

Editor: Sandra Tanner

Utah Lighthouse Ministry

1358 S. West Temple
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THE BOOK OF MORMON: ANOTHER BIBLE OR ANOTHER BIBLE FORGERY? PART 1

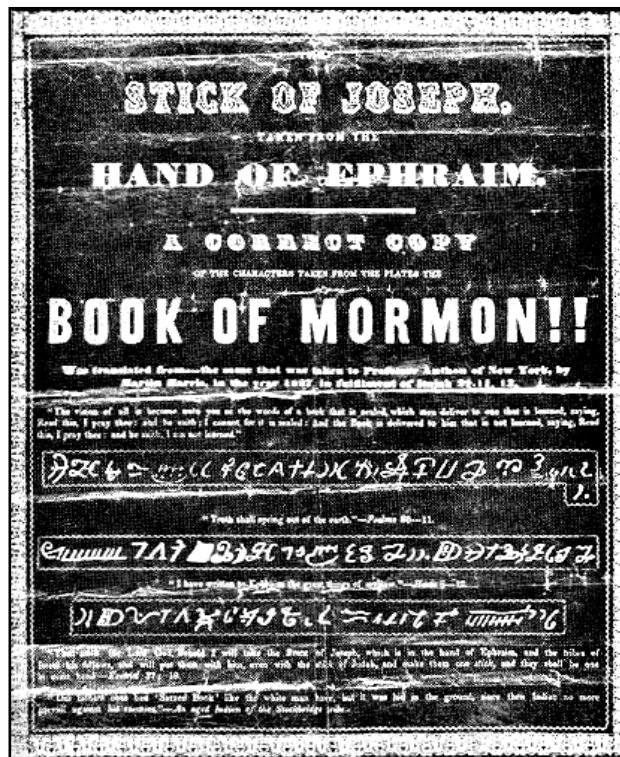
By RONALD V. HUGGINS

Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon present themselves to their readers as many separate works written by different authors over many centuries, eventually collected together into one book. Now the Bible clearly is just that. But what about the Book of Mormon? Is it really the same sort of book the Bible is? Or, as C. S. Lewis suggested, is it rather a book written *in imitation* of the Bible?¹ The introduction of the current edition of the Book of Mormon asserts it is the former:

The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God’s dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains the fulness of the everlasting gospel. The book was written by many ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Their words, written on gold plates, were quoted and abridged by a prophet-historian named Mormon.

These words merely reiterate the view of the Book of Mormon officially held by the Mormon Church from the time Egbert B. Grandin of Palmyra, New York, published it on March 26, 1830,

right down to the present day. This was also the view put forward by Joseph Smith himself, as indicated in the title he chose for the original edition: *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*. In providing this title, Joseph Smith is giving us to understand that Nephi (7th/6th cent. BC) and Mormon (4th/5th cent. AD) were real historical people and that the Book of Mormon was translated into English from an abridgment of the plates of Nephi by Mormon. From the beginning as well the Book of Mormon has included two additional documents under its covers called “testimonies,” one of three and the other of eight witnesses, all of whom say they actually saw the plates from which Joseph translated the Book of Mormon and the characters on the plates. Both “testimonies” begin with the remarkably comprehensive line identifying the intended audience of the book: “BE it known unto all nations,



Broadside used in the early days of the church to publicize the Book of Mormon reproduces the characters Joseph Smith copied from the plates. The broadside was printed in gold letters on black paper. (Church Archives)

kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come. . . .”² The plain intention of these testimonies is to assure readers everywhere that the Book of Mormon

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version: The Ethel M. Wood Lecture Delivered before the University of London on 20 March 1950* (London: The Athlone Press, 1950), 26.

² *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Palmyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, 1830), [589] and [590].

was not a mere imitation of the Bible but actually what it purports to be: *another Bible*, and that it was translated, according to the oft-used expression, “by the gift and power of God.”³ But what exactly does that phrase mean?

“By the Gift and Power of God”

Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris are the names of the men who signed the Book of Mormon “testimony of the three witnesses” declaring that: “We also know that they [the plates] have been translated *by the gift and power of God*” (italics added).⁴ One of the three, David Whitmer, left the following description of what he understood by that phrase, “by the gift and power of God”:

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. 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.* (italics added)⁵

Another of the three, Martin Harris, corroborated Whitmer’s story of the miraculous process of translation:

He [Martin Harris] said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone. Martin explained the translating as follows: By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, “Written,” and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and

3 E.g., “Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift, and power of God” (*Times and Seasons* [March 1, 1842]: 707); “Joseph Smith, the prophet and seer of the Lord, has done more, (save Jesus only,) for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it . . . he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God.” (*The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (2nd ed.; Nauvoo, IL: John Taylor, 1844), 444 (Sec. CXI).

4 “The Testimony of Three Witnesses,” Book of Mormon (1830), 589.

5 David Whitmer, *Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 12.

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.⁶

Even the Prophet Joseph Smith’s own wife, Emma Hale Smith, added her testimony to the above described manner of translation:

When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word *Sarah* he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.⁷

If what David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Emma Smith say is true, if this really was the way the Book of Mormon came forth, then it’s really not surprising that Joseph Smith would describe it as “the most correct of any book on earth.”⁸ Imagine what is being claimed by these witnesses, namely, that the Book of Mormon, at least in the original dictated manuscript or manuscripts,⁹ represents, very literally, God’s own English translation of the Reformed Egyptian characters inscribed on the ancient Nephite plates. Not only do all the *words* come directly by divine dictation, but all the *grammar* and *spelling* as well.

Obviously this story of miraculous origins was intended to underscore the claim that the Book of Mormon is a divine book in its own right and no mere imitation of the Bible. But what if the witnesses’ stories turned out not to be true? What if the story was made up and the Book of Mormon turned out to be just another book written in imitation of the Bible? If *that* were so, the situation would become more complicated than our merely being able to assign the book, as C. S. Lewis did in his non-confrontational way, to the morally-neutral category of an *imitation* of the Bible. If the claims turned out not to be true, the Book of Mormon becomes not merely a

6 “One of the Three Witnesses: Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris,” Letter to the editor by Edward Stevenson, written Nov. 30, 1881, published in the *Deseret Evening News* (Dec. 13, 1881): [4].

7 Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of History* 9.2 (Jan 1916): 454.

8 *History of the Church*, 4:461.

9 Strictly speaking only portions of the original dictated manuscript exist, but the entire copy that was produced from it, called the Printer’s Manuscript, exists in its entirety and represents for many parts the closest we can get to what the Original Manuscript looked like. These two manuscripts are what I have in mind when I refer to manuscripts (plural) throughout this study.

Bible imitation, but a full-blown Bible forgery. As Eric Hebborn (d. 1996), one of the most accomplished art forgers of the twentieth century, wrote: “The making of a new Old Master is not itself a crime . . . A crime has only been committed when the fake is offered for sale as genuinely old.”¹⁰ And so in this case, making an imitation of the Bible is one thing, but falsely putting it forward as ancient or divine in origin quite another.

Given the point he makes above, when Hebborn would paint a forgery he would never actually claim it was authentic. Instead he devised a series of strategies to gently nudge others into making their own affirmative judgments concerning authenticity. In contrast, Joseph and his early followers did not hesitate to venture authenticity claims of the most remarkable nature for the Book of Mormon.

The task of examining the Book of Mormon as a Bible forgery, rather than a Bible imitation, is forced upon us once we face how great an effort on the part of those who produced it to convince people that it was indeed a divine book, as when Joseph Smith declared the Book of Mormon, “the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”¹¹ If Joseph Smith said this, knowing he’d made the whole thing up, then he was, very simply, a very bad man, a man who defrauded people spiritually by producing a fake Bible, in the same way counterfeiters and art forgers defraud people materially or aesthetically by making fake money and fake Picassos.

There will be those, of course, who will resist making such a pointed conclusion about Joseph in this case by suggesting some mitigating factor in his case, as, for example, did Major Lewis C. Bidamon, Emma Smith’s second husband, when he told Edmund C. Briggs, “I believe Joseph Smith was an honest man, but think he might have been deceived.”¹²

The Consistency Test:

**Does the suspected forgery match its maker’s description?
Does its maker act as though he himself believes
his description?**

Inner motivations and their attendant virtues or culpabilities can be hidden. It’s hard to tell when somebody’s lying. But happily when trying to detect a forgery we don’t always have to. What we do have to do is carefully examine whether what the suspected forger *does* matches what (s)he *says*. To begin with one

¹⁰ Eric Hebborn, *Art Forger’s Handbook* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1997), 190.

¹¹ *History of the Church*, 4:461.

¹² Briggs, “Visit to Nauvoo,” 446.

example, if there’s reason to suspect that a forgery has been perpetrated, the thing to do is to determine whether the statements of the forger both before and after producing the suspected work are consistent with the process (s)he claimed to have used in creating the suspected forgery. An example of what I mean can be found in the story of the flamboyant British art forger Tom Keating (d. 1984). Keating claimed that the spirits of the old masters actually possessed him and painted new paintings of their own *through* him and that sometimes this even happened when he was sleeping. Was Keating lying? Did he actually believe his claim that: “I woke up one morning and found it [a self-portrait of the French painter, Edgar Degas (1834-1917)] on the easel, in place of the scratchy, silly daub that I’d been working on the day before?”¹³

Notice now that I am not asking if *we* believed the story, but if *he*, Tom Keating, believed it. We might believe Keating *believed* that dead artists possessed living ones, even if we didn’t believe ourselves that such things ever actually happened. On those grounds we might perhaps be willing even to excuse him for signing their names rather than his own while under the influence.

One way to test whether Keating believed his own story or not would be to ask whether his actual procedures in producing the paintings matched this stated belief? Perpetrators of art forgery very often go to great lengths to produce canvas, ground paint and so on, that exactly match the precise period of the painters they are trying to reproduce.¹⁴ If it could be shown in Keating’s case that he employed this kind of measures in producing his forged canvases, then of course, his claim of being simply possessed by the artists he was replicating would come under suspicion, due to his efforts to deceive those who might examine the painting closely. If, on the other hand, he simply took up the materials immediately at hand on his painting table and dashed off pictures in the precise manner and style of the painters that had allegedly taken hold of him, then, true or not, his excuse would at least be *consistent* with his claim about being possessed by the spirits of dead artists. And as it happens in Keating’s case, his excuse did turn out to be more or less consistent with the kind of process we might expect him to have adopted

¹³ Quoted in Jonathon Keats, *Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 143.

¹⁴ Hebborn, *Art Forger’s Handbook*.

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under the alleged circumstances.¹⁵ Keating had already confessed when he gave this excuse, and surely knew that if scientific tests were done on his forgeries his materials would not have matched those used in the times of the artists he was imitating. In other words his excuse was well invented, if not to persuade people that the forgeries were real, at least to provide himself a justification that might keep him out of jail.¹⁶ But what of Joseph?

If the accounts of David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Emma Smith accurately reflect what happened then we would expect to find evidence of that fact in both the products of the allegedly miraculous translation process and how Joseph Smith himself treated those products afterward. We must ask on the one hand whether what we see in the manuscripts is consistent with their having been produced by the sort of direct, divine oversight described in three accounts. And then on the other hand, whether Joseph treated the original inerrant transcriptions as absolutely sacrosanct and authoritative in the production of the various editions of the Book of Mormon produced during his lifetime. In each case the answer is no. Neither the internal evidence of the original manuscripts themselves nor the way Joseph treated them afterward are consistent with the story.

The Manuscripts as Witnesses to the Translation Process

In the first place the original manuscripts, and indeed the original published Book of Mormon as well, represent an odd mix of English. On the one hand there appears to have been an attempt to make the English sound Bible-like

¹⁵ Keats, *Forged*, 141: “Keating took seriously the work of mastering an artist’s style, teaching himself all he could learn on his own, but this care with technique was intentionally offset by his recklessness with materials. Rather than scraping down the old potboilers he bought in junk shops, he simply cleaned them with alcohol and reprimed them with a layer of rabbit-skin glue. He painted directly onto this surface, often in acrylics, sometimes brushing on a layer of darkening varnish before the paint cured. The results were predictably catastrophic. Even if his synthetic pigments were never detected by scientific testing, the paint would start to peel in a few decades, betraying his ruse.”

¹⁶ Naturally more elaborate excuses could be ventured. Had Keating made attempts to avoid detection he could have suggested, for example, that the spirits of the old masters were apparently so pleased with Keating as a conduit for their ongoing productions that they’d possessed him during the preparation of his materials, his paints and canvases and so on, in order to fool the art world and keep that conduit open. Yet with increasing ingenuity and elaboration comes decreasing plausibility, due in no small part to expanding avenues of scrutiny. And truth be told, if one had scrutinized Keating’s life and activities carefully enough they would have turned up sufficient evidence to debunk even his claim that he had been possessed by the spirits of the old masters.

by mimicking the familiar cadences of the King James Bible throughout. As Mark Twain famously pointed out,

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 laddled 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” was his pet. If he had left that out, his Bible would have been only a pamphlet.¹⁷

Overuse of “And it came to pass” in both the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price: Moses raises suspicion of Bible forgery.

Certainly Mark Twain was correct about the Book of Mormon’s overuse of “It came to pass.” The phrase does occur quite often in the King James Bible (453 times), but it occurs more than three times as often in the Book of Mormon (1447 times). The mere frequency of the phrase, in and of itself, raises suspicion concerning the authenticity of the text. Suspicion is increased when it is discovered that a similar thing occurs in Joseph’s other revelational projects.¹⁸

The overuse of “it came to pass,” is very evident in the *Pearl of Great Price: Moses*, which represents the LDS Church’s canonized Old Testament selection of the so-called Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST). In preparing the JST, Joseph used the King James Version (KJV) as his base text, this time in the form of a pulpit-style Bible published in 1828 by H. & E. Phinney, Cooperstown, New York, which he and Oliver Cowdery purchased from Palmyra printer and bookseller Egbert B. Grandin on October 8, 1829.

The eight chapters of the Book of Moses in the *Pearl of Great Price* represent Joseph’s reworking of Genesis 1:1–6:13. Behind the use of the King James Bible’s phrase “And it came to pass,” is the familiar Hebrew form *wayēhi*. Most modern translations of the Bible simply

¹⁷ Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1873), 127-28.

¹⁸ Forty-eight times in the *D&C* [excluding *D&C* 135, which is not by Smith], and 61 times in the *Pearl of Great Price* [44 times in the Book of Moses, 17 times in the Book of Abraham]. The numbers given here (except for the KJV) are derived from *An Exhaustive Concordance of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price* (comp. by R. Gary Shapiro; Salt Lake City, UT: Hawkes Publishing, 1977). They naturally relate to the then current editions of the Mormon Scriptures.

leave *wayĕhî* untranslated because it is a redundancy, it merely moves the narrative forward, without substantially affecting the meaning.¹⁹ In the course of the King James version of the 50 chapters of the book of Genesis, “And it came to pass” occurs 63 times, a little more than once per chapter. In Genesis 1:1–6:3 in the King James, the passage covered by the Book of Moses, the phrases appears 3 times (Genesis 4:3, 4:8, 6:1).²⁰

In reworking those chapters in the Book of Moses, however, Joseph increased the number of occurrences of “And it came to pass,” from 3 times to 44 times, making Joseph’s restoration of the first 5 chapters of Genesis plus the first 13 verses of the 6th chapter contain more than two thirds the number of occurrences of “And it came to pass” as in the entire 50 chapters of KJV Genesis.

Given the great frequency of the phrase “And it came to pass” in both the Book of Mormon and in the Book of Moses, one has to at least consider the possibility that it derives from Joseph’s prophetic style, rather than from anything present in the texts Joseph claimed he was translating on the one hand and restoring on the other.

When Mark Twain noted the odd mix of what he described as “a mongrel—half modern glibness, and half ancient simplicity and gravity,” he was pointing out another issue that needs considering when trying to determine whether the Book of Mormon is another Bible or another Bible forgery.

If the story is true about Joseph seeing the translation of each word and phrase on the stone (or through the Urim and Thummim), then reciting it to his scribe, who in turn had to get it right before the stone would move on to the next word or phrase, then we have to come to terms with the idea that during the translation process, God for some reason elected to throw a little backwoods grammar, as for example, a little mismatching of singular and plural subjects with the appropriate singular and plural verbs, into the King Jamesy mix. This means we must accept the idea that when Joseph looked at the stone while translating 3 Nephi 17:6-7, what he saw written there in shining letters had Jesus telling the ancient Nephites: “Behold, my bowels *is* filled with compassion towards you . . . my bowels *is* filled with mercy.”

19 So for example, where the KJV reads at Genesis 6:1: “And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth,” the NRSV, NAB, NIV, ESV, HCSB, JB, NJB, pass over the *wayĕhî* and start the passage with “When (man, men, mankind, human beings, people) began to multiply . . .” The NASB, as an example of one of the few Bibles English translations that does translate *wayĕhî* here, reads “Now it came about, when men . . .”

20 All three passages translating *wayĕhî*, but the first two inserting additional words between “and” and “it came to pass.”

Further in view of the descriptions of the translation process the remark on the title page of the 1830 first edition of the Book of Mormon stating that “if there be fault, it be the mistake of men”—which is also present in the current edition—it can only refer to (1) errors made by the ancient authors of the Book of Mormon, in which case we would be dealing with an inerrant translation of a potentially errant text, or (2) typographical errors that occurred in the process of turning the contents of the divinely dictated manuscripts into a book. In the case of the bowels passage, the printed text of the original Book of Mormon does, in fact, reflect the reading of the Printer’s Manuscript, a copy of the original dictated manuscript produced by Oliver Cowdery.²¹

If the story of the divine origin of the English translation of the Book of Mormon is true, we may well ask why God chose to employ the odd mix of only partially successful attempted Elizabethan English and crude American back-woods slang. From the perspective of a non-committed person trying to discern whether we are dealing with a Bible or Bible forgery, this mixed style, especially in light of the Book’s failure to sustain a truly plausible imitation of early 17th century English throughout the course of the narrative,²² naturally points toward considering the work a forgery produced by someone trying to make it sound like the King James Bible without having the linguistic capacity to actually pull it off. The point is illustrated well in a short story by the late Nobel Prize-winning author Isaac Bashevis Singer entitled “The Séance.” In the story the down-on-his-luck scholar Dr. Zorach Kalisher is befriended by a poorly educated psychic named Mrs. Lotte Kopitzky. When Mrs. Kopitzky goes into her trances she supposedly channels a spirit who lived in the 4th century A.D. named Bhaghavar Krishna:

Everything was exactly as it had been yesterday and the day before. Bhaghavar Krishna began to speak in English with his foreign voice that was half male and half female, duplicating Mrs. Kopitzky’s errors in pronunciation and grammar. Lotte Kopitzky came from a village in the Carpathian Mountains. Dr. Kalisher could never discover her nationality—Hungarian, Romanian, Galician? She knew no Polish or German, and little English; even her Yiddish had been corrupted through her long years in America. Actually she had been left

21 1830 Book of Mormon (p. 489) and *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations: Volume 3, Part 2: Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Alma 36-Moroni 10* (eds. Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen; Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 260-61.

22 Apart from those places where the Book of Mormon extensively copies directly from the King James text itself.

languageless and Bhaghavar Krishna spoke the various jargons. At first Dr. Kalisher had asked Bhaghavar Krishna the details of his earthly existence but had been told by Bhaghavar Krishna that he had forgotten everything in the heavenly mansions in which he dwelt. All he could recall was that he had lived in the suburbs of Madras. Bhaghavar Krishna did not even know that in that part of India Tamil was spoken. When Dr. Kalisher tried to converse with him about Sanskrit, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Sakuntala, Bhaghavar Krishna replied that he was no longer interested in terrestrial literature. Bhaghavar Krishna knew nothing but a few theosophic and spiritualistic brochures and magazines which Mrs. Kopitzky subscribed to.²³

To be sure we expect to encounter different styles in a work containing different authors representing a number of different genres. It is quite another matter when the whole of the work appears to be dominated by an overarching and clumsy attempt on the part of the author to make the work appear to be what it is not. When John Ballou Newbrough rolled out his massive *Oahspe, a New Bible in the Words of Jehovih [sic] and his Angel Ambassadors* in 1882,²⁴ we can scarcely think the *New York Times* reporter who covered the event meant to endorse the work's authenticity when (s)he remarked that "The style is in one place modern, and in another ancient, and the English of the King James version of the Christian Bible is mixed with the English of to-day's."²⁵

And yet ingenuity driven by necessity seldom fails at inventing alternative explanations. LDS researcher Mark Thomas, for example, argued that the peculiarities of the language of the Book of Mormon resulted from its being high art, something on the level of William Blake or other great poets and authors. At the 2016 Sunstone Symposium he sought to demonstrate this dramatically by reading passages from the Book of Mormon in what he imagined the early 19th century accent of Joseph

23 "The Séance," in *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), 538 (trans. Roger H. Klein and Cecil Hemley), 200-201.

24 John Ballou Newbrough, *Oahspe, a New Bible in the Words of Jehovih and his Angel Ambassadors: A Sacred History of the Higher and Lower Heavens on the Earth for the Past Twenty-Four Thousand Years* (New York and London, Oahspe Publishing Association, 1882 [Anno Kosmon 34]).

25 "Dr. Newbrough's 'Oahspe.' An 'Inspired' Volume Giving the History of 24,000 Years," *The New York Times* (Oct. 21, 1882): 5. The article explains that the text was produced through automatic writing.

Smith must have sounded like.²⁶ Thomas's view rests on an aesthetic judgment that relatively few (including this author) would share.²⁷ But does Thomas's suggestion really succeed in providing a plausible way of explaining why God chose to translate the Book of Mormon using the strange mixture of rough hewn and faux elevated Englishes, or is there a simpler explanation?

The Evidence of Joseph's Treatment of the Manuscripts

Even if we accept the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon told by the witnesses despite its odd mix of Englishes, did Joseph himself act as though he believed the story? Did he treat the dictated transcriptions created in the course of the translation process as absolutely sacrosanct and authoritative when overseeing the production of the various editions of the Book of Mormon published during his lifetime? When the stone presented the words "Behold, my bowels *is* filled with compassion towards you . . . my bowels *is* filled with mercy," when the stone would not move on to the next word or phrase until Joseph's scribe had carefully copied those words down, bad grammar and all, just as they appeared on the stone, did Joseph, did anyone involved in the printing process, proceed to the next step as if that were what happened? The answer is, they did not. What they did do was treat the Book of Mormon manuscripts like pretty much anyone would have treated any other humanly produced manuscript. They cleaned it up, corrected spellings, fixed grammar, changed words, expressions, here and there, without any warrant in the manuscript and on their own volition, even sometimes where it affected the book's basic doctrine. So, for example, the bowels phrase, which was faithfully reproduced from the Printer's Manuscript in the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, was corrected in the 1837 second edition to read instead: "Behold, my bowels *are* filled with compassion towards you . . . my bowels *are* filled with mercy."

26 "Four Views on the Book of Mormon," Saturday, July 30, 2016, Session 351 ("2016 Sunstone Salt Lake Symposium: July 27-30: Many Mormonisms and the Mormon Movement, Official Program," 37).

27 Another who thinks highly of the Book of Mormon's aesthetic value is Daniel Walker Howe, who astonishingly declared that the Book of Mormon "should rank among the great achievements of American Literature" (Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America: 1815-1848* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], 314, quoted in Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones* [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University/Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2016], 47).

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A large number of such corrections were entered into the Printer's Manuscript in preparation for the second edition, many of them, including this one apparently, by Joseph himself.²⁸ As LDS scholar Royal Skousen comments, "The text has undergone considerable editing in order to remove cases of subject-verb disagreement. This is especially the case in Joseph Smith's editing of the 1837 edition."²⁹ In an earlier work assessing this situation, RLDS Church Historian Richard Howard counted 137 places where Joseph corrected the grammar by replacing "was" with "were," "were" with "was," "is" with "are," "are" with "is."³⁰ Howard counted more than two thousand refinements that had been entered into the Printer's Manuscript, mostly by Joseph Smith himself, more than a thousand of which ended up in the 1837 second edition of the Book of Mormon.³¹ Most, but not all, of Joseph's corrections, as Skousen tells us, "are grammatical in nature,"³² a fact that caused Howard to remark: "The improvement of the text for the 1837 edition makes it clear that Joseph Smith's grammatical abilities matured greatly from the year 1829."³³

While only the Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon is extant for the bowels passage,³⁴ we can be sure from other passages that the various changes Joseph made in the Printer's Manuscript were not motivated by trying to bring it into more perfect agreement with the Original Manuscript.

This is so, as we said, even where important doctrinal issues were at stake. For example, as Joseph's prophetic career progressed so did his doctrine of God. This can be seen clearly in the way Joseph tweaked language that equated Jesus and God the Father in the 1830 first edition of the Book of Mormon in order to distinguish between

28 *The Joseph Smith Papers: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Alma 36-Moroni 10*, 260-61.

29 Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Grammatical Variation* (2 vols.; assist. by Stanford Carmack; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies / Brigham Young University Studies, 2016), 2:880. See further, Skousen's chapter on "Subject-Verb Agreement," 2:880-915.

30 Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (2nd ed.; Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1995), 27. According to Howard, Joseph also replaced "which" with "who" 707 times.

31 Ibid.

32 Royal Skousen, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (2 vols.; Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 2001), 1:4.

33 Howard, *Restoration Scriptures*, 27.

34 *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (ed. Royal Skousen; Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies: Brigham Young University, 2001), 520-521.

the two divine figures in the 1837 second edition. In what is now 1 Nephi 11:18, the 1830 Book of Mormon referred to Mary as "the mother of God" (p. 25). A few lines later (now 1 Nephi 11:21), Jesus was equated with the Father in the statement: "behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father" (p. 25). In each case the 1830 Book of Mormon reproduced the wording that appeared in both the Original Manuscript³⁵ and the Printer's Manuscript,³⁶ and in each case significant words were added to the 1837 second edition. "Mother of God" at 1 Nephi 11:18 became "mother of the Son of God," (p. 27) and "even the Eternal Father" at 1 Nephi 11:21, to "even the Son of the Eternal Father!" (p. 28). In the former case, Joseph himself introduced "the son of" above the line.³⁷ In the latter case the correction was introduced into the second edition without having been entered into the the Book of Mormon manuscripts beforehand.

Sometimes it's not as immediately clear why Joseph departs from the Book of Mormon manuscripts when talking about Jesus and the Father. In the 1830 Book of Mormon at what is now 1 Nephi 12:18 we read of the "justice of the Eternal God, and Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God" (p. 28). This was the reading of both the Original Manuscript and the Printer's Manuscript.³⁸ But again Joseph takes the liberty to change it by entering

28

FIRST BOOK OF NEPHI.

they may perish, and are lost; and the large and spacious building which thy father saw, is vain imaginations, and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever. And while the angel spoke these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.

And it came to pass that I beheld and saw the people of the seed of my brethren, that they had overcome my seed; and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land. And I saw them gathered together in multitudes; and I saw wars, and rumors of wars among them; and in wars, and rumors of wars, I saw many generations pass away. And the angel said unto me, behold, these shall dwindle in unbelief.

1830 Book of Mormon, page 28

35 For the forms of 1 Nephi 11:18, 21, and 12:18 in the Original Manuscript see Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 104.

36 For the forms of 1 Nephi 11:18, 21 and 12:18 in the Printer's Manuscript see *The Joseph Smith Papers: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Alma 36-Moroni 10*, 50-53: "Mother of God" (50-51) and "Lamb of God yea even the eternal God Father" (52-53).

37 Ibid., 50-51.

38 See Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 111, and *Joseph Smith Papers: Printer's Manuscript 1*, 56-57.

a correction into the Printer's Manuscript in preparation for the 1837 printed edition. He marked out the words "Jesus Christ which" and replaced them with "Mosiah who," indicating that the passage should now read: "justice of the Eternal God & Mosiah, who is the Lamb of God." "Mosiah" is apparently a misspelling of Messiah, and in the 1837 second edition the passage reads: "the justice of the eternal God, and the Messiah, who is the Lamb of God" (p. 30).³⁹

So why the departure from the divinely dictated text in this case? Why the change? Perhaps the reason is that the name "Christ" wasn't supposed to be revealed until later in the Book of Mormon narrative, as is suggested by 2 Nephi 10:3, where the Book of Mormon character Jacob says, "it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come." The first time "Jesus Christ" was introduced into the narrative was in 2 Nephi 25:19: "the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time my father [Lehi] left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also of the angel of God, his name shall be called Jesus Christ." In changing "Jesus Christ," to "Mosiah" ("the Messiah") at 1 Nephi 12:18 in the second edition, Joseph was apparently clearing up an anachronism in the text,⁴⁰ and in the process preferring to use a word other than the one he had supposedly read from the stone earlier.⁴¹

Many similar examples of substantive changes in later editions of the Book of Mormon, years after the allegedly divinely guided dictation from the stone took place, are plentiful. The ones presented here were chosen because they come from points where the original dictated manuscript is still extant. It's clear that at least by the time Joseph was preparing the second edition of the Book

of Mormon for the press he was clearly not treating the original dictated manuscripts of the Book of Mormon in such a way as to indicate that he himself believed the claim of his followers about the word for word dictation from the stone. Had he believed it, we've no cause to suppose he'd have taken the liberties he did with the text.

Anachronism as Key to Detection

In rectifying the anachronism of having Jesus Christ named by a Nephite in the story line of the Book of Mormon before that name had supposedly been initially revealed to the Nephites, if indeed that's what he did, Joseph was tacitly recognizing an important reality, namely that the presence of anachronisms in a text is one of the first things one must look to when trying to discern whether a text or picture or similar production is a forgery or not. *The Merriam Webster's 3rd International Dictionary* gives as part of its definition for the word anachronism "a chronological misplacing of persons, events, objects, or customs with regard to each other."

In other words, an anachronism is something out of its proper place or time, and so in the case of detecting literary forgeries, a chronological synchronicity of two things that would have been unlikely or impossible. Something is there in the story that would not/could not have been there at the time the events being described in the story allegedly took place.

Francisco Candido Xavier, Two Thousand Years Ago

One very amusing example of the presence of anachronisms in a book pretending to give a first-hand account of a person living in first century Palestine is the channeled *Two Thousand Years Ago*, supposedly related to the Spiritist Francisco Candido Xavier back in 1939 by a spirit named Emmanuel, who, back in the first century, was a Roman Senator named Publius Lentulus.⁴² On the whole Emmanuel gets the lay of the land as it would have been right, although he does occasionally get snagged on his geography, as, for example, when he describes traveling to Galilee from Jerusalem on the road through Samaria, but says it "often skirted the light, limpid waters

39 Richard P. Howard credited "Mosiah," here to a scribe who misheard Joseph's dictated word "Messiah" (Howard, *Restoration Scriptures*, 45), but Royal Skousen and Scott Robin Jensen identify the word as being introduced by Joseph's own hand (*Joseph Smith Papers: Printer's Manuscript 1*, 57).

40 The change also causes one to wonder whether Joseph realized at that point that "Christ" simply represented the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah," which already appears in the very first chapter of the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 1:19). Against the idea that Joseph was simply taking Christ as Jesus's last name is the appearance of the phrase "Jesus is the Christ," in, e.g., 2 Nephi 26:12, Moroni 7:44.

41 I am indebted to Sandra Tanner for explaining this puzzling change, and for pointing me to her and Jerald's discussion of it in their *Covering up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), 64-65. An expanded edition of this work now appears as the second part of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon* (rev. ed.; Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2010), 216-17.

42 Conveniently, the same name as that given to the alleged author of a forged letter by a supposed contemporary of Jesus that shaped depictions of Jesus in the West. See Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 103-104. See the critical edition of the letter prepared by Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1899), 293-330, esp. 319.

of the Jordan River.”⁴³ Yet like the Hollywood movies of the thirties, Emmanuel seems to have no sense of creating historically plausible dialogue. We can’t help but smile, for example, when we read of Publius stopping by Pontius Pilate’s “office,”⁴⁴ or when we encounter a Roman slave giving deference to his mistress by calling her “ma’am.”⁴⁵ The feel of the language is neither ancient nor modern. It is 1930s-ish. It’s anachronistic. And if we had occasion to want to take a cue from that fact we might even be able to rummage around popular sources available to the scribe/author Xavier in those days and see where he really got his information for writing the book. Still such verbal anachronisms as we find in *Two Thousand Years Ago* might be legitimately explained away as part of providing a fully “modern” translation. But there are anachronisms that cannot be explained away because their presence create alleged historical situations that could not have happened, that were, in fact, impossible.

The Donation of Constantine

One of the most famous of all religious forgeries was a medieval document known as the Donation of Constantine, which pretended to be a decree of the fourth century Emperor Constantine telling the story of how he had been healed of leprosy through the ministrations of Pope Sylvester and of how in gratitude he deeded the Pope and his successors his palace, Rome itself, and the Western Roman Empire. The document, purporting to date from the fourth century, seems to have actually emerged in the ninth. For centuries it served the Papacy essentially as a deed of ownership of Western Europe. Its character as a literary forgery was finally demonstrated in the fifteenth century by the Italian humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla in a work entitled *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* (1440). Key to Valla’s demonstration were two undeniable anachronisms in the Donation’s text. The first was reference on the part of

43 Francisco Candido Xavier, *Two Thousand Years Ago: Historic Episodes of Christianity in the First Century: A Novel Dictated by the Spirit Emmanuel* (trans. Amy Duncan, Darrel W. Kimble, and Ily Reis; Brasilia, DF [Brazil]: International Spiritist Council, 2011 [orig. ed. 1939]), 72. Despite the description of the book as a “novel” in the title, that is not the way the material is represented in the introductory material nor in the text itself.

44 Ibid., 71.

45 Ibid., 77.

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Constantine to “satraps” in his government.⁴⁶ Valla pointed out that satraps did not exist as an office in the Roman government. The other was Constantine’s declaration in the text that the Pope of Rome should exercise dominion over the other chief seats of Christendom, including Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. At the time Constantine supposedly issued the decree, however, Constantinople had not been founded yet, much less arisen to an ecclesiastical status rivaling the other four major seats of Christendom.⁴⁷ Later in the document Constantine actually reports his intention after gifting Rome to the Pope to depart and build a new capital for himself in Byzantium in the East. The capital he spoke of was not named in the document, but it was, of course, Constantinople, a city he had already named in the document as if it was already a prominent city.

Levi Dowling’s Aquarian Gospel

Over the centuries many books, like the Book of Mormon, have been put forward claiming to be other Bibles or Bible portions (e.g., alleged lost Gospels) that are clearly identifiable as forgeries due to the presence of anachronisms. A very clear example is the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ* by one Levi H. Dowling of Bellville, Ohio (1844-1911). Dowling claimed to have, as it were, downloaded the text of the *Aquarian Gospel* psychically from the mystical source known as the Akashic Records, something akin to the storehouse of all human consciousness. The document, however, is bristling with anachronisms, proving if nothing else, that the Akashic Records are no credible source of Gospel history. During the course of telling the story of Jesus’s travels, Levi has him visit Persepolis in Persia (AG 38:6), Abraham’s city, Ur of the Chaldees (AG 42:7), and the Dalai-Lama’s city of Lhasa in Tibet (AG 37). However, the sites of both Persepolis and Ur had long been destroyed and/or abandoned centuries before Jesus (both c. 4th cent. BC) and Lhasa wasn’t to be built until centuries after Jesus (7th cent. AD). Levi also has Jesus encounter a Hindu healer who draws a comparison between the human body and a harpsichord, a musical instrument that did not exist until centuries after Jesus (AG 53:5).

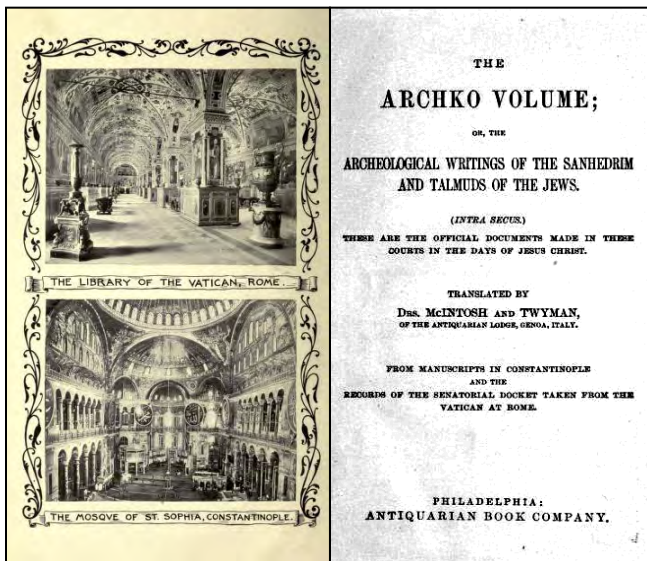
46 Lorenzo Valla’s *Treatise on the Donation of Constantine: Text and Translation into English* (trans. and ed. Christopher B. Coleman; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press / London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1922), 85.

47 Ibid., 95.

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The Archko Volume

Quite often in such cases the anachronisms point not only to the fact *that* a forgery was committed but also *when* it was committed. We may think, for example, of the 19th century Presbyterian W. D. Mahan, who produced the work that now travels under the title *The Archko Volume*, which, he claimed, represented records from the Jewish and Roman courts relating to the trials of Jesus.⁴⁸ Mahan claimed he'd discovered the material in the library of the ancient church of *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople [Istanbul]. But he really plagiarized at least some of it out of Lew Wallace's novel *Ben Hur*, causing the original



Top left: The Library of the Vatican, Rome. Bottom left: The Mosque of St. Sophia, Constantinople. Right: Title page of *The Archko Volume*.

publishing date of *Ben Hur* to represent the real *terminus a quo*, that is to say, the time before which Mahan's book could not have been written. In an ironic twist of poetic justice, the unfortunate Mahan did not realize that the very man whose novel he had plagiarized was then living in Constantinople serving as American minister to Turkey and who, seeing how his novel was being plagiarized, took the trouble to make a personal visit to *Hagia Sophia* accompanied by another person who afterward provided a letter declaring that "No book answering to the description given by Mr. Mahan was found . . . Zia Bey, the librarian, assured General Wallace that he had been in charge of

48 Mahan's Bible forgery has, during its long history, traveled under various titles. The edition I am working with here has the lengthy title: *Historical Records Concerning Jesus the "Christ" Messiah: Records Copied from the Official Manuscripts and Scrolls made by the Senatorial Courts of Tiberius Caesar, and by the Sanhedrim,—in the days of Jesus, entitled "Christ," found in the Libraries at Rome and Constantinople* (comp. by Rev. W. D. Mahan between the Years 1858-1883; trans. by Drs. McIntosh and Twynans of the Antiquarian Lodge, Genoa, Italy; Monrovia, CA: Authur E. Overbary, 1942), 34.

the library for thirty years, and it contained no such manuscripts as Mr. Mahan professed to have seen."⁴⁹ This was in 1885, within two years of Mahan's supposed visit to Constantinople. In consequence Mahan was disciplined by his denomination, and, as so often happens, his bogus volume has been selling pretty well ever since.⁵⁰

The Gospel of Barnabas

To provide yet another example, Muslim apologists often appeal to a work called the *Gospel of Barnabas*, which pretends to have been written by the famous first century missionary associate of St. Paul's (see Acts 4:36), who is erroneously portrayed in the book as one of the twelve apostles, and which represents Muhammad as the true Messiah.⁵¹ The anachronisms contained in the book identify it rather as a late medieval Gospel forgery probably originally written in Italian.⁵²

One of the giveaways for dating the work was the *Gospel of Barnabas*'s descriptions of a seven-level hell based on the traditional list of the Christians' Seven-Deadly Sins, a list that was first enumerated by Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) in his magisterial *Morals in Job*, which was completed in 596 AD or after.⁵³ The reason the *Gospel of Barnabas* is generally understood to have been written in the 14th century rather than merely sometime after the 6th (i.e., after Gregory the Great's time) is the fact that its seven-level hell (135) appears to be modeled after the seven-level island mountain of Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), using the same standardized Western names

49 Reproduced in Edgar J. Goodspeed's, *Famous Biblical Hoaxes, or, Modern Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1956 [1931]), 39.

50 For the whole story see Goodspeed's chapter "The Report of Pilate," in *Famous Biblical Hoaxes*, 28-44.

51 E.g., Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim and Ahmad Thomson, *Jesus: Prophet of Islam* (rev. ed.; New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2003), 105. To his credit, one Muslim apologist, Jerald F. Dirks, cautions his compatriots that "intellectual honesty compels the admission that the *Gospel of Barnabas*, as currently received, cannot be traced in unbroken provenance prior to around the start of the 18th century" (*The Cross and the Crescent* [Beltsville, MD: Amana, 2001], 83).

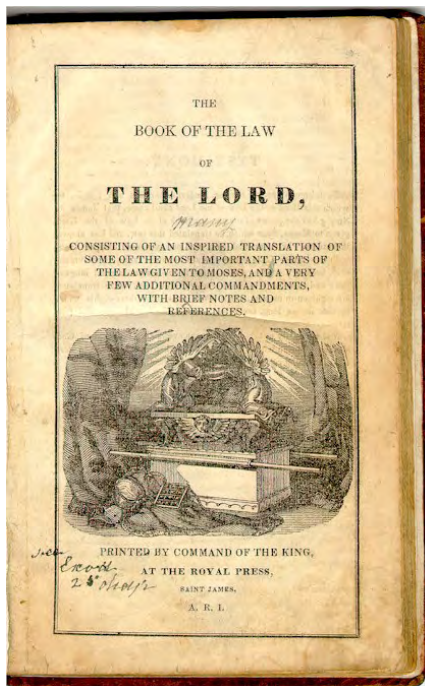
52 "A number of internal indications suggest an origin in the first half of the fourteenth century." (Jan Joosten, "The Date and Provenance of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61.1 [April 2010], 215).

53 *Expositio in Librum Job, sive Moralium, libri xxxi* 31.45.87. Gregory's list: Vain glory (*inanis gloria*), Envy (*invidia*), Anger (*ira*), Melancholy (*tristitia*), Avarice (*avaritia*), Gluttony (*ventris ingluvies*), Lust (*luxuria*). ET: Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* (3 vols.; Oxford: John Henry Parker/London: F. and J. Rivington, 1844-1850), 3:490.

for all the sins as Dante.⁵⁴ The author of the *Gospel of Barnabas* is even suspected of echoing Dante's language at times, most strikingly in its repetition of the line *dei falsi e bugiardi*, "false and lying Gods" (*Inferno* 1:72 = *Gospel of Barnabas* 23, 78, 217). But the forger provided a more decisive anachronistic clue that enables us to date the work even more precisely to between the years 1300 and 1329. We see this in the author's reference to "the year of jubilee, which now comes every hundred years" (sec. 82). The hundred year Jubilee was first instituted by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. How could the author, writing not too long after that, have known that the practice would be abandoned in favor of fifty year Jubilees by 1350?

James Strang's *The Book of the Law of the Lord*

Another Bible forgery, closely related to Mormon origins, is James Strang's *Book of the Law of the Lord*. When Joseph Smith died Strang was one of the men who put himself forward as his chosen successor. All the surviving original witnesses who had signed the



54 Even those who have not read Dante may well remember Domenico di Michelino's small but famous image of the island of Mount Purgatory rising up behind the full-figure standing portrait of the great 13th/14th century poet on the North Wall was of Florence's Duomo. Here are the Italian words used in the *Gospel of Barnabas* followed by their standard Latin counterparts. From lowest to highest level: (1.) The proud (*superbo* / L. *Superbia*), (2.) The envious (*inuidiosso* / L. *Invidia*), (3.) The covetous (*hauaro* / L. *Avaritia*), (4.) The lustful (*lusuriosso* / L. *Luxuria* = Lust), (5.) The slothful (*accidiosso* / L. *Acedia*), (6.) The gluttonous (*gollosso* / L. *Gula*), and (7.) the wrathful (*irachondo* / L. *ira*).

"testimonies" in the Book of Mormon (except Oliver Cowdery) followed Strang.⁵⁵ In the fulness of time Strang produced his own miraculous translation of his own ostensibly newly discovered ancient plates, which was also accompanied by a testimony signed by several witnesses addressed, like the Book of Mormon, with the nearly identical phrase "Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, to whom this Book of the Law of the Lord shall come." The book (except for a small portion of it) presented itself as having been given to Moses by God, but "kept in the ark of the covenant, and . . . held too sacred to go into the hands of strangers."⁵⁶ Again, however, the presence of anachronisms in the text prove that was not its origin.

One very prominent anachronism is the frequent use of the word *synagogue*, an institution that first came into existence long after Moses. The generally accepted theory of its origin is that it arose during the exile to Babylon, which began in 586 BC, or shortly after as a compensatory response to the destruction of Solomon's temple. But actual evidence for its existence even that early is entirely lacking.⁵⁷ It was, in fact, only on the eve of the New Testament period that the synagogue began to come into its own as an established institution within Judaism.⁵⁸ Even the word itself is Greek not Hebrew, related to the word *synagō* ("gather together"). Strang treats what goes on in synagogues throughout as basically the same as temples, which was never the case. Furthermore, the same misunderstanding of what synagogues were all about appears both in those sections of the *Book of the Law of the Lord* supposedly translated from the ancient plates, and those supposedly given to Strang by direct revelation from the Lord.⁵⁹

At many points Strang begins his various sections with a phrase or passage from the King James Bible and then proceeds to freely expand on it. The anachronistic character of these is most obvious where he is quoting books from the King James New Testament, books which

55 See H. Michael Marquardt, "Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831-1870," *Dialogue* 35.3 (Fall 2002): 20.

56 *The Book of the Law of the Lord: Consisting of an Inspired Translation of Some of the Most Important Parts of the Law given to Moses, and a very few Additional Commandments, with Brief Notes and References* (St. James, A. R. I: At the Royal Press, n.d.), 7.

57 See "Synagogue," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (eds. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green; New York: Macmillan, 1996).

58 For a discussion of the relevant evidence, see Howard Clark Kee, "Defining the First-Century CE Synagogue: Problems and Progress," *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 481-500.

59 Compare what appeared on the ancient plates (15.1; 19.1; 26.2; 27. 1, 2 [2 times], 3 [2 times], 4 [2 times]; 32.1, 2, 5; 33.2) to those that came to Strang by way of direct revelation (35.11; 40.2, 4, 15).

did not exist until more than a thousand years after the time of Moses. So, for example, Strang takes the phrase that appears in the King James version of the Gospel of John 3:5—“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”—and uses it as the basis for the opening lines of sections on Baptism and Confirmation in *The Book of the Law of the Lord* (BLL):

BLL 11.1: “Except a man be born of the water, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

BLL 13.1: “Except a man be born of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

Never mind that attributing the institution of Baptism and Confirmation to Moses was also anachronistic! Another clear example of anachronistic quotation, this time following Revelation 7:14, is found in Strang’s section, “Healing”:

Rev 7:14: “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and **made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**” (Rev. 7:14)

BLL 16.2: thou shalt come to the assembly of those who have washed their robes, **and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

In connection with the dating of the previously examined *Gospel of Barnabas*, Oddbjørn Leirvik, has written: “If historical research is to have any value at all, it must be possible to conclude that a certain manuscript is not of ancient, but—in this case—of late medieval or early modern origin.”⁶⁰ The same standard, of course, must also apply in the case of the literary products of the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith. Our main focus here is trying to decide whether the Book of Mormon is another Bible or another Bible forgery. It is a question, however, that cannot be fully pursued unless we are willing to look at evidence pertinent to the question provided by his other prophetic productions. If an artist, for example, is once caught creating and passing off a demonstrable fake, it cannot help but cast a shadow on the authenticity of all his work produced both before and after. And nowhere, in my view at least, does Joseph more conspicuously show his hand in this regard, than in the example we shall discuss next.

⁶⁰ Oddbjørn Leirvik, “History as a Literary Weapon: The Gospel of Barnabas in Muslim-Christian Polemics,” *Studia Theologica* 54 (2001): 20.

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Book of Abraham 4

The prophetic production of Joseph Smith that most readily invites being considered a literary forgery, or in our case a Bible (portion) forgery, is the inadequately scrutinized fourth chapter of the Book of Abraham, now canonized as part of Mormon Scripture in the *Pearl of Great Price*. The clear signs of literary forgery there have been largely overlooked due, no doubt, to the many more pressing issues relating to the authenticity of the Book of Abraham, including such conspicuous problems as the historically implausible setting of the narrative as a whole, which represents Abraham’s city of Ur, usually understood as being located in southern Mesopotamia (modern southern Iraq) as practicing Egyptian religion under the dominion of the Egyptian Pharaoh. As Christopher Woods of the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute, Department of Near Eastern Studies writes:

If we are correct in identifying Abraham’s Ur with Babylonian Ur, this poses grave difficulties for the account given in the Book of Abraham, as there is no evidence whatsoever for the cults of the purported Egyptian gods described in the narrative or for established Egyptian religious practices more generally in the city. Of this we can be sure based on the thousands of cuneiform records that concern Ur and excavations of the city conducted by Sir Leonard Woolley between 1922-34, and, moreover, on everything we know of the history, culture, and religions of the ancient Near East.⁶¹

This problem sent LDS Church scholars scrambling in search of another Ur further to the North which *might* fit the story better, yet all probably in vain since, as Woods goes on to explain, “there is no evidence for the regular worship of Egyptian gods in Haran or, for that matter, at any other location in northern Mesopotamia.”⁶²

Also more pressing in discussions of the Book of Abraham is the fact that Joseph clearly but falsely presented the work as, to quote the 1851 first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*:

A TRANSLATION OF SOME ANCIENT RECORDS, THAT HAVE FALLEN INTO OUR HANDS FROM THE CATECOMBS OF EGYPT, PURPORTING TO BE THE WRITINGS OF ABRAHAM WHILE HE WAS IN EGYPT, CALLED THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM, WRITTEN BY HIS OWN HAND, UPON PAPYRUS.

⁶¹ Christopher Woods, “The Practice of Egyptian Religion at ‘Ur of the Chaldees’?” in *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition P. JS 1-4 and the Hypocephalus of Sheshonq* (ed. Robert K. Ritner; Salt Lake City, UT: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2011), 73-74.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 74.

This same heading accompanied the first installment of the Book of Abraham in the March 1, 1842, issue of the early Mormon periodical *Times and Seasons* (3:704), and it is still used today in the LDS Church published *Pearl of Great Price*. In Book of Abraham 1:12 Joseph even has Abraham referring his reader back to Facsimile 1 at the beginning of the book, implying that Abraham himself had included the picture to illustrate what happened to him in the story. Yet, as people have been pointing out for a very long time, and the LDS Church has only recently admitted, the real contents of the papyri Joseph obtained in 1835 from antiquities dealer Michael Chandler and put forward as the basis for his translation of the Book of Abraham, had nothing whatever to do with the story told in the Book of Abraham. To quote the recent Gospel Topic essay on the official LDS Church website:

None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham's name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham . . . Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.⁶³

So, too, in Book of Abraham 4 there is no connection between that chapter and the papyri Joseph purchased from Michael Chandler. But there is a conspicuous connection with that portion of the Book of Abraham and two other known documents. What we have there, in fact, is the King James Bible's version of the first chapter of Genesis modified in light of Joshua Seixas's *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (1834). What the chapter purports to be is a vision of the creation received by the patriarch Abraham. The portion that became chapter 4 was first published in the March 15, 1842, issue of *Times and Seasons* (pp. 720-22). We first begin to suspect literary forgery from the

conspicuous fact that much of the KJV creation story is carried over unchanged into the Abraham creation story. So, for example, 647 of the 864 words in KJV Genesis 1:1-2:3 are retained in the Abraham account, with almost all of the original KJV word order retained as well. In addition to the 647 words retained, many other KJV words have simply had their tenses or persons adjusted into the plural in order to make them conform to Joseph's new doctrine of creation by a plurality of Gods, which, as we shall see in a moment, is one of the principal concepts governing his reworking of the chapter.

But it is not the mere fact that KJV singular verbs have been retained in plural form that is alone significant as proof that Abraham is dependent on the KJV. Also very important are places where in copying the story out of the KJV Joseph Smith or one of his scribes accidentally forgot to change the tense or person from the singular to the plural when he should have. This occurs twice in the section as it originally appeared in the *Times and Seasons*, once in connection with the plurality of gods idea and once in relation to a simple tense change.

KJV Genesis 1:16 reads: "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also." The parallel verse in the original *Times and Seasons* passage (cf. Abraham 4:16) reads: "And *the Gods* organized the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; with the lesser light *he* set the stars, also." The KJV *he* should have been changed in Abraham to *they*. That this was an error is shown by the fact that it had already been corrected to read "*they* set the stars also" in the 1851 first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* (p. 26).

The second example is KJV Genesis 1:20, which contains God's command that the waters "bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life." The parallel passage in Abraham (4:20) reads instead: "moving creatures that hath life." Since Abraham replaced the KJV's singular *creature* with the plural *creatures* it should also have replaced the third person singular form *hath* with the third person plural form *have*. Perhaps Smith was not familiar enough with older English usage to have noticed that in retaining *hath* he was making the same mistake a modern person would if he said: "the moving creatures that has life." But again we find the error was later set right in the first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*.

Most of the places where Joseph departs from the King James text are easily accounted for by his reliance on Seixas's *Manual Hebrew Grammar*, which he used while studying a little Hebrew with Seixas himself during the winter of 1835-1836. Perhaps one of the reasons Joseph

⁶³ "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," (accessed in the Gospel Topics section at lds.org, Sept. 2, 2016). For the opinions of Egyptologists in the early period see the chapter "Opinions of Scholars upon the Book of Abraham" in Frank S. Spaulding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator* (Salt Lake City, UT: Arrow, 1912), 23-31; reprinted now in *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.). See further the December 29, 1912, *New York Times* headline: "Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet: Sacred Books Claimed to Have Been Given Divinely to the First Prophet Are Shown to be Taken from Old Egyptian Originals, Their Translation Being a Work of the Imagination—What a Comparison with Metropolitan Museum Treasures Shows" (For typescript and PDF scan of article see: <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/nytimes1912papyrus.htm>).

returned so often to Genesis 1 in his later preaching and scripture making was because that passage is the first one used in the “Exercises in Translating” section of Seixas’s *Grammar*.⁶⁴ The most conspicuous influence of Seixas’s *Grammar* on the Abraham creation story is the translation of the Hebrew *tohu webohu* (1:2) *raqia’* (1:6, 7 [3 times], 8, 14, 15, 17, 20). The KJV translates *tohu webohu* “without form and void,” but the word list in Seixas defines *tohu* as “empty” and *bohu* as “desolate.”⁶⁵ Following Seixas’s word list Joseph replaces the KJV’s “without form and void” with Seixas’s “empty and desolate.” The KJV consistently translates *raqia’* “firmament,” but in the same word list by Seixas the Hebrew word is defined “an expanse.” Consequently Joseph again is found replacing the KJV’s translation “firmament” with Seixas’s “expanse.” That this is what Smith was actually doing becomes especially clear when we consider that one of the items on the facsimiles included with the Book of Abraham (Facsimile 1) is described in a note as representing “Raukeeyang, signifying, expanse, or the firmament over our heads . . .” (Facsimile 1, Fig. 12). *Raukeeyang* is Joshua Seixas’s way of transliterating *raqia’*.⁶⁶ In other words Joseph is not translating an Egyptian text at all, he was simply displaying in his rendition of Genesis 1 and in the Facsimile the smattering of Hebrew he’d learned from Seixas.

Even Joseph’s making the agents of creation “Gods” (plural) in the Book of Abraham rather than “God” (singular) is also better understood by an over enthusiasm Joseph shares with many first year Hebrew students upon finding out that the name for God in Genesis 1 is plural in form. We see this in a remark he made in a sermon given June 16, 1844, which again probably refers to his time of study under Seixas:⁶⁷

I once asked a learned Jew, “If the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in *heim* in the plural, why not render the first *Eloheim* plural?” He replied, “That is the rule with few exceptions; but in this case it would ruin the Bible.” He acknowledged I was right . . . “In the very beginning the Bible shows there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of refutation. It is a great subject I am dwelling on. The word *Eloheim* ought to be in the plural all the way through—Gods.”

64 J[oshua] Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (2d ed.; Andover, MA: Gould and Newman, 1834), 85 (Facsimile edition by Sunstone Foundation with Introduction by Louis C. Zucker, Ph.D.; Salt Lake City, UT, 1981).

65 *Ibid.*, p. 78. These are the only definitions given for the two words in the word list.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

67 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 6:475-6; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 372.

But Joseph was jumping the gun there, and his claim that the “learned Jew . . . acknowledged I was right” was probably wishful thinking, since he wasn’t correct.⁶⁸ But whether Joseph knew Hebrew or not is not our concern here, only whether he was creating a literary forgery in which he represented the products of his efforts as one thing (a translation of some of Abraham’s ancient writings, “written by his own hand, upon papyrus”⁶⁹), when really it was something else (a reworking of the first chapter of the King James Bible by an overconfident beginning student of Biblical Hebrew).

The fact that Joseph apparently felt no qualms about incorporating a whole chapter of the King James Bible (which he modified here and there) into what he presented to his followers and the world as a translation of ancient Egyptian Papyri, must be kept in view when considering the significance of his dropping large chunks of the King James Version of Isaiah⁷⁰ and Matthew⁷¹ into what was supposed to be a translation of ancient Nephite plates written in Reformed Egyptian.

Changing the Revelations

And this brings us again to a crucial question associated with the detection of a forgery: Were the actions of the suspected forger consistent with the claims he made about the suspected forgery? To this point we have seen very little evidence of Joseph’s acting in a way that was consistent with the claims he and others close to him put forward about his various prophetic projects. But the inconsistency grows as we consider further statements by Joseph concerning what he claimed he was doing. It is by now common knowledge that the revelations printed in the 1833 *Book of Commandments* were freely expanded and modified in the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants* without any basis in the supporting manuscript material. David Whitmer came to consider this issue as proof that Joseph Smith, whom he believed really had been acting as God’s prophet when he produced the Book of Mormon, later fell away. A key piece of evidence for this in Whitmer’s mind was a revelation dated March 1829 (now *D&C* 5). As it was recorded in the 1833 *Book of Commandments*

68 For a discussion of issues involved see, e.g., Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue* 3.2 (Summer 1968): 41-55 (reprinted in his edition of Seixas’s grammar); Kevin L. Barney, “Joseph Smith’s Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1,” *Dialogue* 30.4 (Winter 1997): 103-135; and my “Joseph Smith and the First Verse of the Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46.1 (2003): 29-52.

69 *Times and Seasons* (March 1, 1842): 702.

70 1 Nephi 20-21 = Isaiah 48-49; 2 Nephi 7-8 = Isaiah 50-52:2; 2 Nephi 12-24 = Isaiah 2-14.

71 The Sermon on the Mount: 3 Nephi 12-14 = Matthew 5-7.

(the precursor to the *Doctrine and Covenants*), God made it clear to Joseph Smith that his prophetic calling was to end once the Book of Mormon was finished: “he [Joseph] has a gift to translate the book, and I have commanded him that he shall pretend to no other gift, for I will grant him no other gift” (*Book of Commandments* 4:2 [p. 10]).⁷² Sometime after, however, Joseph appears to have come to feel that God’s language here was a little too restrictive, and so he created a little wiggle room for himself by doctoring the passage, pretending that what God had actually commanded was to “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*” (*D&C* 32:1 [1835] = current LDS *D&C* 5:4).⁷³ Whitmer came to claim that God told him to separate from Joseph and the Latter-day Saints and he linked the veracity of his original testimony of the Book of Mormon to the veracity of God’s later command to separate from Joseph and the Latter-day Saints:

If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon, if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to “separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, should it be done unto them.” In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. I had been striving with them for a long time to show them the errors into which they were drifting, and for my labors I received only persecutions.⁷⁴

A common attempt to minimize the significance of the changes in the revelations has been that “God had the same right to authorize his appointed Seer to add to any of the revelations certain words and facts, that he has to give him any revelations at all.”⁷⁵ It was a nice thought. But it was not one that Joseph himself endorsed. Or so we gather from a response from him to a request

⁷² *A Book of Commandments, For the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized according to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Zion, W. W. Phelps, 1833), 10.

⁷³ That the added words were not part of the original revelation can now be seen in *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831* (eds. Michael Hubbard MacKay, et al.; The Church Historian’s Press, 2013), [20], where an image of the original revelation, identified as being in the hand of Oliver Cowdery, is presented. The original reading was “he hath A gift to translate the Book & I have commanded him that he should shall pretend to no other gift.” The same image is available online at josephsmithpapers.org.

⁷⁴ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 27.

⁷⁵ David Whitmer, *An Address to Believers in the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 3.

made by Oliver Cowdery to modify *D&C* 20:37, in order that, Cowdery said, “no priestcraft be amongst us.” Joseph reports the request causing “both sorrow and uneasiness,” and his immediately writing back and asking “by what authority he took upon him to command me to alter, or erase, to add or diminish to or from a revelation or commandment from Almighty God.”⁷⁶ And yet he evidenced no such reservations when it came to his own extensive modifications of the text. Joseph *said* he believed the revelations couldn’t be tampered with because they came from God. His actions, however, were not consistent with such a belief. He can be shown to have freely tampered with them.⁷⁷

Mark Hofmann’s Anthon Transcript and the Kinderhook Plates

When, in the Spring of 1980, Mark Hofmann made public his forgery of the transcription of characters Joseph Smith had supposedly copied from the Gold Plates and sent along with Martin Harris to Professor Charles Anthon in New York City to see if he could decipher them,⁷⁸ it became the occasion of testing not only for Hofmann’s character and credibility, but for other people’s as well. Hugh Nibley, one of the most vigorous and learned Mormon apologists at the time, had gotten his first look at the document on Friday, April 25, 1980, and was ready to declare it authentic to the author of an article published in a Provo, Utah, paper before the following Thursday (May 1). “Nobody could have faked those characters,” Nibley told the reporter. “It would take 10 minutes to see that this is fake.”⁷⁹ Not only was it authentic, it was translatable, Nibley said, claiming that he had already “counted at least two dozen out of 47 characters of the Demotic alphabet that could be given a phonetic value,” and that the document was meant to be read “from right to left.”

Contrast this with Klaus Baer of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago: “What is it?” wrote Baer on May 10, “Probably not Egyptian, even if here and there signs appear that could be interpreted as more or less awkwardly copied hieroglyphs of hieratic signs . . . I suspect one could have the same batting average in

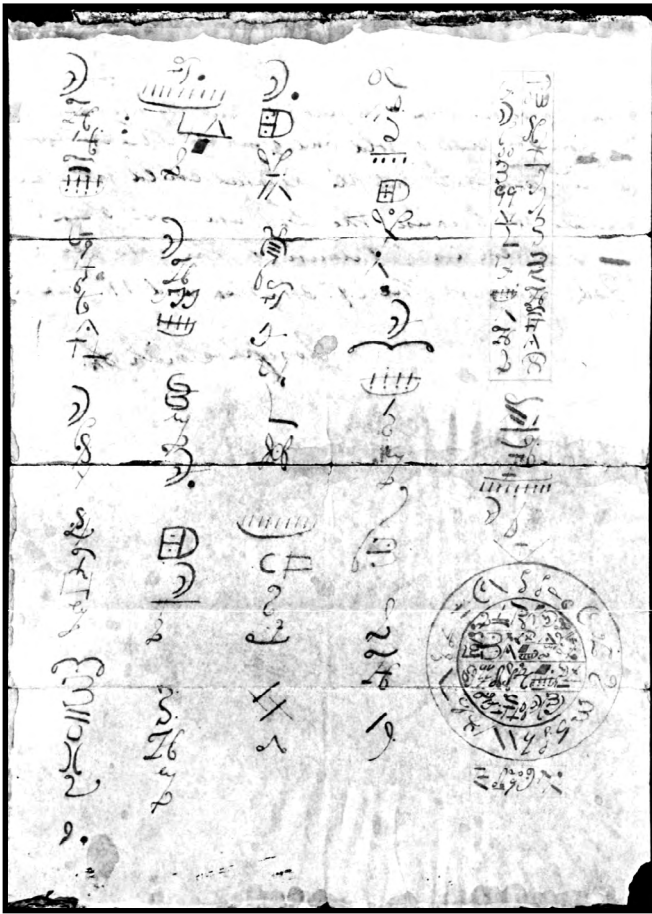
⁷⁶ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 (23 December 1805–30 August 1834). Standard ed. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:105.

⁷⁷ One can, of course, suggestively parse out the passage to make the matter appear less problematic by insisting that Joseph only meant to explode Oliver’s prophetic presumptions by saying something along the lines of “Silly Oliver! Aren’t you getting above your station? I’m the only one with the right to ‘alter, or erase, to add or diminish to or from a revelation or commandment from Almighty God.’”

⁷⁸ *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 64-5.

⁷⁹ John C. Speer, “Transcript of Characters May Support LDS Claims,” *The Herald* (May 1, 1980): 48.

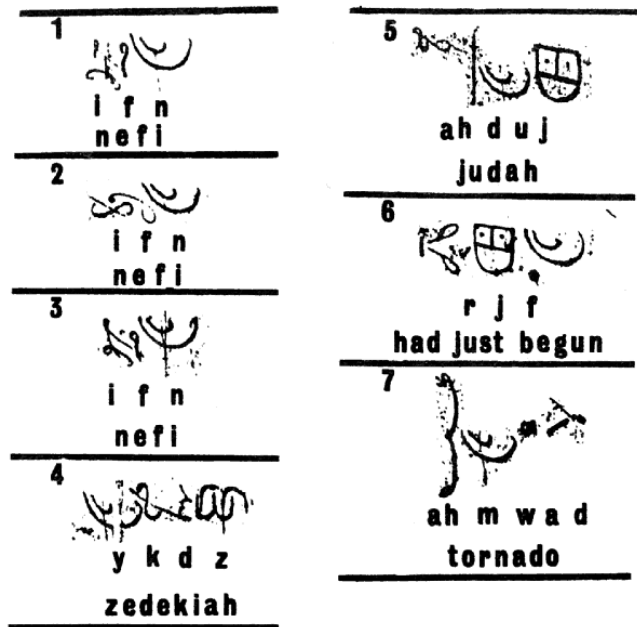
comparing this with Chinese or Japanese.”⁸⁰ The same as it turns out could be said when comparing the characters with the English alphabet.⁸¹



Mark Hofmann's Forgery of the Anthon Transcript

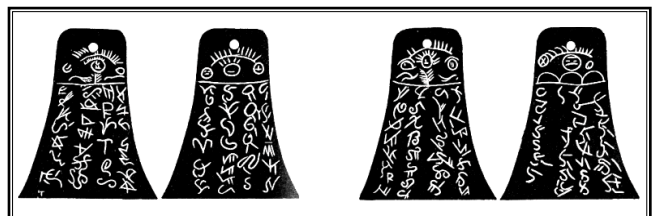
Going even beyond Nibley, was Barry Fell, author of *America B.C.: Ancient Settlers in the New World* (1976).⁸² In a letter dated May 5, 1980, Fell declared the document “immediately decipherable and comprehensible.”⁸³ It employed, Fell said, “four ancient North African alphabets,” all of which apparently Fell was able to read. Most exciting, though, was Fell’s description of what the document actually said: “The text states,” wrote Fell, “that it is the witness of Nefi, who says he is the son born to sagacious parents. Zedekiya of Judah, was reigning over the people. The account is written as a record of piety, and in secret code on account of the persecutions[.] N[efi]. goes on to report that a shining light of fire appeared to his father, whose name was Lehiya.

After gazing steadfastly at it, he went by foot to Salem the Holy city and . . . end of page.” Fell even went so far as to offer to provide *BYU Studies* with a complete translation of the document.



Part of Barry Fell's Translation of the Anthon Transcript

Scarcely anyone would dispute that the claims Nibley and Fell made before it was known that Hofmann’s Anthon transcript was a forgery, represented a rather serious blow to their more general scholarly credibility. Yet, a very similar testing happened to Joseph Smith in May of 1843 when he was presented with six bell-shaped metal plates covered with what appeared to be ancient characters. They had supposedly been dug out of an ancient mound near Kinderhook, Illinois, but had actually been forged by the men who presented them to him. And sadly, Joseph responded in the same way as Hugh Nibley and Barry Fell did. In a May 2, 1843, letter, Charlotte Haven tells how Joshua Moore told her he’d shown the plates to Joseph Smith, who’d told him that “the figures or writing on them was similar to that in which the Book of Mormon was written, and if Mr. Moore could leave them, he thought that by the help of revelation he would be able to translate them. So a sequel



Front and back of two of the six Kinderhook Plates

80 Klaus Bear to Dr. Fitzgerald (May 10, 1980), 1-2.

81 See “Reformed Egyptian or Deformed English?” *Salt Lake City Messenger* (July 1980): 4.

82 *America B.C.: Ancient Settlers in the New World* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976).

83 Barry Fell to Herm Olson (May 5, 1980).

to that holy book may soon be expected.”⁸⁴ Already the day before (May 1) Joseph’s secretary William Clayton recorded that “President Joseph has translated a portion [of the plates] and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and that he received the kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth.”⁸⁵ The LDS Church would finally admit the Kinderhook plates were a forgery in 1981.⁸⁶

The Book of Abraham 4, the changing of the revelations, the Kinderhook Plates incident, all cast a shadow of doubt over the credibility of Joseph Smith as an authentic restorer and recoverer of ancient texts, as a producer, that is, of another Bible. So how do things look when we turn to examine more closely the text of the Book of Mormon itself? We begin by discussing the large scale anachronistic dependence of the Book of Mormon on the King James Version of the Bible, which was first published in 1611.

The Book of Mormon’s Direct Reliance on the King James Bible

Historically Mormons haven’t been particularly troubled by the idea of large chunks being taken over from the King James Bible’s books of Isaiah and Matthew and plunked into the Book of Mormon. It seemed easy enough to just assume that when Joseph came upon parallel texts in the Book of Mormon, he translated them as they appeared in the King James, since that was the English version of the Bible everyone was familiar with, especially where such suppositions were supported by reassurances of the sort Hugh Nibley gave when he wrote that “the Book of Mormon follows the language of the King James Bible *only as far as* the latter conveys the correct meaning of the original.”⁸⁷ In reality Stan Larson’s claim is closer

84 Charlotte Haven, “A Girl’s Letters from Nauvoo,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 16.96 (Dec. 1890): 630.

85 *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (ed. George C. Smith; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, with Smith Research Associates, 1995), 100. The Manuscript History of the Church, based on Clayton’s diary, recast this statement into the first person so as to read: “I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of Heaven and Earth” (May 1, 1843), 1542. (See *History of the Church* 5:372). For a further early account see Parley P. Pratt to John Van Cott (May 7, 1843), (LDS Church Archives MS. 5238).

86 Stanley P. Kimball, “Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth Century Forgery,” *Ensign* (Aug. 1981): 66-74.

87 *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1967), 129.

to the truth when, after examining the textual history of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, he concluded that “the BOM blindly follows the KJV at the precise point where the KJV falls into error due to mistranslating the Greek or translating late and derivative Greek texts which are demonstrably secondary developments in the textual tradition.”⁸⁸ But for most Mormons the kinds of issues he raises might be a bit too arcane to grasp. One issue that does occasionally arise is the recognition that the standard explanation, which has Joseph, for example, coming to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gold Plates and turning to his King James Bible to copy out that part, doesn’t match early descriptions of the original Book of Mormon translation process. Roger Terry recently included as part of the “Book of Mormon Translation Puzzle,” the fact that “whole chapters of text repeated almost verbatim from the King James Version of the Bible, despite the fact that witnesses, including Emma, insisted that Joseph never referred to outside sources.”⁸⁹

88 Stan Larson, “The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses Concerning the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” *Trinity Journal* 7 (Spring 1986): 43, or as I have written elsewhere: “When Joseph Smith transported the Sermon on the Mount from the King James Bible (Matthew 5-7) into the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 12-14), he also carried over almost all the textual errors of the King James Version.” (“‘Without a Cause’ and ‘Ships of Tarshish’: A Possible Contemporary Source for Two Unexplained Readings from Joseph Smith.” *Dialogue* 36.1 [2003]: 166), and further: “Did the Author of 3 Nephi Know the Gospel of Matthew?” *Dialogue* 30.3 (1997): 137-48. See further generally, on Isaiah, Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990); David P. Wright, “Joseph Smith’s Interpretations of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue* 31.4 (Winter 1998): 181-206 and “Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, or Joseph Smith in Isaiah,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (eds. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2002), 157-234; and on the Sermon on the Mount, Stan Larson, “The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses Concerning the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” *Trinity Journal* 7 (Spring 1986): 23-45, and “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993), 115-163.

89 Roger Terry, “The Book of Mormon Translation Puzzle,” *The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 177. This journal is produced by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship of Brigham Young University.

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And indeed Joseph Smith's wife, Emma, when she was interviewed by her son, Joseph Smith III, in 1879, did very definitively reject the idea that Joseph employed any book or manuscript during the translation process:

Q. Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read, or dictated to you?

A. He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.

Q. Could he not have had, and you not know it?

A. If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me. . . .

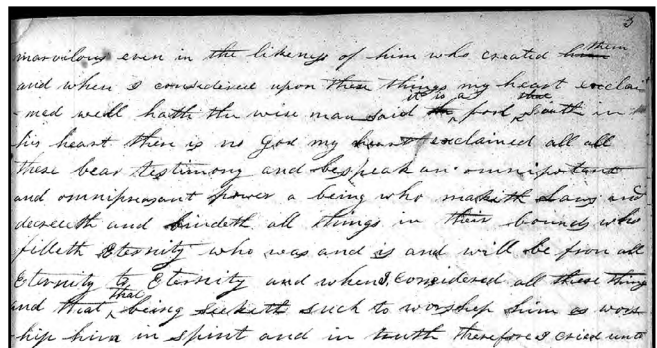
Q. Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you, Oliver Cowdery and the others who wrote for him, after having first written it, or having read it out of some book?

A. Joseph Smith [and for the first time she used his name direct, having usually used the words, "your father," or "my husband"] could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon.⁹⁰

In fact, we know now that Emma's claim that Joseph could not have read from a manuscript or book because he "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter," was, like certain other things Emma said in that interview, quite untrue. Already back in 1948, for example, Dale Morgan countered the claim in a letter he wrote to Francis W. Kirkham in response to the latter's reproducing the above quotation in the second edition of the first volume of his *A New Witness in America to the Book of Mormon* (1947). In the letter Morgan suggested Kirkham "should submit Emma Smith's statements about Joseph's illiteracy to the actual test of his writing," because, in Morgan's view, letters then available at the Chicago Historical Society and the Reorganized Church Libraries dating to 1832 "evidence a flair for words and a measure of eloquence."⁹¹ In the context Morgan was commenting upon, Kirkham had made mention of a personal diary in Joseph's own hand that would verify what Emma had said. Morgan, who had not seen the diary, suggested to the contrary "that it too would invalidate Emma's memory." At the time the LDS Church was suppressing more than one personal diary of Joseph Smith's as well as an important 1832 account of the First Vision, again in his own hand. Kirkham was referring to the 1832-1834 diary, which Joseph had purchased on November 27, 1832, and amounts, in the portions written by Joseph himself, to the recording of

brief notations of daily happenings.⁹² What we do see there, however, is that, contrary to what Kirkham said, Joseph was able to write quite well enough to keep up a daybook. But much more important toward proving Morgan's point, was another document, written earlier in 1832, that neither Morgan nor Kirkham probably ever saw: the earliest extant account of the First Vision, again written by Joseph in his own hand. In it we indeed see in evidence the "flair for words" and "measure of eloquence" Morgan spoke of:

I looked upon the Sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their majesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in majesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intilgence in governing the things which are so exceding great and marvilous even in the likeness of him who created them and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said the it is a fool that saith in his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotant and omnipreasant power a being who makith Laws and decreeeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity.⁹³



Sample of Joseph Smith's handwriting from his 1832 account.

⁹² See Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1984), 15-16. Jessee provides photographs of pages from this journal on 39-57. See *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Volume 1, 1832-1839* (eds. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst McGee, Richard J. Jensen; Salt Lake City, UT: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 8, for a photograph of the cover with Joseph's handwriting.

⁹³ History 1832, Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, 1-2.

⁹⁰ "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald* 26.19 (Oct. 1, 1879): 289-90.

⁹¹ Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism: Correspondence & A New History* (ed. with biographical intro., John Phillip Walker; pref., William Mulder; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1986), 186. The letter's date was January 3, 1948.

Mormonism Research Ministry

Mormonism Research Ministry is a missionary/apologetics organization that was organized in 1979 to propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to critically evaluate the differences between Mormonism and biblical Christianity.

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Although admittedly this document makes it clear that Joseph was not the best speller, it does show that he definitely had a rhetorical flare of the sort Morgan had detected elsewhere. Also, his penmanship is quite competent and good as well.⁹⁴

Joseph himself tells us in this same document that even though his education was limited, he had been “instructid in reading and writing and the ground rules of Arithmetic.”⁹⁵ And then finally, another proof of Joseph’s literacy is seen at one point in the Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon itself (Alma 45:22) there is a sample of Joseph’s own handwriting that runs 28 words. According to Royal Skousen, “These twenty-eight words in Joseph Smith’s hand are written very carefully. And except for one spelling variant (*city*), all the extant words are spelled according to standard orthography.”⁹⁶

The reason Emma had stressed Joseph’s alleged illiteracy was in support of the idea that he could not have read from another book or manuscript during dictation. But the undeniable evidence of many chapters copied verbatim from the King James into the Book of Mormon text suggest otherwise, unless we wished to posit Joseph’s having a photographic memory.

Still it’s not only the large chunks of King James text but the ubiquitous presence of shorter quotations and allusion to the King James text that even more firmly counters Emma’s claims. It is to these that we shall turn in part 2 of this article. ■

94 Jesse, *Personal Writings*, provides photographs from the pages of both the 1832-1834 diary (39-57) and of the 1832 First Vision account (9-14). Jesse provides photographs of pages from this journal on 39-57. Much better photographs can now be viewed at the *Joseph Smith Papers* website, the former, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1832-1834/1>, and the latter at <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-circa-summer-1832>.

95 History 1832, Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, 1.

96 Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence of the Original Manuscript,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (ed. Noel R. Reynolds; Provo, UT: Foundations for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), 73. Also, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (ed. Royal Skousen; Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Brigham Young University, 2001), 378. The *Joseph Smith Papers* project also acknowledges this as coming from Joseph’s own hand, and offers as the date of its occurrence circa May 1829 (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/documents-in-joseph-smiths-handwriting>). Thanks to Brent Metcalfe for pointing this out.

Excerpts From Letters and Emails

May 2016: Blessings! Just writing to say I just handed an LDS friend your newsletter (Heavenly Mother). He said he would read it! Praying God will open his eyes.

May 2016: Sandra Tanner is a hateful lady. Freedom of speech or rumors . . . Why the hate towards the Mormons? What a sad why to live. Hurting others. We don’t hate Christians . . .

May 2016: Your Issue 126 [*Is There a Mother God?*] is outstanding. Well organized and expertly researched and referenced.

May 2016: I wanted to say thank you for the free Newsletters and free stuff you sent out to me. I just left the Lds church 6 weeks ago. Thank you for your kindness. Your ministry is a blessing.

May 2016: Hi again, . . . [in *Doctrines of Salvation* by Joseph Fielding Smith] CH-12 page 182. 1954 Spanish. It says on the head of the paragraph that there is no salvation if we don’t accept Joseph Smith. It also says that no one can reject his testimony without carrying terrible consequences. My family is all Mormon. I am the only one that the Lord has helped to see the light so far. I was just talking to my sister who is very active in the church. I was showing her a copy of D&C changed that I got from your source. She is still firm in her faith. I told her my faith is in The Lord and nothing else. The bible is the word of God and period. I am so thankful for all the work you do to bring the truth out. My wife is active Mormon too. I don’t have any confrontations with her right now because she is in France. I don’t know how we are going to handle having different believes when she comes back. Well, thanks again for helping many Mormons see behind the curtain. I can’t believe Sandra Tanner wrote to me. God Bless you.

June 2016: As I referenced a page on the utlm website today, I found myself needing to give thanks to you and Gerald for your work. Until now, you haven’t known me, and I only know you through this work — *The Changing World of Mormonism*, the utlm website and several youtube videos.

Thanks for your persistence in getting information out of the LDS Church, and publishing what they were unwilling to share with their adherents. I was one of them for 41 years, and have now resigned. It is difficult to remove oneself from such an organization — thank you for helping me see elements of the truth that were hidden,

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and escape from a life dedicated to an organization that requires so much, but provides only a narrow, misleading interpretation of the truth.

June 2016: Call to Repentance.

From what I've read on the website, I gather y'all were once LDS. Why y'all left, idk. (If its explained on the site, perhaps I should have looked for it, to get a better understanding of y'all. & if its not, perhaps you'll explain such).

& now, you've made it your life's work to destroy the faith of others. You claim to be providing "truth", but what you're actually doing, is playing "wolf in sheep's clothing", providng either irrelevant material (irrelevant of salvation, & being a deciple of Christ) or, half-truths meant to mislead/cause doubt.

I feel bad for my lost brothers & sisters. However, I feel more sad for the state of your souls at Judgment Day, when y'all are called upon to take responsibility for the waywardness you've caused. & I sincerely hope y'all turn back from this destructive path, & seek to make restitution for the dmgs you've caused, b4 the day of Reckoning is here.

PS: I like how y'all show comments from both friend/foe, but I think it'd be more helpful, if ya showed the sender's name (unless asked for anonymity). Esp in case of multiple parts. I also find it amusing, you deceptively state "we have the right to twist your words, by omitting parts of a msg" in the legality statement. [Sent by "saberthedragon" anonymously.]

August 2016: On July 25th, I was in town for a family member's funeral and I stopped by Lighthouse Ministry and we chatted for 30 minutes or so. I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me and for freely sharing your experience and conclusion regarding tough doctrinal issues as well as challenging LDS themes. I very much enjoyed the conversation and hope you and your ministry continue to thrive despite the incredible odds against you in the heart of Utah.

August 2016: I have been a Christ-follower (I like that term better than "Christian" these days) for over forty years now, since I entered His kingdom as a junior in high school in South Bend, Indiana.

I was a growing Christian (OK, I used it that time) at Purdue University in the '70s when I helped lead a friend named Jim to Christ (as far as I could tell, at least), and then he promptly fell under the influence of local LDS missionaries and was baptized into their heresy. He then started to bring missionaries to the dorm, and a couple

of other brothers and I made sure we crashed the "party" whenever the "elders" showed up.

Although we didn't know a lot about LDS at that time, we at least knew Jesus and the Bible enough to break up their presentation and turn things toward Jesus instead. Overall, hopefully, we helped several guys look at true Christianity as opposed to a counterfeit. My first exposure to countering LDS doctrine was the section in Walter Martin's Kingdom of the Cults, but I didn't really study much beyond that then. . . .

I haven't really been involved in ministry to cultists in recent years, but the dedication of the new Indianapolis LDS temple last summer helped get my juices flowing again. I made sure I toured it so I could know what a temple looks like on the inside and have the opportunity to share Christ with someone (a beautiful building, but oh, what a waste of money on a pack of lies!).

I started off by asking (innocently enough :-)) why there was a gold angel with a trumpet on the roof instead of a cross, and that got a conversation started with a guy about my age and his adult son. By the time we were back at the parking lot after the tour, I had at least shared enough scripture that I could summarize it by saying, "So you worship a different God and a different Jesus, and you have a different gospel than the Bible." Hopefully, I left them with something to think about.

Anyway, that has kind of gotten me to the point where I have been studying online resources to be more effective in sharing the Truth and confronting their lies. So we'll see if God opens more doors to ministering to LDS folks here in the Indy area. I certainly pray for God's intervention every time I pass the temple building itself.

All that to say, thank you so much again for your walk with Christ and your ministry!

August 2016: I need to thank you for your's and Jerald's work.

I know you wouldn't even remember my visit to your store, but it was a life changing day for me and I have been meaning to thank you for your love toward me and my daughter that day.

I am . . . a lifetime member of the LDS church even though I've never had a testimony or really believed it. I went because my family and neighbors went and it was expected. I married in the temple and raised my five children as LDS. In 2006 my husband died and left me on my own, so I no longer had to follow him to church or be "bishopric guy's" dutiful wife, which was a relief. Then several years ago, the last of my kids left home, my parents passed away, I was an empty nester, no longer responsible for being that smiling mormon

mom and *finally free* to totally quit the church. It was like a weight lifted from my soul. One by one, four of my children also left the LDS church and moved on to other churches. I was able to aid each one of them as they transitioned to their new, happier paths.

The big problem was my daughter who was attending BYU. She was still a believer and still faithful and was guilt riding me over my inactivity and angry over the fact I had not fought harder to keep her siblings in the church. I realized I needed to tell her my entire truth and just accept whatever the consequences would be, even if it ruined our relationship.

I prayed over how to accomplish this and the answer was you. We drove two hours down from Wyoming. . . . Along the way, I was able to tell her my story and my struggles with the church. When we got to SLC I told her I would like to buy her a book on Emma Smith and this certain bookstore had the book I wanted to give her . . . so we made our way to your store. You were there and told me that we were fortunate that you were there that day because you had been traveling and had only come in for a few hours that day because you were getting ready to leave again. I felt like it was indeed, an answer to my prayers.

I told you that I had just that day come out of the "apostate closet" to my daughter who was a BYU student. You walked over to her and hugged her and expressed to her how difficult that probably was for her. Then you took her for a walk around your store, and showed her some books and testified to her, and ever so gently talked to her about facts and problems with the church. You spoke to her intelligently and without any judgement toward her beliefs. We walked out with several other books she chose on your recommendation beside the Emma Smith book. She took them all back to her dorm and read them all. She started asking questions and finding answers herself.

A year later, I am overjoyed to tell you that my daughter has resigned from the LDS church and actually escaped BYU without a husband. She is now attending a grad school in Texas and is so happy with her new life. She still speaks fondly of that day in your bookstore where she felt so loved and accepted and taught . . . So thank you. I know these words are not even enough to express gratitude for the gift you and your husband have given the world with your work.

September 2016: I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and I feel sorry for the Tanners. They have cut themselves off from eternal blessings and have tried in vain to hinder the work of the Lord. Being related to Brigham Young or any other famous person in

LDS history does not carry any weight with the Lord. It is individual faith in Jesus Christ and His atonement that is the foundation of our salvation. The Tanners cannot damage the Lord or His Church. Who can contend with the Lord of Hosts, or violate sacred covenants and not lose it all eventually?

September 2016: Just learning the truth about a religion me and my family have belonged to for generations. Very upsetting.

October 2016: I am a young lds, and I have a few questions to ask Sandra.

1. Why did you fall away from the church?
2. Do you not realise that this only strengthens the truth of the gospel?
3. The only thing that you can't realise is that faith is the step to know that Joseph Smith did see the Lord our God and, his son Jesus Christ?
4. Why do you seek to destroy the church?

You do not have to answer these questions, only ponder them.

Many thanks,
E

(Sandra Tanner's Response)

Dear E,

I am happy to explain why I left the LDS Church. After graduating from LDS Seminary, and attending various LDS Institute classes, I met Jerald (whom I would later marry). We are both from 5th generation LDS homes.

When the bishop started hinting that Jerald should go on a mission he decided to make a more careful study of LDS history and doctrine. When I met him he started showing me the problems he was finding. Joseph Smith's revelations in the D&C have been changed since their first printing. Smith told differing versions of the 1st vision, he was involved in magic and money digging, the Book of Mormon doesn't teach the same as the D&C, Brigham Young taught that you must live polygamy to have exaltation, Young also said the Blacks were not to receive the priesthood until the millennium, the Book of Abraham is not a genuine translation of the papyri the church purchased in Kirtland, the Bible says eternal life is gained through faith in Christ and his atonement, it is by grace, not works. The Bible never mentions Christians

needing an eternal marriage ceremony—in fact, the Bible never says you need to be married at all. The Christians did not have temples or secret ceremonies, etc. After much prayer and study we voluntarily resigned from Mormonism to follow Christ. You can read our story here.

<http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no108.htm>

<http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no109.htm>

<http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no111.htm>

Or you can listen to me tell my story here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6o6KW02w7Q>

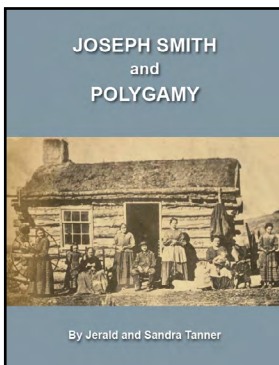
If Joseph Smith did NOT see God and Jesus in 1820, if there never were any Nephites, if the Book of Mormon is a work of fiction, if the temple ritual is NOT from God, then Mormonism SHOULD be exposed as a deception so that people will be free to seek salvation through Christ as offered in the Bible.

Sandra Tanner

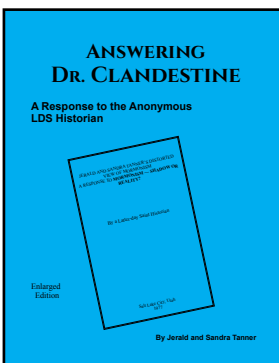
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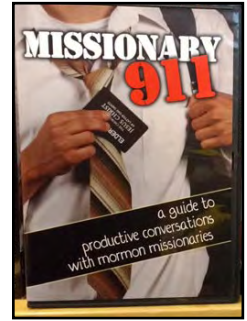


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2. **FROM HERE TO ETERNITY:** Understanding the Mormon "plan of salvation" will help you make better sense of the missionary lessons. You'll learn some of the jargon, and see how it differs from the biblical gospel. This will be a road map that will help keep you from feeling "lost" later down the road.

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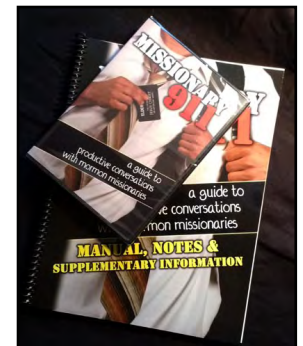
4. **THE PROBLEMS WITH PIES:** You've probably heard about some of the awkward issues with Mormonism—its odd mythology, multiple wives, and mystical temple rituals, stuff like that. Those things spark the curiosity of outsiders, but they're not usually the best place to go in your conversations. Instead, we'll take a look at just a few "slices" of the more relevant issues in Mormonism . . . and more importantly, how to raise them gently and respectfully. These aren't bullets for a gun; they are just some ideas to encourage your new friends to think more deeply.

5. **STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE:** Now it's your turn at bat . . . you're the missionary now! Learn how to share your own faith story with the missionaries in an authentic and natural way that will "connect" with them . . . and learn how to invite them to put their hope and trust not in a religion or a church, but in the Jesus of the Bible.

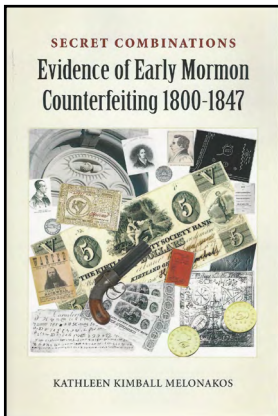
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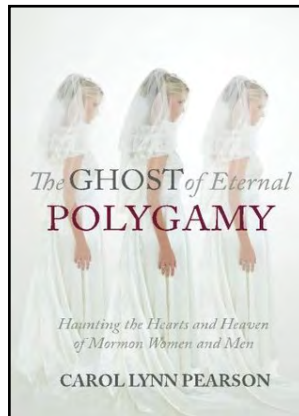
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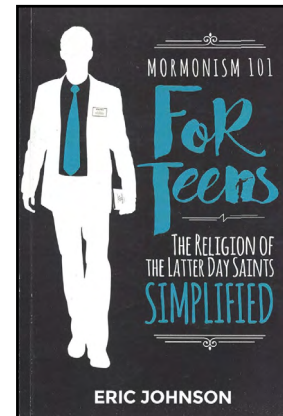
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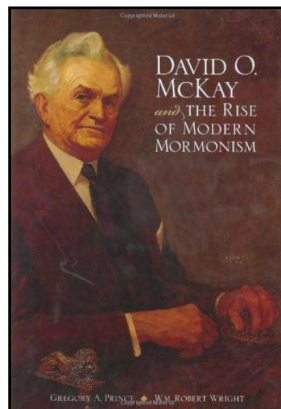
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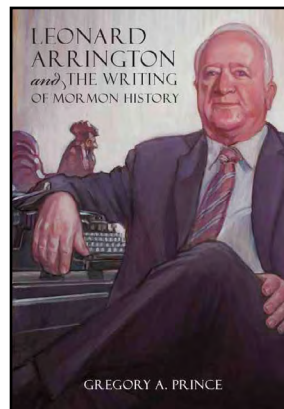
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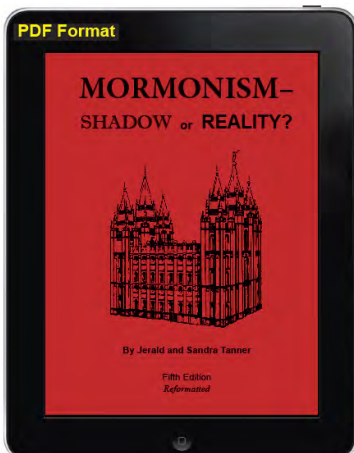


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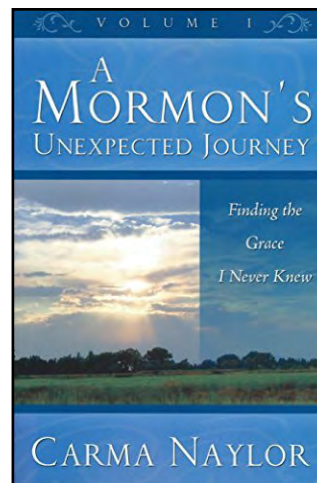
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