

# The Book of Mormon: A Voice from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Dust

An Overview of the Evidence for the Book's Modern Origin



Joseph Smith, by Pomeroy Tucker (1867)

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# Introduction

*"I take in my hand the Book of Mormon... I have read Joseph Smith's explanation of how it came to be. To the unbelieving it is a story difficult to accept, and critics for generations have worn out their lives writing books intended to refute that story and to offer other explanations than the one given by Joseph the Prophet. But to the open-minded, this critical writing has only stimulated them to dig deeper; and the more deeply they dig, the greater the accumulation of evidence for the validity of Joseph Smith's story. Still, as has been demonstrated for a hundred and fifty years, the truth of the Book of Mormon will not be determined by literary analysis or by scientific research, although these continue to be reassuring..." (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Praise to the Man," Ensign, Aug. 1983, 4)*

One of the most important claims in the Joseph Smith Story is that the Book of Mormon is a literal history of an ancient American civilization, a branch of the House of Israel that worshipped Christ and established his gospel on the American Continent. Contrary to Gordon B. Hinckley's assertion, there are *many* "open-minded" historians, critics, and believing members of the church that are "stimulated to dig deeper" into the origins of the Book of Mormon, but fail to find "an accumulation of evidence" for Joseph Smith's claims. On the contrary, they become convinced that the Book of Mormon has been grossly misrepresented – that it is not the record of an ancient people, but rather a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. A large number of these people are devout members of the Mormon Church, who were only trying to strengthen their faith in the restored gospel when they first began to investigate. The more deeply they dig, however, the less that "literary analysis or scientific research" provides any reassurance for their embattled testimonies.

My thesis is simple and unequivocal: The Book of Mormon is not a genuine history; it is the product of the creative genius of Joseph Smith. I leave no room in the following pages for a discussion about the worth of the Book of Mormon. As Boyd K. Packer said, "For generations it has inspired those who read it."<sup>1</sup> The truth of such a statement is beyond debate. Doubtless, there are millions in the world today, myself included, that would heartily agree with Elder Packer, and if their testimonies could be written and collected, the combined pages might fill an entire library.

The fact that a work is inspiring does not make it *true*, however. Take for instance the faith-promoting masterpiece, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. Many have drawn strength, gained hope, and increased faith by pondering its messages and applying its truths. In fact, several general authorities have made reference to and quoted from it over the years, including Elders James M. Paramore, M. Russell Ballard, Vaughn J. Featherstone, and President Spencer W. Kimball. However edifying it may be, *Les Misérables* remains a work of fiction. Likewise, the fact that the Book of Mormon inspires its readers does not prove its historicity.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ," Ensign, Nov. 2001, 62

Lest a Book of Mormon apologist consider me a “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” let me make something clear. I will not attempt to explore how it might be possible to accept the Book of Mormon as religious fiction and retain faith in Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling. Such acrobatics are entirely up to the reader. Surely it would be difficult to uphold the authenticity of one while discounting the other. Still, a select few in the church have managed it – they embrace both the Prophet and his fictitious, but *inspired* book. The rest of the doubters fall into a few other categories: Some become disillusioned with the Book of Mormon and leave the church; some suppress their concerns and doubts and forge ahead in the faith; and some transform their discomfort into a vigorous and desperate defense, becoming even more staunchly loyal to the Book of Mormon.

My purpose in writing this is to review the evidence that proves the Book of Mormon is a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Whether the reader finds my conclusions meritorious or repellent, he should at least have access to some of the pertinent facts. If an honest examination of the information leads to greater faith in the Book of Mormon, then so be it. At the very least, the reader will be informed. As Apostle John A. Widstoe said, “To Latter-day Saints there can be no objection to the careful and critical study of the scriptures, ancient or modern, provided only that it be an honest study – a search for truth.”<sup>2</sup> True to that spirit, scholars and historians of Mormon history have spent the last four decades objectively examining the text of the Book of Mormon. They have combed through the church archives and traveled to distant cities in search of extant documents that help them to recreate the contemporary context in which the book emerged. My aim, then, is to summarize many of their findings, contribute a few observations of my own, and provide interpretation where useful.

I will first consider the internal evidence, or evidence found within the pages of the Book of Mormon, itself. This will include an examination of the grammar, the style of language, the influence of the Bible and Apocrypha, and the existence of 19<sup>th</sup> Century elements, among others things. I will then provide a brief overview of the external factors that challenge the historicity of the Book of Mormon, including evidence from the scientific fields of archeology, genetics, linguistics, and geography.

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<sup>2</sup> John A. Widstoe, *In Search of Truth: Comments on the Gospel and Modern Thought* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), 81–82, quoted in “A Malay Site for Book of Mormon Events,” Ralph A. Olsen, *Sunstone*, March 2004, p.30)

# Internal Evidence

## Grammatical Errors

Critics have long referred to the thousands of textual changes in the Book of Mormon since the original edition as evidence that it did not originate from a divine source. Defenders of the book often claim that these changes were made to improve punctuation and fix a few, minor grammatical problems. This is an understatement. The truth is flawed frontier grammar is inextricably woven throughout the 1830 text. In many cases, the mistakes are quite egregious. Even Mormon's disclaimer on the title page of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon is, itself, grammatically incorrect: "... now if there *be* fault, it *be the mistake* of men" (modern editions read, "...now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men ...").

The following are only a few examples:<sup>3</sup>

- "And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving *the rent* of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had wrote *upon the rent*, and crying with a loud voice..." (page 351, 1830 Book of Mormon)

Modern editions read, "And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent *part* of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had *written* upon the rent *part*, crying with a loud voice..."

- "... the cause of diseases *which was subsequent to man*, by the nature of the climate..."(page 353, 1830 Book of Mormon)

Modern editions read, "... the causes of diseases, *to which men were subject*, by the nature of the climate..."

- "... for behold, his army had been reduced by the Lamanites because of the *numerority* of their forces having slain a vast number of our men..." (page 382, 1830 edition)

Modern editions read, "... for behold, his army had been reduced by the Lamanites because their forces had slain a vast number of our men..."

- "...some have *arrested* the Scriptures ..." becomes "...some have *wrested* the scriptures..." (1830 to modern)

Some believe the grammatical problems are a result of the incompatibility between the spoken Hebrew and the written Reformed Egyptian, and will cite Mormon's

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<sup>3</sup> See Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996

reasoning when he explains to the reader, “if we could have written in the Hebrew, behold, ye would have had *none* imperfection in our record.” (1830 edition, p. 538; Mormon 9:33 in modern editions) This begs the question: Even if there *are* imperfections in the record of the Nephites, *why would these errors be preserved in the English given to Joseph by the gift and power of God?* One of the great historians in church history, B.H. Roberts painfully admitted that the errors in the original edition were so numerous and such a part of the “web and woof of the style” of the text, that they could not be easily explained away:

"Are these flagrant errors in grammar chargeable to the Lord? To say so is to invite ridicule...the awkward, ungrammatical expression of the thoughts is, doubtless, the result of the translator's imperfect knowledge of the English language ... that old theory cannot be successfully maintained; that is, the Urim and Thummim did the translating, the Prophet, nothing beyond repeating what he saw reflected in that instrument; that God directly or indirectly is responsible for the verbal and grammatical errors of translation. To advance such a theory before intelligent and educated people is to unnecessarily invite ridicule, and make of those who advocate it candidates for contempt..."<sup>4</sup>

In consequence, Roberts strongly advocated for the continued editing of the Book of Mormon. His theory, namely that Joseph was inspired to discern the content of the plates and then converted these divine impressions into his own language, may have provided the most plausible explanation for the numerous grammatical errors. E. Cecil McGavin concurred with Robert's conclusion about the *old theory*: “It is evident that the Prophet Joseph Smith did not see the English sentences appear upon the Urim and Thummim. Neither did he hear a voice dictating the meaning of the original characters. He simply was inspired as to the meaning of the Nephite writings, but was left to himself to express those ideas in his own words...”<sup>5</sup>

While providing some level of intellectual relief, the idea that the Book of Mormon text is merely a reflection of the language of Joseph Smith runs counter to the various accounts of the translation process given by key witnesses and other early authorities. Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer said, "I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Defense of the Faith*, by B. H. Roberts, Deseret News, 1907-1912, pages 278, 279, 295, 306, 307 and 308 quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996

<sup>5</sup> E. Cecil McGavin, *An Apology for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), p.16 quoted in La Mar Peterson, *Creation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), p.100.

<sup>6</sup> *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, by David Whitmer, Richmond, MO, 1887, page 12.

Another of the three witnesses, Martin Harris, was reported as saying, “sentences would appear and were read by the prophet...” Martin, acting as scribe, would write down what Joseph had written, “...and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.”<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Knight, an important early convert that witnessed the organization of the church in April 1830, described the translation process. He said that after the prophet had “Darkened his Eyes he would take a sentence and it would appear in Brite Roman Letters. Then he would tell the writer and he would write it. Then that would go away the next sentence would come and so on. But if it was not Spelt rite it would not go away till it was rite...”<sup>8</sup>

“The translation was accomplished by no common method...” wrote Seventy George Reynolds, a former secretary to President John Taylor. “There were no delays over obscure passages, no difficulties over the choice of words, no stoppages from the ignorance of the translator; no time was wasted in investigation or argument over the value, intent, or meaning of certain characters, and there was no reference to authorities... All was as simple as when a clerk writes from dictation. The translation of the characters appeared... sentence by sentence, and as soon as one was correctly transcribed the next would appear.”<sup>9</sup>

Aside from these statements and others from authorities such as Apostle Orson Hyde and President Joseph F. Smith, the Prophet Joseph recorded in the official history of the church: “...we heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, ‘These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. *The translation of them which you have seen is correct*, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.’”<sup>10</sup> He also later “told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth...”<sup>11</sup>

Sadly, this is about as far as the prophet was willing to go to shed any light on the translation process. As might be imagined, many converts in the early days of the church were eager to receive a first-hand account of the wondrous events surrounding the coming forth of the sacred record, and in particular, how Joseph was able to translate the Reformed Egyptian characters into English. They might have expected a magnificent recital from a prophet who was so quick to preach and expound on various mysteries. They had heard him give a brief sketch of the fate of a warrior he identified as “Zelph,” a *white* Lamanite whose remains were discovered during the Zion’s Camp expedition; they

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<sup>7</sup> George Reynolds, *Myth of the Manuscript Found* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1883), p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 (Autumn 1976): 35, quoted in La Mar Peterson, *Creation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), pp. 95-96.

<sup>9</sup> George Reynolds, *Myth of the Manuscript Found* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1883), p. 71.

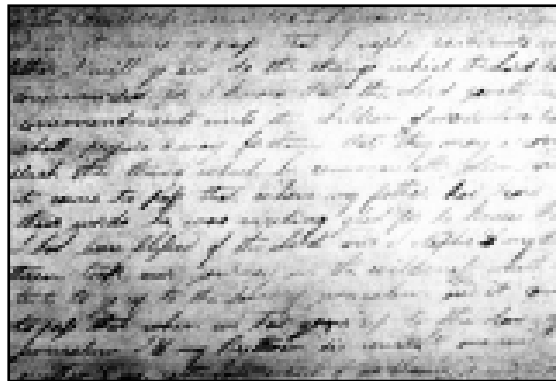
<sup>10</sup> *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts. vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1951), pp. 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 461

had seen him point out a pile of rocks in Davies County, Missouri, and make the staggering disclosure that they were the very stones Adam had used to build his altar to the Lord; they had listened as he advanced fascinating theories on cosmology after interpreting Egyptian hieroglyphics and drawings. So many times before he had brought the imponderable divine so comfortably close to home, whether through sudden strokes of inspiration during a meeting, special revelations for specific individuals, or personal “patriarchal” blessings.

But despite all that Joseph had said before that stretched the minds of his converts, even to the point of snapping at times, he was amazingly curt and unaccommodating on this subject. In reply to one such inquiry, Joseph was reported as saying “it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon... and that it was not expedient for him to relate these things.”<sup>12</sup>

Joseph’s conspicuous silence notwithstanding, church authorities from the earliest days of the church have maintained that the Book of Mormon is a literal translation from the gold plates. To say otherwise is to ignore all that has been said on the subject and to call into serious question the need for plates or interpreters in the first place. It is hard to imagine that the Lord would require the Nephite prophets to engrave their records on plates of ore (a painstaking task according to Jacob [Jacob 4:1]), carefully hand them down from generation to generation, and haul them for an untold number of miles to the Hill Cumorah in New York State, if the words they so tediously inscribed would only end up as a “revelation” in the mind of Joseph Smith. Furthermore, we have Moroni’s charge before us - the plates were of inestimable worth and were to be protected at all costs. If Joseph didn’t need them for translation, what was the point of unearthing, hefting, and hiding them in half a dozen places?



Book of Mormon Manuscript

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<sup>12</sup> Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), p. 23, quoted in La Mar Peterson, *Creation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), p. 102.



### Language in the style of the King James Version of the Bible

Ironically, many of the Book of Mormon's earliest readers found it oddly out of date as soon as it was published in 1830. While the content was very contemporary, the style of language was not. The text of the Book of Mormon mirrors the style of the King James Version of the Holy Bible, which was written in Elizabethan English. The innumerable "thee's" and "thou's" that the reader encounters in the Book of Mormon were indicative of the elevated vocabulary that English translators of the Bible intentionally employed in 1611, over 200 years before Joseph began his work. In short, no one was talking or writing like this in Joseph Smith's time.

The question might be asked: If the Book of Mormon is a literal translation of ancient records, and the Lord caused words to appear in the Urim and Thummim (or seer stone), why would He choose to use an archaic form of English? Would not the Lord speak to Joseph in his own language, *as one man speaks to another*? William Sheldon wryly observed, "Joseph's imitation of this out-dated phraseology... is a strong proof against its divine origin; for Inspiration would not speak in an obsolete language..."<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Joseph's revelations canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants assume the same flavor of the Book of Mormon, so as to suggest that the Lord *is* deliberately speaking in 17<sup>th</sup> century English. It would be absurd to suggest that the Nephites spoke and wrote this way, and since 19<sup>th</sup> century America didn't either, the only plausible explanation is that the Lord (or Joseph Smith) felt it necessary to duplicate the biblical style of language in order to make the Book of Mormon seem credible. After all, if this new record were to stand side by side with the Bible, then it would do well to sound like the Bible.

Mark Twain, who referred to the Book of Mormon as "chloroform in print,"<sup>14</sup> also noted:

"The book seems to be merely a prosy detail of imaginary history, with the Old Testament for a model; followed by a tedious plagiarism of the New Testament. The author labored to give his words and phrases the quaint, old-fashioned sound and structure of our King James' translation of the Scriptures; and the result is a mongrel-half modern glibness, and half ancient simplicity and gravity. The latter is awkward and constrained; the former natural, but grotesque by the contrast. Whenever he found his speech growing too modern-which was about every sentence or two-he ladled in a few such scriptural phrases as "exceeding sore," "and it came to pass," etc., and made things satisfactory again. "And it came to pass"

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<sup>13</sup> William Sheldon, *Mormonism Examined*; or, Was Joseph Smith a Divinely Inspired Prophet? Broadhead, WI, (1876), pp. 82-83 quoted in La Mar Peterson, *Creation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Co., 1872), 102-103.

was his pet. If he had left that out, his Bible would have been only a pamphlet.”<sup>15</sup>

With regard to its biblical phraseology, the late Wesley P. Walters observed that the Book of Mormon text is characterized by an “unskilled mimicking of the style of the King James Version” and that it was “intentionally written by Smith in the King James style, ostensibly so that it would sound like the Bible and be more readily accepted as a companion to it...” He went on to explain:

“In his revelations there also appears this same type of biblical quotation along with an employment of the King James style... therefore, (both works) must be credited to Joseph Smith... there is a continual use of ‘thee’, ‘thou’ and ‘ye’, as well as the archaic verb endings ‘est’ (second person singular) and ‘eth’ (third person singular). Since the Elizabethan style was not Joseph’s natural idiom, he continually slipped out of this King James pattern and repeatedly confused the forms as well. Thus he lapsed from ‘ye’ (subject) to ‘you’ (object) as the subject of sentences...jumped from plural (‘ye’) to singular (‘thou’) in the same sentence (Mosiah 4:22) and moved from verbs without endings to ones with endings (e.g. ‘yields...putteth,’ 3:19).”<sup>16</sup>

Josiah Priest would have agreed with Walters’ assessment that Joseph was inconsistent with his application of the 17<sup>th</sup> century forms, asserting in 1833 that the Book of Mormon “bears the stamp of folly, and is a poor attempt at an imitation of the Old Testament Scriptures, and is without connection, object, or aim; shewing every where language and phrases of too late a construction to accord with the Asiatic manner of composition, which highly characterizes the style of the Bible”<sup>17</sup> Another who spent much time investigating the Book of Mormon, late nineteenth century Reverend M.T. Lamb, noticed “sentences by the thousand, and whole chapters, whose very presence in the Book of Mormon, in the form in which they are found, settles the question of the modern origin of the book beyond the possibility of dispute.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), pp. 7, 10-13, quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West* (Albany, NY: Hoffman and White, 1834), p.73

<sup>18</sup> M.T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible* (New York, NY: Ward and Drummond, 1886) pp. 186-87, quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1998).

## Plagiarism of the King James Version of the Bible

The influence of the King James Version of the Bible on the Book of Mormon doesn't end with the style of language. As Mark Twain mentioned above, there are countless examples where New and Old Testament phrases are grafted into the text. Again, one would not expect to find Nephite thoughts and sentiments articulated in King James language, let alone language that is found word for word in the Bible. Furthermore, anachronisms abound as Old Testament period Nephite prophets use expressions from New Testament period Jewish apostles that lived nearly six hundred years after Nephi. Here are some examples of phrases lifted from the Bible, as demonstrated in Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book, *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible*:

- KJV: Great and marvellous are thy works O Lord God Almighty (Rev. 15:3)  
BofM: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty (1 Nephi 1:14)
- KJV: which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets... since the world began (Acts 3:21)  
BofM: which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets... since the world began (1 Nephi 3:20)
- KJV: It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not (John 11:50)  
BofM: It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief (1 Nephi 4:13)
- KJV: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath...delivered me out of the hand of Herod (Acts 12:11)  
BofM: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath...protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban (1 Nephi 5:8)
- KJV: the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5)  
BofM: the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts (1 Nephi 11:22)
- KJV: and it fell and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:27)  
BofM: and it fell and the fall thereof was exceedingly great (1 Nephi 11:36)

Take, for instance, the following two examples:

1. KJV: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12)  
BofM: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Mormon 9:27)
2. KJV: that ye may consume it upon your lusts (James 4:3)  
BofM: that ye may consume it on your lusts (Mormon 9:28)

The first example features the words “fear” and “trembling” in place of what would otherwise likely read “work out your own salvation *with humility*.” Certainly, the word choice here is strange. It is inconceivable that such an idiomatic expression, clothed in 17<sup>th</sup> century English and attributed to 1<sup>st</sup> century Paul, would be echoed by 4<sup>th</sup> century Mormon on an entirely different continent. The second example also represents highly unusual wording. Again, how did such an expression, translated from the Greek into 17<sup>th</sup> Century English, find its way to a people that spoke Hebrew and wrote in Reformed Egyptian? It is much easier to conclude that Joseph borrowed these phrases from the

Bible. Some may try to explain away the coincidences, but the evidence of plagiarism is overwhelming. In fact, Jerald and Sandra Tanner have identified approximately three thousand examples of plagiarism. Granted, some parallels are only a few words, but others are quite lengthy and so nearly identical as to leave little doubt that either Joseph possessed a near photographic memory as he dictated or he had his Bible open during translation.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from using biblical phraseology, there are instances where Joseph Smith appears to borrow story lines from the Bible. Take for instance the respective stories of Paul and Alma. Again, the Tanners reveal some interesting parallels:

1. Both Alma and Paul were very wicked men before their conversions. (Mosiah 27:8 / I Tim. 1:12-13)
2. Both Alma and Paul traveled about trying to destroy the church of God. (Alma 36:6 / I Cor. 15:9)
3. Both Alma and Paul were rigorous in their persecution of the church. (Alma 36:14 / Acts 22:4)
4. Both Alma and Paul were out on one of their missions of persecution on the day of their conversion. (Mosiah 27:10-11 / Acts 26:11-13)
5. In both cases the people present fell to the earth. (Mosiah 27:12 / Acts 26:14)
6. The companions of both Alma and Paul were unable to understand the voice that spoke. (Mosiah 27:12 / Acts 22:9)
7. In the vision which followed, both Alma and Paul were asked why they fought against the work of the Lord. (Mosiah 27:13 / Acts 9:4; 22:7)
8. Both Alma and Paul became helpless after the vision and had to be helped by their friends. (Mosiah 27:19 / Acts 9:8)
9. Both went without food for a period of time. (Mosiah 27:23 / Acts 9:9)
10. Both Alma and Paul were converted to the Lord. (Mosiah 27:23-24 / Acts 9:18)
11. After their conversions both Alma and Paul traveled about preaching the word of God. (Mosiah 27:32 / Acts 9:20)
12. Both Alma and Paul labored with their own hands for their support. (Alma 30:32 / I Cor. 4:12)
13. Both Alma and Paul performed a similar miracle. (Alma 15:11 / Acts 14:10)
14. Both Alma and Paul were put in prison. (Alma 14:22 / Acts 16:23)
15. In both cases they prayed to the Lord. (Alma 14:26 / Acts 16:25)
16. In both cases there was a great earthquake. (Alma 14:27 / Acts 16:26)
17. In both cases the prisoners' bands were loosed. (Alma 14:28 / Acts 16:26)

H. Michael Marquardt, a prominent expert on Mormon history, has identified the influence of Paul's letters on Alma's sermons:

- The wages of sin is death. (Rom. 6:23)  
For his wages he receiveth death. (Alma 5:42)
- I shew you a mystery. (I Cor. 15:51)

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<sup>19</sup> For a couple examples of these longer passages, compare Moroni 7 and 1 Corinthians 13; Moroni 10 and 1 Corinthians 12.

I unfold unto you a mystery. (Alma 40:3)

- Mortal must put on immortality... corruptible shall have put on incorruption. (I Cor. 15: 53-54)  
Mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption. (Alma 41:4)
- Without God in the world. (Eph. 2:12)  
Without God in the world. (Alma 41:11)<sup>20</sup>

Another peculiar Book of Mormon storyline that finds parallels in the New Testament is that of Ammon and the Lamanite king, Lamoni. The Tanners identified the following similarities with the New Testament story of the raising of Lazarus (Alma 19 and John 11):

(1) In both stories a man seems to die. (2) In both cases the servant of the Lord comes to the scene. (3) A period of time elapses in both stories. (4) In both cases there is great sorrow. (5) Martha and the queen use the word "stinketh." It is significant that this is the only time this word is used in the Book of Mormon and it is only used one other time in the Bible. (6) Both Ammon and Jesus use the word "sleepeth" with regard to the man. This word is only used twice in the Book of Mormon and only appears seven times in the Bible. (7) Ammon and Martha both use the words "he shall rise again." (8) The conversation between Ammon and the queen contains other phrases that are similar to those used by Jesus and Martha. (9) In both cases the man arose.

Other evidence of plagiarism of the Bible has come to light as advancements have been made in Biblical exegesis. With the discoveries of early Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic manuscripts, it has been determined that the later Greek manuscripts used to create the English bible in 1611 contain numerous errors in translation. Access to these older documents has allowed interested scholars to compare Book of Mormon passages with near identical counterparts in the Bible, such as the Sermon on the Mount or the prophecies of Isaiah, to like passages in the early manuscripts. It would stand to reason that the Book of Mormon, if anything, would agree more with the earlier biblical manuscripts. Instead, scholars find the Book of Mormon accounts mirroring the inferior translations found in the King James Version.

Mormon scholar, Dr. Stan Larson, who was considered one of the foremost authorities in the church in textual analysis and was featured in the *Ensign Magazine*, was sorely disappointed after attempting to prove the antiquity of the Book of Mormon's Sermon on the Mount. After careful analysis, he concluded that "its dependence on the KJV is apparent." He sadly reported that the Book of Mormon "follows the KJV into error, echoing mistranslations or including translations of late and derivative Greek texts... A variety of examples has shown that the Book of Mormon text follows errors of

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<sup>20</sup> H. Michael Marquardt, *The Use of the Bible In the Book of Mormon and Early Nineteenth Century Events Reflected in the Book of Mormon* (Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1979), p. 105.

the KJV, but no clear evidence shows the Book of Mormon restoring the long-lost original.”<sup>21</sup>

This discovery suggests, of course, that Joseph Smith used his King James Bible during the translation, an idea that apparently does not bother some apologetic scholars. They aver that when Joseph came to passages on the plates that were nearly identical to those found in his Bible, he simply stopped “translating” with the seer stone and lifted passages from the New Testament. This is problematic, to say the least. Was the translation process painful? Was it exhausting? It’s suspicious that someone with the divine power of a seer would switch between *translating* and *copying*.

Moreover, the idea that Joseph sometimes preferred Bible passages begs the question: How could he be sure that both texts would sufficiently agree without first checking the entire Book of Mormon passage on the plates? Only then could he determine if it were appropriate to use the Bible passage instead. Once he had made the effort to decipher the characters on the plates, why would he not simply dictate to his scribe and move on? Why would he bother to return to his Bible? Considering the length of the Book of Mormon, such redundancy is implausible, as is the entire apologetic theory.

If, indeed, Joseph unabashedly copied passages of the Sermon on the Mount directly out of his Bible, then the text in the Book of Mormon should be identical to that in the New Testament. What the reader finds, however, are many minor textual changes. Dr. Larson noticed that differences in wording are often found where italics occur in the biblical text. Dr. Larson explains: “The Book of Mormon text often reverses biblical quotations at the very point where the original 1611 editions of the KJV prints the word or words in a different type-face in order to indicate that the words are not found in the Greek. This printing device was both inconsistently and sparsely applied in the 1611 KJV and improved in the 1769 printing. When Smith came to the KJV italics in the Sermon of the Mount, which he knew indicated that whatever was printed in italics was not in the original Greek, he would often either drop the word or revise it... On the other hand, the Book of Mormon fails to revise places where the KJV text ought to have been printed in italics but is not. In two places the Book of Mormon copies the noun ‘men’ from the KJV, where it is not in the original Greek and has been improperly added in the KJV.”<sup>22</sup>

So while it appears conclusive that Joseph used biblical phraseology, concepts, and storylines to craft the text of the Book of Mormon, it also appears that he was concerned about being labeled a plagiarist if anyone noticed, as they surely would, that corresponding sections of both cannon matched word for word. To avoid this pitfall, Joseph slightly manipulated the text precisely in the places where he knew he could get away with it. Thus the Book of Mormon’s version of the Sermon on the Mount preserves

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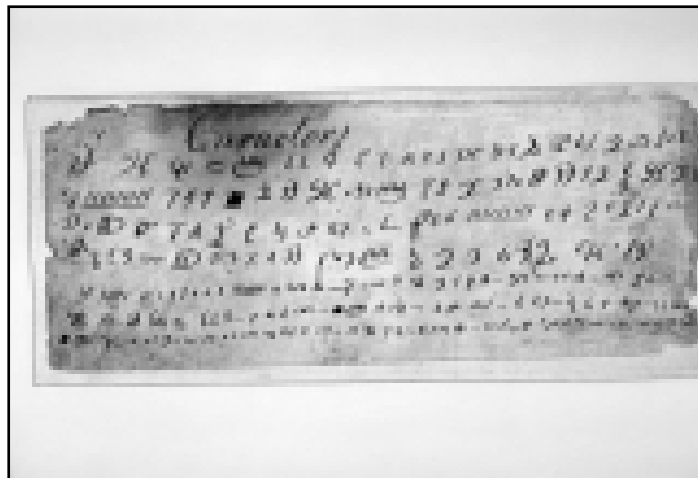
<sup>21</sup> *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992) pp. 116-117, quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

the vast majority of the original King James wording with just enough variation to avoid the appearance of outright plagiarism.

As Joseph later undertook the task of revising the Bible to produce an “inspired” version, scholars would have yet another account of the Sermon on the Mount to examine. One would assume that the Book of Mormon version of Jesus’ sermon, if it agreed at all with either account, would most reflect the wording of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. After all, the Book of Mormon was correctly translated, as confirmed by the angel, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible came directly by revelation. Instead, we see the Book of Mormon preferring the text in the inferior King James Version. In the example below, the reader is left to conclude that the Book of Mormon verse is as incomplete as the Bible’s:

- KJV Mathew 6:22: The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.
- 3 Nephi 13:22: The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.
- JST, Matthew 6:22: The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single *to the glory of God*, thy whole body shall be full of light.



A picture illustrating Isaiah 29 showing characters from the Book of Mormon.

## Borrowing from the Apocrypha

While detecting biblical phraseology in the Book of Mormon may be reasonably easy for the reader familiar with the King James Bible, identifying plagiarism of the Apocrypha may prove to be more difficult. Names like Maccabees, Judith, and Esdras have all but vanished, but in Joseph's day, these and others books were still included in many Bibles. The value of these apocryphal accounts was in question, however, and those who advocated for their removal from the sacred canon ultimately prevailed. It is apparent that Joseph Smith had access to the Apocrypha, and it most likely influenced him as he began to develop material for the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Nephi.

The Tanners took on the tedious challenge of combing through the Book of Mormon for evidence of plagiarism, and once again, they discovered some unmistakable similarities. Perhaps most intriguing is the fact that "twenty-eight of the thirty-two parallels to the Apocrypha are found in the first five chapters of the Book of Mormon."<sup>23</sup> In fact, just two words into the Book of Mormon, the reader finds evidence of the Apocrypha's influence in the name, "Nephi," which also appears in 2 Maccabees 1:36 (The name "Laban" appears in Judith 9:26 and "Ezias," the name of an elusive Jewish prophet mentioned in Helaman 8:20 but absent from the Old Testament, is found in 1 Esdra 8:2).

Also in the second verse of 1st Nephi, chapter one, Nephi claims that he is engraving his record in the Egyptian language. Scholars, both critical and apologetic, have wondered at this statement. Why would the proud Jews ever voluntarily adopt the language of the enemy? It would seem that even the *memory* of Egyptian would be repulsive, let alone its presence in sacred Hebrew texts. But admittedly, this is conjecture. According to the Old Testament, the Jews *did* open diplomatic relations with the Egyptians later in their history, even collaborating in a common defense against Babylonian expansion. So while Jewish-Egyptian documents undoubtedly existed in some form or another, it's unlikely that an entire volume of sacred scripture such as the Brass Plates or the plates of Nephi would ever be written in Egyptian.

Consulting the Apocrypha, the reader discovers what may have contributed to Joseph Smith's decision to have Nephi write in Egyptian. In the 1611 and later versions of the Apocrypha, the introduction to the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees speaks of a "letter from *the Jews at Jerusalem* to them of *Egypt*..." Then in the first verse that follows, the reader finds, "The brethren, *the Jews* that be *at Jerusalem*, and in the land of Judea, wish unto the brethren the *Jews* that are throughout *Egypt*, health and peace." (2 Maccabees 1:1) Verse 10 of the first chapter also mentions "*Jews* that were in *Egypt*."

As Nephi inscribes his history in Egyptian he informs the reader that he is engaged in the process of condensing his father's history: "Behold I make an abridgment of the record of my father..." (1 Nephi 1:17) The prophets Mormon and Moroni were also busy "abridging" records. In fact, the word "abridgement" is so noticeable that one finds

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<sup>23</sup> Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha," Salt Lake City Messenger, Issue No. 89, Dec. 1995.



it twice on the title page of the Book of Mormon. While no examples or variations of the word can be seen in the Bible, “abridgement” is found in abundance in the second chapter of 2 Maccabees: “All these things, I say being declared by Jason of Cyrene in five books, we will assay to *abridge* in one volume.... to us that have taken upon us this painful labour of *abridging*, it was not easy... Leaving to the author the exact handling of every particular, and labouring to follow the rules of *an abridgment*.... But to use brevity, and avoid much labouring of the work, is to be granted to him that will *make an abridgment*.” (Verses 23, 26, 28, 31)

Moving through the narrative to the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, the reader will remember that Nephi was commanded to secure the plates of brass that were kept in Laban’s treasury (1 Nephi, chapter 4). Interestingly, these two elements, “plates of brass” and a “treasury,” appear together in 1 Maccabees 14:49-49: “So they commanded that this writing should be put in *tables of brass*, and that they should be set up within the compass of the sanctuary in a conspicuous place; Also that the copies thereof should be laid up in *the treasury*, to the end that Simon and his sons might have them.”

More evidence of the Apocrypha’s influence is seen below in a list of parallels found in the respective stories of Nephi and Judith (as printed in “Joseph Smith’s Use of the Apocrypha”). Granted, some of the elements found in Judith are scattered across several chapters, but there is enough here to make a case that Joseph Smith borrowed elements from Judith to construct his story of Nephi and Laban:

- Both stories speak of a wicked man who wanted to destroy God's people.

"Laban... sent his servants to slay us..." (1 Nephi 3:25)

"The next day Holofernes commanded all his army... to make war against the children of Israel." (Judith 7:1)

- Both claimed that God's strength did not depend upon numbers.

"the Lord... is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty." (1 Nephi 4:1)

"For thy power standeth not in multitude, nor thy might in strong men... a saviour of them that are without hope." (Judith 9:11)

- In both cases the wicked man was delivered into the hands of the servant of the Lord.

"I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me..." (1 Nephi 4:7)

"And Judith was left alone in the tent, and Holofernes lying along upon his bed..." (Judith 13:2)

- In both cases the wicked man was drunk.

"he was drunken with wine..." (1 Nephi 4:7)

"he was filled with wine..." (Judith 13:2)

- In both cases the servant of the Lord took hold of the wicked man's weapon.

"I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth..." (1 Nephi 4:9)

"she... took down his fauchion from thence..." (Judith 13:6)

- In both cases the servant of the Lord took hold of the wicked man's hair.

"took Laban by the hair of the head..." (1 Nephi 4:18)

"took hold of the hair of his head..." (Judith 13:7)

- In both cases the wicked man's head was cut off with his own weapon.

"and I smote off his head with his own sword..." (1 Nephi 4:18)

"And she smote twice upon his neck... and she took away his head from him."  
(Judith 13:8)

- In both accounts the servant of the Lord changes apparel.

"I took the garments of Laban and put them upon mine own body; yea, even every whit" (1 Nephi 4:20)

"She... pulled off the sackcloth which she had on, and put off the garments of her widowhood... her countenance was altered, and her apparel was changed"  
(Judith 10:2-3, 7)

Aside from these parallels, there are others that could be mentioned such as those found in Lehi's dream of the Tree of Life (probably also influenced by the Book of Revelations and one of Joseph Smith Sr.'s dreams) and Esdra's vision (there is quite a compelling list of words common to both accounts: *tree of life, fruit, building, water, river, narrow, strait, path, broad, field*). But the aforementioned examples should be sufficient to suggest the Apocrypha's connection to many key elements in the first several chapters of the Book of Mormon.



## 19<sup>th</sup> Century Elements

To many astute contemporaries of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon read like a virtual guidebook to the arguments, controversies, and rhetoric of the great revival period of the 1820's. Regarding the rhetoric, alone, a professor at the University of Michigan once reasoned that "either the Lord intentionally made all the mistakes of the first edition and colored the writings with the provincialisms of New York state, or, that the Lord was unable to speak correctly or use other than the phrases and mannerisms of the locality in which Joseph Smith lived."<sup>24</sup> As for 19<sup>th</sup> century issues, the famous Ohio preacher, Alexander Campbell, whom Sidney Rigdon had followed before joining forces with Joseph Smith, described the Book of Mormon as containing "every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years." He went on to say that Joseph "decides all the great controversies - infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of free masonry, republican government, and the rights of man."<sup>25</sup>

Grant Palmer, former long-time LDS Institute educator, explored the connection between the stories, sermons, and other elements in the Book of Mormon and the same from the Palmyra area revival culture. In his book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*<sup>26</sup>, he outlined five points that characterize the evangelical revivalism of the day. Each of these points will be considered and compared with Book of Mormon equivalents below:

- 1. Camp settings.**
- 2. Preaching that interlaced paraphrased biblical passages with revival terminology designed to produce a powerful emotional impact.**
- 3. A conversion pattern characterized by a conviction of sin, intense prayer for forgiveness, and a sweet calming assurance of being forgiven, often accompanied by trembling, tears, falling, and other physical manifestations.**
- 4. Denunciation of Deists, Unitarians, Universalists, and agnostics.**
- 5. Vivid descriptions of the degenerate state of human beings.**

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<sup>24</sup> B.H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1907-1912) vol. 1. p. 307, quoted in La Mar Peterson, *Creation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), pp. 99-100.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (Boston, 1832), p. 13, quoted in Edwin Firmage, Jr., "Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter," *American Apocrypha* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

## Camp Settings

Once the reader becomes acquainted with the New York camp meeting format, parallels in the Book of Mormon become obvious. In one particular Methodist revival that occurred only a mile from Palmyra in 1826, thousands upon thousands of contrite worshippers made their way to the campsite with their families, pitched their tents, and positioned them with the front facing the raised stand where the ministers would preach. In chapter two of the Book of Mosiah, King Benjamin's people "gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which King Benjamin should speak unto them... They pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family... every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple... (King Benjamin) caused a tower to be erected."

In addition to the similar settings, the character of King Benjamin, himself, is conspicuously similar to one Bishop M' Kendree, who, according to a local Methodist publication dated August 1826, gave his farewell address at this particular revival. As presiding leader over the area, he was described as extremely beloved and venerated, yet worn with old age and *feeble*. In this condition he addressed his congregants for the last time, a sermon purportedly so powerful that it sent his listeners to the ground and provoked such a spirit of unity that nearly all in attendance gave themselves to Christ. At the conclusion of his valedictory address, preachers were appointed to various "stations" in the Ontario district.

The reader of the Book of Mormon will remember that King Benjamin gave his farewell address just before he was "about to go down to (his) grave" and that his "whole frame (did) tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak..." The love of the people for King Benjamin was palpable as they leaned on every word he spoke concerning their "nothingness" before God and their dire need to rely on the merits of Christ for their salvation. The power of his sermon was such that "there was not one soul, except it were little children, but who had entered into the covenant and had taken upon them the name of Christ." Priests were then appointed to teach the Nephite people.

The character of King Benjamin also seems to draw inspiration from a Presbyterian minister named *Benjamin* Stockton. According to William Smith, Joseph's younger brother, the Reverend Stockton had attempted to recruit the Smith family but had deeply offended them when another Smith brother, Alvin, tragically passed away. Evidently, Stockton had publicly informed the family that Alvin was suffering in hell as a result of his being "unchurched." In his sermons, Benjamin Stockton was equally inflammatory. Psychoanalyst Robert D. Anderson argues that Stockton's words likely created a great deal of anxiety in Joseph's developing mind (as evidenced by Joseph's later vision of Alvin in the Celestial Kingdom) and that his condemnatory approach is reflected in King Benjamin's scathing sermon mentioned above.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), pp. 115, 132, 133).

Other camp meeting elements that appear in the Book of Mormon include references to “stations,” already mentioned, and “altars.” Reports of the aforementioned Palmyra area revival describe newly appointed “Stations of Preachers.” Interestingly, Mormon uses the same terminology as he recounts how Ammon appointed the other Sons of Mosiah to their “several stations” (Alma 17:18). Earlier in the same chapter, Mormon describes the great success of their missionary efforts, writing that “by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him.” The use of the word “altar” is another indication of camp meeting influence on the Book of Mormon. The raised stand from which the circuit preachers delivered their messages often featured a bench directly below and in front of it, commonly referred to as the “altar of God.” It was here that convicted souls would come to confess their “awful state,” exhibit their fainting or falling behaviors, and plead for mercy until the moment of absolution arrived. Interestingly, emotionally unaffected congregants were admonished to “go to the grove to seek God.”<sup>28</sup>

Palmer mentions that Methodist camp meetings often featured companion preachers, one to preach and one to exhort. Some were known for their ability to preach the scriptures, while others were more skilled at summarizing the preacher’s main points and converting thought to action through impassioned exhortation. Those familiar with the Book of Mormon will recognize this pattern in the “team-teaching” of Alma and Amulek, and will recall Moroni’s frequent use of the word “exhort” in his famous challenge to the reader (Moroni 10:4). Methodist ministers were also encouraged to keep their sermons “plain” and to the point. The reader finds numerous examples where Nephi and others talk about “delighting in plainness” and the “plain and precious truths” missing from the Bible.

### Revival Terminology and its Powerful Effects

*“The translation of the Book of Mormon is English in idiom, and the idiom of the time and locality where it was produced, as all must know who read it, and especially those who have read the first edition of it...”<sup>29</sup>*

Contrary to B.H. Robert’s assertion that “all must know who read it,” modern readers of the Book of Mormon have little hope of recognizing the use of revival phraseology without help. Even so, Mark D. Thomas maintained that “a knowledge of the theological terminology of the original audience is necessary to understand certain passages in the Book of Mormon.”<sup>30</sup> Fortunately for the displaced reader, Thomas, Grant Palmer, Dan Vogel and other scholars past and present have researched the extant Protestant publications and have recovered these forgotten idioms, formed from a combination of paraphrased Bible verses and homespun expressions.<sup>31</sup> Once brought to

<sup>28</sup> Michael T. Walton, “Joseph Smith and Science: The Methodist Connection. A Case Study in Mormonism as a Response to 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Revivalism,” Aug. 1984 Sunstone presentation, quoted in Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), p. 132).

<sup>29</sup> B.H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith*, 1:293

<sup>30</sup> Mark D. Thomas “Revival Language in the Book of Mormon,” *Sunstone*, Issue 39, May-June 1983.

<sup>31</sup> For a late nineteenth century examination, see M.T. Lamb’s *Golden Bible*, 1887.

light, the incendiary tone and vehement exhortation that characterize this era of frontier preaching become readily apparent in the sermons of Alma, Amulek, Jacob, King Benjamin, Abinadi, and others in the Book of Mormon.

Palmer has identified hundreds of parallels in addition to the few listed below (arranged in columns for convenience):

Evangelical Phrases

**Lorenzo Dow:**

“Hard heart”  
 “Sing my redeemers praise”  
 “Unprepared to meet God”

**Ray Potter:**

“I wrestled (in prayer)”  
 “Fill me with his love”  
 “Pains of Hell”  
 “Over a dreadful gulf”

**Alfred Bennett:**

“O blessed Jesus”  
 “Savior’s image be pressed on your heart”  
 “Awful pains of death”

**Eleazar Sherman:**

“Tremble in his presence”  
 “A wounded heart”

**Abel Thornton:**

“Life is a state of probation”  
 “A great change in your heart”  
 “His (Jesus’) arm extended to all”

**George Whitefield:**

“Nothing but fire and brimstone”  
 “Awake, arise from their sleep”  
 “Methinks I see the Judge sitting on  
     his throne”  
 “Wages of the devil/A child of the devil”

Book of Mormon Phrases

“Hardness of hearts” (Alma/Amulek)  
 “Sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma)  
 “This life is the time to prepare to  
     meet God” (Alma/Amulek)

“Wrestle (in prayer)” (Enos)  
 “Filled with the love of God” (Benjamin)  
 “Encircled...pains of hell” (Alma/Amulek)  
 “Everlasting gulf of death  
     and misery” (Ammon/Aaron)

“O Blessed Jesus” (Ammon/Aaron)  
 “His image in your countenance” (Alma)  
 “Encircled...by the bands of death” (Alma)

“Shrink from (his) presence” (Benjamin)  
 “Wounded soul...pierced with  
     deep wounds” (Jacob)

“Life a probationary state” (Alma/Amulek)  
 “Mighty change...in our hearts” (Benjamin)  
 “The arms of mercy are extended towards  
     them” (Alma)

“Torment as fire and brimstone” (Benjamin)  
 “Awake from the slumber of death” (Jacob)  
 “Methought I saw God sitting upon  
     his throne” (Alma/Amulek)  
 “Wages of him/a child of the devil”(Alma)

It would be most easy to conclude from the examples above that these prominent Protestant ministers had a profound influence on Joseph Smith, and thus on the language of the Nephite prophets. But in defense of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, the question might be asked: Do some of these phrases have Brass Plate precedents from which the Nephites could have drawn? Scanning the scriptures using the LDS Church’s

online search feature (lds.org), it is possible to check some of this Evangelical terminology against the text of the Bible.

The term “fire and brimstone,” for example, appears nine times in the Bible, including both the New and Old Testaments. Five of these cases occur in the Book of Revelations, which post dates the content of the Brass Plates. While Revelations could have had no logical effect on the language employed by the Nephite authors, it is interesting to note that “fire and brimstone” in Revelations is used in much the same way as the Book of Mormon prophets Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, and Alma use the expression – a way to describe the torture of hell:

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with *fire and brimstone*: which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

“Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of *fire and brimstone*, which is endless torment. (2 Nephi 28:23)

The few instances of this phrase (Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah) that may have been available to Lehi and his posterity in the Brass Plates reveal a different context (i.e. raining down from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah). Thus there is no identifiable precedent for the use of “fire and brimstone” among the Nephites. A more reasonable explanation is this: The Protestant ministers in upstate New York quoted from Revelations, and the historical record shows that they, along with the Bible, itself, greatly influenced Joseph’s thinking and future direction. Quite simply, the “fire and brimstone” rhetoric in the Book of Mormon is only another case where anachronistic revival language finds its way into the supposed ancient record of the Nephites.

Two other peculiar Evangelical phrases mentioned above and worthy of mention are “probationary state” or “state of probation,” and “methinks” or “methought.” The word “probation” occurs only in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, and appears to have no Old Testament, or Brass Plate, precedent. The same can be said for the very quaint word, “methought.” It appears only twice in the entire Book of Mormon and nowhere else in the standard works. It is obviously a variation on the word, “methinks,” a word that Reverend George Whitefield used in his sermons. These are just two more examples where it is clear that revival terminology unique to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had an impact in shaping the text of the Book of Mormon.

## Revival Conversion Pattern

The revival conversion pattern is one where the candidate for the Lord's grace first feels convicted in his conscience because of his sinful state. He then appeals desperately for divine intervention. He may weep, tremble, or even fall to the ground, losing consciousness. This period of relatively brief, but unfathomable suffering is followed by a flood of relief as the Spirit witnesses to the heart that Jesus has forgiven him. He may then display other highly emotional behavior as he savors the ecstasy of the moment.

Historian Dan Vogel, in his book, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*, quotes from a 1741 journal entry penned by John Wesley, himself, founder of Methodism: "I preached on the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith. While I was speaking, several dropped down as dead and among the rest such a cry was heard of sinners groaning for the righteousness of faith as almost drowned my voice. But many of these soon lifted up their heads with joy and broke out into thanksgiving, being assured they now had the desire of their soul--the forgiveness of their sins."<sup>32</sup> Describing some of the behaviors at the earlier American revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as "emotional extravagances," Northampton preacher Jonathan Edwards recalled, "There were some instances of persons lying in a sort of trance, remaining for perhaps a whole twenty-four hours motionless, and with their senses locked up; but in the meantime under strong imaginations, as though they went to heaven, and had there a vision of glorious and delightful objects."<sup>33</sup>

The astute reader will immediately recognize this pattern in the conversion stories in the Book of Mormon. Like the camp meetings, Book of Mormon accounts feature dramatic scenes replete with miracles, falling, fainting, and comatose states where the soul is nurtured in the Spirit. Ironically, the modern reader's conversion experience is likely to be much more mundane in comparison. The common course for most members of the LDS Church is to study, pray, attend meetings, visit the temple, pray some more, and feel the Spirit. Through the aggregate of these faith-promoting experiences, they form a testimony of the gospel. But when considering the Book of Mormon accounts, they are left to marvel at a bygone era when miracles flourished and conversions were sensational. They likely find it difficult enough relating to their own historical record when they read of early meetings in Kirtland in which ordinary members regularly spoke in tongues and witnessed elaborate theophanies and angelic manifestations.<sup>34</sup>

Palmer has identified several accounts of Methodist conversions occurring in Joseph Smith's time:

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<sup>32</sup> John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed. Percy Livingstone Parker (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 99, quoted in Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1988)

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, vol. 4, in John E. Smith, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 5 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 4:546, 547, 550, quoted in Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1988)

<sup>34</sup> See John David Beurger's *Mysteries of Godliness* (Signature Books, 1994).



- Reverend George Lane, commissioned to preside over Methodist activities in the Palmyra area in 1823 and, according to Oliver Cowdery, a great influence on young Joseph, told of a girl who attended a “prayer meeting” whose “heart was broken up; she saw clearly that she was a child of wrath, and in danger of hell. With this view of her sad condition, she fell prostrate at the feet of her offended sovereign, and in the bitterest anguish cried for mercy. In this situation she was not suffered long to continue before she obtained a most satisfactory evidence of her acceptance with God through the merits of Jesus Christ. Her soul was unspeakably happy...”<sup>35</sup>
- Reverend Lorenzo Dow described his own conversion experience. At a prayer meeting he observed that “sinners were weeping on every side... They since have told me that I fell down several times... my distress was so great that I scarcely knew what position I was in. When I got home... I then lay down to rest... I awaked in endless misery. I strove to plead with God for mercy... to break these chains... I saw the Mediator step in, as it were, between the Father’s justice and my soul, and these words were supplied to my mind with great power; ‘Son! Thy sins are forgiven thee... The burden of sin and guilt and the fear of hell vanished... My soul was so filled with peace and love and joy, that I could no more keep it to myself.’”<sup>36</sup>
- Reverend Darius Williams at the time of his conversion was one of many in a congregation that “shook like a mighty wind” when he recognized his awful condition. Darius “fell helpless in a prayer-meeting, and lay for two hours in his father’s arms.” After receiving his strength and crying for mercy he “declared that he had found peace.”<sup>37</sup>

Compare these with the accounts of Alma the Younger, Zeezrom, King Lamoni, and Lamoni’s Father in the Book of Mormon:

- **Alma** (selections from Alma 36:10-21):  
 “And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs. And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them... But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins... yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror... And now,

<sup>35</sup> George Lane, “Letter from Rev. George Lane,” 25 Jan. 1825, *Methodist Magazine* 8 (Apr. 1825): 159, quoted in Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), p. 101.

<sup>36</sup> Lorenzo Dow, *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil, As Exemplified in the life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow* (Norwich, CT: Wm. Faulkner, 1833), pp. 14-16, quoted in Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>37</sup> George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, D.D.* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 108-109, quoted in Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p. 106.

for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul... I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more... And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold... there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.”

- **Zeezrom** (selections from Alma, chapters 12-15)

“Now when Alma had spoken these words, Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly, for he was convinced more and more of the power of God... And it came to pass that Zeezrom was astonished at the words which had been spoken... and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt; yea, he began to be encircled about by the pains of hell... Zeezrom lay sick at Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness... therefore he began to be scorched with a burning heat... And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, taking him by the hand: Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation? And he answered and said: Yea, I believe all the words that thou hast taught... And then Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ. And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk... And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; and he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.”
- **Lamoni** (selections from Alma, chapters 18-19)

“And it came to pass that after (Ammon) had said all these things, and expounded them to the king, that the king believed all his words. And he began to cry unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, have mercy... And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth... and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights... And it came to pass that he arose, according to the words of Ammon; and as he arose, he stretched forth his hand unto (his wife, the queen), and said: Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou... behold, I have seen my Redeemer... Now, when he had said these words... he sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit... (Ammon) fell upon his knees... and he was also overpowered with joy; and thus they all three had sunk to the earth... And it came to pass that (the King’s servants) did call on the name of the Lord, in their might, even until they had all fallen to the earth... (The queen) arose... and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people! And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking *many words which were not understood*; and when she had done this, she took the king, Lamoni, by the hand, and behold he arose and stood upon his feet.”
- **Lamoni’s Father** (selections from Alma 22)

“And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit

rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day?... I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.... the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying: O God... I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead... (Aaron) said unto him: Stand. And he stood upon his feet, receiving his strength... and he did minister unto them, insomuch that his whole household were converted unto the Lord.”

In these instances the revival conversion pattern is clear, and like the aforementioned protestant ministers who entered the ministry some time after their respective conversions, each of these Book of Mormon converts immediately began to preach the gospel or “minister” unto the people. It is also interesting to note that Lamoni’s wife is said to have uttered “many words which were not understood.” In this we see the manifestation of the “gift of tongues,” or the phenomenon of glossalalia, that was so prevalent in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century (numerous accounts reveal that it was a regular feature of Latter Day Saint meetings during the late Kirtland period).

#### Anti-Deist, Anti-Universalist, Anti-Restorationist, Anti-Agnostic

As Alexander Campbell observed above, the great controversies and conflicting Christian philosophies of the day worked their way into the pages of the Book of Mormon, as though these very unique 19<sup>th</sup> century issues were also being debated among the ancient Nephites. Granted, people in all ages have asked questions about the purpose of life and the destiny of man, so one might expect to find similar arguments in any civilization’s religious record. In the case of the Book of Mormon, however, the similarities are so intricate and occurrences so frequent that the reader can not help but notice its dependence on early 19<sup>th</sup> century revival history.

In particular, the Book of Mormon features many debates and confrontations over revival period hot-button issues like Deism, Universalism, Restorationism, and Agnosticism (also conspiracy theories around Free Masonry and the role of folk magic in religion, two issues that will be considered later). The religious establishment in Joseph’s day was very concerned about the proliferation of heretical ideas from these unorthodox movements. The concern grew to fear, and the traditional clergy soon declared holy war on their opponents.

Some preachers went so far as to label their foes “Anti-Christ.”<sup>38</sup> The reader may recall that this stinging appellation was given to a certain antagonist in the Book of Mormon, Korihor, and may wonder about the severity of such a label. But when the reader understands that “anti-Christ” was an Evangelical term commonly used in Joseph’s day, its connection with Korihor makes sense. The title, “anti-Christ,” was only

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61 (Oct 1980), pp. 362-363, 375, quoted in Palmer, *Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p125.

made more colloquial when preachers disseminated pamphlets that featured mock dialogues between believers and their opponents. In these fictitious debates, the dissenter, though prideful and presumptuous at first, would invariably succumb to the power of the word of God.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the Book of Mormon debates follow the same pattern, as will be shown below.

Since the modern reader might be unfamiliar with these religious philosophies, a brief summary of each is provided below, followed by examples of situations in the Book of Mormon where each particular philosophy is under attack:

### **Deism**

“A religious philosophy... that became prominent... in the 17th and 18th centuries... Deism derives the existence and nature of God from reason and personal experience, in contrast to theism (with religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism) which relies on revelation in sacred scriptures or the testimony of other people. Deists typically *reject supernatural events (prophecy, miracles)* and tend to assert that God does not interfere with human life and the laws of the universe... Some Deists rejected the claim of Jesus' divinity but continued to hold him in high regard as a moral teacher (see, e.g., Thomas Jefferson's famous Jefferson Bible). Other, more radical Deists *rejected Christianity altogether* and expressed hostility toward Christianity, which they regarded as pure superstition.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Deism in the Book of Mormon:**

Consider the case of Sherem and Jacob, where Jacob swiftly prevails and consigns Sherem to God's judgment after a robust but succinct debate. Notice Sherem's denial of prophecy, Christ, and miracles:

“And now it came to pass... there came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem... (and) he began to preach among the people, and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ... and this he did that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ... And now behold, I, Sherem, declare... no man knoweth of such things; *for he cannot tell of things to come*... But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my (Jacob's) soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words. And I said unto him: Deniest thou the Christ who shall come? And he said: If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that *there is no Christ*, neither has been, nor ever will be... (Sherem) said unto me: *Show me a sign* by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much... the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days... on the morrow the multitude were gathered together; and he spake

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<sup>39</sup> James H. Hotchkin, *A History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York, And the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Presbyterian Church in that Section* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1848), 167, 123, quoted in Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* p. 126.

<sup>40</sup> Wikipedia.com

plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels... he had been deceived by the power of the devil... he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment... when he had said these words he could say no more, and he gave up the ghost.” (selected verses from Jacob, chapter 7)

### Universalism

“A religion and theology that generally holds all persons and creatures are related to God or the divine and will be reconciled to God. A church that calls itself Universalist may emphasize the universal principles of most religions and accept other religions in an inclusive manner, believing in a Universal reconciliation between humanity and the divine. Other religions may have Universalist theology as one of their tenets and principles, including Ananda Marga, Christianity, Hindu, and some of the New Age religions.”<sup>41</sup>

### Universalism in the Book of Mormon:

Dan Vogel explains that “Universalists argued for universal salvation or ‘restoration’ - that Jesus’ atonement *applies to all regardless of performance* in mortality.”<sup>42</sup> That Universalist themes are evident in the Book of Mormon is reflected in the words of E.D. Howe, author of the first, definitive publication against the church, *Mormonism Unveiled*, when he sardonically observed, “The name of our ancient Universalist is called Nehor.”<sup>43</sup> Even devout followers noticed the anti-Universalist sentiments in the Book of Mormon. Vogel quotes early convert, Eli Gilbert, whose words to Oliver Cowdery were printed in the *Messenger and Advocate* in October 1834: “(The Book of Mormon) bore hard upon my favorite notions of universal salvation.”<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps Gilbert had Nephi and Moroni in mind when he said this. These two key prophets “bore hard” on Universalist beliefs in the passages below:

#### **Nephi:** (Concerning latter-day Universalism)

“Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.” (Concerning latter-day Restorationism, a branch of Universalism that believes in limited Godly punishment) “And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1988).

<sup>43</sup> E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled [sic]: or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834), 70, quoted in Vogel, *Religious Seekers*.

<sup>44</sup> Eli Gilbert to Oliver Cowdery, 24 Sept. 1834, *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (Oct. 1834): 9, quoted in Vogel, *Religious Seekers*.

for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (Nephi) Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines... and their works shall be in the dark. And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.” (2 Ne 28:7-10)

**Moroni:** (Concerning the time the Book of Mormon would come forth) “There shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.” (Mormon 8:31)

As is the case with Deism, Universalism has its “day in court” where the verdict is again pre-determined. This time it is Nehor’s turn to debate, provoke, and lose much more than the argument:

“And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people. And he also testified unto the people that *all mankind should be saved at the last day*, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, *all men should have eternal life*... And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to *establish a church* after the manner of his preaching... (at his execution) he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death. (Selected verses from Alma, chapter 1)

It’s interesting to note that in addition to the clear references to and disdain for his Universalist church and teachings, Nehor is also accused of committing two other sins, priest craft (payment for preaching) and the wearing of expensive clothing. According to Jason Whitman of the Boston Unitarian, most people in western New York in the 1820’s looked disfavorably on both.<sup>45</sup>

Although Nehor is extinguished, his ideology spreads like cancer. Those professing to be “after the order of Nehor” keep reappearing throughout the Book of Alma. On one occasion, Amulek explains to the people of Ammoniah that Christ will not save them in their sins (Alma 11:34-37). Helaman later reminds his sons of this sermon, saying, “And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people,

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<sup>45</sup> “The Book of Mormon,” The Unitarian, 1 Jan. 1834, 47.

*but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.”* (Helaman 5:10) This wording is significant because it is nearly identical to the argument put forth by Victor, New York minister, Charles Marford in 1819 when he warned that “Christ is a Savior to Save his people *from their Sins, and not in them* and those that think otherwise will be overthrown with that dreadful overthrow with which God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.”<sup>46</sup>

The Book of Mormon not only denounces Universalism, but it also discredits its counterpart, Restorationism. Universalists who considered the evidence in the scriptures for post-mortal punishment too convincing to ignore became Restorationists, advocating a belief in limited or temporary punishment. The Book of Mormon confronts this ideology, not through a debate with the enemy, but rather through the compassionate overtures of a father to a son. Corianton is confused about the “restoration” and the nature of eternal punishment, but his father, Alma, sets him straight:

“Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness... is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature? O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful... I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery.” (Selections from Alma chapters 41 and 42)

Conducting a simple keyword search on lds.org will show that Restorationism is the focal point of three entire chapters of the Book of Mormon; variations of the word “restoration” appear 25 times in Alma chapters 40-42. Interestingly, Alma informs Corianton, “this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets...” (Alma 40:24), as if to suggest that the “restoration” was a subject that had been given much attention in Nephite history.

Indeed, variations of “restoration” appear many times in the words of the prophets before the time of Alma, both in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, but not in the same context as we see in Alma’s preaching. The closest example is found in Second Nephi, chapter 9, in which “restoration” is used in connection with the resurrection. Looking back through the scriptures, one finds references to restoring property, restoring someone to their rightful position, restoring someone to life, restoring peace, restoring lost knowledge, restoring lands, and restoring the House of Israel, to name a few. However, the idea of a restoration, as Alma defines it, that “more fully condemmeth the

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<sup>46</sup> From original sermons of Charles Marford, in possession of J. Sheldon Fisher of Fishers, New York, quoted in Vogel, *Religious Seekers*.

sinner” and restores “good for good” and “evil for evil” is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon.

### **Agnosticism**

“(A) philosophical view that the truth value of certain claims—particularly metaphysical claims regarding theology, afterlife or the existence of God, gods, deities, or even ultimate reality—is unknown or, depending on the form of agnosticism, inherently unknowable due to the nature of subjective experience... Agnostics claim either that it is not possible to have *absolute* or *certain* knowledge of the existence or nonexistence of God or gods; or, alternatively, that while individual certainty *may* be possible, they personally have no knowledge. Agnosticism in both cases involves some form of skepticism.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Agnosticism in the Book of Mormon**

In the aforementioned anti-Christ, Korihor, we see the traits of an Agnostic, Atheist, and Deist:

“...And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor... began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach, saying: O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope... Why do ye look for a Christ? *For no man can know of anything which is to come*. Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers... *ye cannot know of things which ye do not see*; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ... God (is) a being who never has been seen or known, *who never was nor ever will be*.” (Selected verses from Alma chapter 30)

Korihor later backs away from his atheistic assertion that God “never was nor ever will be” as he answers Alma with a more agnostic reply:

“*I do not deny the existence of a God*, but I do not believe that there is a God; and I say also, that ye do not know that there is a God; and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe.” (Alma 30:48)

In typical fashion, the reader is provided with another sensational story in which an antagonist meets his appointed destiny. By this time in Nephite history it should have been clear to any outspoken dissident what fate awaited him if he ventured to publicly challenge the teachings of a prophet of God:

“Now Alma said unto him... I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance. Now when Alma had said these words, Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma... And Korihor did go about

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<sup>47</sup> Wikipedia.com



from house to house, begging food for his support... and as he went forth... he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead.”  
(Selections from Alma chapter 30)

### The Degenerate State of Human Beings

According to the circuit preachers in Joseph Smith’s day, men were hopelessly lost, consigned to a destitute state of abject wickedness and carnal depravity as a result of the fall of Adam. Furthermore, they were no better than “children of hell” without divine intervention. These ministers’ dogged determination and evocative oratory combined with the intoxicating effects of group hysteria to produce in their listeners a sense of unbearable shame and utter hopelessness. In this condition, it is little wonder why their congregants would commence weeping, falling, and fainting. This view on the condition of man is echoed by many of the prophets in the Book of Mormon, especially King Benjamin. In his final address, Benjamin reminds his listeners just how *low* they really are:

“And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the *dust of the earth*... I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own *nothingness*, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, *unworthy creatures*, and humble yourselves even in the *depths of humility*... For the natural man is an *enemy to God*, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord... And if they be evil they are consigned to an *awful view* of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to *shrink* from the presence of the Lord into a state of *misery and endless torment*, from whence they can no more return... Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with *guilt, and pain, and anguish*, which is like an *unquenchable fire*, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever... Their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable...” (selected verses from Mosiah, chapters 2-4)

True to revival conversion form, the despair is soon followed by euphoria. Benjamin’s condemnatory rhetoric and subsequent offer of mercy through Christ’s atonement result in a very familiar scenario:

“And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking ...he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had *fallen to the earth*, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them...they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less

than the dust of the earth... And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: *O have mercy*, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins... And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were *filled with joy*, having received a remission of their sins..." (Selected verses from Mosiah 4:1-3)



King Benjamin's Farewell Address, by Minerva Kohlhepp Teichert, 1888-1976



Angel Appears to Alma and the Sons of Mosiah, by Minerva Kohlhepp Teichert, 1888-1976

## Other 19<sup>th</sup> Century Elements

A few more compelling peculiarities in the text of the Book of Mormon are the occurrences of the phrase “*secret combinations*,” the word “*slippery*,” and language similar to that found in an important Presbyterian publication. In the case of the first two, modern readers will likely not attach any significance to either idiom, as both would seem to spring from Nephite vernacular. But in reality, these expressions were also rooted in Joseph’s environment.

### Secret Combinations

The Book of Mormon phrase, “Secret Combinations,” is used over 18 times (many more times in modified form) to describe the Gadianton Robbers and other organized dissident groups that pledged loyalty to one another in order to sustain and conceal their quest for power, plunder, and murder. They were said to have their “signs and oaths” and “secret works of darkness.” Ironically, the same could be said of the Masonic Order in the late 1820’s.

Estranged Freemason and Upstate New York resident, William Morgan, had written a scathing, tell-all exposition entitled, *Illustrations of Masonry*. Just as he was about to get it published, he mysteriously disappeared. What followed was a firestorm of controversy, accusation, and intolerance that swept the country, and local Anti-Masonic publications and political parties began springing up and denouncing the institution and its members. The raging controversy even affected the 1828 presidential race as efforts were made to thwart the candidacy of President Andrew Jackson, a Freemason.

In the December 2, 1828 edition of *The Palmyra Freeman*, the editor makes clear which side of the controversy he is on: “Our Government and Country will BE DESTROYED, unless the people put down MASONRY root and branch... and what will the people of this country think of themselves ten or twenty years hence, if they should suffer themselves to be duped, and do not [now?] unite hand and heart, to put down a *secret society*, which, if again suffered to get fairly the ascendancy will crush them and their liberties together.” And on November 10, 1829 it declared, “Masonry, thank God, is now before the world in all her naked deformity!—a *SECRET COMBINATION* to destroy liberty and religion...”<sup>48</sup>

In his famous farewell address, George Washington, himself a Mason, had warned America about the political dangers of “combinations or associations,” for they “are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people, and to usurp for themselves the reins of government; destroying afterwards the very engines, which have lifted them to unjust dominion.” Little did Washington know that his words would one day be caught up and transformed into a battle cry against the Masonic order and its secret signs, oaths, and penalties.

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Mormon Kingdom, Volume 1* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1969) pp.151-169.

According to the Tanners, extant anti-Masonic publications also featured the words “band,” “plunder,” and “craft” in connection with the Masonic Order. The Book of Mormon includes these words, as well. Examples of these and other anti-Masonic words and phrases appear below:

- “For the Lord worketh not in *secret combinations*... and whatsoever nation shall uphold such *secret combinations*, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed... Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this *secret combination* which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain...” (Selected verses from Ether, chapter 8).
- “And behold, I am Giddianhi; and I am the governor of this the *secret society* of Gadianton; which *society* and the works thereof I know to be good; and they are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us.” (3 Nephi 3:9)
- “And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his *band*, who had taken this covenant. And whosoever of those who belonged to their *band* should reveal unto the world of their wickedness and their abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness...” (Helaman 6: 22, 24)
- “And they were kept up by the power of the devil to administer these oaths unto the people, to keep them in darkness, to help such as sought power to gain power, and to murder, and to *plunder*, and to lie, and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms.” (Ether 8:16)
- “For there was one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his *craft*, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery; therefore he became the leader of the band of Kishkumen.” (Helaman 2:4)

In another passage on the subject of “secret combinations,” the very peculiar term “flaxen cord” appears:

“And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and *he leadeth*

*them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.”*

With all the Masonic catch phrases packed in before it, it would logically follow that the reference to a “flaxen cord” would have some 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent. Indeed it does, as is shown below in this description of a portion of a Masonic ceremony from Morgan’s *Illustrations of Masonry*: “The candidate is then blindfolded, his left foot bare, his right in a slipper, his left breast and arm naked, and *a rope called a Cable-tow round his neck* and left arm, [the rope is not put round the arm in all lodges] in which posture *the candidate is conducted to the door* where he is caused to give, or the conductor gives three distinct knocks...”<sup>49</sup> While it is uncertain from this description what kind of material was used to make a “cable tow,” it certainly could have been flax fiber. Whatever the case, it was used to lead a person “by the neck” to another location.

Considering the anti-Masonic flavor of the Book of Mormon, it is highly ironic that the later Mormon temple endowment would so closely resemble the Masonic ceremonies of the day. In Nauvoo, Joseph Smith only confused the issue when he said, “We further, caution our brethren, against the impropriety of the organization of bands or companies, by *covenant, oaths, penalties, or secrecies*... pure friendship, always becomes weakened, the very moment you undertake to make it stronger *by penal oaths and secrecy*.”<sup>50</sup> While the nature of the temple ceremonies were antithetical to Joseph’s statement and the Book of Mormon’s vehement denunciation of the secret world of Masonry, it wasn’t the only time that Mormon doctrinal development leaped beyond the bounds set by the Nephite record (See section below entitled “Key Doctrines Missing”).

### Slippery Possessions:

Perhaps one of the strangest descriptive words in the entire Book of Mormon is “slippery,” which is used in a few places to describe a most perplexing condition in which otherwise secure possessions become mysteriously elusive. According to ancient Nephite prophets, the Lord sometimes used curses and enchantments against the wicked. While the rational reader may struggle with this idea, those acquainted with the money-digging sub-culture in backwoods New York would have no problem relating. Compare selected verses from the Book of Mormon with accounts from contemporaries of Joseph Smith:

1. “And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become *slippery*, that ye *cannot hold them*... Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become *slippery* that we should lose them... for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become *slippery*, and we *cannot hold them*.” (Helaman 13:31,33,36)

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<sup>49</sup> Page 18 of a photo-copy of the 1827 publication (Utah Lighthouse Ministry)

<sup>50</sup> *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 1, page 133, quoted in David Whitmer’s *Address to All Believers in Christ*.

"There was a company... who were digging for money supposed to have been hidden by the ancients. Of this company were old Mr. Stowel--I think his name was Josiah--also old Mr. Beman, also Samuel Lawrence, George Proper, Joseph Smith, jr., and his father, and his brother Hiram [Hyrum] Smith... and they took Joseph to look in the stone for them, and he did so for a while, and then he told them the *enchantment was so strong that he could not see*... Mr. Stowel was at this time at old Mr. Smith's, digging for money. It was reported by these money-diggers, that they had found boxes, but before they could secure them, *they would sink into the earth*. A candid old Presbyterian told me, that on the Susquehannah flats he dug down to an iron chest, that he scraped the dirt off with his shovel, but had nothing with him to open the chest; that he went away to get help, and when they came to it, *it moved away* two or three rods into the earth, and they could not get it. There were a great many strange sights..."<sup>51</sup>

2. "AND now there began to be a great *curse* upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he *could not find it*, so great was the *curse* upon the land."  
(Ether 14:1)

"Jonathan Thompson says that prisoner (Joseph Smith, Jr.) was requested to look for chest of money... Smith looked in hat while there, and when very dark, and told how the chest was situated. After digging several feet, struck upon something sounding like a board or plank. Prisoner would not look again... the last time he looked he discovered distinctly the two Indians who buried the trunk, that a quarrel ensued between them, and that one of said Indians was killed by the other, and thrown into the hole beside the trunk, to guard it, as he supposed. Thompson says that he believes in the prisoner's professed skill; that the board which he struck his spade upon was probably the chest, but *on account of an enchantment the trunk kept settling away* from under them when digging; that notwithstanding they continued constantly removing the dirt, yet the trunk kept about the same distance from them."<sup>52</sup>

3. "And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became *slippery*, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they *could not hold them*, nor retain them again  
(Mormon 1:18)

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<sup>51</sup> An interview with Martin Harris, published in *Tiffany's Monthly*, 1859, p.165.

<sup>52</sup> Excerpt from the record of Joseph's 1826 Bainbridge, New York trial published in *Fraser's Magazine*, February, 1873, vol. VII, p. 229-230, quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Changing World of Mormonism*, p. 70.

“These treasures that are in the earth are carefully watched, they can be removed from place to place according to the good pleasure of Him who made them and owns them.... There were a great many treasures hid up by the Nephites... there is a *seal upon the treasures* of earth; men are allowed to go so far and no farther. I have known places where there were treasures in abundance; *but could men get them? No...*”<sup>53</sup>

### Presbyterian Publication

While Methodism probably had the greatest influence on Joseph, there can be no doubt that Presbyterianism also made its mark. Indeed, many of his own family had joined with the Presbyterians. That Joseph was very familiar with the Presbyterian teachings is indicated in the apparent use of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms in the Book of Alma. Alexander Campbell considered this document to be a vital resource for gospel instruction among Presbyterian families. Below is a list of parallels between consecutive verses in Alma, chapter 40, and chapter 32 of the Confession.<sup>54</sup>

- “the state of the soul between death and the resurrection...”  
(Book of Mormon, Alma 40:11)  
“the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection...”  
(Westminster Confession, chap. 32)
- “the spirits ... are taken home to that God who gave them life”  
(Alma 40:11)  
“their souls... return to God who gave them” (WC 32:1)
- “the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness...” (Alma 40:12)  
“The souls of the righteous... are received into the highest heavens...” (WC 32:1)
- “the spirits of the wicked ... shall be cast out into outer darkness...”  
(Alma 40:13)  
“the souls of the wicked are cast into hell ...and utter darkness...”  
(WC 32:1)
- “the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, remain in this state, ...until the time of their resurrection” (Alma 40:14)  
“the souls of the wicked.... remain in.... darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.” (WC 32:2)
- “the souls and the bodies are re-united...” (Alma 40:20)  
“bodies ...shall be united again to their souls...” (WC 32:2)

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<sup>53</sup> Sermon by Brigham Young, recorded in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 19, pp.36-39.

<sup>54</sup> *The Confession of Faith: The Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, Philadelphia, 1813, as printed in the Tanner's *Changing World of Mormonism*, 112.

### Signs of Jewish Culture Missing

Toward the end of his account, Nephi proclaimed, “And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we *keep the law of Moses*, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled... And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the *performances and ordinances* of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses.” (2 Nephi 25:24, 30) Speaking of the faithful in the time of Ammon, Mormon adds, “Yea, and they did *keep the law of Moses*; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they *must keep those outward performances* until the time that he should be revealed unto them.” (Alma 25:15)

In light of the statements above, it is staggering that there is not more attention in the Book of Mormon given to the intricate and infinitely rich religious heritage enjoyed by the Jews since the time of Moses. If indeed the Nephites were observing the law with all its “outward performances,” Mormon and the other authors did very little to provide evidence of their obedience. Some of the most basic elements of the Jewish faith are nowhere to be found. Below is a list of some Jewish traditions and observances connected with the Law of Moses that receive little or no attention in the Book of Mormon:<sup>55</sup>

- **Passover:** This word never appears in the text and there is no evidence that the Nephites observed this most important Jewish holiday.
- **The Feasts of: the Passover, Unleavened Bread, the Harvest, Weeks, Tabernacles, the Ingathering, the Seventh Month, Dedication, the Lord, the Jews:** These phrases never appear in the text of the Book of Mormon.
- **The Sabbath:** Three out of the five occurrences appear in one verse that is speaking of the Ten Commandments. Only one of the remaining two examples reports that the people were keeping the Sabbath Day holy.
- **Circumcision:** There is no mention of this word or any evidence it was practiced, with the exception of one verse, Moroni 8:8, in which Jesus explains that “circumcision is done away in me,” a phrase also found in the Bible.
- **Temple:** While the word is mentioned many times as a place to preach or gather, there is never any mention of temple worship, nor are there any descriptions of temple rites or ceremonies like those given in the Old Testament.

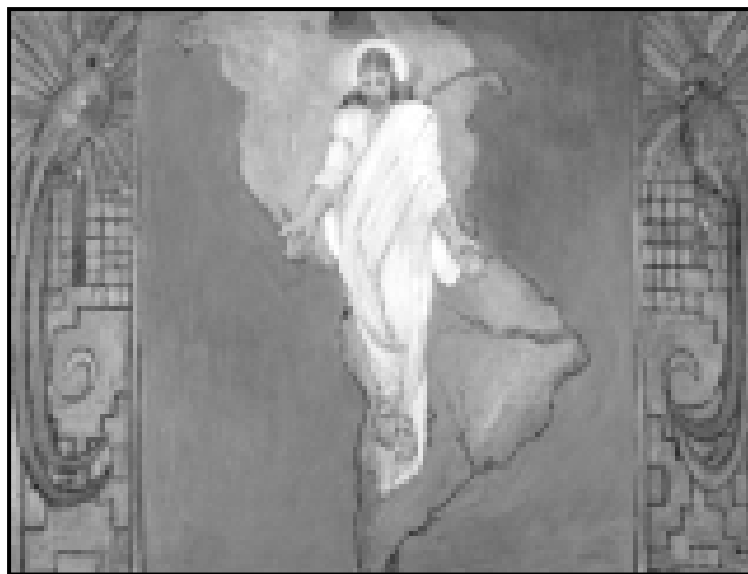
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<sup>55</sup> Claims can be verified using the scripture word search feature on lds.org; see also *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* included in *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner)



- **Altars:** Aside from the Old World example when Lehi built his altar to the Lord and made an offering, no mention is made of Nephites later building altars for the same purpose.
- **Burnt Offerings:** – Christ tells the Nephites that their “sacrifices and (their) burnt offerings shall be done away” (3 Nephi 9:19), but ironically there is no mention of burnt offerings after they arrive in the Americas. The only exception is found in Mosiah 2:3. Here it is explained that “they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses.” While certainly an example of obedience, it only shows how errant their obedience was. According to the Law of Moses, firstlings were not to be used for burnt offerings; they were considered to be the property of the Lord and were thus given to the High Priest to be used as peace offerings.
- **Trespass Offerings, Meat Offerings, Drink Offerings, Wave Offerings, Peace Offerings:** There is not a single example of any of these in the Book of Mormon.
- **Ceremonial Cleanliness and Unclean Foods:** Other than what is found in the portions of the Book of Mormon that quote from Isaiah, there is nothing to suggest that anyone observed the many strict requirements for staying clean and avoiding the unclean. Specifically and most noticeably, there is no mention of Kosher eating.

From the examples above, the reader can only conclude that the Nephite record is transparently deficient in attention to Jewish cultural and religious detail. If the reader puts the blame for these egregious omissions on the Nephite authors, it must be said that their neglect was inexplicable. If the reader puts the blame on a young and naive Joseph Smith, the mystery is easily solved.



Christ in America, by Minerva Kohlhepp Teichert, 1888-1976

### Key Mormon Doctrines Missing

Members of the Mormon Church have been taught from an early age that the Book of Mormon contains the “fullness of the gospel.” While scholars and general authorities can argue over the semantics of such a phrase, the believing reader may find it puzzling that the Book of Mormon makes no mention of many critical theological elements embraced by the modern church as eternal “truths.” The Nephites were privy to knowledge that superceded anything their Old World counterparts in Jerusalem seemed to possess – information about the name of the Messiah, the name of the mother of Jesus, the fact that Jesus would come to the American Continent, and that he would establish his authority there and institute his church with all its saving ordinances.

It seems strange, then, that the Nephite prophets appear to have no understanding of some of the “plain and precious” truths about:

- The true nature of the Godhead – that there are three separate beings (treated in next section)
- The fact that God has a body of flesh and bones
- The pre-existence of man
- A heaven with three degrees of glory
- A limited punishment with eventual salvation extended to all but a few
- Baptism for the dead
- The temple endowment
- Eternal marriage

An apologist may cite the principal of continuing revelation as the reason why these important doctrinal elements are absent from the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the Lord reserved some sacred truths for the “fullness of times.” But as apologetics go, he may just as quickly point to other controversial doctrines or practices and argue that they have always existed from the “foundation of the world,” reminding his audience that God is an unchangeable being and that his ordinances and priesthood are eternal. While the apologist may find this type of logical flexibility useful, it wouldn’t be pliable enough to cover the gaping hole in the Book of Mormon.

The glaring question remains: Why wouldn’t the Lord have provided his chosen people with an understanding of some of the most fundamental and precious truths of the plan of salvation? If he *did* reveal these things to the Nephites, why did they fail to write about them? It’s not as though they didn’t expound on a variety of other doctrinal topics. It’s staggering to think that Mormon, for instance, would fail to elucidate a doctrine with such eternal implications as temple marriage.

Perhaps the paucity of latter-day doctrines and practices is best understood by examining early church history. Looking back on the early days of the Restoration, David Whitmer emphatically declared his belief that Joseph Smith was never meant to create a church – that his only calling was to bring forth the “marvelous work and a wonder,” the

Book of Mormon.<sup>56</sup> He also claimed that the Book of Mormon was intended to be the ultimate authority on matters of truth and religious worship. He pointed to a revelation from the Lord received in June, 1829, intended for Joseph, Olive Cowdery, and himself:

"Behold I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written; for in them are all things written, concerning my church, my gospel, and my rock. Wherefore if you shall build up my church, and my gospel, and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you." (1833 Book of Commandments, Chapter 15)

It is interesting that the Lord uses the words, "build up my church," implying, perhaps, that it already existed. Whitmer explained that the "real" church was already being "built up" for months before the state required the Saints to officially organize themselves, which was done on April 6, 1830. In other words, the organization of the church was merely a formality. Whitmer also disclosed that Joseph had informed him that he (Joseph) was finished with all that the Lord had intended for him to do, with the exception of preaching the gospel, and that it was expedient that they follow the direction of the Spirit from that time forth "to be guided into truth and obtain the will of the Lord."<sup>57</sup> Could it be that Joseph's original intention was to bring forth scripture that would "reform" Christianity rather than "restore" it? Evidence for this notion is seen below in the following revelation, given before the organization of the church:

"And for this cause have I said: If this generation harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them. *Now I do not say this to destroy my church, but I say this to build up my church*; Therefore, whosoever belongeth to my church need not fear... but they shall build it up, and shall *bring to light the true points of my doctrine*, yea, and the only doctrine which is in me. And this I do that I may establish my gospel, that there may not be so much *contention*; yea, Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention concerning the points of my doctrine... Behold, this is my doctrine—*whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church. Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me*; therefore he is not of my church."<sup>58</sup>

Reflecting the Lord's final words in the passage above, David Whitmer insisted that Joseph had given in to human passion and pride when he began to "declare more" than that intended by the Lord as printed in the Book of Mormon. He said that over time, "the heads of the church had gone too far, and had done things in which they had already gone ahead of some of the former revelations."<sup>59</sup> To make his point, he cited a startling revision of one of the early revelations found in chapter four of the Book of

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<sup>56</sup> David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers in Christ*, Richmond, MO, 1887

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>58</sup> Selections from Section 10 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In the original revelation printed in chapter 4 of the Book of Commandments, the Lord said, "if the people of this generation harden not their hearts I will work a *reformation* among them..."

<sup>59</sup> Letter written by David Whitmer, published in the *Saints' Herald*, February 5, 1887, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, issue 71, April, 1989.

Commandments. In this revelation, Joseph is told that he “has a gift to translate the book” and that he should “pretend to no other gift,” for the Lord will “grant him no other gift.” Whitmer was incensed as he recalled how this revelation was revised in 1835 to include several more words that radically altered the original meaning:

“And you have a gift to translate the plates, *and this is the first gift that I bestowed upon you*, and I have commanded you that you should pretend to no other gift, *until my purpose is fulfilled in this*; for I will grant unto you no other gift *until it is finished*.” (Doctrine and Covenants 5:4)

With the limits set by the original revelation obliterated, Joseph was a step closer to enjoying the Lord’s retroactive blessing on a number of developments, including the creation of a new church and new offices in the priesthood, and securing the divine go-ahead for future improvements such as temple worship and plural marriage. But the revelation in chapter four of the Book of Commandments is not the only location where the reader finds the Lord placing limits on Joseph’s authority. In the Book of Mormon, itself, the Lord informed Joseph of Egypt long ago that Joseph Smith would remain under his control:

“I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers. And I will give unto him a commandment that *he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him*. (2 Nephi 3: 7,8)

Notwithstanding the Lord’s words above and those found in the fourth chapter of the Book of Commandments, Joseph would later pursue “the work” of an administrator, a banker, a land agent, an editor, a Master Mason, a mayor, a lieutenant general, and a candidate for the presidency of the United States. One wonders if the Lord had all those duties in mind when he gave this revelation.

With all the evidence suggesting that Joseph transformed the restoration movement into something more than originally intended, it is easy to understand why there is so much critical doctrine missing from the Book of Mormon. Even Joseph, himself, seemed to be aware of this problem when the revelations were being gathered and edited for the publication of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (1835). As a result, he quietly authorized a small change in the wording of a critical revelation in order to justify the current reality in the church. What had once been a rigid directive to follow the pattern set forth in the Book of Mormon (“for in them are all things written, concerning my church”) was now a carefully worded command with infinite possibilities:

“Behold I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written; for in them are all things written, concerning *the foundation of my church*, my gospel, and my rock. Wherefore if you shall build up my church *upon the foundation of my gospel*, and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.” (D&C 18: 4, 5).

Thus with the addition of just a few, simple words, the Restoration was changed forever. What may have begun as another “reformation” was now a dynamic movement limited only by the ingenuity of its founder – a church unchained by the limitations set by the Book of Mormon. With the concept of “open-ended” revelation moving from theory to practice, the young prophet was free to continually redefine himself and his church, and allow his restless imagination and indefatigable creative energy to dictate the future. As Joseph put it, “It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I shall make the Saints of God comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind.”<sup>60</sup>



John C. Bennett, (1842)



Jules Remy (1861)



Unknown Artist (c. 1844)



S. Maudsley, (1842)



John Hafen (1888)

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<sup>60</sup> *History of the Church*, 5:362

## One God or Three?

Already highlighted above as one of the “missing” latter-day doctrines in the Book of Mormon, the concept of a Godhead with three separate and distinct beings seems to elude the Nephite prophets. One would think that if the Book of Mormon were intended to “confound” false theology and put an end to doctrinal contentions, it would, at the very least, set the record straight concerning the doctrine of the trinity. After all, Joseph taught that the first principal of religion is to know the true nature of God.

Apologists might argue that there *is* plenty of evidence in the Book of Mormon for the Mormon concept of the Godhood. However, the same could be said for the Bible. Stephen saw the Lord on the right hand of the father, Peter, James, and John heard his voice, and Jesus offered the great intercessory prayer, presumably to someone besides himself. Still, the Bible contains numerous ambiguous references to “one” God, enough so to cause the confusion that lead to the ecumenical debates in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and the subsequent adoption of the Nicene Creed. Likewise, the Book of Mormon contains enough nuggets of ambiguity to leave plenty of room for doubt. Take, for instance, the following sermon by Abinadi:

“I would that ye should understand that *God himself* shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, *being the Father and the Son*— The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son— *And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth...* Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen. (Selected verses from Mosiah 16)

Many students of the Book of Mormon find this passage thoroughly confusing, but LDS institute instructors and other teachers in the church have assured them that this only confirms their belief about the Godhood. Admittedly, if the reader labors hard enough on it, the passage can be forged to fit the LDS concept. Even so, it’s one of the most strained and awkward explanations of doctrine found in the scriptures. If, on the other hand, the reader takes the traditional Trinitarian point of view, he will have a much easier time interpreting the passage. I ask: Why should there be this kind of confusion in a book intended to clarify God’s truth? Why didn’t Abinadi offer an unambiguous, definitive statement that corroborates Joseph Smith’s official description of the Father and Son in his account of the First Vision?

Abinadi is not the only Nephite prophet to blame, however. Amulek contributed to the problem in this exchange with Zeezrom:

“And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God? And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God. Now Zeezrom said: *Is there more than one God?* And he answered, *No...* Now Zeezrom saith

again unto him: *Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?* And Amulek said unto him: *Yea, he is the very Eternal Father* of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last..." (Selected verses from Alma 11)

The 1830 version of the Book of Mormon contained even more references to a "Nicene" God than one finds in modern editions. Nephi prophesied about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, saying, "These last records ... shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the *Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and the Savior...*"<sup>61</sup> This was altered in later editions to read, "These last records ... shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is *the Son* of the Eternal Father, and the Savior ..." (1 Nephi 13:40)

In another instance, the 1830 edition portrayed the angel's words to Nephi in the following terms:

"Behold, the virgin which thou seest, is the *mother of God*, after the manner of the flesh... And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even *the Eternal Father!*"<sup>62</sup>

Apparently, church authorities felt that clarification was in order, for in later editions, three additional words appeared that helped to pull the reader from the doctrinal quagmire:

"Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the *Son of God*, after the manner of the flesh... And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the *Son* of the Eternal Father!" (Selected verses from 1 Nephi, chapter 11)

Ironically, even early church authorities, themselves, failed to articulate this new critical belief. The three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer, signed their names to a document that ended with a conspicuously Trinitarian sentiment: "And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, *which is one God*. Amen."<sup>63</sup> It's strange that one of the most important proclamations of the new dispensation would end with such an old sectarian phrase. Was not the Restoration to supplant the Reformation and the antiquated Catholic creeds? With the knowledge that came from the Sacred Grove in the Spring of 1820, one would expect a much more explicit statement about the Godhead.

As perplexing as it all may be, there is a reason why both the witnesses and the Book of Mormon are so abstruse. The missing piece to this theological puzzle is this: An account of the first vision that included both the Father and Son was not put to paper until 1838, when the Prophet sought to rewrite his history in the wake of numerous defections,

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<sup>61</sup> *Book of Mormon*, 1830 edition, page 32.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>63</sup> The Testimony of Three Witnesses, printed in the Book of Mormon after the title page and introduction.

a failed banking venture, and the banishment of nearly every witness to the Book of Mormon. The earliest account of the First Vision, written in 1832 in Joseph's own hand, is very revealing (discovered in the historical archives of the church in Salt Lake City in the 1960's). In it, Joseph explained that he did not go to the grove to ask God which sect he should join, for he had already determined on his own that they were all in error. He went there because he felt "convicted" of his sins and sought the Lord's mercy...

"...and while in attitude of calling upon the Lord a pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the opened the heavens upon me and *I saw the Lord* and he spake unto me saying *Joseph thy sins are forgiven thee*... I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life..."<sup>64</sup>

In this account there is no mention of a Father in Heaven calling him by name; as impressive as it is, only Jesus appears to the boy Joseph. He extends forgiveness to Joseph and tells him that his Second Coming is imminent. In the 1838 account, Joseph explained that he was persecuted for telling people about his vision, but in the 1832 account, he merely said, "[I] could find none that would believe the he[a]v[e]nly vision..."<sup>65</sup> The historical record supports his 1832 assertion. Historians have searched the Palmyra and Manchester records and have failed to find any personal letters, newspaper articles, or journal entries that suggest that Joseph Smith's vision was even a popular topic of conversation in the 1820's, let alone a target of derision (accounts of miraculous visions of the Savior were not uncommon at that time). What's more, there is no indication that Joseph's family or closest associates were talking about his vision either. From the earliest days of the church, the Saints were keeping journals, writing letters, granting interviews from journalists, and publishing church periodicals and missionary tracts. None of these early sources contain any information about the First Vision.

Did Joseph revise his own story in 1838 to include the presence of the Father? An objective review of the historical research would indicate that he did. Perhaps, then, the most logical explanation for the Book of Mormon's lack of clarity on the nature of the Godhead is that its author initially held traditional views on the Trinity, as did the Three Witnesses and everyone else in the early days of Mormonism. As a consequence, Book of Mormon prophets Abinadi, Amulek, and Nephi naturally followed. While disconcerting to the faithful, reexamining Book of Mormon statements from this new perspective allows the text to speak for itself, revealing a context consistent with the theology of post-Nicene Christendom.

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<sup>64</sup> *An American Prophet's Record*, ed. Scott Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



### Peculiarities, Absurdities, and Ironies

If the Book of Mormon was written with 19 Century ink instead of 4<sup>th</sup> Century engraving tools - if it was brought forth by the ingenuity of man instead of the gift and power of God, it would naturally follow that a volume of work this size would contain numerous errors and inconsistencies. Not surprising, it has many. Given that the text was produced in such rapid fashion, it is amazing there are not more. Joseph Smith's creation of the Book of Mormon was truly a "miraculous" accomplishment, one that is well beyond the reach of the common man (this will be considered in the conclusion below). Indeed, he was an extraordinary man with extraordinary talents. But for all that the prophet *could* do, he *could not* create a new book of scripture that truly reads like history.

With the title of this section what it is, the reader might infer that my intent is to ridicule and disparage Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. This is not the case. The purpose of this section is to provide further proof that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient historical record. By revealing the book's many textual peculiarities, absurdities, and ironies, I hope to reveal more instances where Joseph has left his very human, indelible mark.

Below are several examples:

- Joseph catches himself in an error when he unwittingly has Abinadi, a prophet predating Christ's birth, speak of the coming of the Savior in the past tense: "And now if Christ had not come into the world, *speaking of things to come as though they had already come*, there could have been no redemption. (Mosiah 16:6)
- The 1830 edition features the following sentence: "And Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Benjamin had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings..." (page 200). The problem with this statement is that King Benjamin was dead at the time it was made. Later editions were changed to read: "...king *Mosiah* had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings..." (Mosiah 21:28)
- As he delivers the Sermon on the Mount for the second time, the Lord uses old world terms that the Nephites would not understand: "And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council..." (3 Ne. 12:22). The insult, Raca, is an Aramaic word, while "the council" refers to the Sanhedrin, the same Jewish administrative body that tried Jesus for blasphemy. The Nephites would have had no understanding of the Aramaic language and Jewish politics.
- Not only are the words of the Sermon on the Mount virtually the same in both the Book of Mormon and the New Testament, Mormon and Matthew use nearly identical transitional phrases as they finish their accounts: "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it. *AND now it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings* he cast his eyes round about on the multitude..."

(3 Nephi 14:27, 15:1) “And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine...*” (Matthew 7:27-28) Was this an incredible coincidence, or another example of plagiarism?

- Both the 12 disciples in the New World and the original 12 Apostles consist of two sets of brothers and two others sharing the same name: “And it came to pass that on the morrow, when the multitude was gathered together, behold, *Nephi and his brother* whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was *Timothy*, and also his son, whose name was *Jonas*, and also Mathoni, and *Mathonihah, his brother*, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and *Jonas*, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah - now these were the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen .” (3 Nephi 19:4) What are the chances that *real* history would produce such a coincidence?
- Mormon says the following about the plates: “I made this record out of the plates of Nephi, and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these *few plates* which I gave unto my son Moroni.” (Mormon 6:6) Upon receiving them, Moroni adds: “Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, *I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore have I none*, for I am alone.” (Mormon 8:5) But in spite of the lack of resources, Moroni somehow manages to abridge the record of Ether (15 chapters worth): “AND now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country.” (Ether 1:1) He then records his own account (10 chapters worth): “NOW I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished... Wherefore, *I write a few more things*, contrary to that which I had supposed... (Moroni 1:1,4) Where did he find the room to pen 25 chapters worth of material? Did he make new plates?
- Nephi contradicts himself in consecutive verses: “And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, *which were in great abundance...* And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; *for they were not to be found upon the land...*” (2 Nephi 5:15-16)
- Jacob finishes his account by saying, “...and to the reader I bid farewell, hoping that many of my brethren may read my words. Brethren, *adieu*.” It’s interesting that the French word “adieu” appeared on the seer stone instead of an English equivalent. As FARMS points out, “adieu” was commonly used instead of “goodbye” or “farewell” in America at the time the translation occurred. Perhaps

the Lord followed the trend. The reader can decide whether or not this represents a “peculiarity.”

- The Lord gives some of the most elementary instruction in all of scripture as he advises the Brother of Jared on how to prepare his ship: "Make a hole in the top and also in the bottom; and when thou shalt suffer for air thou shalt unstop the hole and receive air. And if it be so that the water come in upon thee, behold, ye shall stop the hole, that ye may not perish in the flood" (Ether 2:20) Now, just how old *was* the Brother of Jared? At the risk of sounding scornful, was it any wonder that the Lord did not trust the Jaredites with navigational responsibilities? On a side note, one wonders how they managed day to day in a vessel that could be right side up one day, and upside down the next. It's amazing that all living things aboard made it to the promised land without broken necks!
- The Jaredite barges moved at an incredibly slow pace, notwithstanding “the Lord God caused that there should be a *furious wind* blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind... And it came to pass that the wind did *never cease to blow* towards the promised land while they were upon the waters...” (Ether 6: 5, 8) In spite of the hurricane-like conditions, the voyage took “three hundred and forty and four days.” (Ether 6:11) The average sailing vessels that brought settlers to America in the 1600's traveled at approximately 6 knots per hour.<sup>66</sup> At that rate it would take only 150 days to circumnavigate the entire globe! Even if the Jaredite barges were barely creeping along at 2 knots (a little over 2 mph) it would take only 231 days to go from Dubai on the Arabian Peninsula to Los Angeles, California.<sup>67</sup> Assuming that the Jaredites traveled a comparable distance in 344 days, their barges were moving at a snail's pace of about 1.4 knots an hour. In retrospect, the Jaredites would have been much better off if the Lord had provided them with sailing vessels, calm seas, and some good wind (it would have solved the issues of fresh air, light, and broken necks, too).
- Moroni seems to subscribe to a very superstitious view of ocean wildlife as he recounts the Jaredite voyage: “And thus they were driven forth; and *no monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them...*” (Ether 6:10) Were nondescript monsters and malicious whales truly two of the dangers that confronted the Jaredites?
- How historically viable is an epic battle of extinction where millions of men, women, and children slaughter one another until there are only two left, and these two survivors happen to be the military commanders (and most important characters) for each side. Stretching the bounds of plausibility even farther, they fight each other until they both pass out. The warrior that awakens first (Coriantamur) removes the head of the other (Shiz), who, with his spinal cord completely severed, manages to raise up “on his hands,” and then inexplicably

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<sup>66</sup> 6.9 mph according to a NASA fact sheet posted on its website.

<sup>67</sup> 11099 nautical miles according to Distances.com

- “struggle(s) for breath.” (Ether 15:31) All the while, a lonely prophet (Ether) looks on from a safe distance, but is obviously close enough to record even the most minute, gory details of this unprecedented human tragedy.
- Nephi quotes Malachi’s yet unwritten words when he declares: "...the day soon cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned." (1 Nephi 22:15, compare to Malachi 4:1) While typical of other anachronistic borrowings from the Bible, it sets up something more noteworthy. When Jesus appears to the Nephites, he tells them, "... Behold other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not." (3 Nephi 23:6) Among these unrecorded scriptures are the words of the Old Testament prophet, Malachi. Jesus then provides them with the text, which includes the line that Nephi had already recorded: "...and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up..." (3 Nephi 25:1) Did Jesus not know that Nephi had recorded this passage?
  - Greek names and words somehow find their way into the Hebrew spoken by the Nephites. Two of the Nephite disciples, *Jonas* and *Timothy*, share Greek names. The name of the Messiah, himself, is announced in its Greek form to the people. Centuries after the angel revealed the “Christ” to Nephi’s brother, Jacob, the Apostle Paul had the Lord’s name changed to the Greek as the missionary work expanded to the gentile world in the first century A.D. “Jesus” is the Greek equivalent of *Jeshua* (Joshua), and “krhistos,” a word meaning “anointed,” is Greek for “messiah.” The Nephites would have been more comfortable preaching about the coming of “Jeshua the Mashiah.”
  - Korihor, the famous Nephite anti-Christ, was “struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma...” (Alma 30:50). He acknowledged this fact when he declared, “I know that I am dumb, for *I cannot speak...*” (v. 52) Apparently, the chief judge was confused in the excitement and mistakenly assumed that Korihor was *struck deaf*, because he immediately “*put forth his hand and wrote* unto Korihor, saying: Art thou convinced of the power of God?” (v. 51)
  - Notwithstanding the Nephites had already gained advantage over their enemy by getting them drunk (Alma 55: 8-15), the Lamanites were unwitting enough to try the same strategy. Mormon informs the reader that the Nephites were well aware of their schemes and would not allow the Lamanites to trick them into consuming tainted wine. Apparently, they did not want to reject Lamanite “hospitality” altogether, per chance a good bottle of wine should make its way into their hands. Therefore, they accepted the Lamanite offerings, but would first test it out on some of their captives (v. 31). Question: Wouldn’t it have been much smarter to simply reject *all* Lamanite wine up front? In any case, Mormon reasoned that the procedure for “testing” the wine was failsafe, “for if their wine would poison a Lamanite *it would also poison a Nephite...*” (v. 32)

- When Alma recounts his conversion story to his son, Helaman, he tells him that while he was “racked with torment,” he recalled that his father had prophesied about the coming of “*one* Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.” (Alma 36:17) Alma speaks of this “*one* Jesus Christ” as though the atonement were some abstract concept that had faded from his memory. The question is, how could Alma forget? Was he not at one point going about to “destroy the church of God” and to “lead astray the people of the Lord?” (Mosiah 27:10) Was he truly ignorant of the central message of his father’s sermons? It’s absurd to suggest that he could have spent so much time and energy attacking the church without being intimately acquainted with its core belief in Jesus Christ.
- It is similarly confusing how King Benjamin’s people seem to be hearing about Christ for the first time as he delivered his final address: “And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins...” (Mosiah 4: 1-3) One might argue that this was part of an “ongoing” repentance process, but if that’s the case, why were they given a “new name” (Mosiah 5: 7-12) If Nephi and Jacob had truly testified and written about the Savior, how is it that the people in Zarahemla were just then taking upon them the name of Christ? It would appear that King Benjamin’s subjects were newly converted Christians!
- Alma informs Zeezrom that those who harden their hearts are eventually “taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction...” He then explains that “this is what is meant by the *chains of hell*.” (Alma 12:11) When Alma says this, it is implied that the phrase, “chains of hell,” had been in circulation among the Nephites, but there is no proof of this in the pages of the Book of Mormon. Alma is the only one that uses the expression. There is also no Biblical precedent. It was, however, a phrase uttered by 19<sup>th</sup> Century circuit preachers (see section above on revival terminology).
- Alma goes on to expound more things to Zeezrom, explaining to him how “it was appointed unto men that they must die; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end.” He then reveals that the Lord came to a most important realization, one that would have lasting consequences for mankind: “And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, *then he saw* that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them...” (Alma 12: 27, 28)
- King Lamoni loses consciousness, being overwhelmed by the Spirit, and the “people” are summoned to witness the scene: “...one of the Lamanitish women, whose name was Abish... ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people. And they began to assemble themselves together unto the house of the king. *And there came a multitude*, and to their astonishment, they beheld the king, and the queen, and their servants prostrate upon the earth...” (Alma 19: 16-18) On a separate occasion, his father also faints by the power of the Holy Ghost, and

here again, an attempt is made to gather the people: “Now when the queen saw the fear of the servants she also began to fear exceedingly, lest there should some evil come upon her. And she commanded her servants that they should go and *call the people*, that they might slay Aaron and his brethren.” These were both situations occurring in the private residence of a monarch. Where, I wonder, is palace security, the police, or even the military? Who are, and where are “the people?” It would seem that they are a readily accessible, small cluster of able-bodied citizens waiting just outside the royal grounds. It would be hard to imagine the Queen of England dealing with an internal security issue by sending her advisor outside the gates of Buckingham Palace to cry out to “the people” for assistance.

- The book of Alma begins with a most awkward expression: “NOW it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, from this time forward, king Mosiah having gone the way of all the earth, *having warred a good warfare...*” (Alma 1:1). Could this be an extremely clumsy rewording of the Apostle Paul’s statement, “fought a good fight?” (2 Timothy 4:7)
- In the account of the Jaredites, the reader finds two familiar Nephite names: “...and after he had armed them with swords he returned to the city *Nehor*, and gave battle unto his brother *Corihor...*” (Ether 7:9) What are the chances that the names Nehor and Corihor (Korihor) would appear in the records of two civilizations that spoke entirely different languages?

One of the peculiarities of the Book of Mormon text is that it’s disjointed and redundant. This is certainly ironic since the task of inscribing characters on metal plates was such a tedious undertaking. Jacob admitted that he “cannot write but a little of (his) words, because of the difficulty of engraving (their) words upon plates...” (Jacob 4:1). Indeed, it was so laborious that the Nephites chose to write in a more efficient language, Reformed Egyptian. With that in mind, it’s astonishing that passages exist like the ones that follow:

- “I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his *holy order*, which was after the *order of his Son...* And those priests were *ordained after the order of his Son*, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption. And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, *on account of their exceeding faith and good works*; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising *exceedingly great faith*, are called with a *holy calling...* And thus they have been *called to this holy calling on account of their faith...* thus this *holy calling* being prepared *from the foundation of the world* for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared— And thus being *called by this holy calling*, and ordained unto the *high priesthood* of the

*holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men... This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity... Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end— Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen. Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance...*" (selected verses from Alma 13)

- “And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.” (4 Nephi 1:6) *Could Mormon not have simply started the verse by saying that fifty-nine years had passed away?*
- “Now there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to *unequal grounds*... if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him... For there was a law that men should be *judged according to their crimes*. Nevertheless, *there was no law against a man’s belief*; therefore, a man was *punished only for the crimes* which he had done; therefore all men were on *equal grounds*. And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (*and the law could have no hold upon him*)...” (selected verses from Alma 30)

Aside from being painfully redundant, there is a notable absurdity in the account of Korihor. It is patently clear from the passage above that the Nephites enjoyed what Americans today would call “freedom of speech.” If a man was free to have his opinions and was only punished for the illegal things he had done, such as theft or murder, then why was Korihor arrested and bound three different times for speaking his mind?:

“Now (Korihor) went over to the land of Jershon also, to preach these things among the people of Ammon, who were once the people of the Lamanites. But behold they were more wise than many of the Nephites; for *they took him, and bound him, and carried him* before Ammon, who was a high priest over that people. And it came to pass that he caused that *he should be carried* out of the land. And he came over into the land of Gideon, and began to preach unto them also; and here he did not have much success, for he was *taken and bound and carried* before the high priest, and also the chief judge over the land. Now when the high priest and the chief judge saw the hardness of his heart... they *caused that he*

*should be bound; and they delivered him up into the hands of the officers, and sent him to the land of Zarahemla...*” (Selected verses from Alma 30)

Perhaps freedom of thought was allowed but freedom of speech was not. In any case, after Korihor was struck dumb, a proclamation was sent out to warn those that had sympathized with him that “they must speedily repent, *lest the same judgments would come unto them.*” (v.57) Were they to understand that while there was no law in the land against a man’s beliefs, God would nonetheless strike them dumb if they chose to agree with Korihor? Does God *really* operate in such a manner?

This was not the only time the Nephites showed hints of legal hypocrisy. When Nephite dissident, Nehor, was about to be put to death, “he was caused, *or rather did acknowledge*, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught the people was contrary to the word of God...” (Alma 1:15) So which is it? Was he forced to confess, or did he voluntarily speak his own mind? It’s important to know, because “there was no law against a man’s belief,” suggesting that the use of coercion was illegal. As was the case with Abinadi’s reference to Christ in the past tense (Mosiah 16:6), it would appear that what is *really* happening in this verse is that Joseph Smith had once again caught himself in a contradiction, and had made an instantaneous correction during dictation. Ironically, while he had the presence of mind to fix *this* error, Joseph was completely oblivious in the case of Korihor, in which he allowed Korihor to be arrested three times.



Moroni, the Last Nephite , by Minerva Kohlhepp Teichert, 1888-1976



### Elder B.H. Robert's "Studies" and *View of the Hebrews*

A must-read for all those investigating the origins of the Book of Mormon is a book published in 1985 entitled, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*.<sup>68</sup> It is essentially a collection of three manuscripts written by Elder B.H. Roberts, "Book of Mormon Difficulties: A Study," "A Book of Mormon Study," and "A Parallel." Roberts initially began his investigation in 1921 after being asked by Elder James E. Talmage and President Heber J. Grant to be part of a committee that was tasked with looking into the Book of Mormon's archeological problems. He went on from there to research the similarities between Ethan Smith's 1823 publication, *View of the Hebrews*<sup>69</sup>, and the Book of Mormon. While he presumably never intended for these manuscripts to be made public, he did present some of his concerns in person to the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve at a special gathering organized for that purpose. Although little came from these meetings, Roberts continued his studies while serving as a mission president in the Northeast United States, where he was conveniently close to sites of historical importance.

There is no clear evidence that Roberts ever denied his testimony of the Book of Mormon, or that he ever declared it to be a fabrication. By all accounts, he remained fiercely loyal to Joseph, his church, and its scriptures. Still, he was unafraid to ask the tough questions, and was the type of man that would rather face his opponent armed to the hilt with logic and reason, rather than refuse to participate in an exchange that could threaten his position. His courage and intellectual rigor allowed him to anticipate and evaluate the intelligent arguments against the Book of Mormon's historicity that he thought would surely come from scholars, critics, and curious readers. But his writings leave many readers to conclude that Roberts at least thought it possible that Joseph's keen intellect and imagination could have produced the Book of Mormon. While this certainly doesn't amount to a denial of the Book of Mormon's divinity, his arguments provide the reader with some real food for thought.

Consider a few of his statements as printed in *Studies of the Book of Mormon*:

- "...was Joseph Smith possessed of a sufficiently vivid and creative imagination as to produce such a work as the Book of Mormon from such materials as have been indicated in the preceding chapters ... That such power of imagination would have to be of a high order is conceded; that Joseph Smith possessed such a gift of mind there can be no question." (p. 243)
- "...there can be no doubt as to the possession of a vividly strong, creative imagination by Joseph Smith, the Prophet, an imagination, it could with reason be urged, which, given the suggestions that are to be found in the 'common knowledge' of accepted American antiquities of the times, supplemented by such a work as Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*, would make it possible for him to

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<sup>68</sup> B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

<sup>69</sup> Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (1825 [photo reprint available from Utah Lighthouse Ministry]).

create a book such as the Book of Mormon is.” (p. 250)

- “If... the view be taken the Book of Mormon is merely of human origin; that a person of Joseph Smith's limitations in experience and in education, who was of the vicinage and of the period that produced the book—if it be assumed that he is the author of it, then it could be said there is much internal evidence in the book itself to sustain such a view. In the first place there is a certain lack of perspective in the things the book relates as history that points quite clearly to an undeveloped mind as their origin. The narrative proceeds in characteristic disregard of conditions necessary to its reasonableness, as if it were a tale told by a child, with utter disregard for consistency.” (p. 250)
- Regarding the many anti-Christ's in the Book of Mormon, Roberts observed: “I shall hold that what is here presented illustrates sufficiently the matter taken in hand by referring to them, namely that they are all of one breed and brand; so nearly alike that one mind is the author of them, and that a young and undeveloped, but piously inclined mind. The evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America.” (p. 271)

Perhaps the most revealing of all of Robert's discoveries was how Book of Mormon themes and ideas parallel those of the book, *View of the Hebrews*, written several years before and widely distributed in the region where Joseph lived. Robert N. Hullinger summarized some of the elements of *View of the Hebrews*. The similarities to the Book of Mormon are unmistakable:

1. Indians buried a book they could no longer read.
2. A Mr. Merrick found some dark yellow parchment leaves in “Indian Hill.”
3. Native Americans had inspired prophets and charismatic gifts, as well as...
4. ...their own kind of Urim and Thummim and breastplate.
5. Ethan Smith produced evidence to show that ancient Mexican Indians were no strangers to Egyptian hieroglyphics.
6. An overthrown civilization in America is to be seen from its ruined monuments and forts and mounds. The barbarous tribes—barbarous because they had lost the civilized arts—greeting the Europeans were descendants of the lost civilization.
7. Chapter one of *View of the Hebrews* is a thirty-two-page account of the historical destruction of Jerusalem.
8. There are many references to Israel's scattering and being “gathered” in the last days.
9. Isaiah is quoted for twenty chapters to demonstrate the restoration of Israel. In Isaiah 18 a request is made to save Israel in America.
10. The United States is asked to evangelize the Native Americans.

11. Ethan Smith cited Humboldt's New Spain to show the characteristics of Central American civilization; the same are in the Book of Mormon.
12. The legends of Quetzacoatl, the Mexican messiah, are paralleled in the Book of Mormon by Christ's appearing in the western hemisphere.<sup>70</sup>

Below are some of Robert's thoughts and conclusions about the possibility that *View of the Hebrews* could have had a significant impact on the creation of the Book of Mormon:

- "...did Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* furnish structural material for Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or a half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon origin... The material in Ethan Smith's book is of a character and quantity to make a ground plan for the Book of Mormon..." (p. 240)
- "...the prevailing ideas respecting the American Indians throughout the regions named were favorable to the notion that they were of Hebrew origin... And with the existence of such a body of knowledge, or that which was accepted as 'knowledge,' and a person of vivid and constructive imaginative power in contact with it, there is little room for doubt that it might be possible for Joseph Smith to construct a theory of origin for his Book of Mormon in harmony with these prevailing notions; and more especially since this 'common knowledge' is set forth in almost handbook form in the little work of Ethan Smith... that one book, at least, with which he was most likely acquainted, could well have furnished structural outlines for the Book of Mormon; and that Joseph Smith was possessed of such creative imaginative powers as would make it quite within the lines of possibility that the Book of Mormon could have been produced in that way." (pp. 152-54)
- "Could an investigator of the Book of Mormon be much blamed if he were to decide that Ethan Smith's book with its suggestion as to the division of his Israelites into two peoples; with its suggestion of 'tremendous wars between them'; and of the savages overcoming the civilized division led to the fashioning of chiefly these same things in the Book of Mormon?" (p. 192)

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<sup>70</sup> Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), pp. 183-184, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Issue 107, October 2006.

## External Evidence

Above I have considered and summarized the internal evidence that shows that the Book of Mormon fits best in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century context and was surely a product of the brilliant mind of Joseph Smith. Its dependence on the text of the King James Version of the Bible, its employment of King James language, its borrowing from the Apocrypha, its innumerable grammatical errors, and its many references to 19<sup>th</sup> century elements and controversies lead the reader to conclude that the Book of Mormon is simply not a record of ancient history.

To further support my case, I will next consider the external evidence. It is not my intent to provide the reader with an exhaustive review. I will very briefly note some of the salient findings from several relevant scientific fields, including archeology, genetics, linguistics, and geography. I encourage the reader to use the following examples as a springboard into a more thorough examination of the research. A list of recommended readings for all the subjects I've covered, whether internal or external, is included in the appendix.

### Archeological Evidence

Mormon scholars have long yearned to find definitive evidence for the existence of the massive civilizations described in the Book of Mormon. As a Mormon myself, I can hardly think of anything that would have been more exciting than to read in the New York Times that Central American archeologists had uncovered an ancient battle field with weapons dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., or found caves with stacks of records and Egyptian hieroglyphics on the wall denoting names of Nephite cities, Kings, and Prophets. But the truth is, whatever has been found to date has been of such little significance, that it sends the believer right back to the Moroni challenge to secure his faith in the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

There is perhaps no better way to succinctly describe the daunting archeological challenges the Book of Mormon faces than to include excerpts from two letters – the first from the National Geographic Society and the second from the Smithsonian, both in Washington D.C. In a letter dated January 11, 1990, the National Geographic Society responded to an inquiry into its use of the Book of Mormon as a tool to aid in archeological pursuits. A representative from the Society curtly but cordially denied any connection with the Book of Mormon, saying, "...we do not believe that any of the places named in the Book of Mormon can be placed geographically by the evidence of archaeology. So far as we know there is no archaeological evidence to verify the history of early peoples of the Western Hemisphere as presented in the Book of Mormon."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Response written by Pamela Tucci, Research Correspondence, National Geographic Society, Washington D.C., 20036.

In a much more substantive response to a similar inquiry in 1996, the Anthropology Outreach Department of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History rebutted the rumor that it had been consulting the Book of Mormon as a scientific guide. The letter affirmed that the department "has never used it in archeological research and any information that you have received to the contrary is incorrect." The letter then expressed the Smithsonian's concern about the "unauthorized use of its name to disseminate inaccurate information," and asked for the names of any known persons misusing it. Apparently the Outreach Department had "received numerous inquiries" similar to the one being responded to, so it subsequently prepared a statement articulating the Smithsonian's official position on the Book of Mormon. I have included several excerpts below:

- Smithsonian archeologists see no direct connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book.
- The physical type of the American Indian is basically Mongoloid, being most closely related to that of the peoples of eastern, central, and northeastern Asia.
- American Indians had no wheat, barley, oats, millet, rice, cattle, pigs, chickens, horses, donkeys, camels before 1492. (Camels and horses were in the Americas, along with the bison, mammoth, and mastodon, but all these animals became extinct around 10,000 B.C. at the time when the early big game hunters spread across the Americas.)
- Iron, steel, glass, and silk were not used in the New World before 1492 (except for occasional use of unsmelted meteoric iron). Native copper was worked in various locations in pre-Columbian times, but true metallurgy was limited to southern Mexico and the Andean region, where its occurrence in late prehistoric times involved gold, silver, copper, and their alloys, but not iron.
- ...certainly there were no (New World) contacts with the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, or other peoples of Western Asian and the Near East.
- No reputable Egyptologist or other specialist on Old World archeology, and no expert on New World prehistory, has discovered or confirmed any relationship between archeological remains in Mexico and archeological remains in Egypt.
- Reports of findings of ancient Egyptian Hebrew, and other Old World writings in the New World in pre-Columbian contexts have frequently appeared in newspapers, magazines, and sensational books. None of these claims has stood up to examination by reputable scholars. No inscriptions using Old World forms of writing have been shown to have occurred in any part of the Americas before 1492...<sup>72</sup>

Simon Southerton described the insurmountable archeological obstacles the Book of Mormon faces:

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<sup>72</sup> Prepared by The Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, 1996; Anthropology Outreach Office, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History MRC 112, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

“The narrative (of the Book of Mormon) includes descriptions of large civilizations with populations reaching into the millions and the practice of Christianity, a written language, metallurgy, and the farming of several Old World domesticated plants and animals. In addition, the immigrant Hebrew Christians found horses, oxen, cattle, and goats in the New World.

Anthropologists and archaeologists, including some Mormons and former Mormons, have discovered little to support the existence of these civilizations. Over a period of 150 years, as scholars have seriously studied Native American cultures and prehistory, evidence of a Christian civilization in the Americas has eluded the specialists...”<sup>73</sup>

### DNA Evidence

*“Folk biological claims of an Israelite ancestry, a curse with a dark skin, and a whitening of dark-skinned Native American and Polynesian Mormons fail to stand up to scrutiny among scientifically literate Latter-day Saints.”*<sup>74</sup>

Church Authorities from Joseph Smith to Gordon B. Hinckley have long preached that the Native Americans, whether in North, Central, or South America, are primarily the descendents of the Lamanites, who were in turn from the Israelite tribes of Ephraim (Ishmael), Manasseh (Lehi), and to a small degree, Judah (Mulekites). In a 1971 article in the Ensign magazine that featured a report on the great progress of the church among the Lamanites, Apostle Spencer W. Kimball very confidently declared:

“The term Lamanite includes all Indians and Indian mixtures, such as the Polynesians, the Guatemalans, the Peruvians, as well as the Sioux, the Apache, the Mohawk, the Navajo, and others... they are in all of the states of America from Tierra del Fuego all the way up to Point Barrows, and they are in nearly all the islands of the sea from Hawaii south to southern New Zealand... There are three stakes in Samoa and another is to be organized in those small Samoan islands. Four more stakes with Lamanite leaders... There are three stakes of Zion in Mexico City with Mexican leaders—Lamanite leaders. The stake presidencies, the bishops, the high council, the auxiliary leaders—everybody, with one or two exceptions—are Lamanites. In Monterrey, Mexico, in Guatemala, in Lima, in New Zealand, and elsewhere we have stakes of Zion with all their appropriate leaders.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Simon Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), Introduction, p. xiv-xv, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Issue 103, November 2004.

<sup>74</sup> “Genetic Research a ‘Galileo Event’ for Mormons,” by Thomas W. Murphy and Simon Southerton, *Anthropology News*, February 2003, p. 20, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Issue 103, November 2004.

<sup>75</sup> “Of Royal Blood,” *Ensign*, July 1971, p.7.

Thus, for these many years has the Church been literally gathering Israel, bringing western American Navajos and Apaches, native Hondurans and Mexicans, and indigenous Bolivians and Peruvians to a knowledge of their God and their heritage. But in looking at the archeological, cultural, and linguistic evidence, anthropologists have come to the conclusion that New World pre-Columbian civilizations had much more in common with the ancient peoples of Northeast Asia. This theory has virtually been made fact by recent DNA studies.

In light of the DNA evidence and the immense difficulties in finding any substantive clues of a pre-Columbian Christian culture in the Americas, apologetic Mormon scholars have been forced to revise and even discard long-held beliefs about Lamanite identity. Judging by some of their treatises on the subject, it would appear that the seed of Lehi was so overrun by outsiders that they have all but vanished, leaving no trace of their linguistic, religious, or genetic heritage. In other words, we wouldn't know a Lamanite if he were staring us in the face! One wonders how the Church will watch the Lamanites "blossom as the rose" if it has no way to identify them.

These revisionist ideas have apparently traveled up the highway to Salt Lake City, where the Mormon Church is planning to make a very small change in the introduction to the Book of Mormon with very large ramifications. What has for many years read, "the Lamanites... are the *principal* ancestors of the American Indians..." will soon read, "the Lamanites are *among* the ancestors of the American Indians." In reality, the Church has no choice but to change the Book of Mormon's introduction. The DNA testing on 150 tribes located all throughout the Americas has been overwhelmingly conclusive, to the detriment of traditional Mormon claims. Mormon anthropologist Thomas W. Murphy commented on these findings:

"Some Latter-day Saints have expressed optimism that DNA research would lead to a vindication of the (Book of Mormon) as a translation of a genuine ancient document... The results, though, have been disappointing... Genetic data repeatedly point to migrations from Asia between 7,000 and 50,000 years ago as the primary source of Native American origins. DNA research has substantiated the archaeological, cultural, linguistic, and biological evidence that also points overwhelmingly to an Asian origin for Native Americans."

"While molecular anthropologists have demonstrated a technological capability to use DNA to identify descendants of ancient Hebrews, no such evidence has turned up in Central America or elsewhere among Native Americans... Investigation of mitochondrial DNA of more than 5,500 living Native Americans reveals that 99.4% can be traced back to Asia... Only 0.6% came from Africa or Europe, most likely after 1492.

Likewise, approximately 99% of the Polynesians surveyed to date can trace their maternal lineages back to Southeast Asia...”<sup>76</sup>

### Linguistic Evidence

The fact that there is no trace of Hebrew in the languages spoken by indigenous groups in North, Central, and South America is extremely problematic. Some apologists have argued that this fact is no call for alarm, as it is not uncommon for languages to be obliterated when new cultures move in and dominate. That *all* traces of a language spoken for a thousand years can utterly vanish is questionable, but true or not, this theory depends on the notion that the Nephites and Lamanites were not alone in the promised land. As Mormon scholars Matt Roper and John Sorenson recognized, “Indications are strong that there was considerable linguistic differentiation in Mesoamerica as early as 1500 B.C... this means that the old supposition by some Latter-day Saints that the Hebrew tongue used by Lehi's and Mulek's immigrant parties became foundational for all ancient American languages is impossible,”<sup>77</sup>

They admit, then, that there were civilizations in the Americas at least 900 years before Lehi arrived. But to preserve the historicity of the Book of Mormon, they must reduce the Nephites and Lamanites to a speck among a vast hemisphere of diversity. The problem here is that there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of outsiders in the Book of Mormon, itself. On the contrary, it explicitly states that the Lord had kept the promised land from the knowledge of other nations. After combing through the Book of Mormon, Brent Metcalfe noted:

“When ancestry is identified, *all* post-Jaredite peoples—Nephites and non-Nephites, good and bad, groups and individuals—consistently trace their pedigree back to the founding Israelite immigrants. Ammon, for instance, says that he is “a descendant of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 7:13; see also v.3) who “was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness” (Mosiah 25:2), and Mulek was “the son of Zedekiah” the Jewish King (Hel. 6:10; cf. Omni 1:15). Nephite dissident Coriantumr “was [also] a descendant of Zarahemla” (Hel. 1:15)...”<sup>78</sup>

Couple this fact with the innumerable declarations from church authorities concerning the Lamanites being scattered across both continents and over the Pacific, and it’s difficult to maintain the notion that the Lamanites and their language were swallowed up and lost.

Assuming that there *were* no “others” and that the Lamanites are alive and well, the focus returns to the problems of a disappearing language. It is simply not

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<sup>76</sup> From an essay entitled, “Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” posted on Brent Lee Metcalfe’s website, <http://mormonscripturestudies.com>; modified version found in Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), pp. 47–77.

<sup>77</sup> “Before DNA,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 17, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Issue 103, November 2004.

<sup>78</sup> “Reinventing Lamanite Identity,” by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Sunstone*, March 2004, pp. 21-23.



scientifically viable that New World languages, springing from a common Hebrew source, could become so numerous and diverse in such a short period of time. Noting the existence of not only various dialects, but also entirely different language stocks, B.H. Roberts grappled with this fact and observed, “if... the difference between the Cakchiquel and Maya dialects could not have arisen in less than 2,000 years, how many thousand years would it require to produce language stocks—which are so much more widely divergent than dialects? And from the Book of Mormon standpoint, it should be remembered, all these stocks came into existence since the Nephite debacle at Cumorah 400 A.D.”<sup>79</sup>

### Geographical Evidence

In order to further explain the paucity of evidence for the existence of vast and complex Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite civilizations, Mormon scholars such as John L. Sorenson have adopted a “limited geography” approach to the Book of Mormon. After examining the geographical clues in the text, they discovered that it was simply impossible to match the descriptions of travel times (walking distance) and population growth to the traditional hemispheric model. Thus, they necessarily shrunk the setting for the Book of Mormon to only a few hundred square miles in Mesoamerica, the New World location featuring the greatest evidence for ancient, highly developed civilizations.

Again, the problem with this theory is that it nullifies the statements of early authorities, Joseph Smith included, who were in the best position to know the revelatory truth concerning whom the Lamanites were and where they lived. These utterances were so numerous and so frequent throughout church history, that only a few minutes of research will show how unorthodox the modern, limited geography model *really* is. I need mention only a few examples below:

- A revelation from the Lord in 1831 sent Newel Knight to “the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites.” (D&C 54:7-8)
- “The principal nation of the second race fell in battle towards the close of the fourth century. The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit this country.”<sup>80</sup>
- “The great and last battle, in which several hundred thousand Nephites perished was on the hill Cumorah, the same hill from which the plates were taken by Joseph Smith...”<sup>81</sup>
- “...the Hill Cumorah, and the Hill Ramah are identical... it was around this hill that the armies of both the Jaredites and Nephites fought their great last battles... it was in this hill that Mormon deposited all of the sacred records... it was from this hill that Joseph Smith obtained possession of them.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992) p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> *History of the Church*, by Joseph Smith, Deseret Book, 1976, vol. 4, p. 537, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Issue 103, November 2004.

<sup>81</sup> Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 14, pg. 331, quoted in *Salt Lake City Messenger*, Issue 103, November 2004.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony W. Ivins, Conference Report, April 1928 - Morning Session

- In 1834, while on the march to recover the Saints' lands in Missouri, Joseph Smith identified the remains of a white Lamanite named "Zelph," a warrior that fell in the final battles of extinction. According to Smith, he served under the great general-prophet, Onandagus, who was well known across the North American continent.<sup>83</sup>

Ironically, while proponents of the "limited geography" theory must dismiss statements like those above, they would still argue that the church is, and always has been, led by revelation. But in a church that sustains its leaders as prophets, seers, and revelators, cherry-picking agreeable statements while rejecting the rest is tricky business. If past authorities could have been so wrong about such important matters as Lamanite identity, what else could they have been wrong about?

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<sup>83</sup> History of the Church, Vol. 2, pp. 79-80.

# Other External Evidence

## Unreliable Witnesses

Much has been made of the fact that the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, never once denied their testimonies as written in the official statement included at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. It is true that history offers no proof that they ever *directly* betrayed their collective, solemn witness, but if one examines their many sensational statements and suspicious activities, especially those that followed their experience with the angel, a compelling case can be made that these witnesses, in effect, *indirectly* compromised their testimonies. It is not my intent to describe each witness in detail; there are plenty of books and articles that provide thorough overviews. I will, however, offer a brief list of some of their questionable traits, strange words, and inexplicable actions that serve to illuminate their superstitious, “magic world view,” and challenge the veracity of their statements regarding the Book of Mormon.<sup>84</sup>

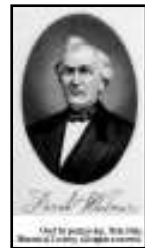
### **Oliver Cowdery:**

- Oliver was skilled in working with magical divining rods, which were used to “divine” information about buried treasure, among other things. In the Book of Commandments, chapter 7, the Lord acknowledges his use of “the rod” and how it “has told (him) many things.” This reference to a divining rod was deleted when the D&C was introduced in 1835.
- He reported that he had “seen the plates” in vision before he met Joseph Smith.
- According to David Whitmer, with whom Oliver lived during the last year of his life, he rejected the Doctrine and Covenants and considered the church to be in error.



### **David Whitmer:**

- Whitmer testified that God had spoken to him from heaven in June, 1838, and told him to separate from the church.
- Along with Oliver and others, he accepted the revelations that one of the eight witnesses, Hiram Page, received through his seer stone. Joseph later received a revelation that rejected Hiram’s contributions and helped to consolidate his own authority as the sole revelator for the church.
- David reported in June, 1829, that he, Joseph, and Oliver had seen a Nephite carrying the plates in a knapsack on his way to the Hill Cumorah and had later perceived this same Nephite secreting himself under the Whitmer’s shed.

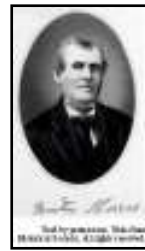


<sup>84</sup> For verification of the facts below, see the “suggested readings” section.

- David was ordained as a prophet, seer, revelator, and translator for the offshoot Church of Christ, continued to keep a seer stone, and later authorized his grandson to use one to translate undiscovered records. His brothers, also witnesses to the Book of Mormon, continued to possess seer stones.
- After Joseph Smith's death, he accepted James J. Strang as the Lord's ordained successor to Joseph and believed Strang's claims to have translated additional, sacred records.
- Whitmer told a faithful Mormon interviewer that he saw an angel and handled the plates "in vision," but did not handle them in a physical manner.

### **Martin Harris:**

- Martin was described by many in his neighborhood as a good, but highly superstitious man.
- He described an incident in 1827 in which he was digging for treasures in the Hill Cumorah. After he discovered a hidden chest, it suddenly sunk into the earth.
- Before his visionary experience with the other witnesses, Harris told Joseph that the Lord had revealed to him much more about the plates than Joseph realized and that he had already seen the plates in vision.
- Harris served on James J. Strang's high council and went to England to serve a mission for his new church.
- Altogether, Martin joined eight different religious groups. One of them was Anne Lee's Shakers, and his recorded testimony of Shakerism is perhaps as convincing as anything he had written about the Book of Mormon.
- On multiple occasions, he told others that he had seen the plates and the angel in vision only, or with his spiritual eyes, as one sees a "city through a mountain."



### Thoughts on the 116 Pages

First-time readers of the Book of Mormon may be puzzled as they quickly pass through 290 years of Nephite history, as contained in three, relatively insignificant books (Enos, Jarom, Omni - each offering only one chapter a piece with the latter featuring five different authors), and arrive at a curious interruption in the Nephite narrative known as “The Words of Mormon.” In effect, the prophet, Mormon, inserts this “literary timeout” to set the stage for events that would occur in 1828, when the first hand-written manuscript for the Book of Mormon (116 Pages) would be lost by scribe, Martin Harris. Mormon’s subtle but poignant message is that neither the Lord nor His purposes can be frustrated. Martin Harris’s monumental blunder had been foreseen and a divine plan had been laid as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, beginning with Nephi’s creation of a second set of plates and continuing with Mormon’s inspired decision to include them with his abridgement. Mormon explains:

“I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and *I found these plates*, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi... Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi (Large Plates of Nephi). But behold, *I shall take these plates* (Small Plates of Nephi), which contain these prophesyings and revelations, *and put them with the remainder of my record*, for they are choice unto me...” (Words of Mormon 1:5, 6)

Rather fortuitously for Joseph Smith, these Small Plates of Nephi would cover the exact time period of the 116 pages that were lost by Martin. Interestingly, Mormon explains that he included this smaller stack of plates “for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.” (v. 7) But in truth, it would seem that Mormon knew a little more than his words would indicate. It’s curious how his last words engraved on the Small Plates inadvertently and most conveniently provided Joseph with a seamless transition into the next phase of translation, the Book of Mosiah. It was as though Mormon could see in his mind’s eye the exact spot in the plates where Joseph would begin translation again after the loss of the 116 pages:

“Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land (last verse of Words of Mormon)... AND now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin, so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days (First verse of Mosiah 1).”

Was this an example of deadly accurate inspiration 1400 years before Martin made the most careless mistake of his life? To the skeptic, it appears to be only another example of Joseph retrofitting history in order to bolster, or in this case, salvage his prophetic career. To an outsider looking in, it's difficult to see the loss of the 116 pages as anything other than an unmitigated disaster for Joseph. He could not have known if they would be found and altered, found and destroyed, or found and preserved just the way they were. If by chance the latter, then surely those holding the manuscript were intending to put the young prophet to the test. If he truly were a prophet and had access to the "gift and power of God," would he not be able to return to the plates (upon receiving them from the Angel again) and retranslate the missing content? If he were an imposter, then surely he would never dare attempt to reproduce the same material.

But if one assumes for a moment that Joseph was, indeed, a true prophet, retranslation clearly represented the best of all options for everyone involved, including Nephi and Mormon. In this scenario, there would have been no need for Nephi to keep two sets of plates covering the same time period - no need for Mormon to waste countless hours making an abridgement that would only be discarded and replaced by an altogether more valuable record. Joseph could have been rebuked by the Lord and punished for a time, as he was. He could have wallowed in the depths of humility and learned the lesson of his life, as he did. History could have maintained its course and still have allowed Joseph to translate the stolen portion over again. So why, then, was it not undertaken? The official answer is found in a revelation from the Lord in D&C 10:

"And, behold, Satan hath put it into their hearts to alter the words which you have caused to be written, or which you have translated, which have gone out of your hands. And behold, I say unto you, that because *they have altered the words, they read contrary* from that which you translated and caused to be written... For he hath put into their hearts to do this, that by lying they may say they have caught you in the words which you have pretended to translate... For behold, he has put it into their hearts to get thee to tempt the Lord thy God, in asking to translate it over again. And then, behold, they say and think in their hearts—*We will see if God has given him power to translate*; if so, he will also give him power again; And if God giveth him power again, or if he translates again, or, in other words, if he bringeth forth the same words, behold, we have the same with us, and *we have altered them; Therefore they will not agree*, and we will say that he has lied in his words, and that he has no gift, and that he has no power; Therefore we will destroy him, and also the work..."

As if this isn't clear enough, the Lord continues his superfluous rant. He again reminds Joseph that these would-be destructors "are corrupt, and full of wickedness and abominations..." and that "Satan has great hold upon their hearts..." He reiterates that Satan has "laid a cunning plan, thinking to destroy the work of God" and that his earthly minions "lie in wait to catch, that (they) may destroy..." He even goes so far as to call Martin a "wicked man." The Lord reminds Joseph yet again that "they have altered these words" and that if he should "bring forth the same words they will say that (he has) lied

and that (he has) pretended to translate, but that (he has) contradicted (him)self.” He then reassures Joseph that He “will not suffer that they shall destroy (His) work” and that His “wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil.”

Judging from the revelation above, it would appear that the Lord (or Joseph) was uncharacteristically agitated and needed to vent. Perhaps he knew the very serious trouble Joseph would have been in if he failed to intervene. But judging from a historical perspective, was Joseph *really* in serious trouble? Perhaps the question should be asked: If such an altered manuscript *did* exist and were published against a retranslated 116 pages, how damaging would it really be? It would seem that all Joseph would need to do is to declare the altered manuscript a forgery. This move would put pressure on his supposed enemies to produce the original stolen manuscript to bolster their case. If they did so, they would not be able to hide their deception as the alterations would be obvious and the evidence of forgery clear; if they refused to produce it, their credibility would invariably suffer. In the absence of further evidence against Joseph, the whole affair would devolve into a spitting match – their word against Joseph’s. Was this the best the devil could do?

Truly, this kind of controversy would have been ordinary fare for Joseph Smith. Any honest study of the life of Joseph Smith would show that such adversity was his common lot. As Joseph put it, he was accustomed to swimming “in deep water,” and there were times he nearly drowned in controversies far more dangerous than any doctored manuscript. In the years that followed, neighbors and other Palmyra area citizens would undermine him in numerous affidavits, insiders would accuse him of adultery, witnesses to the Book of Mormon would leave him, and even his closest associates in Kirtland would consider him a fallen prophet. These were *real* threats to Joseph’s authority and the stability of his fledgling church, and yet in these cases there were no elaborate plans put into place to protect him. But according to the word of the Lord in D&C 10, the ills caused by an altered Book of Mormon manuscript were so potentially devastating that the remedy required a divinely manipulated chain of events going back 2400 years.

If an objective reader were examining the historical record for the first time, what scenario would offer the most plausible explanation for the introduction of a new and improved record of Nephi in the place of a second translation of the original? Would that scenario involve a crafty adversary, an altered manuscript, a stinging rebuke, a painful repentance process, a dutiful Nephi, an inspired Mormon, a revelation from the Lord, and over 2400 years of combined history? Or, perhaps, would a much less complicated scenario prove to be more believable – one that simply involves a careless scribe, a suspicious wife (Lucinda Harris), and a panicked young prophet? The answer to this question, of course, is a matter of perspective. For those irretrievably committed to the belief that Joseph was a prophet called of God, the first scenario is the *only* scenario, however convoluted it may be.

## Conclusion

Sometimes when I read the Book of Mormon, I can almost hear the creative voice in Joseph's mind whispering from the pages. I do see impressive insights and meticulous attention to doctrinal details, but I also see a rambling narrative that reads like frontier fantasy. Still, as flawed, sensational, and heavily dependent on other sources as the Book of Mormon is, it is, in my estimation, an amazing book. I don't need faith to admit that much. Taken as a whole – considering its length and the speed in which it was produced - it is a remarkable achievement. Indeed, the faithful have embraced this fact as the greatest piece of non-spiritual evidence for the authenticity and divinity of the Book of Mormon. They ask themselves: How could a boy with very little schooling create such a complex book?

This is a question for the ages, and one that I have grappled with many times. It belongs right there with history's other perplexing questions: How did Handel create his intricate masterpiece, *Messiah*, in a mere twenty-four days? By what means was Nostradamus able to effortlessly compose his "Centuries" with all its predictions for the future of humanity, many of which, some scholars would argue, have come to fruition? How is it that Ellen White, a young prophetess of eighteen with only four years of formal education, could launch a prolific career that would produce over 2200 revelations and mountains of literature?

There are at least a few scholars that have proposed theories to explain this latter-day mystery. Scott C. Dunn suggests that the descriptions of Joseph's "translation" process very much resemble known cases of "automatic writing."<sup>85</sup> Automatic writers are able to channel subliminal forces and effortlessly dictate vast amounts of information in a very fluid and rapid fashion. They have created poetry, fiction, and even "scripture," and have been responsible for such famous works as *A Course in Miracles*, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ*, and the novel, *Jane Eyre*. Some have the capability to withdraw mid-sentence, turn their attention to some other conscious activity, and pick up exactly where they left off without so much as a glance at the material they had just written.

The reader may remember that Emma Smith, who was at one time a scribe for her husband, noted this very phenomenon when Joseph would resume translation after dealing with various distractions. We also know that despite the difficult circumstances he found himself in, Joseph dictated the bulk of the Book of Mormon in a little over two months, a rapidity reminiscent of similar works that have been produced by automatic writers. Admittedly, it's only a theory, but there are certainly some compelling similarities between Joseph Smith's sudden bursts of inspiration and the many well-known cases of automaticity. As famed psychologist William James observed, "You will in point of fact hardly find a religious leader of any kind in whose life there is no record of automatisms."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Scott C. Dunn, "Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon," *American Apocrypha* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), p.17.

<sup>86</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 2002 [1902]), p.520.



Psychotherapist Robert D. Anderson saw Joseph's dictation process as a type of "free association." In his book, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith*, Anderson breaks down the Book of Mormon section by section, and hypothesizes how traumatic events in the life of the young prophet, especially his excruciating leg surgery at age seven, were subconsciously confronted and repeatedly overcome through the characters, conflicts, and events in the book. Dan Vogel also approaches the enigmatic prophet from a psychobiographical perspective in his book, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*.<sup>87</sup> While conversing with me one evening, writer and Mormon scholar, Brent Metcalfe, offered still another possible explanation for Joseph's amazing abilities. He pointed out that because the creation of the Book of Mormon was a feat that eludes our understanding and exceeds our own capabilities, so many of us naturally conclude that Joseph could not have produced it by his own means. But in his opinion, an achievement is not rendered impossible simply because many people *think* it is. From his point of view, Joseph's "gift and power" may have been nothing more than an unusually developed cognitive potential – a more complete neurological connection between the subliminal and the conscious.

All conjecture aside, there really is no definitive way to explain how Joseph accomplished this most daunting task. But the fact that we don't yet fully understand *how* Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon doesn't change the fact that he clearly *did* produce it. The internal and external evidence, in my opinion, is simply too overwhelming to say otherwise. Furthermore, there is little doubt that Joseph possessed extraordinary imaginative powers, as B.H. Roberts readily acknowledged. Joseph's own mother, Lucy Mack Smith, would have agreed. She provided this small glimpse into the creative abilities of the boy-prophet, well before he took to the work of translating the plates:

"During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them."<sup>88</sup>

In summary, if the Book of Mormon truly spoke as a voice from out of the ground, it was ground made up of fertile, 19<sup>th</sup> Century soil. If it truly "spoke to our day," that day was the Second Great Awakening that swept frontier America, and the intended recipients of this great message were, in all reality, the clergy, congregants, and general citizens of Joseph's day. If the Hill Cumorah truly produced an ancient American civilization's golden record – a ponderous, religious epic with tales of intrepid prophets, apocalyptic wars, and cataclysmic events - it was the Cumorah in Joseph's enigmatic mind. And what of Joseph's mind? Just like the hill, itself, it may have appeared as

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<sup>87</sup> Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith, The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, by Lucy Smith, 1853, p. 85, quoted in Salt City Messenger, Issue 107, October 2006.

nothing special upon first glance, but upon “second sight,” it was as an open mountain filled with vast repositories of imaginative treasures!



The Hill Cumorah, New York

# Appendix

## Moroni's Challenge and Testimony: A Personal Perspective

*“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Moroni 10: 4)*

I have been taught all my life, as most members of the church have, that Moroni's promise would provide me with the sweetest assurance I could ever hope to have in life – a burning testimony of the Book of Mormon and the gospel of Jesus Christ, one that would transcend all logic, supercede all reason, and trump all knowledge:

“Each of us... can know with surety that these things [the teachings of the restored gospel] are true... We do not need to rely upon intellect or our physical senses. We study, we pray, and... we may even fast, and then comes a still, small voice and a throbbing heart. Imagine a personal revelation from God that these things are true. The very thought of it makes my heart throb.” (Richard C. Edgley, "A Still, Small Voice and a Throbbing Heart," Ensign, May 2005, 12)

Like many others before me, I sought for that personal revelation that would cause my heart to “throb” with joy. I took “Moroni's challenge,” and over time, I developed a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. But over the last year, I have uncovered new information that has challenged my testimony of the Book of Mormon and the church to the very core. After countless hours of intense study and fervent prayer, I have come to the unfortunate but definite conclusion that the church, its scriptures, and its historical narratives are not what they purport to be. Still, how could I forget the many spiritual experiences that have happened in church settings – experiences that had produced undeniable feelings of peace, love, and warmth? As I was first going through the turmoil of inner-change, I had to figure out how to reconcile my newly found unbelief with the vivid memory of feelings that had inspired belief. My restless mind played these experiences over and over again, to the point where I could almost taste the joy that accompanied them.

As I searched the archives of my mind, I began to recall several different experiences that soon shed some much-needed light on my disconcerting situation. One of these occurred not too long before my investigation into Mormon origins. One night, while I was watching an inspiring program on television, I felt that familiar “burning in the bosom.” As I sat there savoring the moment, I began to pull back for a moment and really think about what I was feeling. I then realized that it was indistinguishable from the emotional responses I've had in the temple, in fast and testimony meetings, and at youth conferences. But I refrained from exploring the issue any further - it was too risky to entertain a line of thinking that might eventually challenge my concept of “testimony.” These feelings, as I understood them, were reserved for a Holy Ghost whose job was to

testify of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. To discover otherwise would have been too unsettling.

As I continued to wrestle with my spiritual dilemma, I remembered an experience I had back in 1996, when I took part in a three day training to learn an alternative healing technique. While I had looked forward to the event, I found myself recoiling soon after my arrival. I simply wasn't comfortable with what I considered to be an esoteric environment filled with eccentric people. I fought through the uneasiness, however, and decided to search for any truth and light I could gain from the experience. It's good that I did, because it turned out to be one of the most intense and sustained spiritual experiences of my life. Never had I felt so enlightened. Rarely had I ever been so "filled" with love. Whether or not the Holy Ghost was responsible for it, I couldn't say. Then again, it really didn't matter what the cause of it was, it just *was*. There was no one there to interpret it for me – no one to assign it meaning. The experience was left alone to speak for itself.

As I continued to reconstruct the events that challenged my assumptions about the meaning of spiritual feelings, I remembered a compelling story that I heard in an Elder's Quorum lesson many years ago. The president of the quorum, Neil, told of a time when he was teaching the discussions to an Italian professor of religion. After a futile discussion about doctrine and history, Neil decided to share his testimony. He explained to the professor that after the dust of debate had settled, he would still be left with the undeniable witness of the spirit. Neil told us that the professor became frustrated with him and replied, "Are you Mormons so arrogant as to think that you're the only people that feel this strongly about your faith?"

As I sat there and listened to Neil, I couldn't help but notice a subtle agitation in my stomach. I doubt there was anyone there that day that took the professor's words as seriously as I did. I'm sure Neil intended to use the story to set up the rest of his faith-promoting lesson, but I was not ready to move on yet. I was stuck on one of the most disturbing questions I had ever heard. Indeed, the Italian professor had made his point loud and clear that day, and from that time forward, I would find myself rehearsing his question over and over again. Thinking about it too much was a dangerous prospect, however, for I might have come to the conclusion that "Mormon's are *not* the only ones that feel this way about their faith." If that were true, then I would be forced to confront another daunting question: Could the Holy Ghost testify of the truthfulness of other faiths?

It wasn't but a few years later that these kinds of questions began flooding into my mind. I questioned whether "testimonies" were unique to the restored church, or if they were shared by millions outside of my faith. I wondered if these feelings emanate from God, as I understand Him, from some other divine source, or simply from my own psychological processes. Perhaps more than anything, I desired to understand what these feelings really *mean*. I started to think about all the forms I had seen the "spirit" take in my lifetime, and began to conclude that people can find the Holy Ghost in just about anything their imaginations can conjure.

While on my mission, a high-ranking leader filled with “righteous indignation” once chastised me for allowing my junior companion to speak his mind during a zone meeting. He scolded me for the better part of a half hour, hurling several, personal insults at me. For example, he told me he would exhort me to hit my knees and pray for forgiveness for my sins, but that it wouldn’t do any good as he and I didn’t believe in the same God. According to him, I had done “nothing but waste my time” in the mission field with nothing to show but a pitiful number of converts who “might make it to the Celestial Kingdom, but definitely without me.”

Later that night, he consoled me on the phone in an obvious attempt to follow the D&C’s counsel to “show an increase of love.” He acknowledged that his words were harsh, but insisted that he was constrained by the Spirit to say what he did. As it turned out, the Spirit moved him quite often after that, as he went around the mission rebuking other elders with the same routine and the same insults! Now was that the Holy Ghost, or simply a 20 year-old kid intoxicated with his first taste of power and authority?

Years later, the same power that fell upon this missionary inspired a Born-Again Christian co-worker of mine to bear *his* testimony. He told me that he knew with all his heart that Joseph Smith was a fraud. Apparently, the testimony I had just offered him didn’t have the desired effect. Now which one of us had the Spirit? Would it *really* be acceptable to dismiss his belief simply because it was not consistent with mine? And what does this say about the spiritual convictions of people outside Christianity?

When followers of Islam weep as they hear the Koran read from the minaret, are they also feeling the Spirit? If so, what conclusions do they come to – that Islam is the true faith; that Mohamed is the true Messenger; that the Koran is the word of God? I recently watched a news story that featured video footage of Iranian president, Achmidinijad, speaking to a Shiite cleric about how Allah had held his audience transfixed as he addressed the United Nations. He said that observers later told him that they had seen a heavenly light rest upon him as he spoke. Admittedly, my first reaction upon hearing this was to scoff. But when I began to consider it more carefully, I realized that his assertions weren’t any crazier than is my story of a “light brighter than the noon-day sun” resting on Joseph Smith!

So where am I now? Though I may never fully understand the nature and origins of spiritual experiences, I have reached at least a few conclusions. If Moroni’s challenge works for Mormons and their faith, the same principle will work for Catholics and theirs. It’s clear to me now that the “manifestation of the spirit” is such a part of worldwide religious experience, that it cannot be claimed as the exclusive gift of any one faith. Moreover, it doesn’t belong only to religion. It is a *human* phenomenon!

Considering the subjective nature of spiritual experiences and the multiplicity of interpretations people give them, they are hardly an accurate way to arrive at truth. I’ve learned that it’s *people* that give meaning to feelings, not *feelings* that give meaning to people. If divine, these feelings are accessible to everyone as they encounter, consider, and embrace light and truth in all its forms. If not divine, then perhaps they are simply a

part of our complex physiology. Either way, these feelings serve to enlighten, guide, and inspire people to build character and lift others, and help to create some of the most treasured moments in our lives.

# Recommended Readings

## **The Book of Mormon Changes, Language, and Use of the Bible and Apocrypha –**

- Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*, (Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996).
- Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990).
- M.T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible* (New York, NY: Ward and Drummond, 1886).
- Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1998).
- Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha," Salt Lake City Messenger, Issue No. 89, Dec. 1995.
- Lamoni Call, *2,000 Changes in the Book of Mormon* (Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1898), Photo-Reprint of 1898 Edition.
- H. Michael Marquardt, *The Use of the Bible In the Book of Mormon and Early Nineteenth Century Events Reflected in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1979)
- *Joseph Smith Begins His Work Vol. 1*, ed. Wilford C. Wood (Wilford C. Wood, 1830), Book of Mormon 1830 First Edition. Reproduced from uncut sheets.

## **19<sup>th</sup> Century Elements –**

- Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (Boston, 1832).
- Mark D. Thomas, "Revival Language in the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone*, Issue 39, May-June 1983.
- Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1988).
- Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," *New York History* 61 (Oct 1980).
- Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000).

## **Scientific Evidence –**

- Simon Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).
- "Reinventing Lamanite Identity," by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Sunstone*, March 2004, pp. 21-23.
- Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates - Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for The Book of Mormon* (Freethinker Press, 1996).

## Other –

- H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations Text & Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).
- D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).
- David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers in Christ*, Richmond, MO, 1887
- *An American Prophet's Record*, ed. Scott Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989).
- Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 1825

## General –

- *Early Mormon Documents, Vols. 1 – 6*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996-2003).
- H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).
- The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).
- B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).
- Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith, The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).
- D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power, Vol. 1* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994).
- Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).
- *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992)
- E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled [sic]: or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834).
- Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism: Biography of Its Founders and History of Its Church* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1867), photocopy of original 1867 edition.
- La Mar Peterson, *Creation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000).
- *American Apocrypha*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe and Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).
- Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).
- Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999)
- Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987).