

# The Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon

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## The Critics View

One of the most prevalent attacks against the Book of Mormon today is based on the Prophet's testimony that the Book of Mormon is "the most correct book." Starting from this declaration, the critic proceeds to "expose" the nearly 4000 changes that have been made in this *most correct book* since the publication of the original edition in 1830. The foundation for this criticism is strengthened by a quotation from David Whitmer in which he describes the manner of translating the Book of Mormon.

"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 [previously describe by David Whitmer as a chocolate-colored egg-shaped rock that Joseph used when translating] 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 [sic] 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."<sup>(1)</sup>

Taken at face value, this description of the translation would strongly suggest that the "perfection" of the Book of Mormon should be absolute. The book was, by David Whitmer testimony, virtually dictated, *word for word*, by the Lord. This, in fact, has been the popular view of many Latter-day Saints. They've been told that Joseph Smith dictated the translation to Oliver Cowdery and that dictation was published exactly as written, and has never been changed. When confronted with the history of change to the Book of Mormon text they are unprepared to either respond or to understand.

Certainly, if David Whitmer's description of the translation process is accurate, an explanation of 1400 changes would be awkward. The challenge, even to the validity of the book might be powerful. The need to "edit" the first edition, even though the changes might be trivial, would certainly be inconsistent with a claim of "word for word" perfection.

As with most disagreements, the problem here is with the basic assumption: that David Whitmer is a reliable source for an accurate description of this translation process. David's participation in the process was at best minor. Also, this statement was given in 1887. How much of this statement reflects David's knowledge as opposed to his imaginings, as he, through many years of consideration drew his own personal conclusions as to the details of the process.

David's purpose in writing must also be considered. This statement on the translation process is part of his "Address to All Believers in Christ." His objective was to bear testimony as to the *truth* of the Book of Mormon. There had been those who had claimed that he had denied his witness. Before he left mortality he wanted to make abundantly clear his testimony of the divine origin of that book.

This discussion will look at the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. Also, those near 1400 changes will be examined and put in their proper context. We will not learn how Joseph translated the book of Mormon, but there is much we can know. Joseph and God are the only ones who know how this book was translated, and neither has said much that process. Yet, we can learn much be a careful consideration of what Joseph did say, and what he did, and what has been said by those who were participants and witnesses to the translation. We

now have all but a few lines of the printer's manuscript and we have about one fourth of the original manuscript. These speak facts, not opinions. We also know much about the nature of the translation. We know the reasons for most all the corrected "errors." There is much we can and will learn. I believe that the results reaffirm Joseph's claim regarding the *correctness* of this book. Yet, we will end our discussion with only some of our questions answered and with a whole new set to ponder.

## The Manner of Translating

Joseph Smith, when once asked to comment on the translation process, "*said that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things.*"<sup>(2)</sup> He further stated, "*Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record, by the gift and power of God.*"<sup>(3)</sup> Oliver Cowdery describes these events thus:

"These were days never to be forgotten--to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, 'Interpreters,' the history or record called 'The Book of Mormon.'"<sup>(4)</sup>

Oliver further testified at a conference held at Kanesville, Iowa, October 21, 1848:

"I wrote with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God."<sup>(5)</sup>

Very little more is said by either men regarding the mechanisms of this translation. Further, no contemporary record was left by anyone who was closely associated with that translation. The statement above quoted from David Whitmer was written some forty years after the fact. In 1879, an excerpt from a reported conversation between Joseph Smith's widow, Emma Smith Bidamon, and her son Joseph Smith, was printed in *The Saints Advocate* (a publication of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). That report included Emma's testimony to her son as to the origin and authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

"My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity--I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscript unless he was inspired; for when (I was acting) as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so . . . unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.

"Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well worded letter, let alone dictate a book like the Book of Mormon, and though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translation of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder,' as much so as to anyone else."<sup>(6)</sup>

These scant bits of information are very valuable as testimony, but they give us little information about the translation process. For that we must turn to the fruits of that translation, the Book of Mormon itself. But, before looking at the translation itself, some discussion of the instruments of translation is appropriate.

## The Instruments of Translation

David Whitmer, in his description of the translation process says that Joseph translated by putting an egg-shaped stone in a hat and then putting "his face into the hat." This does not sound like translation by the *Urim and Thummim*. What's the story on this *seer stone*. Well, there was a stone. The story is that Joseph and Alvin found it in 1822 while working on Mason Chase's property. It's described as being about the size of a small hen's egg. Was it really used for translation? Maybe. If the Lord could give translating power to two stones set in a bow, He could certainly place that power in some other stone. William Smith explains that the stones in the *interpreters* were placed too far apart for Joseph to use them comfortably. Instead, William says he usually used the *seer stone* for translation.

Both Joseph and Oliver state that the translation was made by means of the *Urim and Thummim*. They make no mention of the use of the *seer stone* in that process. However, if the "seer stone" had been given the properties

of translation, then the "seer stone" was a *Urim and Thummim* and might properly be referred to by Joseph and Oliver in those terms. We do know that at the completion of the translation the stone was given to Oliver and later came into the possession of Brigham Young. It is believed to be in the held today by the First Presidency. Is it used today as a *Urim and Thummim*? I am aware of no statement by any church leader to the effect that anyone, other than Joseph Smith, is even suspected of having used the "seer stone" as an instrument of revelation.

Does it matter whether the translation came by looking through two stones set in a bow or by a single stone placed in a hat? I know that I can't comprehend or explain either possibility. The process of translation was miraculous--it cannot be explained, but the results can be studied, analyzed, and verified. However improbable, it happened!

### **The Original Manuscript Sheds Some Light**

Let's look at what we can learn from the portion of the original manuscript that was written by Oliver Cowdery. On the 2nd of October, 1841, this manuscript was placed by the Prophet in the corner stone of the Nauvoo House. When the Nauvoo House was torn down in 1884, the cornerstone was opened, and it was found that the manuscript had mostly been destroyed by mold. While only about a fourth of that original manuscript remains today (in the possession of the Church Historian's Office), this is sufficient to enable at least three observations about the process of translation.<sup>(7)</sup>

- | There are very few cross-outs or changes in the original manuscript.<sup>(8)</sup> It would appear from this that Joseph dictated the record with but minor changes. For the most part, those changes which were made were corrections in the spelling of proper name. This would suggest that either the manuscript was not read back for correction, or upon reading very few errors were found.
- | The scribes wrote the words of Joseph without punctuation or capitalization.<sup>(9)</sup> The only divisions in the text were for books and chapters. This would suggest that the scribes wrote down just what was dictated, probably writing as fast as they could to keep up with that dictation. Surely, Oliver, as a school teacher, had the capacity to provide the punctuation. His letters during this period exhibit an excellent command of language and style.<sup>(10)</sup> The obvious explanation is that Oliver recorded the words as given to him by the Prophet and only those words. He took no time, or had no time, due to the speed of the dictation, to arrange the words into sentences and paragraphs. This would be done later.
- | The scribes spelling tended to be phonetic and inconsistent. Just a word about spelling in the early 1800s is in order here. There were five dictionaries in use in America in 1827 and each had its own opinion as to the spelling of many words. Two examples will suffice.<sup>(11)</sup> Creature was variously spelled: *creatshur*, *cretshure*, *creatshure*, and *creture*; and stature was spelled: *stattshur*, *stattshure*, and *statyur*. There was not a standard spelling as we have today and phonetic spelling was common. Further, with an absence of a standard, spelling accuracy in 1827 did not have the significance that it has for us today (for example, the following variations appeared in the writings of Washington Irving: *smoak*, *smocke*, *schmoke*, and *smoke*.)

### **The Printer's Manuscript Helps**

Joseph, concerned about the safety of the manuscript, did not allow the printer to work with that original. He had Oliver Cowdery write out a complete copy of the of the manuscript which was then given to the printer a few pages at a time (as they were completed).

All but a few lines of this printer's manuscript have survived and are available to church scholars in their study of the translation process. Comparing this copy with the available portion of the original manuscript has demonstrated that Oliver was a very good copyist--he made only about one error per page, which is outstanding. Further, comparing this printer's manuscript with the 1830 edition reveals that additional (inevitable) errors were added by the printer.

### **The Translated Text Provides the Best Clues**

It is the translated text of the Book of Mormon that provides us with the clearest window through which to examine the characteristics of this translation process. Three peculiarity of the language of the Book of Mormon text will here be explored as a demonstration of the insight into this process that is available to us from the translation it's self. These are:

1. the many Biblical passages that are rendered in the language of the King James translation;
2. the strange new proper names that appear throughout the text;
3. and, the appearance throughout the text of language constructs peculiar to the Hebrew and Arabic cultures.

### **Passages Lifted Bodily From The King James Version**

As every reader of the Book of Mormon is aware, there are many passages in the book that are virtually identical with the Bible. Joseph has been accused by his critics of plagiarism--these passages have obviously been copied from the Bible There are two aspects to this objection:

- I the Book of Mormon contains teaching that are presented in language that is almost identical to the language of these same teachings as they are recorded in the New Testament, particularly some of the teachings of Paul. Now, the New Testament was obviously not available to the Book of Mormon peoples, thus, it would seem that Joseph Smith must have copied these teachings directly from the Bible--Mark Twain accused Joseph of having "smouched from the New Testament, and no credit given."<sup>(12)</sup>
- I When the Book of Mormon quotes from the Bible, or the teachings of Christ that are the same as his teachings to the Jews in Jerusalem, Joseph's "translation" of these passages is expressed in language that is identical to the language of the King James Bible. It is as if Joseph lifted these passages bodily from the King James Version.

It is this second objection that will be looked at here.<sup>(13)</sup>

B. H. Roberts gives us the following explanation of the procedure used by Joseph Smith when he encountered a passage which he recognized as a Bible quotation.

"When Joseph Smith saw that the Nephite record was quoting the prophecies of Isaiah, of Malachi and the words of the Savior, he took the English Bible and compared these passages as far as they paralleled each other, and finding that in substance, in thought, they were alike, he adopted our English translation."<sup>(14)</sup>

This statement would suggest that when Joseph came across a passage that was substantially the same as a passage from the Bible, he *did* "copy" that passage from the Bible, using the King James text. However, Roberts points out that the King James translation was used only so long as the sense of that text agreed with the sense of the Book of Mormon record. If this was the procedure used by Joseph it was it was a very careful process. This is obvious from the number of changes made to these biblical passages. For example, of the 433 verses of Isaiah that are quoted in the Book of Mormon, 234 have been changed, many substantially.

However, Eye witnesses to the translation, particularly Joseph's wife, Emma, insist that Joseph had no other text before him from which to copy these passages. Further, contrary to popular opinion, Joseph's mother's description of his biblical studies does not support the idea that he was at this time well versed in the Bible. She says that he "was less inclined to the study of books than any child we had, but much more given to reflection and deep study." She further claims that at the time of Moroni's first visit he "had never read the Bible through by course in his life."<sup>(15)</sup>

The evidence strongly suggests that Joseph translated these "plagiarisms" from the Bible in the same way as he translated all other portions of the Book of Mormon. There is no evidence to suggest that he was at the time aware that much of that translation consisted of quotations from the biblical record. Why, then, is the language identical to the King James translation? Certainly this was not the language used by the Nephites. Dr. Hugh Nibley, makes the following comments on the appropriateness of rendering these passages in the familiar and scriptural language of Joseph's day:

"As to the `passages lifted bodily from the King James Version,` we first ask, `How else does one quote scripture if not bodily?` And why should anyone quoting the Bible to American readers of 1830 not follow the only version of the Bible known to them?"

"Actually the Bible passages quoted in the Book of Mormon often differ from the King James Version, but where the latter is correct there is every reason why it should be followed. When Jesus and the Apostles and, for that matter, the Angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in the New Testament, do they recite from some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century b.c. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament. When `holy men of God` quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing."<sup>(16)</sup>

Why were these passages translated into the exact phrasing of the King James Bible? Apparently, because that was exactly how the Lord wanted them translated. Thus, the translation was not always into Joseph's language. This suggests that there were times when David Whitmer's description of the translation process had some validity. While Joseph may not have been merely reading an English text set before him via the *interpreters*, there appear to have been times when the Lord did very exactly inspire (*control?*) his choice of words. More will be said of this later.

### Proper Names in The Book of Mormon

While, in general, Joseph Smith may have translated the text of the Book of Mormon, other than Bible quotations, into his own language, the unusual proper names found throughout the book could not have come from his "own language." Commenting on these names in the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley has written:

". . . Upon seeing these strange words before him, how could the illiterate Joseph Smith have known how to pronounce them? And upon hearing them, how could his half-educated scribe have known how to write them down phonetically? Remember, these names are not translations into English like the rest of the book but remain bits of the authentic Nephite language. Between them, the guesses of the prophet as to pronunciation and the guesses of Oliver Cowdery as to transcription, they would be bound to make complete havoc of the original titles. Only there was no guessing. According to David Whitmer and Emma Smith in interviews appearing in *The Saints Herald* and pointed out to the author by Preston Nibley, Joseph never pronounced the proper names he came upon in the plates during the translation but always spelled them out. Hence there can be no doubt that they are meant as they stand to be as accurate and authentic as it is possible to render them in our alphabet."<sup>(17)</sup>

This is another case where the translation process described by David Whitmer appears to be the only alternative that makes sense. It was necessary for the prophet to receive very specific information if he was to have any chance of getting these names right. It was also necessary that the transmission of that information to the scribe be specific and exact. *And did Joseph Smith ever get these names right!* These strange Book of Mormon names follow proper Hebrew, Egyptian, or Arabic rules of philology; the peculiar name forms found in the Book of Mormon are consistent with the form and structure of names found in other Hebrew, Egyptian, and Arabic records that date back to the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; *Baal* names that are common throughout the Old Testament but which were out of favor in the sixth century B.C. (a fact that seems to have been first noticed by Professor William Albright in 1942), do not appear in the Book of Mormon. In addition, a clustering of names very similar to those in the Book of Mormon has been found in the up-river country of Egypt, an area recently found to have been settled by Jews who fled Jerusalem at the time of the 596 siege of Jerusalem by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>(18)</sup>

Again, we have an instance where the Lord did direct the work of his Prophet with such precision that the translation was given to him letter perfect, much as David Whitmer described.

### Some Strange Language in The Book of Mormon

Next we will look at what may be the most unusual characteristic of this translation. This is a fascinating area of study that has been gathering increasing attention during the last 25 years, with a virtual flood of new discoveries during the last 10 years.<sup>(19)</sup> These studies are referred to by names as strange as any found in the book that is the object of their study. Colophones, Merismus, Difrasismo, Antenantiosis, Epanalepsis, Hebraisms, and Chiasmus; are some of the names given to the recent studies of *Book of Mormon* language. For purposes of this discussion only two examples will be examined: *Hebraisms* and *Chiasmus*.

### Hebraisms in The Book of Mormon

*Hebraisms* is a term used to describe the occurrence of Hebrew language characteristics in English texts. The first lesson in this series has illustrated in some detail the presence of these characteristics in the Book of Mormon. John A. Tvedtnes, the current expert on the subject of Book of Mormon Hebraisms describes his introduction to this fascinating subject:

"During the years 1968-71, I taught Hebrew at the University of Utah. My practice was to ask new students to respond to a questionnaire, giving some idea of their interests and linguistic background. One student wrote that she wanted to study Hebrew in order to prove the Book of Mormon was a fraud. She approached me after class to explain.

"When I inquired why she felt the Book of Mormon was fraudulent, she stated that it was full of errors. I asked for an example. She drew my attention to Alma 46:19, where we read, *'when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air.'* She noted that in the 1830 edition (p. 351), this read simply *'waving the rent of his garment.'* In English, the *rent* is the *hole* in the garment, not the piece torn out of the garment. Therefore, Moroni could not have waved it. This was an error, she contended, and adding the word *part* later was mere deception.

"This was my first introduction to variations in different editions of the Book of Mormon. Without a Hebrew background, I might have been bothered by it. But the explanation was clear when I considered how Mormon would have written that sentence. Hebrew does not have to add the word *part* to a verbal substantive like *rent* as English requires. Thus, *broken* in Hebrew can refer to a *broken thing* or a *broken part*, while *new* can refer to a *new thing*. In the verse the student cited, *rent* would mean *rent thing* or *rent part*. Thus, the *'error'* she saw as evidence of fraud was really a Hebraism that was evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon."<sup>(20)</sup>

Here are some other examples of *Hebraisms* given by Brother Tvedtnes.<sup>(21)</sup>

"**plates of brass**" instead of brass plates

"**words of plainness**" instead of plain words

"**with much harshness**" instead of very harshly

"**judge righteous judgements**" instead of judge righteously

"**taxed with a tax**" instead of taxed

"**by the hand** of your enemies" instead of by your enemies

"they fled **from before my presence**"

". . . **the city of** Laman, **and the city of** Josh, **and the city of** Gad, **and the city of** Kishkumen"

". . . **All their** men **and all their** women **and all their** children . . ."

"And **because that** they are redeemed from the fall"

"**before [that]** they were slain" (**that** was in the original but was dropped from later editions)

"**after [that]** I have abridged (**that** was in the original but was dropped from later editions)

### Chiasmus in The Book of Mormon<sup>(22)</sup>

In 1967, brother John W. Welch became acquainted with Chiasmus as a student in a New Testament class. Learning of the unique Hebrew fondness for this form of expression, Brother Welch determined to search the Book of Mormon for possible evidence of chiastic structures similar to those found in the Bible. His search was rewarded by the discovery of numerous examples of such structures. Shown here is an elaborate chiasmus found in Alma 41:13-15. This chiasmus ranks Alma as one of the most skilled practitioners of the chiastic art. Notice the clever twist: After listing four pairs of terms, Alma pairs two lists of four terms and reverses their order at the same time. This is just one of many examples of such chiastic structures that can be found throughout the Book of Mormon.

Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon is particularly impressive when we realize that, with some minor exceptions, the chiasmus in the Old and New Testaments have not survived translation. To study chiasmus in these records it is necessary to go back to the Hebrew and Greek texts. In the Book of Mormon, however, chiasmus, as seen in this example, is clearly visible in the English translation.

What does all this mean? First, it should be obvious that the language characteristics here described could not have come from the mind of a frontier farm boy, no matter how brilliant his intellect. The language of the first edition of the Book of Mormon was like "chloroform in print" because it reads like an almost literal translation from Hebrew into English. It reads like an English translation made by a translator who was very unsophisticated in English composition and grammar.

The chiastic structures found throughout the text (over 300 have thus far been identified) would have been beyond the reach of the most educated in 1827. Even today, *chiasmus* of the intricacy found in the Book of Mormon is a lost art. The complexity of its composition, once understood and appreciated by the ancients, leaves this student in awe. I don't know how any human mind, unaided by inspiration from above, could form language into such profoundly intricate structures and at the same time not only maintain but enhance meaning. And Joseph Smith, certainly knowing nothing of *chiasmus*, gave us a translation which preserves these intricate linguistic structures with astonishing fidelity. Again, Joseph did not translate this book into *his* language. They were his words, but the choice and placement of these words was obviously very specifically controlled by that source of inspiration and revelation from which he received the inspired understanding of the sense of this record.

### What Has The Lord Told Us of the Translation Process?

Our final insight into the translation of the Book of Mormon comes from the instructions given by the Lord to Oliver Cowdery when he desired to translate:

"Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart."<sup>(23)</sup>

#### ALMA 41:13-15 is Pure Poetry

- a) My son, the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back
- b) evil for evil carnal for carnal devilish for devilish -  
w1 w2 good for that which is good,  
x1 x2 righteous for that which is righteous,  
y1 y2 just for that which is just,  
z1 z2 merciful for that which is merciful;
- c) Therefore my son see that thou art  
z'1 merciful unto your brethren,  
y'1 deal justly,  
x'1 judge righteously,  
w'1 and do good continually;
- c) and if ye do all these things, ye shall receive your reward, yea,  
z'2 ye shall have mercy restored unto you again,  
y'2 ye shall have justice restored unto you again,  
x'2 ye shall have righteous judgment restored unto you again,  
w'2 and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.
- b) For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again and be restored;
- a) Therefore the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner and justifieth him not at all.

Then when Oliver failed in his attempt to translate, the Lord said:

"Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

"But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

"But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me."<sup>(24)</sup>

B. H. Roberts, commenting on these verses, wrote:

"This is the Lord's description of how Oliver Cowdery could have translated with the aid of Urim and Thummim, and is undoubtedly the manner in which Joseph Smith did translate the Book of Mormon through the medium of Urim and Thummim. . . Since the translation is thought out in the mind of the seer, it must be thought out in such thought-signs as are at his command, expressed in such speech-forms as he is master of; for man thinks, and can only think coherently, in language; and, necessarily, in such language as he knows."<sup>(25)</sup>

Well there we are. It was necessary for Joseph to *think out* the translation and he must express the results in "such speech-forms as he is master of." Yet, the Lord's direction, even *control* of this translators use of his language was precise. The Book of Mormon was not translated into the manner of speech of an uneducated upstate New York farm boy. The language of this translation can only be explained as a literal translation from an ancient Semitic record. By all current standards of evaluation this uneducated and unsophisticated translator has produced a translation that must be classed as a masterpiece.

What about David Whitmer's description of an *infallible* translation process? While this translation was obviously inspired, and even very tightly managed, it's obvious that Joseph did not share David's view of its perfection. As will be seen in the following discussions, shortly after publication Joseph began a process of very careful editing which was not to end until his death in 1844.

## The Publication of the First Edition

By Joseph's instruction, spelling for the first edition was edited by the printer, who also provided the punctuation and capitalization. It is, thus, obvious that Joseph had no illusion as to the orthographic accuracy of the translation. Joseph was similarly under no delusion as to the perfection of the grammar. While he turned down the printer's offer to correct grammatical errors, he did not do so with any affirmation of accuracy. He, in effect, said: "Don't bother, it's not important, the Bible is also full of grammatical errors."<sup>(26)</sup> Joseph was at this time a young man of limited education and worldly experience. The importance or even the value of literary mechanics had not been drilled into him by years of education. To Joseph, the ideas, the meaning, the message, these were the only matters that concerned him.

The publication of the first edition was allowed by the Lord to proceed in natural fashion, subject to the introduction of errors that are common to the publishing process. George Horton, who is the past chairman of the department of Ancient Scripture at BYU, has written a fascinating article on the problems of transmitting the Book of Mormon text from the original manuscript to its publication as the 1830 first edition.<sup>(27)</sup> In this article he describes the common problems experienced in all publishing efforts and gives examples of each from the first edition of the Book of Mormon. For instance:

- I There were numerous errors that can be traced to problems common to typesetting. Words were misspelled (*aaswer*, *amog*, *bacause*) and handwriting was misinterpreted. Oliver's *rm* was misread as *un*, resulting in *foundation* instead of *formation*. Also, the printer appears to have had some difficulty in distinguishing Oliver's *n* and *r*, and his *b* and *l*. At one place these two difficulties combined and Gadianton "the robber" was called "the nobler."<sup>(28)</sup>

- I Letters, syllables, words, and even lines were omitted. The last *r* was left off of the word year in Alma 48:21; a letter was dropped from *immortality* so that it read *immorality*. Two full sentences were dropped from Alma 32:30 due to similar endings of two sentences in the paragraph (this was not restored until the 1981 edition).

There appears to have been little proofreading of the text prior to printing the first edition. Again, Joseph and Oliver were not familiar with the problems of publishing and the frontier printing shop lacked the sophistication that would today be common place.

## Editing by Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith appears to have done no editing, even proof reading, of the Book of Mormon text until after the publication of the first edition. Following that publication, Joseph carefully went through the text, as time permitted, and made over one thousand corrections and some minor clarifications that first appeared in an 1837 edition published in Kirtland. This was followed by editions published in Nauvoo in 1840, 1842, and 1844. These last editions each contained the following on the title page: "Carefully Revised by the Translator." The first European edition was published in 1841, this edition was based on the 1837 edition. In 1871 the next American edition was published. This edition also followed the 1837 edition, as did all subsequent American editions up until 1981. Not until 1981 did the changes made by Joseph Smith after 1837 appear in a modern edition of the Book of Mormon. These included the much discussed change in 2 Nephi 30:4 from "white" in the 1921 edition to "pure" in the 1981 edition.

## Conclusion

This is a translation like no other. While much of that translation has the clear stamp of Joseph Smith's language, there is just as much that is expressed in a vernacular that is totally foreign to the experience of this frontier farm boy. Then, there is that portion of the record that conforms perfectly to a grammar quite unknown to even the ablest scholar in 1827. Clearly, the inspiration of the Lord rested heavily on His boy prophet and the language of his translation was strongly influenced by his divine mentor. How was this done? Again, *The Doctrine & Covenants* Section 9 gives us our only clue:

"But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

"But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the things which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me."<sup>(29)</sup>

The Book of Mormon **was** translated by the gift and power of God and the instrument of that translation was a fallible man. The message of the book is true, and where important, even the language by which that message is expressed is divinely given. But, for much of the translation, the language of the "unlearned man," was sufficient.

While the first edition of the book was a reasonable representation of the work of translation, the publication was closer to a proof draft of today. This was not inconsistent with printing practices of the time. Yes, many changes have been made in the Book of Mormon since that first publication, almost 4000. These changes have corrected some of the frontier grammar of its translator; brought spelling in line with modern standards; corrected inevitable printing errors; made minor changes in the punctuation provided by the printer; updated some phraseology to reflect modern language usage; modified many of the *Hebraisms*, which sound so strange to our ears, so as to render them in more familiar English structures. Yes, there have also been some passages where modifications have been made that appear to change the meaning. Briefly, these changes have been made to clarify passages, which in the original wording were ambiguous and subject to misinterpretation.<sup>(30)</sup> While these changes were made by Joseph Smith, some have not found their way into modern additions until the publication of the current addition in 1981.

When Joseph Smith said that this was *the most correct book*. It should be obvious that he was not talking about the grammar, the spelling, or the literary quality of this work. Only the message mattered to Joseph. His claim was not his own but based on the heavenly confirmation given to the three witnesses chosen to bear special testimony of its divine character: *And he has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true.*<sup>(31)</sup> The original records that formed its source were written by prophets of God. The selection of those records which were to be relevant to our day was made by prophets of God. The hand of God was manifest in the preservation and recovery of the record. The translation into English was made by one chosen by God, prepared for this task by angelic ministers--the translation was made by a prophet of God. What other book can make these claims. This is not a claim, however, of infallibility. While a prophet, Joseph Smith was yet a fallible man. The proclamation is that it is the *most correct!* The message, however, of God's own testimony is that its correctness is sufficient:

" . . . after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness; And gave unto him commandments which inspired him; And gave him power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon; Which contains a record of a fallen people, and the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also; Which was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared unto the world by them--Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old, Thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. Amen"<sup>(32)</sup>

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## References:

1. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, p. 12; as quoted in Bill McKeever, *Answering Mormons' Questions*, p. 111; Walter Martin, in *The Maze of Mormonism*, pp. 50-51; and many other books that purport to *expose* Mormonism.
2. *History of the Church* Vol 1, p. 220.
3. *Ibid* Vol 4, p. 537.
4. *Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1 (October 1834), pp.14-16; as quoted in *The Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith - History footnote, p. 58 (1981 edition).
5. *Contributor* 5:446; *Historical Record* 6:201; as quoted in Paul R. Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism*, p. 56.
6. As quoted in Paul R. Cheesman, *The Keystone of Mormonism*, p. 47.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-67. Here, Brother Cheesman gives a detailed account of the history of the original manuscript, together with a photograph of one page of the manuscript.
8. *Reexploring The Book of Mormon*, edited by John Welch, Chapter 2, "The Original Book of Mormon Transcript," p. 10.
9. Cheesman, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
10. See Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness For Christ in America*, Volume 1, Chapters VII and VIII.
11. For a fuller treatment of this subject, see George Horton, "Book of Mormon - Transmission from Translator to Printed Text", published in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, edited by Paul R. Cheesman, pp. 237-255, from which much of the information presented in this section has been obtained.
12. S. L. Clemens, *Roughing It*, Definitive Edition (New York, 1922), III, 110.
13. While of great importance, this problem of New Testament teachings in the Book of Mormon is not directly related to the subject of this paper. For detailed considerations of this subject see: Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, Chapter 5, "The Bible in the Book of Mormon"; *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, pp. 77-92; *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, Vol. 3 (1991), pp. 217-228.
14. As quoted in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness For Christ in America*, Vol 1, p 203.
15. Smith, Lucy Mack. *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by his Mother*. Edited by Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1996, p. 111.
16. *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, p. 215.
17. *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Vol 5, Part 1, Ch 2, p 31.
18. For a full treatment of the subject of proper names in *The Book of Mormon* see Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, Lesson 22, pp 242-254; and *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Lehi in the Desert)*, Vol 5, Part 1, Ch 2, pp 25-34.
19. See Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol 5, Part 1)*, especially the following chapters: Language and

*The Book of Mormon*, Lehi and the Arabs, Lehi the Dreamer, A Note on Rivers, Place Names, and Lehi the Poet. See also, *Rediscovering The Book of Mormon*, Chapters 8 through 12, and *Reexploring The Book of Mormon*, chapters 3, 5, 8, 21, 25, 32, 33, 35, 41, 46, 47, 48, 52, 64, 66, 67, 83, and 85.

20. See "The Hebrew Background of The Book of Mormon," by John A. Tvedtnes, in *Rediscovering The Book of Mormon*, Ch 8, pp.78.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 77-91. See also, "Chloroform in Print," lesson 1 of this series.

22. See "Chiasmus: A Remarkable Literary Art," lesson 2 of this series.

23. *Doctrine & Covenants* 8:2.

24. *Doctrine & Covenants* 9:7-9.

25. Brigham H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 279; as quoted in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness For Christ in America*, pp. 200-201.

26. Horton, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-239.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-255.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 244. Horton provides a rather detailed analysis of these transmission errors, grouping them into standard copyist and typesetting error categories.

29. *Doctrine & Covenants* 9:7-9.

30. See Horten, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 248-250, for a discussion of these changes.

31. *Doctrine & Covenants*, 17:6.

32. *Doctrine & Covenants*, 20:6-12.