

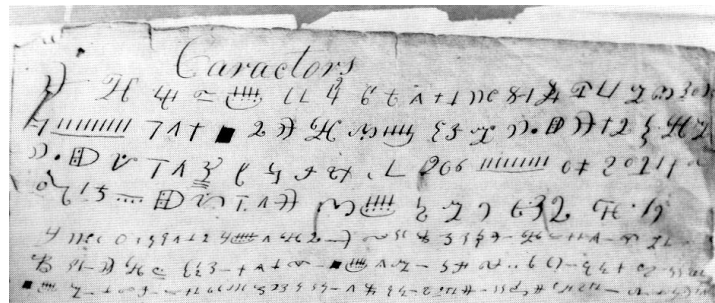
# PLAGIARISM IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

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The Book of Mormon was presented to the world in 1830 as a translation of an actual historical record of the forefathers of the Native Americans. The record was buried in a hill close to the Smith home in upper state New York. Joseph Smith said that an angel had shown him the location of the plates, and spent four years grooming Smith for the roll of translator, delivering the plates into Joseph's care in 1827.

A sample of the Book of Mormon script has been preserved in a document known as the Anthon Transcript.



However, this type of writing has never been located in the Americans and bears no resemblance to the Mayan script.

Since the story, beginning about 2200 BC and ending at approximately 421 AD, was engraved in Reformed Egyptian, the plates were unreadable in Joseph Smith's day. Even though a divinely prepared instrument called "Interpreters" had been preserved with the plates for the use of translation, the published work seems to have been accomplished by Smith's use of his 'seer stone' found in a well.<sup>1</sup> This same stone had earlier been used by Smith to locate lost objects and hidden treasures. In fact, in 1826 Joseph was arrested on a charge of being a "glass looker", or magician.

This small stone was evidently easier to transport and use than the bulky "interpreters" preserved with the plates.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/book-of-mormon-translation?lang=eng>

Those who witnessed the process of translation described Smith simply looking at his stone in his hat and then reading the revealed text to the scribe. Thus he was not reframing the original text into his own thoughts or vocabulary, but dictating the words he read. . David Whitmer, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, gave this account of the process:

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph 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.** Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man. (*An Address To All Believers in Christ*, by David Whitmer, 1887, p. 12)

Realizing the extent of biblical phrases and modern concepts in the text, LDS scholars discuss various theories on how much of Joseph Smith's own thoughts and words occur in the translation. However, with the publishing of photographs of Smith's chocolate colored seer stone by the LDS Church in 2015, the leaders have committed to the concept of a tight translation, being read off the stone and recorded by Smith's scribe.

This was reinforced by Apostle Uchtdorf in 2016, when he posted a photo holding his cell phone and comparing the Book of Mormon translation to that of someone reading a text message on their phone.<sup>2</sup> This would mean that every word was revealed on the stone and Joseph Smith could not be responsible for any of the vocabulary, anachronisms or plagiarism in the book.



However, when we compare the Book of Mormon to the King James Version of the Bible, printed in 1611, it is obvious that there has been extensive borrowing. LDS members will often defend the inclusion of chapter after chapter from the King James Version of Isaiah by pointing out that Lehi brought most of the Old Testament with him to the New World in about 600 BC. We don't have time in this session to discuss the problems with that theory,<sup>3</sup> but it doesn't explain the extensive borrowing of specific phrases from the New Testament portion of the King James Bible.

In trying to address this problem, one LDS scholar has proposed that the Book of Mormon represents a combination of ancient text mingled with Joseph Smith's expanded commentary.<sup>4</sup> Others have suggested that Joseph translated the text using his own patterns of speech, thus accounting for the King James verbiage.

2 Dieter Uchtdorf's Facebook page, June 21, 2016; <http://www.ldsdaily.com/church-lds/president-dieter-f-uchtdorf-compares-seer-stone-cell-phones/>

3 See *Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon*, by Wesley Walters.

4 Blake Ostler, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1987.

But such theories are incompatible with the statements of those who witnessed Smith literally reading the text off the seer stone.

### ***KJV Bible***

While parallels could be drawn between the Book of Mormon and such books as *View of the Hebrews*, published in 1823, or *The Late War*, published in 1816, I will focus on two sources that were undoubtedly available to Joseph Smith—the King James Bible and the Presbyterian’s Westminster Confession of Faith.

In preparing our book, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*, we found hundreds of phrases lifted directly from the King James bible, plus other books. Since the Nephites would have had no way to read these English texts, the Book of Mormon must be a document created after these books were published.

First, there is the problem of the Nephites knowing the name of Jesus Christ, and the concept of baptizing in the name of Jesus before he was even born. Added to this problem is the extensive borrowing of New Testament concepts and phrases inserted into a text purported to have been written hundreds of years before the New Testament was even penned.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Quoting John***

The author of the Book of Mormon seemed to be especially partial to John’s phraseology in the New Testament. Take for instance the use of John’s unique phrase, “white in the blood of the Lamb” in Rev. 7:14. Supposedly the Jaredites, at approximately 2200 BC,<sup>6</sup> used this same phrase. Ether writes in ch. 13, verses 10 and 11:

“ . . . for it is they whose garments are **white through the blood of the Lamb**; . . .  
 . . . for they have been **washed in the blood of the Lamb**;

Nephi, in about 600 BC, also uses this phrase. In 1 Nephi 12:10-11 we read:

“ . . . because of their faith in **the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood**.  
 . . . and their garments were **white even like unto the Lamb of God**. And the angel said unto me: These are made **white in the blood of the Lamb**, because of their faith in him.”

Then, moving to about 82 BC, we read in Alma 13:11:

“Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed **white through the blood of the Lamb**.”

A similar statement appears in Alma 34:36:

“ . . . but their **garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb**.”

It should be noted that the use of the phrase “White through the blood of the Lamb” by Nephi and Alma could not have come from reading the book of Ether since it was not entered into the record until after the time of Christ, when Moroni condensed the Jaredite record at about 400 AD.

<sup>5</sup> See 2 Nephi 30:5; 31:13-14, 20-21, purported to have been written about 550 BC.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lds.org/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-50-ether-1-5?lang=eng>

Thus the nineteenth-century author of the Book of Mormon becomes responsible for the phrase appearing throughout the record.

Also, in the entire Bible we only read the phrase “white through the blood of the Lamb” in Rev. 7:14, written about 90 AD. The presence of such unique Christian phrases and concepts in the Old Testament time period of the Book of Mormon could only come from a modern author familiar with the King James Bible.

### *Quoting Peter*

The author of the Book of Mormon also liked Peter’s phrase “For I perceive that thou art in the **gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity**” as quoted in Acts 8:23.

Curiously, these words appear four times in the Book of Mormon, two are before the time of Christ and two are toward the close of the Book of Mormon.

Mosiah 27:29 reads: “My soul hath been redeemed from the **gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity.**”

Alma 41:11 reads: “All men . . . are in the **gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.**”

Mormon 8:31 reads: “they are in the **gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.**”

And finally, in Moroni 8:14 it states: “he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the **gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.**”

Is it reasonable to think that four authors in the New World, over hundreds of years, chose the exact same words and then, miraculously, Peter, on another continent, also came up with the exact same phrase?

### *Quoting Paul*

The Book of Mormon author also plagiarized Paul’s unique phrase in Romans 8:6: “For **to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.**”

These same words appear in 2 Nephi 9:39, written at approximately 550 BC: “Remember, **to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.**”

Again we see the infusion of New Testament words and doctrine in the Old Testament time period of the Book of Mormon. Even Paul’s famous passage on charity appears in the Book of Mormon. By way of example, let me quote from Moroni 7:45:

“And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

In case you did not immediately recognize the plagiarism, let me read 1 Corinthians 13:4-6:

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

Such slavish copying could only result from plagiarism. It also makes one wonder why the divine translation would be rendered in old fashioned King James verbiage and not in the current style of Smith’s day. Just look at the local newspapers and you will see that they are not written with ‘thee’ and ‘thou.’

### *Matthew*

Now I’d like to look at Matthew 23:27:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

The author of the Book of Mormon decided to use this verse as part of Jesus’ supposed sermon given to the Book of Mormon people. This creates several obvious problems.

First, chickens were not present in the Americas at the time of the Book of Mormon. They were not introduced until approximately 100 years before the time of Columbus. (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-chicken-conquered-the-world-87583657/>) Thus any reference to hens gathering their chicks would have made no sense to the audience.

Second, the author ruins the beauty of Jesus’ words by enlarging the quote to the point of absurdity.

Here is the Book of Mormon revision. 3 Nephi 10:4-6 reads as follows:

4 O ye people of these great cities which have fallen, who are descendants of Jacob, yea, who are of the house of Israel, **how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings**, and have nourished you.  
5 And again, **how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings**, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, **how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not**.  
6 O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, **how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings**, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart.

Notice that the phrase “as a hen gathereth her chickens” is repeated four times in just three verses. Is it reasonable to think that Jesus was the author of this? Would a scribe be this wordy while laboriously engraving on metal plates? Invariably when the author of the book expands on a biblical text it becomes awkward and needlessly wordy.

Another problem for the translation of the Book of Mormon is the inclusion of Matthew’s version of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi, chapter 12, with only slight modification. We don’t have time to explore the problem, but for those who want to pursue it, Stan Larson, who holds a Ph.D. in New Testament studies, did an excellent study on this issue in the book, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brent Metcalf.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi”; <http://signaturebookslibrary.org/book-of-mormon/>

## *Ending of Mark*

Also challenging the Book of Mormon as a literal translation is the presence of quotes from the dubious ending of the gospel of Mark. Scholars have long recognized that the section of Mark 16:9-19 does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of the gospel. Renowned bible scholar Bruce Metzger observed:

“Clement of Alexandria and Origen show no knowledge of the existence of these verses; furthermore Eusebius and Jerome attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet Mormon 9:22-24 is clearly dependent on the King James Version of Mark 16:15-18. The passage in Mark reads:

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.  
16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.  
17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;  
18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Compare this to the passage in Mormon 9:22-24:

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;  
23 And he that **believeth** and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be **damned**;  
24 And **these signs** shall follow them that believe—in my name shall they cast out **devils**; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay **hands** on the sick and they shall recover;

Is it reasonable to assume that two authors, independent of one another, on different continents, could arrive at the exact same wording?

## *Preface to KJV*

The author of the Book of Mormon not only plagiarized large portions of the Bible, he also borrowed unique phrasing from the preface to the 1611 King James Version, which is still printed at the front of the LDS Bible. In the Preface we find the following:

“. . . **clouds of darkness** would so have **overshadowed** this Land, that men should have been in doubt which way they were to walk . . .” (*The Holy Bible*, Preface: as printed by the LDS Church in 1979)

Compare this 1611 phrase with several verses in Helaman, chapter 5, written about 30 BC.

verse 34 — “... the Lamanites could not flee because of **the cloud of darkness** which did **overshadow** them; ...”

verse 40 — “... What shall we do, that **this cloud of darkness** may be removed from **overshadowing** us?”

verse 41 — “... and when ye shall do this, **the cloud of darkness** shall be removed from **overshadowing** you.”

verse 43 — “... they cast their eyes about, and saw that **the cloud of darkness** was dispersed from **overshadowing** them...”

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8 Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition, (Hendrickson Publishers, 2005).

It is the unique pairing of the words “cloud of darkness” with “overshadowing” that points to the Preface of the 1611 Bible. The phrase “cloud of darkness” never appears in the Bible, but it appears 10 times in the Book of Mormon, once in Alma 19:6, the rest in the book of Helaman, chapter 5.<sup>9</sup>

### *Westminster Confession*

The Westminster Confession, adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1729, provides another example of borrowed phrases. The unique phrase “**infinite goodness of God**” appears in both the Confession, ch. 5:4, and in Mosiah 5:3. The Mosiah text reads: “And we, ourselves, also, through the **infinite goodness of God**, and the manifestation of his Spirit, ...”

While the word “infinite” is found in the bible, it is never used in connection with the words “goodness of God.” The phrase “infinite goodness of God” only appears in the Westminster Confession.

Keep in mind that those who witnessed the translation process of the Book of Mormon, such as Joseph Smith’s wife Emma, along with David Whitmer and Martin Harris, gave statements that Smith read the divine text off the stone, while the plates were either covered with a cloth or hid somewhere, thus eliminating the argument that Smith was paraphrasing or influencing the wording of the translation. Once the door is opened to allow Smith to add phrases or concepts to the text, it is possible for him to compose the whole book.

### *Conclusion*

The Book of Mormon, with its inclusion of hundreds of unique phrases from the King James Bible, and other sources that post-date the time of the Nephites, must be seen as a modern composition, not a translation of an ancient text. The first edition of the Book of Mormon was right when it listed Joseph Smith as the author and proprietor.

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For further reading, see our book, *Joseph Smith’s Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*, available as a free digital book on our web page, Utah Lighthouse Ministry - [www.UTLM.org](http://www.UTLM.org).

Also see our articles dealing with the Book of Mormon in our publication, *Salt Lake City Messenger*, numbers 29, 95, 103,105, 107, 114, 125, 127, 128 and 135, posted on our web page.

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<sup>9</sup> Alma 19:6; Helaman 5:28, 29, 31, 34, 36, 40, 41, 42, 43.