

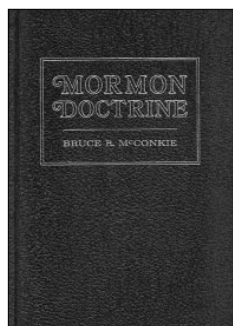
# OUT OF THE BEST BOOKS?

## PUBLICATIONS CONTINUE TO PROMOTE FOLKLORE

**A**LTHOUGH THE PRIESTHOOD BAN WAS LIFTED in 1978 and today's Church leaders no longer teach that blacks descend from Ham or Cain, nor speak about curses or historical or doctrinal justifications for the original restriction, books and pamphlets containing such teachings are easy to find. Many are still in print and for sale at most LDS bookstores, including Church-owned Deseret Book. Are such speculations and pronouncements really "in the past" when they are in print and allowed to stand without repudiation?

### MORMON DOCTRINE

Because of its A to Z topical format and authoritative-sounding title, Elder Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* is a common source for Latter-day Saints who seek answers to basic gospel questions. Much has been said about changes made between the book's first and second editions that softened its tone and excised certain claims, but the current edition still includes information on blacks and the denial of the priesthood that is based on old understandings. For instance, the entry on "Cain" notes, "The Lord placed on Cain a mark of a dark skin, and he became the ancestor of the black race" as punishment for slaying his brother Abel (109). The entry on "Caste Systems" states:



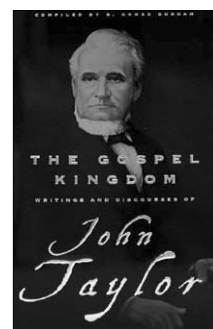
"Caste systems have their root and origin in the gospel itself, and when they operate according to the divine decree, the resultant restrictions and segregation are right and proper and have the approval of the Lord. To illustrate: Cain, Ham, and the whole negro race have been cursed with a black skin, the mark of Cain, so they can be identified as a caste apart, a people with whom the other descendants of Adam should not intermarry" (114).

In the entry on "Negroes," Elder McConkie claims that "interracial marriages are discouraged by the Brethren" (527).

*Mormon Doctrine's* entry on "Ham" states, "Through Ham (a name meaning black) the blood of the Canaanites was preserved through the flood, he having married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain. Ham was cursed, apparently for marrying into the forbidden lineage, and the effects of the curse passed to his son, Canaan. Ham's descendants include the Negroes, who originally were barred from holding the priesthood but have been able to do so since June, 1978" (343).

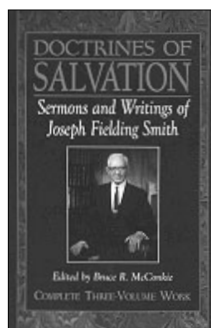
### THE GOSPEL KINGDOM

*The Gospel Kingdom* is a collection of sermons delivered by third LDS president John Taylor. In anticipation of the 2003 priesthood and Relief Society curriculum studying President Taylor's life and teachings, Deseret Book has reprinted *The Gospel Kingdom* in paperback and in a handsome leather edition. On page 103 appears the following: "And after the flood we are told that the curse that had been pronounced upon Cain was continued through Ham's wife, as he had married a wife of that seed. And why did it pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God." Because Taylor believed that the curse of Cain was equivalent to black skin, his comment would seem to imply that, in his mind, the black race was somehow aligned with Satan.<sup>1</sup>



### DOCTRINES OF SALVATION

This three-volume collection of sermons by President Joseph Fielding Smith has several references to blacks as descendants of Cain. The most prominent is the following statement, implying that "Negroes" have received what they deserve in this life because of actions (or inaction) in the pre-existence: "There were no neutrals in the war in heaven. All took sides either with Christ or with Satan. Every man had his agency there, and men receive rewards here based upon their actions there, just as they will receive rewards hereafter for deeds done in the body. The Negro, evidently, is receiving the reward he merits" (1:65).

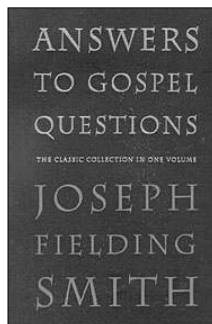


In another entry, President Smith states: "The only souls coming to this world who are under restriction are the Negroes, and they cannot hold the priesthood; but Negroes may be baptized, and we have many Negroes in the Church" (2:55).

**Twenty-five Years after the Revelation—Where Are We Now?**


## ANSWERS TO GOSPEL QUESTIONS

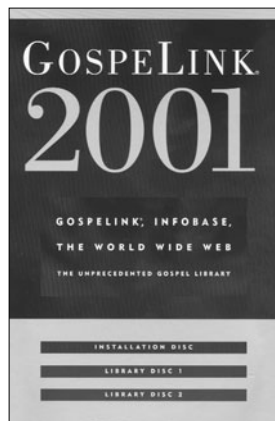
Another popular reference book for Latter-day Saints is *Answers to Gospel Questions*, also by President Joseph Fielding Smith. The book is a compilation of several columns written by President Smith in the official Church publication, *The Improvement Era*. In his column, titled “I Have a Question,” President Smith entertained several queries about the restriction on priesthood blessings to blacks. He repeated the notion that blacks are descendants of Cain and were therefore cursed with priesthood denial. A typical entry reads, “If Abraham, Joseph, and Moses had married Negro wives their descendants would have been denied the priesthood according to the word of the Lord to Abraham. Had such a thing happened the Lord would not have called Israel as a chosen people, neither would he have chosen the Prophet Joseph Smith and given him the keys of authority for the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, as he was a descendant of Joseph and of Abraham” (1:168).



## OUT OF PRINT TITLES

In addition to these titles still available in most LDS bookstores, there are many other out-of-print titles readily accessible to Latter-day Saints. The *Journal of Discourses* contains statements from Brigham Young identifying the curse of Cain as the “flat nose and the black skin,” (7:290). Young also declared as God’s law that any interracial couple should be put to “death on the spot,” (vol. 10:110). Other books by President Joseph Fielding Smith, such as the *Way to Perfection* and *Man: His Origin and Destiny* contain statements which promote blacks-as-cursed folklore. A pamphlet of an address given by Alvin R. Dyer titled *For What Purpose?* also suggests that blacks are descendants of Cain and therefore ineligible for the priesthood. Harold B. Lee reiterated this belief in his book, *Decisions for Successful Living*. Books by lay members of the Church are also plentiful. Two books, one by John J. Stewart and the other by John L. Lund, argue in defense of the Church’s policy of denying blacks the priesthood based on LDS scripture and statements by Church leaders.

These titles are available through libraries and used bookstores. And the majority are also offered on the *GospelLink 2001* CD-ROM program produced by Deseret Book. 



## NOTE

1. Although this statement by President Taylor does not make explicit the link between the curse of Cain and blackness, Taylor was editor of the *Times and Seasons* when the following unsigned essay was published:

After the flood and after Ham had dishonored the holy priesthood, Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his (younger) son (Ham,) had done unto him. And, as the priesthood descended from father to son, he delivered the following curse and blessing, as translated by King James’ wise men and recorded in Genesis:

“And he said, cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”

History and common observation show that these predictions have been fulfilled to the letter. The descendants of Ham, besides a black skin which has ever been a curse that has followed an apostate of the holy priesthood, as well as a black heart, have been servants to both Shem and Japheth, and the abolitionists are trying to make void the curse of God, but it will require more power than man possesses to counteract the decrees of eternal wisdom. Again Shem or his descendants were blessed with receiving the revelations, prophets, and Savior: A blessing truly which even the most sagacious infidel has not been able to explain away. Again, Japheth has dwelt in Shem’s tent, both in the land of Canaan and in America; for “tents” is a figurative expression which in Hebrew, would signify the residence or abode. Now our short chapter will soon end, for the Savior said (Jerusalem should be trodden down till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,) and the very movement of every nation shows the eternal truth of the above quoted passage of scripture. It frustrates the designs of sectarians; it chokes the deists; astonishes the world, and delights the saints—Amen.

(From *Times and Seasons* [6.6: 857])



## TREE LINE

In my father’s world there is one field  
and one tree line working as a wind-break.  
On one side everything is planted in rows,  
a penance furrowed like the scar-tissue  
cutting his lungs. His conscience is wheeled  
from one end to the other, each mistake  
measured with what he remembers, each stone  
piled in altars for his god to review.

The other side’s scattered in deep thickets  
of briar and black locust that barely  
let in light, an unnavigated space  
he’ll wander for days while his condition twists  
sorrow like wild grapevine, with wind-blown seed  
skimming the moist soil for a birthplace.

—BARRY BALLARD