

THEY LIE IN WAIT TO DECEIVE

by Robert L. & Rosemary Brown

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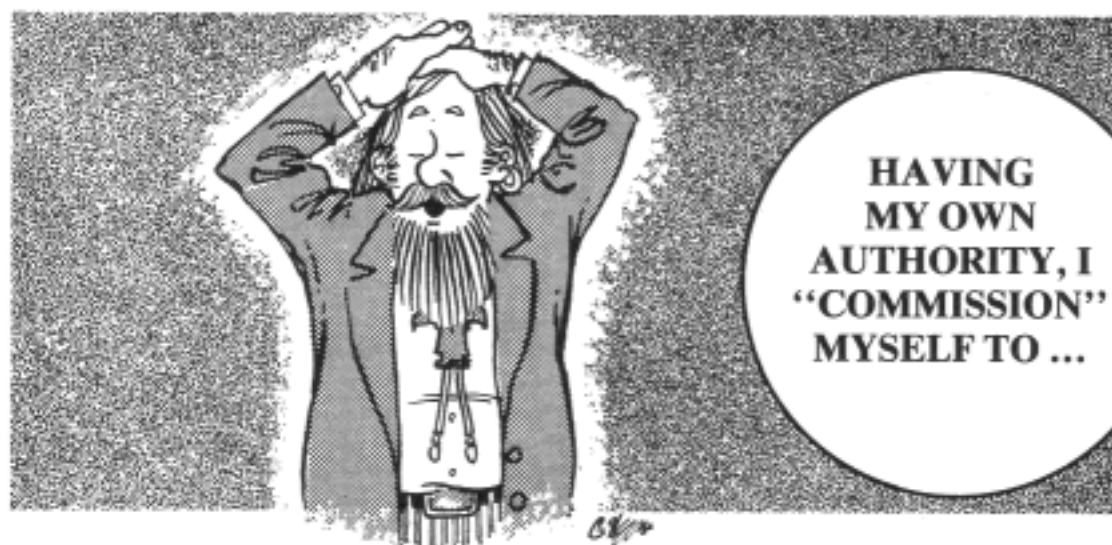
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The Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research

NELSON'S "COMMISSION" TO TRANSLATE THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI



OBJECTIVES

- To prove that Dee Jay Nelson was not commissioned by President N. Eldon Tanner, of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to translate the Joseph Smith Papyri.
- To prove that Nelson is unfamiliar with LDS church policy or he would know that "commissions" are not given as he claims.
- To prove that Dr. Klaus Baer, Dr. Richard A. Parker, and Dr. John A. Wilson had translated the Joseph Smith Papyri and published it **before** Nelson's translation. There would be no need to "commission" Nelson, a complete unknown, as the papyri was already in the hands of three of the top Egyptologists in the United States.
- To prove that Nelson was not asked by Dr. Nibley to help defend the church in the matter of the translation of the Joseph Smith Papyri.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NELSON'S "COMMISSION" TO TRANSLATE THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI

The story about Nelson being "commissioned" by the church to translate seems to be told in about the same way whether in writings or lectures. It goes like this — When Nelson first heard about the papyri, he went to Brigham Young University to see Dr. Hugh Nibley. After chatting with Dr. Nibley for awhile, Nibley took Nelson to see the display of the papyri and gave him color reproductions of them. (In some stories, Nibley gave Nelson the copies of the papyri; in other stories, Pres. Tanner gave Nelson the copies of the papyri). Dr. Nibley supposedly gave Nelson a "letter of introduction" to Pres. N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He claims he then spoke for "less than 15 minutes" to Pres. Tanner who supposedly said, "I think you are the man to do the job; you are the one to translate the papyri." President Tanner, according to Nelson, "made a deal" — "If I would just translate the hieroglyphics into their modern English equivalent, that the Church would publish the work." When the translation didn't say what the church wanted it to say, Nelson was supposedly "dumped" and the church as been charged with a cover-up to its members ever since (see lecture, p. 184, 185 & 187).

WHAT IS A COMMISSION?

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines "commission" as:

"To choose someone to perform specified duties; or, the state of being authorized to perform certain duties or tasks."

I'm sure Nelson feels the church selected him above all others because of his "widely acclaimed reputation as a world famous Egyptologist." Nelson says that he and Pres. Tanner "made a deal" (the commission) that if he would translate the papyri, the church would publish the work — meaning pay for the printing, distributing, advertising, etc. Are commissions by the Church obtained in this manner?

WHO COMMISSIONS FOR THE LDS CHURCH?

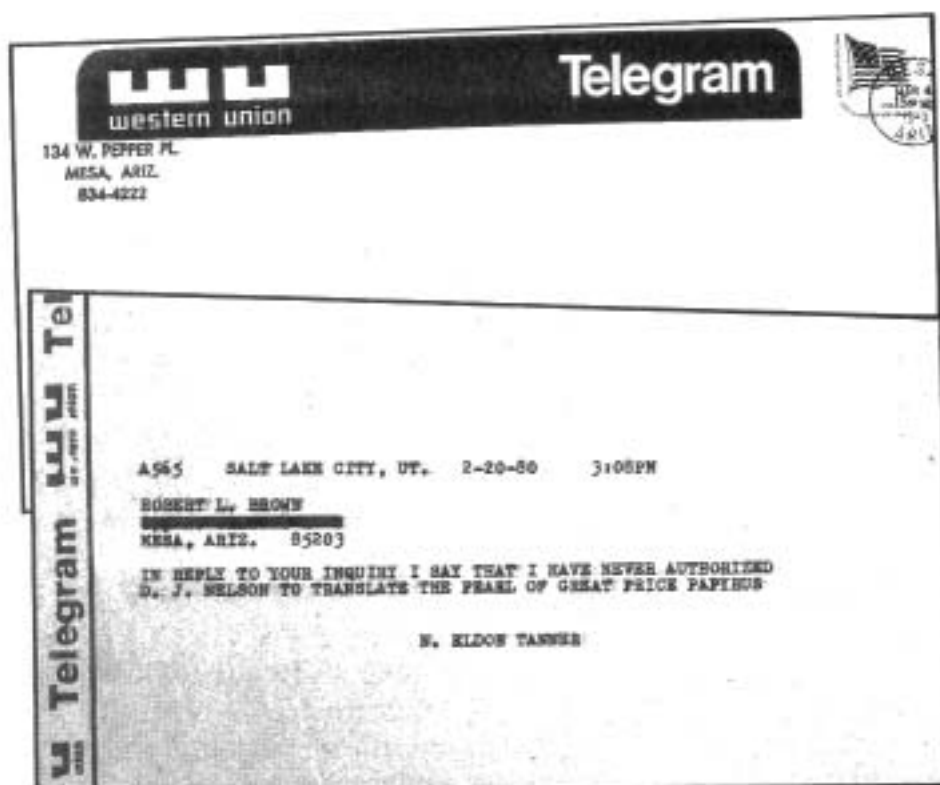
Before any money or services can be bound by the LDS church, it must have the final approval of the **entire** First Presidency (3 persons) — either directly or indirectly. Pres. N. Eldon Tanner, acting alone as claimed, may recommend, but not bind, the LDS church to any commitment.

To commission Dee Jay Nelson, Pres. Tanner would counsel with the other General Authorities and the matter would be brought before the **entire** First Presidency and probably the quorum of the Twelve for a decision. **This is church procedure.**

It is church policy for the leaders throughout the church, whether in small branches or wards to the Presidency of the church, to "set apart" members who are called to do a specific work. This is done by two or more of the brethren holding the priesthood placing their hands upon the head of the one called and delivering a blessing which asks for the Spirit of the Lord to guide and direct them in their work. Members are set apart for all jobs, whether teacher, camp director, clerk, Counselor, Bishop, Stake President, etc. Nelson claims he was "commissioned", but makes no mention ever of being set apart to do the translation. He never mentions who the brethren were that set him apart. **Nelson is obviously not familiar with LDS Church government!**

DID PRESIDENT N. ELDON TANNER COMMISSION DEE JAY NELSON TO TRANSLATE THE "JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI"?

In a telegram to this author from President Tanner, he says he did not commission Nelson to translate anything:



The anti-Mormons have several colorful and descriptive accounts of Dee Jay Nelson's supposed "commission" to translate the papyri. One of these interesting accounts is given by Walter Martin on one of his taped lectures to the Phoenix-Mesa, Arizona, area. (Walter Martin is author of the book MAZE OF MORMONISM which discusses Dee Jay Nelson on 38 pages. Martin has lectured and written fairly extensively against Mormonism and several other religions.) **Walter Martin states:**

"God marvelously restored to us the manuscript of the Book of Abraham, and the section that was restored from the Metropolitan Museum of Natural History in New York is now in the hands of the Mormon church. When it was first received, the statements were made, rejoicing in the media, that they had found that portion of the sacred book of Abraham — the Pearl of Great Price. The Mormons immediately took it from the Metropolitan Museum. The New York Times carried the story and then the Mormons hunted for their top Egyptologist. They had to get a man who could read hieratic Egyptian papyri — a man who could translate for them and they wanted it to be done by a Mormon.

They chose Professor Dee Jay Nelson, the most brilliant Mormon Egyptologist lecturer at B.Y.U., international authority in the Egyptian language. **Dr. Nelson's credentials cannot be challenged.** He was selected by his church to translate it. Dr. Nelson translated it and he presented his findings to the President of the Mormon Church. That was the last anybody ever saw of what Dr. Nelson translated. It was suppressed by a direct act of the Mormon Church to keep it from the people until they had time to develop an answer, but Nelson would not be put down. He insisted they publish their research. They refused. Nelson published his own. The Mormon Church reacted. Nelson reacted too. May I read on the letterhead of Professor Dee Jay Nelson the following letter: Attention the First Presidency, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah. This letter is to inform you that is our considered desire that my own name and those of my wife and daughter be removed from the membership rolls of the Latter-day Saint Church. We, Dee Jay Nelson, Catherine G. Nelson, Kim Cherry Nelson do freely and with full understanding of the implications of the step require that our names be removed from all member records of the Latter-day Saint Church. I, Dee Jay Nelson, do hereby renounce and relinquish the Priesthood which I now hold. Following my translation, the first to be published of the hieratic and hieroglyphic Egyptian text upon the Metropolitan Joseph Smith Papyri fragments, three of the most eminent Egyptologists now living published corroborating translations. These amply prove the fraudulent nature of the Book of

Abraham . . . We do not wish to be associated with a religious organization which teaches lies . . . By affixing our signatures to this document we exercise our constitutional rights of religious freedom and separate ourselves from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Signed Dee Jay Nelson, Catherine G. Nelson, Kim Cherry Nelson, December 8, 1975.

This is the top Mormon Egyptologist in the world, and he has just told you Joseph lied to you in the Book of Abraham”

Interesting story isn't it? Just for the record on the above statements by Walter Martin — When the Mormons received the papyri, they put it on display for all to see; they did not go on a hunt for “their top Egyptologist”. They did not “choose Professor Dee Jay Nelson, the most brilliant Mormon Egyptologist lecturer at B.Y.U., international authority on the Egyptian language.” Nelson is not a Professor, is not brilliant, is not an Egyptologist, is not a lecturer at B.Y.U. (**and never has been**), and is not an international authority on the Egyptian language. **“Dr.” Nelson’s credentials can certainly be challenged!** Nelson was not selected by the church to translate anything. The Mormon church did not suppress any translation of the papyri. Nelson’s translation was not “the first to be published”. The Book of Abraham is not a fraud. The Mormon church does not teach lies. Dee Jay Nelson was not “the top Mormon Egyptologist in the world”! He was not an active Mormon, and he was never an Egyptologist.

DR. KLAUS BAER’S, DR. RICHARD A. PARKER’S, AND DR. JOHN A. WILSON’S TRANSLATIONS PRECEDED NELSON’S!

Nelson, and his supporters, likes to make it sound as if he was commissioned to translate the Joseph Smith Papyri because of his “world-wide reputation as an Egyptologist”, that the papyri was “suppressed” from the public, that copies of the papyri were given only to Nelson, and that he was the **first** to translate and publish the Egyptian document. In reality, the first scholarly publications were by Dr. Klaus Baer, Dr. Richard Parker, and Dr. John A. Wilson. Nelson temporarily forgot his claim that he was selected as the first to translate the papyri; notice the last part of his lecture on p. 207:

“This was the first translated, not by me, but by Dr. Klaus Baer of the University of Chicago.”

When the papyri was turned over to the Mormon church and made available to

the public, Egyptologists and anyone else interested, were invited to translate it. Nelson obtained copies of the papyri and tried his hand at it also. His preliminary work with the Facsimiles in the papyri was praised by Hugh Nibley in BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDIES, Spring, 1968, p. 247: "Nelson has been careful to consult top-ranking scholars where he has found himself in doubt. He has taken the first step in a serious study of the Facsimilies of the Pearl of Great Price, supplying students with a usable and reliable translation of the available papyri that once belonged to Joseph Smith."

However, Nelson had the work of Baer, Parker, and Wilson available to him in preparing his own translation of the text of the papyri. The aforementioned three eminent Egyptologists had published their translations in DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT before Nelson published his. Dr. Baer published his translation, "The Breathing Permit of Hor, a Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," in DIALOGUE 3 (Autumn, 1968), p. 109-134. After this time, Nelson asked Dr. Baer for help in his translation. In a letter from Dr. Baer, (see Baer letter, p. 37 & 38, para. #4), he states that **after** he had published his translation in DIALOGUE:

"A certain amount of correspondence resulted with others who had been working on the Joseph Smith papyri, including Jerald Tanner and Grant Heward, and they apparently suggested that Nelson get in touch with me. He wrote me on August, 1968, and included drawings for his pamphlet on the "Eye of Ra". I replied on August 22 with some general comments and annotations and corrections on the drawings (mostly dealing with the transcription of the Hieratic characters into hieroglyphs). There was some more correspondence during the remainder of 1968 regarding his next two pamphlets, again mainly concerned with the reading of the Hieratic; this was acknowledged, e.g. in "Appendix 2" of THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI, Part 2. Since then there has been no contact between us. I have never met him."

The point here is that Nelson was encouraged (by Dr. Nibley) in his translation as much as anybody else would be that wanted to try it. Good sense dictates that he should have consulted with authorities when making his translation — that is to his credit. However, it is interesting to note that in Nelson's "Eye of Ra" and "The Joseph Smith Papyri", he agrees with Joseph Smith's interpretation on several points. **Later, when he found his anti-Mormon lectures were quite popular and lucrative, you didn't hear anything at all about the points of agreement.** In fact, his stories kept getting bigger and bigger until the deception prompted the research that resulted in this book.

WHAT ABOUT THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM DR. NIBLEY?

Jerald and Sandra Tanner in *MORMONISM: SHADOW OR REALITY*, 1972, spend approximately 75 pages quoting Nelson. On p. 310, they refer to a handwritten note from Dr. Nibley which was given to Nelson:

"On Jan. 4, 1968, Dee Jay Nelson visited with Dr. Nibley at Brigham Young University and examined the original papyri. Dr. Nibley agreed that Nelson should translate the papyri, and he sent a note to N. Eldon Tanner, a member of the First Presidency, stating that "it would be a good idea to let Professor Dee Jay Nelson have copies of the papyri." This was before the Mormon leaders allowed photographs of all the papyri to be published."

The note, although not shown in Tanner's book, was shown in a full-page anti-Mormon newspaper article by Concerned Christians of Mesa in the Mesa Tribune (Arizona), B4, Saturday, Nov. 1, 1980. (This newspaper article, and our reply, begins on p. 250 in the Appendix.) The note and accompanying explanation from the newspaper article is shown below:

Provo
Jan 4, 1968

I think it would be a
good idea to let Prof.
Dee J. Nelson have
copies of the "Metro-
politan" papyri, inclu-
ding Fac. #1.

Hugh Nibley

The note written by Hugh Nibley and hand carried to N. Eldon Tanner by Mr. Nelson

Provo
Jan. 4, 1968

I think it would be a good idea to let Prof. Dee J. Nelson have copies of the "Metropolitan Papyri," including Fac. #1.

Hugh Nibley

This note is purported to be a Letter of Introduction to President N. Eldon Tanner and is always shown in anti-Mormon literature to give credence to Nelson's claim that he met with Pres. Tanner and obtained his commission to translate the papyri. **Where on the note, then, is Pres. Tanner's name? Pres. Tanner's name does not appear anywhere on it!** Who says this note was a Letter of Introduction? Nelson says, that's who! **This was merely a note instructing a secretary or clerk at the library to give Nelson copies of the papyri.** It was not necessary for Nelson to have a note because the papyri were available to the public, but Nelson insisted on having one so Dr. Nibley gave him one.

WAS DR. NIBLEY COMMISSIONED TO TRANSLATE?

NO! The Mormon church did not commission anyone to translate the papyri. From the moment the papyri was turned over to the church, it was made available to the general public and any scholars who cared to translate it. As previously mentioned, several who responded were Dr. Hugh Nibley, Dr. Klaus Baer, Dr. John Wilson, and Dee Jay Nelson. **Each had to publish their own findings themselves!**

Dr. Hugh Nibley wrote a book, *THE MESSAGE OF THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI*, and had it published by Deseret Book Company in Salt Lake City. A call to that Book Company confirmed that the contract was between Nibley and Deseret Book and that Nibley receives the royalties as any other author.

WHY DIDN'T THE PRESENT PROPHET TRANSLATE IT?

Why wasn't the papyri given to the prophet and leader of the LDS church to translate? That the papyri was translated by several persons shows that such translation is humanly possible. Why would the prophet need to translate it?

Our Heavenly Father will **not** do for us what we can do for ourselves. Individually, or as a group, we grow and progress by solving our own problems. There was **no need** to have the papyri translated by the prophet . . . **and it wasn't!**

WAS NELSON ASKED TO HELP DEFEND THE CHURCH?

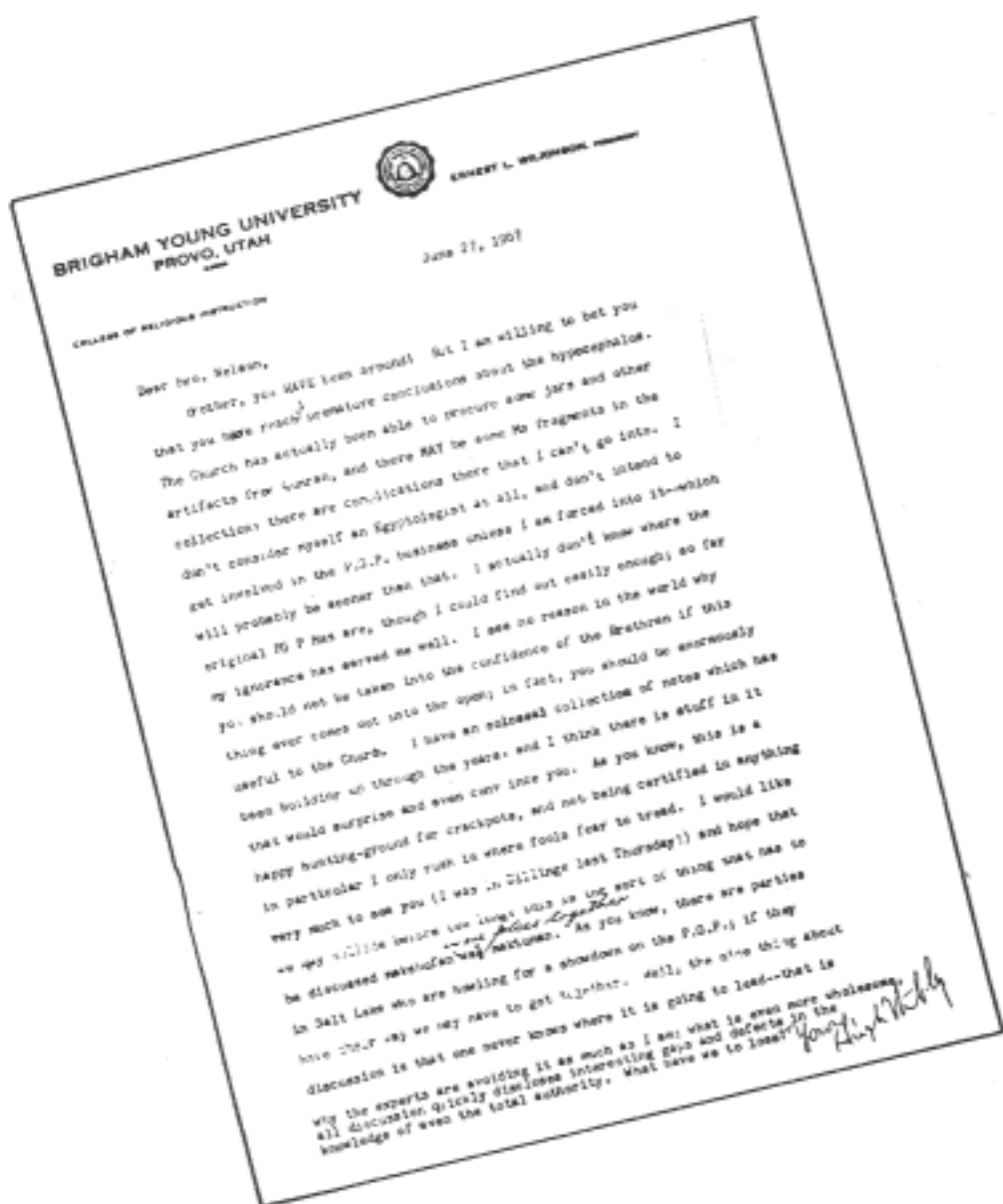
Was Nelson asked by Dr. Nibley to help defend the church in the matter of the translation of the Joseph Smith Papyri?

NO!

Most anti-Mormon books tell the story much the same as was reported in the Mesa Tribune, November 1, 1980, B4:

“Mr. Nelson’s credentials, prior to 1967, influenced the Mormon high authorities into accepting him as the most likely candidate to do a translation and yet be sympathetic to Mormon beliefs. When Dr. Hugh Nibley learned of Nelson’s ability as an Egyptologist, he wanted Mr. Nelson to help defend the Church. In a letter dated June 27, 1967, Dr. Nibley told Nelson he could “see no reason in the world why you should not be taken into the confidence of the brethren . . .”

This letter from Dr. Nibley is then shown: (below)



Notice that the letter is dated June 27, 1967 — **five months before** the church received the papyri. The papyri came into the church's possession in November, 1967. From the moment the church leaders learned that they may be the new owners of some of the original Joseph Smith papyri, it was a time of exciting speculation and anxious expectation — not an attitude of cover-up as Nelson would like everyone to surmise from the aforementioned letter.

What, then, were they really discussing? It is certain that they were not referring to any translation as anti-Mormon writers would like to lead people to believe. The papyri had not even been received and translated yet!

The letter by Nibley states:

“. . . But I am willing to bet you that you have reached premature conclusions about the Hypocephalus (Facsimile #2).”

Dr. Nibley and Nelson were discussing the hypocephalus — What were the facsimiles from the Book of the Dead doing in the Book of Abraham: At that point in time, they didn't know. They had questions, but no answers.

From Dr. Nibley's comment, "Brother, have you been around", it appears that Nelson wasted no time giving his long list of phony credentials — professor, World's Greatest Egyptologist, author, lecturer, movie maker, etc. **With credentials like that, if real, why shouldn't Nelson be "taken into the confidence of the brethren" and be "enormously useful to the church" in helping find some answers?** At the date of this letter, June 1967, there was no papyri and no way to find a relationship.

Providentially, the papyri came forth in November, 1967, **five months after** this correspondence with Nelson. The papyri tied everything together and explained the significance. On both occasions, in Joseph Smith's day and in our day, the brethren were studying the problem out in their minds first as the Lord dictates. (D & C 9: 7, 8). The Lord provided the papyri to Joseph Smith the first time in preparation for the restoration of the true temple endowment. The Lord provided the papyri again in our day to answer the question foremost in the minds of the church brethren — what do the facsimiles have to do with the Book Abraham? The answer was simple. It contained important symbols clarifying the ancient apostate temple ceremony that Abraham participated in as mentioned in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. (More information on this subject is available in Chapter 10, "The Truth About The Book of Abraham".)

IN SUMMARY . . .

Nelson claims he was commissioned by President N. Tanner to translate the Joseph Smith Papyri. His credentials are **unknown** to Egyptologists (and remember he claims to be the World's Greatest Egyptologist), he omitted mentioning anything about being set apart for the job of translating which is standard church policy, three of the top Egyptologists in the United States had copies of the papyri and were translating it, and yet Nelson claims he was "commissioned" to translate the papyri. You can be sure that President Tanner would have no reason whatsoever to commission him to translate anything — **and he didn't!**

No one was "commissioned" to translate the papyri —not even Dr. Hugh Nibley. The papyri was available to the public and all were invited to try their hand in the translation.

Walter Martin's lecture was typical of anti-Mormon propagandists. **With extreme emotion in his voice**, he tells how Dee Jay Nelson was "commissioned" to translate the Joseph Smith Papyri — commissioned because "Professor" Nelson was the "most brilliant Mormon Egyptologist lecturer at B.Y.U., international authority in the Egyptian language, and whose credentials cannot be challenged." These false stories have been used for years to prove Nelson's authority in declaring that Joseph Smith fabricated the Book of Abraham, which is regarded as scripture by the LDS church.

Nelson claims he was asked to help defend the church in the matter of the translation of the Joseph Smith Papyri. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the fastest growing church in America today. It has certainly done well without Nelson's help.**
