbook to write corrections and revisions in the margins, making their books consistent with his 1834 edition.<sup>109</sup>

For homework assignments, students were required to fill out worksheets relating to the lessons being taught in class. The content of the worksheets was taken directly from the Church’s 1836 abbreviated supplement of Seixas’s grammar book, only without the Hebrew letters and words. This allowed students to reproduce on the worksheets the Hebrew forms they were learning from Seixas’s lectures and textbook. Worksheets contained grammatical exercises in which students practiced copying prefixes, nouns, noun terminations, possessive pronouns, verb conjugations, participles, weak verbs, and the numerical system.<sup>110</sup> The annotations found in surviving copies of the textbook and these worksheet exercises show that students in the class learned aspects of the language that went well beyond the basics.<sup>111</sup>

Following this intensive introduction to grammar, Seixas had his class begin translating portions of the Hebrew Bible in the third week of class.<sup>112</sup> The first portions were passages from Genesis 1 (the Creation) and 8 (the Flood), along with short sentences Seixas culled from throughout the Bible.<sup>113</sup> Translation and the reviewing of previous grammar lessons continued through the fourth week of class, possibly using Genesis 3 (the Fall of Adam and Eve) as the text.<sup>114</sup> Translations





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In addition to attending his regular classes, Joseph asked Seixas for private study sessions,<sup>124</sup> worked ahead on translation assignments,<sup>125</sup> reviewed lessons on Sundays,<sup>126</sup> and studied when he was sick.<sup>127</sup> After his own “first class” had finished its course, Joseph attended less advanced classes as they required an additional two weeks to complete their instruction.<sup>128</sup> In light of Joseph’s ecclesiastical responsibilities (including finishing and dedicating the temple), his ongoing work with the Egyptian project, his increasing visionary experiences, and his tireless efforts to learn Hebrew, one teacher at the Kirtland school described Joseph as “the calf that sucked three cows.”<sup>129</sup> Joshua Seixas—who graciously tolerated Joseph’s persistent inquiries<sup>130</sup>—was impressed with Joseph’s “industry” and stated that he had been “indefatigable in acquiring the principles of the sacred language of the Old Testament Scriptures in their original tongue.”<sup>131</sup>

By late March 1836, just days after the dedication of the temple, Seixas’s seven week course came to an end.<sup>132</sup> Joseph asked Seixas to extend his employment into the summer to accommodate additional classes; Seixas apparently agreed and moved his family to Kirtland for the new arrangement.<sup>133</sup> After the school’s initial spring session, however, it is not clear how long Seixas remained in Kirtland. There is evidence that he taught a second series of classes through August (which Joseph Smith encouraged and may have occasionally attended), but by the fall of 1836 there is no more mention of Seixas in Mormon records.<sup>134</sup> Although many of the Kirtland students had moved on to the study of Greek and Latin,<sup>135</sup> additional Hebrew courses were offered through the summer of 1837, but it is not clear who instructed these later classes.<sup>136</sup>

Because there is no record of Joseph Smith actually using Hebrew in his writings or teachings in early 1836, it is difficult to assess his academic performance in the Kirtland Hebrew class. Upon completion of the initial seven-week course, Seixas issued two certificates of Hebrew proficiency to Mormon leaders, one to Joseph and one to

Orson Pratt. It is sometimes claimed that Joseph was the best student of the class,<sup>137</sup> but of the two, Orson Pratt's certificate qualified him to teach the language while Joseph Smith's indicated that "by prosecuting the study he will be able to *become* a proficient in Hebrew."<sup>138</sup> Even if Joseph was not as skilled in the language as Orson Pratt, Seixas wrote that he had "so far accomplished a knowledge of it, that he is able to translate to my entire satisfaction."<sup>139</sup> Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that Joseph was a diligent student, that he successfully completed the intensive introductory course (the equivalent to one or two semesters of first-year biblical Hebrew at a contemporary Protestant seminary), and that by April 1836, he was able to translate chapters of the Bible.

Unfortunately, Joseph was never able to pursue his studies to the extent that his teacher had hoped, nor did ever become the Hebrew scholar he once hoped he would be. From 1837 to 1839, Joseph's studies were interrupted with internal apostasy in Kirtland, the flight from Ohio, the difficulties of Missouri, and the establishment of the new Mormon settlement in Illinois. During these years, Joseph does not show much interaction with Hebrew in his writings, and we can assume that he experienced a certain amount of linguistic atrophy in his time away from the language. Nevertheless, with a revival of Hebrew interest among the Mormons during the relative peace of the Nauvoo period, Joseph drew upon his earlier Hebrew studies in a way that would have a profound impact on his later translation projects, theological innovations, and prophetic development.

### **The Impact of the Kirtland Hebrew School**

The short-term results of the Kirtland Hebrew school might be difficult to assess, but the subsequent impact on Joseph Smith and the Mormon community was significant. Several of the students in Seixas's class—including Orson Pratt, Orson Hyde, and W. W. Phelps—would subsequently use Hebrew terms, concepts,

or translations in their writings and teachings.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, inspired by the legacy of the Kirtland school, the study of Hebrew became a minor cultural touchstone among Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo, Illinois (1839–46), with a revival in Hebrew interest resulting in small study sessions among Church leaders,<sup>141</sup> the use of transliterated Hebrew and new translations of Old Testament passages in Church newspapers,<sup>142</sup> Hebrew books being made available in public libraries,<sup>143</sup> and possibly the teaching of Hebrew at the University of Nauvoo.<sup>144</sup> It was during this revival that Joseph Smith revisited Hebrew and began using it in his efforts to recover ancient texts, doctrines, and practices.

The limited space that remains will not allow for a full discussion on Joseph’s use of Hebrew in Nauvoo nor an assessment of his applications of the language during that period. However, it is necessary to make a few concluding remarks regarding the long-term impact of the Kirtland Hebrew class on Joseph’s prophetic development. Previously in this paper I considered the various motivations for Joseph to learn Hebrew in late 1835 and early 1836, including his desire to discover the pristine teachings of the biblical text, to elucidate the meaning of the Egyptian papyri, and to forge a bond of fellowship between his community and the sacred past. Although Joseph was not able to accomplish all of these goals immediately, in Nauvoo he would fulfill many of these desires in interesting and unique ways.

For example, in 1841 Joseph began using words and short phrases from the Hebrew Bible in his public sermons as sources of inspiration and support for his more innovative doctrines. Like many of his Protestant contemporaries, Joseph saw Hebrew as a valuable resource in his scriptural explications, and he increasingly used it in this way in the final years and months of his life.<sup>145</sup> In some instances, Joseph used traditional lexical definitions of Hebrew words to support his teachings, while in others he showed a large degree of

linguistic creativity as he focused on obscure meanings, unconventional interpretations, or unattested translations of Hebrew words. These uses of the language can be seen in Joseph's later sermons on creation out of pre-existing materials<sup>146</sup> and the nature of the spirit world.<sup>147</sup> Joseph also went beyond his contemporaries by drawing out deeper (and he felt more pristine) meanings from Hebrew phraseology and developing intricate theology from his exegesis. For example, during the last few months of his life, Joseph creatively used the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 to inspire and buttress his evolving teachings on the plurality of gods and the existence of a premortal divine council.<sup>148</sup>

Joseph also used his Hebrew knowledge to assist in his translation of the Egyptian papyri, as he had hoped from the beginning. Although almost two chapters of the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1:1–2:18) were translated by the fall of 1835 (before he had studied Hebrew), other portions of that book were not completed until the spring of 1842 (e.g., Abraham 3–5; Facsimile no. 2);<sup>149</sup> in these latter portions, Joseph incorporated Hebrew words to elucidate some of its “Egyptian” terminology, particularly in regard to Abrahamic astronomy. These include the words *raukeyyang* (“expanse or firmament”),<sup>150</sup> *shaumahyeem* (“heavens”),<sup>151</sup> *kokaubeam* (“stars”),<sup>152</sup> and *gnolaum* (“eternity”).<sup>153</sup> Each of these terms is standard Hebrew vocabulary that Joseph learned from his studies and spelled using Seixas's method of pronunciation. Joseph's Hebrew studies also seem to have influenced his translation of the Abrahamic creation account (Abraham 4–5), again by highlighting the plurality of gods and the eternal nature of matter.<sup>154</sup>

Finally, in Nauvoo, Joseph used Hebrew as a way to bind his community in fellowship with the ancient Saints. This effort had already begun in Kirtland, as the Mormons' Hebrew studies in the spring of 1836 helped facilitate their visionary experiences, accompanied their performance of biblical anointing rituals, and prepared them

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for the Kirtland Temple dedication. In *Nauvoo*—a city named with the Hebrew word for “beautiful place”<sup>155</sup>—Joseph assigned Hebrew code names to individuals in letters of recommendation,<sup>156</sup> newspaper editorials,<sup>157</sup> and printed revelations.<sup>158</sup> By naming Church headquarters and leaders with Hebrew terms, Joseph showed his ongoing desire to affiliate his community with the sacred past. Furthermore, in 1842 Joseph incorporated Hebrew into the rituals of his “Quorum of the Anointed,” a select group of associates Joseph initiated into ceremonies that were the precursor to the Nauvoo temple endowment. By using Hebrew names (such as Joseph’s own, *Baurak Ale*) for members of the quorum, Hebrew concepts (such as the plurality of gods) for the quorum’s ritual drama, and transliterated Hebrew for the quorum’s prayer liturgies, Joseph sought to revive the “Ancient order of things for the first time in these last days.”<sup>159</sup>

The first session of the Kirtland Hebrew school was relatively brief, lasting just over two months, but this exposure to the language came to have a significant impact on Joseph Smith’s prophetic development and the evolution of Mormon theology. In some ways, Joseph and the Latter-day Saints resembled their Protestant contemporaries who sought to uncover the pristine teachings of the biblical text through the study of its original languages. In other ways, however, Joseph’s unique and creative use of Hebrew would inspire and shape his later scripture translations, doctrinal teachings, and temple rituals, all of which continue to inspire modern Mormonism. From Joseph’s perspective, his academic study of Hebrew in Kirtland supplemented his spiritual gifts in a way that allowed him to magnify his office and fulfill his title of “seer, translator, and prophet.”

## Notes

1. See Samuel Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt: Babel, Hieroglyphs, and the Pure Language of Eden,” *Church History* 78, no. 1 (March 2009): 26–65;

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- Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Academic Study of Antiquity in Antebellum America” (the opening chapter in this volume).
2. “Manuscript History of the Church” (May 4, 1842), cited in Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 4–5; cf. Joseph Smith, comp., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 5:1–2.
  3. D. Kelly Ogden, “The Kirtland Hebrew School (1835–36),” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*, ed. Milton V. Backman Jr. (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1990), 63–87, 155–66.
  4. Leroi C. Snow, “Who Was Professor Joshua Seixas?,” *Improvement Era*, February 1936, 67–71.
  5. See Michael T. Walton, “Professor Seixas, the Hebrew Bible, and the Book of Abraham,” *Sunstone* 6, no. 2 (March/April 1981): 41–43; Kevin L. Barney, “Joseph Smith’s Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 103–35, and idem., “Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith’s Understanding of Genesis 1:1,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 107–24.
  6. Louis Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 41–55.
  7. See Shalom Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 25–26.
  8. For example, William Bradford and William Brewster—both political and religious leaders of the Plymouth colony—studied Hebrew “that most ancient language, and holy tongue” on a daily basis (Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 7–9).
  9. Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 9–14, 29–30, 52–53, 60, 70. Yale’s official seal included the Hebrew words אורים ותמים (*Urim and Thummim*), which was translated into Latin as *Lux et Veritas* (“Light and Truth”). Dartmouth’s

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- seal included the Hebrew phrase אֵל שַׁדַּי (*El Shaddai*; “God Almighty”), and Columbia’s seal was crowned with the name of God (יהוה; *YHWH*).
10. For a popular example of this theory from the early nineteenth century, see Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (1823); see Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 1–2, 15–23, 86–87.
  11. Jonathan Edwards seems to have been particularly influenced in his understanding of *prisca theologia* (the “ancient theology” from which all truth originally sprang) by Theophilus Gale’s two volume work, *The Court of the Gentiles* (1669–82), which argued that all ancient learning is derived from Hebrew language and scripture. Within this worldview, Hebrew represented the perfect language from which humanity fell at Babel; see Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 23–25, 80–82.
  12. For example, one of Stuart’s students, Edward Robinson, became one of the first American explorers of Palestine and biblical exegetes in the nineteenth century; see Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 116, 144–47.
  13. As early as July 1828, Joseph’s revelations claimed that God had given him “sight and power to translate” (D&C 3:12; cf. D&C 5:4 [March 1829], 20:8 and 1:29 [April 1830]).
  14. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student,” 43.
  15. For example, Oliver Cowdery’s interest in supernatural gifts of translation and the decipherment of ancient languages can be seen in Doctrine and Covenants 6:25, 28; 8:11; and 9:10 (April 1829).
  16. The book’s final author (Moroni) states: “We have written this record . . . in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian. . . [but] if our plates were sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:33); cf. 1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:4.
  17. Naturally, Latter-day Saints were among the most enthusiastic in making associations between the Book of Mormon and reports of “Hebrew” Indian artifacts. For example, “The Mormons,” *Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1842, 81 discussed claims made in Josiah Priest’s *American Antiquities*, 4th ed. (1834) that

- parchments were passed down among Indian tribes that allegedly contained Hebrew writing. For similar reports of Hebrew written on Indian artifacts, see “Correspondence,” *Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1843, 231; Parley P. Pratt, *Voice of Warning* (1846), 78–87; *Visions of Joseph the Seer; Discoveries of Ancient American Records and Relics; with the statements of Dr. Lederer (Converted Jew) and Others* (Lamoni, IA: Board of Publication of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1881), 33–45. In April 1870, Orson Pratt reported that he had seen Hebrew writing (the name of Moses and the Ten Commandments) inscribed on a stone (later discovered to be a forgery) found in a burial mound near Neward, Ohio; see *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 13:130–31; 14:297–98; Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School,” 80–81.
18. For the debate over the existence of Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon, see John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 77–91; Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002): 155–89; Thomas J. Finley, “Does the Book of Mormon Reflect an Ancient Near Eastern Background?,” in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owens (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 337–66.
  19. See W. W. Phelps, “The Book of Mormon,” *Evening and Morning Star*, December 1832, 58–59.
  20. Around 1835—probably a few months before he had actually studied Hebrew—Oliver Cowdery wrote that the original Hebrew behind Jacob 5:13 (“for it grieveth me that I should lose this tree & the fruit thereof”) was “fin Zemin ezmon E. Zer Oms. Ifs veris exzer ens. vonis vinesis,” and that the Hebrew behind Jacob 7:27 (“brethren I bid you adieu”) was “ifs E. Zamtri.” Obviously, these transliterated texts do not contain any recognizable Hebrew words and do not represent Hebrew in any traditional sense. However, they



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- show that at least one individual close to the translation project associated the plates with Hebrew, or perhaps the Hebrew-Egyptian amalgamation described in the Book of Mormon. For the two documents containing Cowdery’s reverse translation efforts, see Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 361–63.
21. See “Communications,” *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1841, 545. Since Anthon had little or no knowledge of Hebrew when he made this statement, the historical value of his claim is extremely limited.
  22. In 1842—six years after he studied Hebrew—Joseph stated that the characters on the plates ran in the same direction as Hebrew writing (i.e., from right to left), but this falls short of claiming that the text was written in Hebrew (*Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1842, 943). In addition, the creative etymology of “Mormon” given in May 1843—often attributed to Joseph Smith but likely written by W. W. Phelps—includes a statement that the plates were written in a currently unknown language, and thus required divine assistance to interpret. *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, 194.
  23. See Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, and Robin Scott Jenson, “The ‘Characters’ Document: New Light on an Early Transcription of the Book of Mormon Characters,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 131–52.
  24. For example, Joseph’s interpretation of the Hebrew word Zion focused more on ideas of unity, holiness, and the New Jerusalem than its traditional sense of “a fortress or stronghold” (see Moses 7:18–19, 62). Similarly, some of Joseph’s revelations in 1832–33 used the Hebrew phrase “Lord of Sabaoth” (literally translated as “Lord of armies”) as a divine title. While some appearances of this phrase in Joseph’s revelations could imply its traditional associations with warfare (e.g., D&C 87:7; 88:2; 98:2), one revelation offered an unprecedented interpretation of “Lord of Sabaoth” as being, “by interpretation, the creator of the first day, the beginning and the end” (D&C 95:7).

25. For example, W. W. Phelps—who was celebrated by the early Saints as an amateur linguist—interpreted the *Teraphim* (“idols”) of the Bible’s patriarchal narratives as “the Urim and Thummim,” thus attempting to use Hebrew to demonstrate that Jacob possessed “sacred spectacles” (“Hosea Chapter iii,” *Evening and Morning Star*, July 1832, 14; “The Book of Mormon,” *Evening and Morning Star*, December 1832, 58). Phelps also discussed Hebrew names and, as editor of the *Evening and Morning Star*, occasionally published editorials from eastern newspapers that contained discussions of Hebrew words; see “The Ten Tribes,” *Evening and Morning Star*, September 1832, 34 and “The Rabbi from the Holy City,” *Evening and Morning Star*, February 1833, 67–68. It is unclear where Phelps acquired his own very limited knowledge of Hebrew words by this time. For a consideration of Phelps’s linguistic interests, see Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 26–62, esp. 31–32.
26. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 164 (January 19, 1836). Elsewhere Joseph stated, “my soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original.” *JSP*, J1:186 (February 17, 1836) and prayed, “may the Lord help us to obtain this language that we may read the scriptures in the language in which they were givn.” *JSP*, J1:180 (February 4, 1836).
27. This was written in the textbook’s preface by Oliver Cowdery; *Supplement to J. Seixas’ Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Kirtland, Ohio, Theological Institution* (New York: West & Trow, 1836), 8.
28. D&C 88:77–80, 118–19 (December 27, 1832); D&C 90:14–15 (March 8, 1833); D&C 93:53 (May 6, 1833).
29. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student,” 42, suggests that these revelations instilled within Joseph a personal ideal of intellectualism and prompted the Mormon community to allow “reason and learning” a place as “adjuncts” to supernatural revelation. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The*

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- Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 168–69, points to Joseph’s early emphasis on his spiritual gifts as compensation for his lack of learning, but suggests that his admiration for knowledge and criticisms of his writings led him to make academic learning a Mormon virtue at this time.
30. For the history and development of the Kirtland school system, see Milton V. Backman, Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 264–70; Orlen Curtis Peterson, “A History of the Schools and Educational Programs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ohio and Missouri, 1831–1839” (master’s thesis; Brigham Young University, 1972); Bruce Kelly Satterfield, “The History of Adult Education in Kirtland, Ohio, 1833–1837” (PhD diss., University of Idaho, 2002).
  31. Technically, the phrase “school of the prophets” does not appear in the Elijah narrative in 2 Kings (2 Kings 2:7 refers to “fifty men of the sons of the prophets”). Nevertheless, clergy before and during the time of Joseph Smith frequently associated this phrase with Elijah; see note 32.
  32. Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 9–14, 29–30, 52–53, 60, 70.
  33. Later recollections noted that the purpose of the Kirtland Elder’s school was to prepare Church missionaries to have more influence over the learned men of the world and “to meet them on their own ground.” See “Minutes Regarding School of the Prophets” (LDS Church Historian’s Office; January 14, 1871), cited in Peterson, “History of the Schools,” 50–51.
  34. See John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 43.
  35. See note 16.
  36. See the comments Joseph made to W. W. Phelps (letter, July 20, 1835; cited in Brown, “Translator and Ghostwriter,” 35) and to Warren Parrish (*JSP*, J1:99–100 [Nov. 14, 1835]). Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt,” 33–35, notes that in Mormon scripture, heroes such as Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Abraham are presented as possessing linguistic ties to the ancients, possibly prompting Joseph and his followers to attain this ideal for themselves.

37. *Messenger and Advocate*, December 1835, 234. This statement by Cowdery is often inaccurately attributed to Joseph Smith (e.g., Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School,” 65). In evaluating Cowdery’s description of the papyri, it is important to note that Cowdery did not know Hebrew at the time he made this claim; Cowdery acknowledged that he was “unacquainted” with Hebrew before he began his studies in January 1836 (see *Messenger and Advocate*, January 1836, 252), several weeks after he wrote his description of the papyri. His earlier attempt to translate the Book of Mormon into “Hebrew” (see note 20) demonstrates his lack of Hebrew knowledge through 1835, but it also shows that he associated “reformed Egyptian” with “Hebrew.” Therefore, he may have thought that the study of Hebrew could assist in the translation of the papyri.
38. The “Egyptian Alphabet” in the handwriting of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (ca. July–October 1835) defines some of the Egyptian characters by using possible variations of three Hebrew letters: *Aleph*, translated in the “second part first degree” as “in the beginning with God, the son, or first born”; *Beth*, translated in the “first degree Second part” as “mans first residence fruitful garden A great valy a place of hapiness/times or residence”; and *Gahmel* (included under “first degree Second part” but not translated). See Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt,” 55n126, and Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2010), 228–29.
39. According to Charlotte Haven, Lucy Mack Smith claimed in 1843 that the papyri were “written in Hebrew and Sanscrit”; cited in Hauglid, *Textual History*, 222.
40. Brown, “Translator and Ghostwriter,” 29–30.
41. For example, W. W. Phelps, “Sacred Poetry,” *Evening and Morning Star*, November 1832, 45, claimed that Hebrew “was nearer the pure language, with which Adam gave names, than any other since used by man.” This placed him alongside other restorationists (such as Alexander Campbell) who also believed that Hebrew was at least partially spared the curse of Babel; see Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt,” 36–39, and Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 190.

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42. Oliver Cowdery, sketchbook (written during the winter of 1836), describes the washing and anointing rituals performed by Church leaders in the months they were studying Hebrew. He also records that they associated these rituals with the priests of the Old Testament: “While performing this washing unto the Lord, our minds were filled with many reflections upon the propriety of the same, and how the priests anciently used to wash always before ministering before the Lord” (Post Script to January 16, 1836); “annointed with the same kind of oil and in the man[ner] that were Moses and Aaron, and those who stood before the Lord in ancient days” (January 21, 1836). Other anointings conducted while the Hebrew school was in session (often occurring in the evenings following class) can be seen in the entries for January 28, 30, and February 6. For a full transcription of the sketchbook, see Leonard J. Arrington, “Oliver Cowdery’s Kirtland, Ohio, ‘Sketch Book,’” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (1972): 410–26.
43. On January 21, 1836, Joseph Smith recorded a washing and anointing session which was held after Hebrew class. During this meeting, the blessings of Moses were pronounced upon Joseph and he received a vision of Adam, Abraham, Michael, and others (*JSP*, J1:166–71). On April 3, 1836 (shortly after the end of Hebrew classes and the dedication of the temple), Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery recorded the appearance of Old Testament figures such as Moses and Elijah to bestow “Keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the Earth and the leading of the ten tribes from the Land of the North” (*JSP*, J1:219–22; D&C 110).
44. *JSP*, J1:84 and Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 112 (November 3, 1835).
45. See statements made by Wilford Woodruff and Parley P. Pratt in Charles Edward Haggerty, “A Study of the Book of Abraham” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1946), 39.

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46. Oliver Cowdery, sketchbook (January 22 and February 6, 1836); *JSP*, J1:215 (March 30, 1836).
47. After Joseph began his formal studies of Hebrew, one critic wryly noted Joseph's new approach to languages: "Whether the [seer] stones had become rusty, or whether the gift of the Spirit had withdrawn, and left them to the vulgar necessity of grammars and lexicons, or, whether they wished an opportunity to compare the inspired with the ordinary mode of acquiring an unknown tongue, is not yet fully revealed" in J. B. Turner, *Mormonism in All Ages: or the Rise, Progress, and Causes of Mormonism* (New York: Platt & Peters, 1842), 40. Similarly, Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 169, noted that Church leaders were "untroubled by the paradox that they should struggle with Hebrew grammar on weekdays and speak fluently in tongues on Sunday."
48. The Oliver Cowdery Letter Book, 57 (LDS Church Archives), contains a letter written by Cowdery to Parker on October 28, 1835. This letter refers to a letter written by Parker on October 16, which responded to Cowdery's original invitation earlier that month. Cowdery's original invitation and Parker's response are no longer extant. Parker likely came to the Mormons' attention through his cousin, Brigham Young.
49. In the October 28 letter, Cowdery asks Parker to suggest a more "accomplished" teacher; see Odgen, "Kirtland Hebrew School," 66, and Peterson, "A History of the Schools," 52.
50. *JSP*, J1:82; *JSP*, H1:110 (November 2, 1835). Biographical information about Daniel Peixotto can be found in Burton E. Levinson, *The Western Reserve: Its Hebrew Influence* (Typescript, American Jewish Archives: Cincinnati, OH), 73–74, 129–30.
51. Peixotto's letter to Warren Parrish on January 5, 1836 (*JSP*, J1:161–64; *JSP*, H1:184–85) and Oliver Cowdery's letter to J. M. Henderson on November 2, 1835 (Oliver Cowdery Letter Book, 62), suggest that Peixotto and Cowdery initially coordinated efforts to acquire the necessary textbooks for the class.
52. *JSP*, J1:82; *JSP*, H1:110 (November 2, 1835). Numerous scholars have assumed that the encounter with Peixotto was Joseph's main motivation for learning Hebrew; see Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student," 44, and Donna Hill, *Joseph*

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*Smith: The First Mormon* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 190–91. However, it is clear from the above discussion that Mormon leaders had decided to study Hebrew at least a month before they met Peixotto. Therefore, they likely attended Peixotto’s lecture to see if he would be a suitable teacher. Joseph’s decision to send Oliver Cowdery to purchase the Hebrew books may have been influenced by an earlier revelation which designated Cowdery as responsible for obtaining resources for Church schools (D&C 55:4, June 1831).

53. For the visit of “Joshua the Jewish Minister”/Robert Matthias to Kirtland, see *JSP*, J1:86–95; *JSP*, H1:115–20 (November 9–11, 1835) and Theodore Schroeder, “Matthias the Prophet (1788–1837),” *Journal of Religious Psychology* 6 (January 1913): 59–65.
54. In *Messenger and Advocate*, January 1836, 252–53, Cowdery reports on his visit to New York City, where he met an elderly Jewish scholar. In addition to discussing resources for the study of Hebrew, Cowdery and the Jewish scholar had a lengthy discussion on the nature of the Messiah. This encounter confirmed to Cowdery the importance of reading the Old Testament in its original language; see Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School,” 66. Oliver also mentions his visit with the elderly Jewish scholar in letters to his brother Warren, dated November 22 and December 14, 1835 (Oliver Cowdery Letter Book, 63, 66).
55. *JSP*, J1:107; *JSP*, H1:131(November 20, 1835).
56. See Cowdery’s correspondence with Parker and Peixotto, as well as the account of his conversation with the Jewish scholar in New York in notes 48–49 and 51–52.
57. See *JSP*, J1:107n159. Augustus Hahn, ed., *Biblia Hebraica*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Caroli Tauchnitz, 1833). Joseph Smith’s copy of this edition is housed at the Community of Christ Library-Archives. Its front page contains an inscription, “Joseph Smith Jr.’s Book,” and has an “FWC” endorsement inside the front cover, indicating that it was the property of F. G. Williams & Co. (the organization responsible for purchasing school materials). An inscription “D. H. Smith” inside the book’s back cover indicates that it eventually came into the possession of Joseph’s youngest son, David Hyrum. There are also three copies of the 1834 edition at the LDS Church History Library, belonging

- to Hyrum Smith, Heber C. Kimball, and John Taylor. The L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University possesses an 1834 edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* owned by Horace Kimball Whitney (possibly the youngest student in the Kirtland Hebrew School) and a possible second copy of an unidentified edition owned by Hyrum Smith.
58. Moses Stuart, *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language*, 5th ed. (Andover, MA: Gould and Newman, 1835). Joseph Smith's copy of this edition (signed, "Joseph Smith Jr.'s Book") is housed in the Community of Christ Library-Archives, but is currently on display at the Kirtland Temple Visitors' Center. The Community of Christ Library-Archives also possesses an unsigned 1835 edition with the "FWC" imprint on the last page. An unsigned copy of the same edition can be found in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections. An 1831 edition owned by John Taylor is located in the LDS Archives, but since he did not participate in the Hebrew School at Kirtland, it is not clear how or when he obtained his copy. Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 271 claims that the Kirtland school also used the 1821 edition of the Stuart grammar, but the only evidence for this seems to be the existence of one unsigned copy in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
59. Josiah W. Gibbs, *A Manual Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah Howe, 1832). There are three copies of this edition at the Community of Christ Library-Archive. All three bear the "FWC" imprint on the last page, indicating that these copies were purchased for the use of the Hebrew School in Kirtland. One is signed "D. H. Smith" on the front cover, showing that eventually this volume came into the possession of Joseph Smith's youngest son. None of these three volumes contain marginal notations, and they do not seem to have been used extensively (the pages in all three volumes were not cut properly, making half of the pages difficult to access).
60. By November 21, 1835—the day after Cowdery arrived with the Hebrew books and before the Hebrew class had begun—the Hebrew School Committee was already considering releasing Peixotto from their earlier arrangement. *JSP*, J1:107–9; *JSP*, H1:131–32. The records do not give the reason for this decision,



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- but they do show that there was another attempt at procuring Peixotto’s services the first week of January 1836. *JSP*, J1:143; *JSP*, H1:167. This second attempt failed as Peixotto was unable to keep his appointment, resulting in harsh feelings between him and the Mormon students in Kirtland. See the heated correspondence between Peixotto and Warren Parrish in *JSP*, J1:161–64; *JSP*, H1:184–85. The reason for the second episode seems to have been Peixotto’s apparent lack of commitment, but one source suggests that the Mormons were also concerned about Peixotto’s habitual drunkenness; see Shalom Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas (1802–74): Jewish Apostasy and Christian Hebraism in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *Jewish History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 78.
61. Joseph Smith’s journal entry on November 21, 1835 (*JSP*, J1:107–9; *JSP*, H1:131–32), states that the school committee planned “to send to N York for a Jew to teach us the language” in place of Peixotto. Joseph does not provide the identity of this “Jew,” but a letter from Oliver Cowdery to his brother Warren indicates that the elderly Jewish scholar Oliver met in New York was the individual they had in mind (Oliver Cowdery Letter Book, 66; December 14, 1835).
  62. See Joseph’s daily journal entries from November 21 to December 31 (*JSP*, J1:107–40; *JSP*, H1:131–63).
  63. According to his scribe, Joseph’s heart was “raised in prayer to the Lord to give him learning, especially a knowledge of languages, and endue him with qualifications, to magnify, and adore, his great and exalted name.” *JSP*, J1:135; *JSP*, H1:158–59 (December 21–22, 1835).
  64. *JSP*, J1:137; *JSP*, H1:160 (December 26, 1835).
  65. Joseph’s journal entries record that he read his Hebrew books (either alone or with associates) on November 21, 23, and 27, and December 4, 5, 7, 8, 14, 21, 22, 26, 30, and 31 (see note 62).
  66. Immediately after holding the first class, Joseph made arrangements for Orson Hyde and William McLellin to travel to Hudson, Ohio, to find a proper teacher, *JSP*, J1:143; *JSP*, H1:167 (January 4, 1836).
  67. Stuart intended his textbook to be a resource for advanced students. In its preface, Stuart decries attempts to abridge or simplify explanations of Hebrew:

“Any Grammar that professes to do so, must either be obscure or leave many phenomena of the language untouched. . . . Those who wish a ‘royal road’ to the Hebrew, may publish such grammars or study them, if they are content to acquire the name of Hebrew scholars without the reality. . . . ‘Drink deep, or taste not,’ is [my] most serious advice to all theological students” (Stuart, *Grammar* [1835], iv). One reviewer in *The Christian Examiner* 15 (September 1833): 66 criticized Stuart’s textbook as being too detailed, too technical, and “overloaded” with unnecessary commentary, and lamented that only a Hebrew scholar could understand its contents.

68. *JSP*, J1:145; *JSP*, H1:167–68 (January 5–6, 1836). Stuart, *Grammar* (1835), 9–13, introduces the Hebrew alphabet and vowels, and explains that there are differences of opinion on the pronunciation of some of the letters. On page 16, Stuart instructs the reader to practice writing each letter, pronouncing it as part of the exercise. This was likely the section of the textbook Joseph’s class was studying when the debate broke out. The unit on vowels in Stuart’s grammar would have been very confusing without a teacher.
69. *JSP*, J1:145; *JSP*, H1:168 (January 6, 1836).
70. *JSP*, J1:164 (January 19, 1836); cf. *JSP*, J1:146, 165 and *JSP*, H1:169 (January 8 and 20, 1836).
71. *JSP*, J1:146–47, 171–72; *JSP*, H1:169–70 (January 9, 11, 22–23, 1836).
72. For a detailed study on Seixas’s family background and qualifications as a Hebrew scholar, see Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas,” 65–88; idem., *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 176–98; and Snow, “Professor Joshua Seixas,” 67–71. Seixas’s father, Rabbi Gershom Mendes Seixas, led the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue congregation of New York during the Revolution and was a member of Columbia’s board of trustees from 1787 to 1814, a position no Jew would again hold until 1978; see Greenspahn, “Judaic Studies,” 210n10.
73. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student,” 45.
74. Stuart, *Grammar* (1835), iii: “I have availed myself, in the present edition, of the corrections and of some additions, which my friend Mr. J. Seixas, in a very obliging manner, has suggested to me. . . . I return to him my most sincere thanks and acknowledgments.” See Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas,” 70–71.

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75. Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas,” 79.
76. There is evidence that Lorenzo wrote to his Mormon sister Eliza in Kirtland to inform her of Seixas’s abilities in teaching the language. Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1884), 6, records that Lorenzo came to Kirtland to take additional Hebrew classes from Seixas and ended up joining the Church. See Snow, “Professor Joshua Seixas,” 67–68, 70; Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, 270; Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas,” 77.
77. Seixas also seems to have functioned in this role for Moses Stuart and his student Edward Robinson, both of whom worked and studied not far from Kirtland; Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 183, 193.
78. *JSP*, J1:107–9; *JSP*, H1:131–32 (November 21, 1835); cf. note 61.
79. Evidence for his conversion is found in private letters to close friends. One such letter shows Seixas’s deep spirituality and commitment to Christ, even at the expense of his family: “Imitating the Lord Jesus Christ would be my dying request to my wife, my children, my parents, my sisters & brothers, my friends and to the whole world,” Joshua Seixas Letter to “My Dear Talmidah (Elizabeth)” (February 22, 1834); Seixas Family Papers, American Jewish Historical Society, New York. In another letter to Moses Stuart, Seixas wrote: “Moses was true and true is his law, And Joshua was his servant May Jesus guard them in the future world” (cited in Snow, “Professor Joshua Seixas,” 71). For a fuller consideration of this evidence, see Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas,” 65–88, esp. 74.
80. It has been suggested that Seixas’s conversion to Christianity was motivated by his need for employment with Christian seminaries which would not hire Jews for full-time faculty positions. This seems unlikely, however, since his conversion was never made public and he never benefited from it in this way (he never did receive a full time faculty appointment). Seixas’s granddaughter reported that he eventually returned to teach at New York’s *Shearith Israel* synagogue, and thus returned to Judaism in his old age. Because of the vague and conflicting evidence, Greenspahn, “Judaic Studies,” 210n12 questions the extent of Seixas’s conversion (“its sincerity and utility, not to mention its

- very existence”), as Seixas apparently hid this fact from most Christians and Jews alike.
81. Non-Mormon accounts of Seixas’s activities in Kirtland unanimously refer to him as a respectable Jewish teacher; e.g., Henry Caswall, *America and the American Church* (London: J.G.&F. Rivington, 1839), 323, and *Ohio Observer* (January 7, 1836). Christopher Crary, a resident of Kirtland in 1836, remembered Seixas as “a Jew” who was invited by Rev. Truman Coe to lecture at the local Congregational church every Sabbath during his stay in Kirtland. Seixas agreed, but only upon the condition that he not pray or take any part in the meetings beyond delivering his lectures, Christopher G. Crary, *Pioneer and Personal Reminiscences* (Marshalltown, IA: Marshall Printing Co., 1898), 33. Some accounts refer to Seixas as a “gentleman of Jewish parentage,” *The Christian Examiner* 58 (September 1833): 66; cf. Thomas B. Marsh, “History of Thomas B. Marsh,” *Millennial Star*, 1864, 391, but it is unclear if these writers were aware of a conversion or not. One of Seixas’s colleagues at the Mormon school in Kirtland (Chauncey G. Webb) simply recalled him to be “a learned Jew.” Wilhelm Wyl, *Mormon Portraits, or the Truth about Mormon Leaders from 1830 to 1886* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886), 25.
  82. Joseph’s history calls Seixas “a Jew by birth & education,” *JSP*, H1:168 (January 6, 1836). This may suggest that he knew Seixas was no longer a practicing Jew, but the statement is too vague to be certain.
  83. *JSP*, J1:178 (January 30, 1836).
  84. *JSP*, J1:179, 182–83, 187 (February 1, 8, and 19, 1836). In addition to appearing interested in Joseph’s visionary experiences, Seixas examined the papyri that prompted the “Egyptian Alphabet” project and the Book of Abraham. *JSP*, J1:178 (January 30, 1836). On one occasion, William Smith claimed that Seixas “talked against the Church” (William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* [Lamoni, IA: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883], 23), but Joseph settled the “misunderstanding,” *JSP*, J1:190 (February 26, 1836).
  85. Oliver Cowdery, sketchbook (February 15, 1836), records a lengthy prayer offered by Joseph Smith and other Church leaders in which they prayed that

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- Seixas “may be lead to embrace the gospel and believe the book of Mormon . . . that he may come forth and be baptized into the Church of Christ, that we may be benefitted with the knowledge he has of languages.” For an assessment of the religious dynamics and conversations between Smith and Seixas, see Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 88–89.
86. *JSP*, J1:145; *JSP*, H1:168 (January 6, 1836). Hours for the first class were scheduled from 10:00–11:00am and from 2:00–3:00pm, Mondays through Saturdays, with recitations fifteen minutes before class and translation sessions following each lecture. *JSP*, J1:173 (January 26, 1836). The Lorenzo Barnes Journal (February 9, 1836), 42, states that tuition for students was \$6.00 for the term. This is slightly less expensive than the \$7.50 tuition at Western Reserve College, where non-Mormon John Buss took Seixas’s course in previous weeks. John Buss, journal, January 19, 1836.
87. Joseph Bates Noble, journal, 12–13, typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
88. Elisha Hurd Groves records that he started in the English grammar class, but was “taken out by the Prophet Joseph and put into an hebrew School” (cited in Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School, 74).
89. This scenario is suggested by claims and comments in Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 271; Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School,” 74–77; *JSP*, J1:179–80 (February 1, 4, 1836); and Oliver Cowdery, sketchbook (February 1–2, 4, 1836), but the available evidence does not allow us to be precise regarding the exact number of students. In any case, after two weeks Cowdery described Seixas as being “weary with his labors in teaching the school,” Oliver Cowdery, sketchbook (February 19, 1836). William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism*, 23, greatly exaggerated when he later stated that eight hundred students were enrolled.
90. Satterfield, “History of Adult Education,” 118.
91. *JSP*, J1:187 (February 19, 1836). Other students in this group were Edward Partridge, William E. McLellin, Sylvester Smith, and Warren Parrish. Seixas requested that these students attend additional lectures in the upper room of the printing office and spend an extra hour each day reading Hebrew before class.

92. According to one biographer, Brigham Young “gamely endured” Joseph’s request that he attend the Hebrew school despite his lack of proficiency in English. It came as “no great disappointment” to Brigham when he was asked by Joseph to withdraw from the Hebrew class to focus on painting and finishing the temple. Turner, *Brigham Young*, 43, 45; History of the Church, 2:399; “History of Brigham Young,” *Deseret News*, February 10, 1858, 386. Similarly, Joseph Bates Noble confessed that he struggled with the Hebrew instruction, having not yet mastered English grammar (Joseph Bates Noble, journal, 12–13). A story is occasionally told that Heber C. Kimball had so much difficulty learning his Hebrew vowels that Joseph Smith jokingly threatened to whip him. This story actually took place in the English grammar class the previous year, and not Seixas’s Hebrew class. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 431–32. Nevertheless, the story is probably indicative of Kimball’s academic performance in the Hebrew class as well. As the school’s English teacher Chauncey Webb recalled, “[Joseph] learned rapidly, while Heber C. Kimball never came to understand the difference between noun and verb.” Wyl, *Mormon Portraits*, 25. Kimball’s unmarked Hebrew Bible is located in the Church History Library.
93. JSP, J1:140, 143, 174; JSP, H1:163, 167 (December 31, 1835; January 4, 28 1836). In describing the Kirtland Temple, non-Mormon Truman Coe, “Mormonism,” *The Cincinnati Journal and Western Luminary* (August 25, 1836): four reported that the lower story of the temple was used for worship, the middle story for the School of Prophets, and the upper story for the academic school.
94. For additional lectures and translation sessions in the printing office, see JSP, J1:187, 190–91, 195, 199 (February 19–20, 27; March 1, 8, 24, 1836). For private tutorials and discussions at Seixas’s residence, see JSP, J1:195–96 (March 7, 10–11, 1836).
95. For Lorenzo Snow’s participation in the class before he converted to Mormonism, see note 76. *Messenger and Advocate*, April 1836, 302, also reports that a non-Mormon minister from Elyria, Ohio (James E. Eells), once visited the Hebrew class in Kirtland and wrote about his experience in the “Ohio Atlas.”

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96. See James E. Eells to Brother Levitt, April 1, 1836; cited in “The Mormons,” *Patriot and Democrat* 2, no. 62 (May 7, 1836): 2, and in *Among the Mormons*, ed. William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1958), 88. “Young gentlemen and ladies” were invited to attend the school the previous year (*Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, 80, so it is reasonable to assume that a similar invitation was extended for the 1835–36 school year as well.
97. See *Pioneer Women of Faith and Fortitude* (International Society Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1998), 3:2561–62, and Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1904), 4:447.
98. Autobiography of Caroline Barnes Crosby, cited in *Women’s Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900*, ed. Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 53 and in Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 272.
99. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4:61–62. An 1834 edition of *Biblia Hebraica* inscribed, “H. K. Whitney, 22nd Jan 1836” is extant in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
100. J. Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (Andover: Flag, Gould, and Newman, 1833) and idem., *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners*, 2nd ed., enlarged and improved (Andover: Gould and Newman, 1834). Numerous copies of both editions owned by students in the Hebrew school are extant. The LDS Archives possesses two copies of the 1833 edition (including copies owned by Orson Hyde and Reynolds Cahoon) and two copies of the 1834 edition; the Community of Christ Archives possesses one copy of the 1833 (belonging to a student named “Barkdull”) and two copies of the 1834 (one owned by John Whitmer and another with the “FWC” imprint belonging to J. J. Shingler); BYU Special Collections possesses one copy of each edition. Snow, “Professor Joshua Seixas,” 70, claims that an 1834 edition used by Newel K. Whitney is in the BYU library, but I was not able to locate this copy. It is difficult to determine if one edition was more prominent than the other in the school, since both are attested in almost equal number. Joseph Smith recorded that Seixas returned to Kirtland after a weekend trip with “a few more bibles and one grammar of his 2d edition.” *JSP*, J1:190–91 (February

- 29, 1836). This might mean that the classes were only using the 1833 edition until then, but the evidence is inconclusive.
101. *Supplement to J. Seixas' Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Kirtland, Ohio, Theological Institution* (New York: West & Trow, 1836). The book's preface (pp. 7–8) written by Oliver Cowdery indicates that Seixas oversaw the abbreviated lesson material for this supplement. The preface also implies that the supplement was published in response to the limited number of books at the school. For example, Genesis 1 was reproduced in the supplement so “that young students may the better preserve their Bibles” from being torn up for distribution. Cf. JSP, J1:180 (February 4, 1836). It seems that the Saints chose to publish this supplement in New York since the publishers “West & Trow” were among the few to possess the type necessary to print Hebrew characters; see J. C. Derby, *Fifty Years among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York: Carleton & Co., 1884), 658–59 and Satterfield, “History of Adult Education,” 117.
102. Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), iv.
103. Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), iii. The review of Seixas's grammar in *The Christian Examiner* 15 (September 1833): 67, celebrated its accessibility compared to the more technical textbook of Moses Stuart.
104. Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), 5–6.
105. Daily journal entries describing the class were written by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. John Buss—a freshman student of Seixas at Western Reserve College from December 1835 to January 1836 (i.e., the class taught by Seixas immediately before he came to Kirtland)—kept a similar journal (available in the Oberlin College Library) that sheds further light on how Seixas taught his classes.
106. John Buss, journal (December 8, 1835), states that in the first week “we commenced . . . by spelling in the Hebrew Bible.” Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), 5–20, contains the spelling exercises conducted by the class, including a vocalized reading of Psalm 29 on pages 10–18.
107. John Buss, journal (December 16, 1835), states that in the second week, “For the first time had a lesson in the grammar, that is Hebrew.” Seixas, *Grammar*



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(1834), contains the units on prefixes and nouns (pp. 19–23), pronouns (pp. 24–25), and verbs and participles (pp. 25–78) that Buss and the Mormons would have studied in class.

108. For example, Orson Hyde’s copy of the grammar (1833 edition; LDS Church Archives) and Barkdull’s copy (1833 edition; Community of Christ Library-Archives) have the same lengthy handwritten note on verbs and vowels at the bottom of page 21. A fuller examination of markings and marginalia in the extant copies of the Seixas grammar would likely shed additional light on classroom dynamics.
109. For example, Barkdull’s copy of the grammar (1833 edition; Community of Christ Library-Archives) has “three verbs” handwritten into §51 (on פּ Hithpael verbs; p. 27), making it consistent with the revisions in the 1834 edition (p. 49). Similarly, the copies of the 1833 edition belonging to Barkdull, Orson Hyde, and Reynolds Cahoon (the latter two in the LDS Archives) all have “seldom two” handwritten into §10.2 (on nouns with radical roots; p. 9), making them consistent with the revisions in the 1834 edition (p. 20).
110. The Community of Christ Library-Archives possesses a completed worksheet (page 9 of the set) that was signed by Joseph Smith, folded, and placed into his 1833 *Biblia Hebraica*. While the signature and Hebrew Bible belonged to Joseph, the two English words handwritten into the worksheet exercises (“from” and “not”) appear to be in Oliver Cowdery’s handwriting. In addition, some of the exercises were filled in with pencil and others were filled in with ink, with one often correcting the other. Since it is difficult to identify the handwriting of the Hebrew characters, the precise history of this document may be impossible to determine. It may be that Joseph and Oliver shared this copy of the worksheet and both attempted its exercises, correcting each other’s work in the process. A full nine-page set of the worksheets belonging to Amasa Lyman is extant in the LDS Archives. In addition to completing the worksheet exercises, Lyman practiced his Hebrew number system on the back of the last sheet. The Community of Christ Library-Archives also possesses a Hebrew alphabet sheet (a variation of Seixas’s alphabet chart) signed by Peter Whitmer (Jr.?) which was placed inside John Whitmer’s copy of the Seixas textbook.

111. Several pages of handwritten (lecture?) notes from Joshua Seixas exist in the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society in New York. I have not yet determined the context of these notes, but they show that Seixas was very interested in linguistic parallels, anomalies, and highly technical aspects of Hebrew grammar. It is reasonable to assume that Seixas often brought these insights into his classroom lectures.
112. Seixas's methodology might have been influenced by Moses Stuart, who had recently published a chrestomathy—a printing of biblical passages in Hebrew to be read in conjunction with grammar lessons. In Stuart's 1832 edition of the chrestomathy, he acknowledged Seixas for his help preparing the book for publication; see Moses Stuart, *A Hebrew Chrestomathy* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1832), vii.
113. John Buss, journal (December 26, 1835); cf. *JSP*, J1:186 (February 15, 1836). Seixas, *Grammar* (1834): 83–100, contains exercises in translation, vocabulary lists, the Hebrew text of Genesis 1 and 8, and short sentences. The grammar supplement published by the Church also contained the Hebrew text of Genesis 1 for translation (pages 28–32). *JSP*, J1:180 (February 5, 1836) records that some copies of the Hebrew Bible had to be divided among the classes, since students outnumbered the available Bibles. Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 271, suggests that this might have resulted in different translation schedules among the various sessions.
114. John Buss, journal (January 1, 1836); cf. *JSP*, J1:186–88 (February 16–22, 1836). Horace Kimball Whitney's *Biblia Hebraica* (L. Tom Perry Special Collections) contains pencil markings next to all of the Niphal verbs in Genesis 3, and wrote down numerous possible translations of קוּל ("voice") in Genesis 3:8.
115. John Buss, journal (January 11, 1836).
116. John Buss, journal (January 14 and 19, 1836); *JSP*, J1:195 (March 8, 1836).
117. *JSP*, J1:195 (March 7–8, 1836). John Buss, journal (January 22, 1836), indicates that in the middle of the seventh week of class, Seixas was still giving review lessons on grammar ("vowel changes and so forth").
118. In 1833, Seixas published a short Aramaic grammar to accompany his Hebrew courses, J. Seixas, *A Key to the Chaldee Language* (Andover, MA: Flagg,

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- Gould, and Newman, 1833). Joseph Bates Noble recorded that in the Kirtland school he “gained considerable information on the Hebrew and Caldee language, so I could read and translate tolerably well” (journal, 12–13; emphasis added). Years later in Nauvoo, W. W. Phelps (a student in Joseph’s “first class”) used Aramaic with Seixas’s transliteration system in his newspaper editorials. *Nauvoo Neighbor*, December 6, 1843, 2; *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1844, 528–33; Brown, “Translator and the Ghostwriter,” 45, 48.
119. By the third week of class, Seixas told Joseph that the Kirtland Hebrew school was “the most forward of any class he ever taught, the same length of time.” *JSP*, J1:186 (February 15, 1836).
120. See the statements by James E. Eells in *Messenger and Advocate*, April 1836, 302, and “The Mormons,” *Patriot and Democrat 2*, no. 62 (May 7, 1836): 2.
121. Caswall, *America and the American Church*, 323.
122. On February 13, 1836, Oliver Cowdery wrote a letter on behalf of the Church’s First Presidency to Seixas’s wife, requesting that she send a certain lexicon and expressing to her the conviction that their studies under her husband’s tutelage was “through the immediate directions of God to promote the cause of truth and benefit a fallen world” (Oliver Cowdery Letter Book, pages 77–78; Huntington Library).
123. *JSP*, J1:186 (February 17, 1836); cf. *JSP*, J1:180 (February 4, 1836).
124. *JSP*, J1:195–96 (March 7, 10–11, 1836).
125. *JSP*, J1:195 (March 8, 1836).
126. *JSP*, J1:187–88, 190 (February 21 and 28, 1836).
127. *JSP*, J1:111, 116; *JSP*, H1:133–34, 139 (November 27 and December 5, 1835).
128. *JSP*, J1:198–212 (March 17–29, 1836).
129. Wyl, *Mormon Portraits*, 25. This statement was from Chauncey Webb, who taught English grammar at the school.
130. In addition to requests for additional tutelage, Joseph occasionally challenged Seixas’s interpretation of Hebrew grammar. For example, when Joseph noticed that the Hebrew word for “God” (*Elohim*) was plural in form, he asked Seixas (presumably the “learned Jew”) why “God” in Genesis 1:1 should not be translated as a plural. Although Seixas personally believed that *Elohim* in

- that case should be translated as a singular (cf. Seixas, *Grammar* [1834], 94), Joseph kept pushing the point until Seixas conceded; see Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 379 (hereafter *WJS*); *History of the Church*, 6:475 (June 16, 1844). This episode may have occurred during the third week of class, when students were translating Genesis 1 (see note 113).
131. Certificate, Joshua Seixas to Joseph Smith, Kirtland, Ohio (March 30, 1836); located in LDS Archives and cited in Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School,” 80.
132. *JSP*, J1:211–12 (March 29, 1836).
133. *JSP*, J1:196–97 (March 11–14, 1836).
134. Truman Coe, “Mormonism,” *Ohio Observer* (August 11, 1836), 1 stated in the summer of 1836 that Seixas “is now giving his second course, with about one hundred in each class” (cf. *The Cincinnati Journal and Western Luminary* [August 25, 1836]: 4). Caroline Crosby claimed that her husband “attended the Hebrew school that summer [1836]” (Autobiography; cited in Godfrey, et al, *Women’s Voices*, 53). Jonathan Crosby confirms this, reporting that after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple and April 1836 General Conference, “by request of the prophet, I attended the Hebrew School. He himself attended it and many others. This was in the summer of 1836” (Jonathan Crosby Autobiography, 14–15; typescript, Utah State Historical Society). This is contrary to the common assumption (made in Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas,” 82) that Seixas left Kirtland in the spring of 1836. In addition, there is evidence that in April and May 1836 (a few weeks after Seixas’s first session ended) Mormon leaders continued to study Hebrew and read from their Hebrew Bibles, either on their own or in small groups. For example, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal that, on May 5, 1836, he “spent the day . . . studying Hebrew <with Elder Patten>.” Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 1:69. William E. McLellin similarly noted his ongoing Hebrew studies during April and May; see Jan Shippo and John W. Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831–1836* (Provo, UT: *BYU Studies*, 1994), 215, 217, and 219.

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135. For sources on the Greek and Latin courses, see Satterfield, “History of Adult Education,” 124–27.
136. S. A. Davis, a writer for a Universalist newspaper who visited Kirtland in March 1837, stated that “various branches of English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages are now taught to a large number of students” (“Kirtland Mormonism,” *Messenger and Advocate*, April 1837, 490. A notice in *Messenger and Advocate*, June 1837, 519, announced that in the summer of 1837, “It is expected that a course of instruction in Hebrew will be given, to continue 12 weeks, commencing as soon as a sufficient number have signed to warrant the undertaking.” Furthermore, financial records of the Chester store in Kirtland indicate that, as late as May 1837, Joseph Smith ordered an additional “8 Seixas grammar[s],” presumably for the use of the school (MS 155; Box 5; Folder 9, LDS Church Archives; I thank Elizabeth Kuehn and Gerrit Dirkmaat for bringing this reference to my attention). This is contrary to the claim (made in Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student,” 47) that after Seixas’s departure, “Hebrew was never taught again to the Mormons in Kirtland.”
137. Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 21.
138. For the certificate attesting to Orson Pratt’s “proficiency in the language” and “capability of teaching that language,” see *Orson Pratt Journals*, ed. E. J. Watson (Salt Lake City: E. J. Watson, 1975), 75. It is not certain if Pratt ever taught Hebrew officially, although a brief note in *Millennial Star*, September 1842, suggests he may have at the University of Nauvoo. However, there are numerous reports of Pratt using Hebrew extensively in the Utah period, including in his commentary on an inscribed stone found in Ohio (*Journal of Discourses*, 13:130–31, 14:297–98) and in a public debate over polygamy with Dr. John P. Newman, the chaplain of the US Senate (“History of Orson Pratt,” *Millennial Star*, February 11, 1865, 87; *Journal of Discourses*, 25:214–15; 26:123; Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student,” 54–55).
139. Certificate, Joshua Seixas to Joseph Smith (March 30, 1836); cited in Ogden, “Kirtland Hebrew School,” 80.

140. For the subsequent use of Hebrew by Orson Pratt, see note 138. For W. W. Phelps, see Brown, “Translator and the Ghostwriter,” 42–44, 57–59. Orson Hyde later claimed to have memorized the Old Testament in Hebrew (*Journal of Discourses*, 2:82).
141. Barney, “Joseph Smith’s Emendation,” 115–17 discusses Hebrew study meetings in April 1844 with John Taylor, W. W. Phelps, and Thomas Bullock. Alexander Neibaur, the first male Jewish convert to the Church, immigrated to Nauvoo in 1841 and advertised private Hebrew tutorial sessions. *Times and Seasons*, December 1, 1841, 622. Joseph Smith took advantage of Neibaur’s services and occasionally studied Hebrew with him (e.g., *History of the Church*, 6:402 [May 23, 1843]).
142. Mormon writers, most notably W. W. Phelps, often attempted alternative translations (transliterated with Seixas’s pronunciation system) of Hebrew texts based on a 1720 edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* published by Johann Heinrich Michaelis; see *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1843, 306; September 1, 1843, 318; August 1, 1844, 601; December 15, 1844, 748; February 4, 1845, 791.
143. Christopher C. Jones, “The Complete Record of the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 10 no. 1 (Spring 2009):197–98, records that Hebrew grammars were donated to the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute by Benjamin Winchester and Mrs. Addison Pratt. John D. Lee’s registration of books in the Seventies Hall Library also included Hebrew Bibles, grammars, and lexicons.
144. *Millennial Star*, September 1842.
145. For example, see Joseph’s comments about Hebrew in *WJS*, 185, 188 (April 3, 1843), and 366 (May 12, 1844).
146. *WJS*, 60–61 (January 5, 1841).
147. *WJS*, 211–15 (June 11, 1843); cf. the definition of “sheol” in Gibbs, *Lexicon* (1832), 213.
148. The two most famous examples of this were his teachings in the “King Follett Discourse” on April 7, 1844, and the sermon on the plurality of gods delivered on June 16, 1844. See the sources, texts, and analyses of these discourses in Barney, “Joseph Smith’s Emendations,” 103–35.

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149. See the summary of the extant Book of Abraham manuscripts in Hauglid, *Textual History*, 5–9.
150. See Book of Abraham, Facsimile no. 1, fig. 12, and Facsimile no. 2, fig. 4; cf. the definition and spelling of “raukeyyang” in Gibbs, *Lexicon* (1832), 207, and Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), 12, 21, 78.
151. See Book of Abraham, Facsimile no. 1, fig. 12; cf. Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), 78, 85.
152. Abraham 3:13, 16 and Facsimile no. 2, fig. 5; cf. “kokab” in Gibbs, *Lexicon* (1832), 97.
153. Abraham 3:18; cf. Gibbs, *Lexicon* (1832), 165; Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), 16, 62, 91; *WJS*, 343 (April 7, 1844).
154. See Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student,” 50–52, and Walton, “Professor Seixas,” 41–43.
155. *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 24; June 1840, 123; January 15, 1841, 274; see the definitions and spellings in Gibbs, *Lexicon* (1832), 138, and Seixas, *Grammar* (1834), 50, 111.
156. For example, on June 1, 1843, Joseph (or possibly his scribe W. W. Phelps) wrote similar letters of commendation for at least two Apostles—Wilford Woodruff and Heber C. Kimball—calling both of them “Haura-ang-yeesh-rau-ale . . . [or] the friend of Israel”; see Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman’s View: Helen Mar Whitney’s Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1997), 219–20, and Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 1:237–39.
157. Joseph Smith or one of his ghostwriters assumed the name *Zaphnathpaaneah* (the title of Joseph of Egypt; Genesis 41:45) as an occasional nom-de-plume. See Zaphnathpaaneah, “Parable of the Lame Boy and the Blind Horse,” *Nauvoo Neighbor*, June 28, 1843; Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt,” 41.
158. Although other code names were used in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, code names using transliterated Hebrew were first printed in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in the sections now identified as Doctrine and Covenants 103 and 105. Both revelations were received in 1834—almost two years before Church leaders knew Hebrew—and early

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manuscripts contained the real names of the individuals involved. Sometime before publishing the two revelations in 1844, however, some of the names were changed into Hebrew pseudonyms, reflecting the training Joseph received in 1836. For example, “mine elders” was changed to *baneemy* (likely meant as the Hebrew for “my sons”; D&C 105:27) and Joseph’s name was changed to *Baurak Ale* (“God Blessed” or “the blessed [one] of God”; D&C 103:21–22, 35).

159. *History of the Church*, 5:2 (May 4, 1842); see Anderson and Bergera, *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed*, 5, 25–26.