

## **How the Book of Mormon was Written**



# **How the Book of Mormon was Written**

by

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# Introduction

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regard the Book of Mormon as the primary pillar of their faith, and the basis on which they bear their testimony of the church's truthfulness. Even in the face of challenges to the church's history, and even in their own personal struggles with decisions and commands made by prophets and general authorities, faithful members will fall back on their staunch testimony of the Book of Mormon's divinity in order to maintain their association with the church. Putting aside the perceived spiritual witness that drives members to profess its truthfulness, there's a common set of talking points used to assert the book's merit based on the content of the book itself and the circumstances surrounding its authorship.

One of the most oft-repeated talking points is that Joseph Smith was an illiterate farm boy who was simply incapable of writing the Book of Mormon of his own accord. It is only by the power of God that such a lowly man could have possibly written this book with such theological richness, timeless wisdom, and complex narrative, members will assert. Members will insist that it is such a smooth, well-written book whose chapters are flawlessly interwoven into such an intricate narrative that provides a profound level of doctrinal edification and clarification from things not specified in the Bible. Members insist that no reasonable person could ever read this book with an open mind and open heart and end up coming to the conclusion that this book isn't from God.

Proponents of the Book of Mormon will also insist that the seemingly different writing styles throughout different sections lend credence to numerous

different authors of the original text instead of just one singular author of Joseph Smith. They will insist that the Book of Mormon was dictated in such a short time span that it's more realistic to assume there was divine intervention than to assume that Joseph Smith made it all up. And above all, they will insist that the additional testament it bears of Jesus Christ and of his love for us, and of Heavenly Father's plan of salvation for us is so full of divine wisdom and poetic imagery that only God could have written it.

In this document, I seek to counter this line of argumentation by making a case for how Joseph Smith, without any real divine intervention from God, could have come up with and dictated the Book of Mormon. Throughout this document, I intend to make the case that through the known historical facts of Joseph Smith's character, life experiences, and surrounding influences, the Book of Mormon is most logically explained as a man-made document and a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, by analyzing the timeline of events throughout the authorship of the Book of Mormon, we can see fingerprints of Joseph Smith covering his tracks amid challenges and criticisms from others.

This document is not intended to defame Joseph Smith's character, although I will be touching on some unsavory aspects of his early life and events in the history of the early church insofar as they pertain to the authorship of the Book of Mormon. This document is not intended to pick apart every last truth claim of the LDS church, nor is it a document designed to criticize the doctrine of the church, the revelations and statements of prophets, or the LDS church as an institution. The purpose of this document is simply to refute the claim that Joseph Smith would have been incapable of dictating the Book of Mormon without God guiding him in this whole process.

## Chapter 1

# The Character of Joseph Smith

Apart from testifying to a perceived spiritual witness, one of the most common tactics used by members of the church to make a case for the Book of Mormon is to talk about how Joseph Smith would have been incapable of writing it without God guiding him because he simply wasn't that smart of a person. "Joseph Smith was an ignorant farm boy, he could barely even write a sentence, let alone a book. If you believe that someone as incapable and obtuse as Joseph Smith somehow managed to come up with the Book of Mormon, you're actually believing something significantly more far-fetched than if you believe that this book is from God." Latter-day Saints will assert that an endeavor such as making up the Book of Mormon was wildly out of step with both his capability and his character, and this is the point that I will refute in this chapter.

First and foremost, Joseph Smith may not have been the most fluent writer, but he sure was good at dictating, so it's no surprise that he relied on scribes to bring the Book of Mormon about. He was a notorious and creative storyteller, and entertained his family for hours at a time with his own original fictional stories, and those skills would have carried over nicely into coming up with the Book of Mormon. In addition to being a talented storyteller, he also knew the Bible really well, attentively listened to a plethora of sermons from preachers in his local area, and even received personal instruction on preaching sermons

himself, which would have gotten his creative juices flowing further. Not only would he have been capable of coming up with the Book of Mormon, we know that he was a highly charismatic visionary who thrived on emotionally manipulating and scamming people with various folk magic practices that were common in his day. All of this points to Joseph Smith's character and prowess being fully consistent with the scenario of the Book of Mormon being a fraudulent work.

## **Education**

The first myth that needs to be dispelled is one of the church's own invention, which is the whole notion that Joseph Smith was some ignorant farm boy who lacked an education. Contrary to the church's insinuation, he wasn't just some delinquent who would go skipping school and had no interest in reading books—he had a creative, imaginative, and inquisitive mind. Joseph was surrounded by educators growing up, he was able to read and write, and a large area of focus for him in his education was studying the Bible. In the years he spent recovering from an invasive surgery on his leg, he was directly tutored by his brother Hyrum, who had been educated at Moor's Academy, the prep school for Dartmouth. The level of education Hyrum received, which he helped impart onto his brother, exceeded that of the average person.

Members of the church will often cite a quote from Emma Smith saying that her husband could barely even write a sentence:

*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*

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*transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder,' as much so as to anyone else.*

(Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289–90)

It's worth noting that Emma Smith was speaking 44 years after the events in question, and she was speaking in the context of a denominational dispute between the RLDS Church and the larger LDS Church. The RLDS Church was attempting to assert its own legitimacy as the true continuation of the original church founded by Joseph Smith, and part of its strategy involved asserting the divine nature of the Book of Mormon, questioning the authority of Brigham Young in the wake of Joseph's death, and insisting that polygamy started with Young, not Smith. Emma would have had a clear incentive to respond to her interviewer, Joseph Smith III, in a way that painted her late husband as having divine intervention during the authorship of the Book of Mormon. This account is especially unreliable given that later on in that same interview, Emma is asked about polygamy, and she blatantly lies by insisting that her husband never received any revelation on that matter, or that he ever had any wives other than her, be they spiritual or otherwise.<sup>[1]</sup>

More importantly, though, this insinuation of illiteracy is simply not consistent with the far more numerous and thorough accounts and traces we have which point to Joseph's education, writing, and oratorical prowess. Without a doubt, Joseph Smith preferred dictating to his scribes over writing things himself, but that doesn't mean he couldn't do it when he needed to. In October 1829, he wrote a letter to Oliver Cowdery which read as follows:

*I would inform you that I arrived at home on sunday morning the 4th after having a prosperous Journey, and found all well the people are all friendly to [us] except a few who are in opposition to evry [sic] thing unless it is some thing that is exactly like themselves and two of our most formadable*

*persacutors [sic] are now under censure and are cited to a tryal [sic] in the church for crimes which if true are worse than all the Gold Book business. we do not rejoice in the affliction of our enimies [sic] but we shall be glad to have truth prevail there begins to be a great call for our books in this country the minds of the people are very much excited when they find that there is a copy right obtained and that there is [a] really book, about to be printed...* (Joseph Smith Papers, Letter to Oliver Cowdery, October 1829)

As you can see from the letter, there are some spelling errors and scanty punctuation, but this is far from being the work of someone who “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter.” It’s also important to note that the original Book of Mormon manuscript had no punctuation at all, and had quite a few spelling mistakes before being revised for publication (we will explore this further in chapter 4). Putting aside the rough syntax, this letter is pretty well-written, which shows that Joseph Smith was a fairly smooth linguist and had the ability to coherently translate his thoughts to paper. This letter was written in 1829, the same year that the Book of Mormon was dictated. It’s also worthy of note that soon after this, he would write the 1832 First Vision account, and many letters to Emma during periods of absence from one another.

## **Storytelling**

In addition to his formal education, Joseph Smith was a very gifted storyteller, and his family often recounted how he routinely entertained them for hours at night around the fire with his creative tales. He was even telling stories about the events in the Book of Mormon to his family back in 1823, which was a whole 6 years before the dictation process began for the Book of Mormon

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as we know it today. His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recounts Joseph telling stories about the events of the Book of Mormon long before he even claimed to have golden plates:

*From this time forth Joseph continued to receive instructions from time to time, and every evening we gathered our children together and gave our time up to the discussion of those things which he instructed to us... In the course of our evening conversations, Joseph gave us some of the most amusing recitals which could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, their manner of traveling, the animals which they rode, the cities that they built, and the structure of their buildings with every particular, their mode of warfare, and their religious worship as specifically as though he had spent his life with them... The angel informed him at one time that he might make an effort to obtain the plates [on] the [22nd of the] ensuing September.*

(1845 manuscript of Lucy Mack Smith's autobiography)

We can see from this account that not only was Joseph an enthusiastic storyteller, but he had a long-term project brewing ahead of time in coming up with a story that contains very similar elements to those written about in the Book of Mormon; namely, ancient civilizations in the Americas, along with the wars and religious disciplines. He was able to keep his family captivated for hours with his in-depth story-telling. This is evidence that he was thinking about these stories early on (possibly even rehearsing them), and was able to speak/dictate from memory with great details about things that, if not the actual Book of Mormon stories, share a startling amount of common elements with them.

This is a much less common skill than it used to be, but it's not at all out of the ordinary for people to be able to narrate numerous different stories with unique places, settings, characters, and voices for those characters, without

using any notes or script. These people can see the characters and the places in their heads, because some people are naturally talented at visualizing their own created worlds and describing them, so it's not hard for them to tell the story as it unfolds. Many of these storytellers can tell one story one night, and then another story the next night, and pick back up right where they left off on the first story and include bits from the story's past. This may seem uniquely impressive now, but it's not particularly extraordinary, especially back in Joseph Smith's time. Back when there was no such thing as TV, this was a much more common form of entertainment, and Joseph Smith was the resident performer of his family.

That particular account from Lucy Smith does mention Joseph already talking about the plates, but this is still a while before he has claimed to obtain them. If the narrative about the authorship of the Book of Mormon is true, Joseph Smith wouldn't have had access to the plates for at least a few years, and shouldn't have been able to describe these events in such detail. On the flip side, if these detailed stories about ancient civilizations are unrelated to the Book of Mormon, then this proves the point that Joseph Smith was a talented storyteller who was more than capable of making up a story very similar to that told in the Book of Mormon, and could dictate the story with such ease as if he had spent his life with the characters.

## **Knowledge of Christianity**

On top of Joseph Smith's education and charisma, he was a fluent student of the Bible and was thoroughly familiar with the different Christian denominations that were prevalent in his community. He visited around different churches, continuously attended sermons by preachers in his area, and sought to learn all he could. He thoroughly studied and pondered the content of the Bible, as well as had discussions with pastors from different denominations in order to

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get the different perspectives and have a well-rounded understanding of the church at large. He even received a sizable amount of doctrinal instruction, discussions, and even gave some entry-level sermons under the tutelage of some of the Methodist pastors in his region.

The Smith family moved to Western New York in the Winter of 1816–17 during a widely known historic event known as the Second Great Awakening, which took place roughly between 1790 and 1840. The Palmyra/Manchester area where the Smiths lived was the hotbed for this vigorous religious revivalism, where preachers were incessantly delivering lengthy and fiery sermons that riled up the local community and rapidly produced new converts to Christianity or rejuvenated the spirit of those who were otherwise lukewarm. The prevalence of these fire and brimstone sermons was so overwhelming that the region became known as the “Burned Over District.” Faced with the inescapable influence of the religious fervor in their community, the Smith family embraced and immersed themselves in it.

The Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches were particularly on the Smiths’ radar, and Joseph dedicated as much time as he could to making the rounds with each of them and learning everything he could.<sup>[2]</sup> For a period of time, the whole Smith family frequented the Presbyterian church, which resulted in several members of the family (not including Joseph) obtaining membership.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Exploring other options, Joseph was known to occasionally attend his local Baptist church’s meetings and revivals.<sup>[5]</sup> While Joseph Smith never officially joined any of these churches, he most actively engaged with and absorbed the teachings of the Methodists, immersing himself in their community and eagerly seeking knowledge and guidance.<sup>[6]</sup>

Joseph Smith went so far in his ventures with Methodism that he even joined a probationary six-month membership class. Although Joseph withdrew from this class before the trial period ended,<sup>[7]</sup> he still attended and participated avidly enough to become a highly talented and prolific lay preacher.<sup>[8]</sup> He was never formally called as an ordained exhorter, but he was exposed to,

learned from, and sometimes even practiced many of the preaching techniques, conversion narratives, and prayers that were taught in the Methodist church. [9] During these membership classes, the Methodist leaders were instructed to identify potential pastors from among the participants who demonstrated a fervent spirit, a talent for compelling public speaking, and heartfelt prayers. [10] Joseph Smith would have undoubtedly been identified as meeting these basic criteria due to this time spent participating as a lay exhorter.

This practice of having lay preachers practice in class served as an “internship” of sorts for young preachers looking to gain experience and demonstrate their talent to leaders of the church. Entry-level preachers in this class were trained in their emotional oratorical skills, as well as doctrinal education on the Bible and the church’s teachings. Smith’s active role as a lay exhorter in these Methodist classes is an evident source of much of the knowledge and skills that would enable him to eventually fulfill his religious aspirations as the founder of the LDS church and author of the Book of Mormon.

## **Treasure Digging**

In his youth, Joseph Smith was an active participant in a folk magic scam known as treasure digging. You may also hear it referred to as “treasure seeking,” “treasure hunting,” or “money digging.” Many LDS members are likely to have heard these terms and have a concept of it being tied to some of the occultist practices that Joseph Smith was involved with in his teen years, but most church-approved sources of information will scarcely provide any details beyond that. Treasure digging refers to a scam that was common in the 18th and 19th century in which someone would claim to be a “seer” who knew the location of buried treasure that the spirits had revealed to him, and he

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would direct people on where to dig to find that buried treasure. This practice of treasure digging is a crucial point when discussing the authorship of the Book of Mormon, because this folk magic impacts the gold plates story, the translation process, the text of the Book of Mormon itself, and many aspects of the church today that many people don't even realize.

In order to be successful, treasure seeking practitioners would need to have good manipulation skills, because they needed to fool people into believing that treasure was buried in certain locations, and needed to be able to charm them into paying money in exchange for showing where the imaginary treasure was buried. Gullible victims would often spend days or even weeks digging at certain sites in the hope of finding buried treasure. In every case, the scammer would find a way of convincing the diggers that the guardian spirits who revealed the location of the treasure had decided to remove the treasure or yank it way deeper down into the earth, beyond the reach of the diggers.

A key part of the craft of treasure seeking was for the scammer to provide a convincing explanation on why the treasure had suddenly become inaccessible and make the laborers think that it was their fault that the dig failed. Excuses for the failed digging consisted of the incantations not being said exactly right, the rituals not being followed in the way necessary to appease the spirits, the guardian spirits being too strong for the seer to see the treasure anymore, or someone making a mistake during the digging that offended the spirits. When it was revealed that the dig had failed, the conman would say things like "the ground is cursed." And when a treasure would be yanked farther down, it was often referred to as "a slippery treasure" or it would be stated that the treasure "slipped away." Despite the emotional turmoil, the men digging at the site usually walked away thinking that the conman was still a seer who saw the treasure revealed to him by guardian spirits.

This treasure digging scam was so well-known that Benjamin Franklin (who died 15 years before Joseph Smith was born) made the following remarks:

*There are among us great numbers of honest artificers and labouring people, who fed with a vain hope of growing suddenly rich, neglect their business, almost to the ruining of themselves and families, and voluntarily endure abundance of fatigue in a fruitless search after imaginary hidden treasure.... At length a mighty hole is dug, and perhaps several cartloads of earth thrown out, but alas, no cag or iron pot is found! no seaman's chest cram'd with Spanish pistoles, or weighty pieces of eight! Then they conclude, that thro' some mistake in the procedure, some rash word spoke, or some rule of art neglected, the guardian spirit had power to sink it deeper into the earth and convey it out of their reach.*

(Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* 1, p. 134–139)

Not only was this practice considerably well-known, it was also illegal. It was harmful enough, pervasive enough, and well-known enough to make legislatures pass laws prohibiting this activity. This activity, while embedded into the culture in many areas, was also still viewed as superstitious by others who saw through it. One of the most crucial points in all of this is that Joseph Smith performed this treasure digging scam with the same tools that he would later use to translate the Book of Mormon. It was common in that era to place a “seer stone” into a hat and use it to see the location of the buried treasure, and we have numerous accounts of Joseph Smith doing just that in these treasure digging activities.<sup>[11][12][13]</sup>

Before the actual digging for treasure could commence, certain preparatory rituals were performed in order to appease the guardian spirits. This often involved animal sacrifices and sprinkling the digging site with the blood of the animal that was killed. We even have numerous accounts of digs led by Joseph Smith in which dogs were sacrificed as an offering to the guardian spirits.<sup>[14][15][16]</sup>

Joseph Smith was known to have led dozens of treasure digs over the course of his “career” as a treasure digger from 1822 until 1827 when he promised

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Isaac Hale that he would give it up, and there are a few documented cases of him briefly resuming this activity after that.<sup>[17]</sup> He became so infamous in the community for these activities that he was put on trial in 1826 for the treasure digs that were funded by Josiah Stowell. It's worthy of note that many respected voices in the church were trying to insist that this trial never happened, until the evidence piled on so hard that it became irrefutable. Hugh Nibley, the foremost LDS apologist of his time, wrote in his 1961 book *The Myth Makers* that “if this court record is authentic it is the most damning evidence in existence against Joseph Smith” and that it would be “the most devastating blow to Smith ever delivered.” In the years since Nibley wrote his book, the court records were unearthed proving this trial happened and that Joseph Smith was found guilty.<sup>[18]</sup>

In that court trial, one of the numerous witnesses testified that Joseph led a treasure digging expedition in which he claimed to see treasure and also a feather. He found the feather when digging, but never found the treasure. Feathers disintegrate in the earth after about 2 months, so the feather would have had to have been planted there prior to the witness finding it. This was one of the tactics Joseph Smith and others like him used to make his victims walk away from the dig even more thoroughly convinced that he was a seer despite the dig having failed. The fact that Joseph Smith would have gone to the trouble to plant that feather in the ground to make the ruse more convincing further indicts him as deliberately deceiving gullible people in his community.

When it comes to saying anything critical about Joseph Smith's character, this is the farthest I will go. The reason I bring this up is because it shows that he had the ability and propensity to con people with his professed gift as a “seer.” It also showcases the soft skills, the tools, and much of the folklore surrounding the activity of treasure digging that Joseph would carry over into the authorship of the Book of Mormon. I'll expand on this in the corresponding “Treasure Digging and the Book of Mormon” section in the next chapter.

## Citations from Chapter 1

1. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879):289-90. Later on in the interview, Emma Smith is asked about polygamy, and blatantly lies in order to protect her husband’s legacy:  
Q. *Did he not have other wives than yourself?*  
A. *He had no other wife but me; nor did he to my knowledge ever have.*  
Q. *Did he not hold marital relation with women other than yourself?*  
A. *He did not have improper relations with any woman that ever came to my knowledge.*  
Q. *Was there nothing about spiritual wives that you recollect?*  
A. *At one time my husband came to me and asked me if I had heard certain rumors about spiritual marriages, or anything of the kind; and assured me that if I had, that they were without foundation; that there was no such doctrine, and should never be with his knowledge, or consent. I know that he had no other wife or wives than myself, in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise*
2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* Vol 1, pages 2-3: “*There was in the place where we lived [Manchester, New York] an unusual excitement on the subject of religion... Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist... [I] attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit.*”
3. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 1, pages 494-95: William Smith, one of Joseph’s younger brothers, recalled that their mother Lucy “*prevailed on us to attend the meetings, and almost the whole family became interested in the matter, and seekers after truth.*”
4. Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), page 37.
5. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 3, page 259. Baptist historian Mitchell Bronk (1862-1950), who was born and raised in Manchester, noted based on conversations with his grandfather and other old townsmen

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from the area that “*Joe occasionally attended the stone church [The First Baptist Church of Manchester]; especially the revivals, sitting with the crowd—the ‘sinners’—up in the gallery. Not a little of Mormon theology accords with the preaching of Elder [Anson] Shay.*”

6. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* Vol 1, page 3: “*In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them.*”
7. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 3, page 94: According to Pomeroy Tucker, a Palmyra resident, Joseph Smith “*joined the probationary class of the Methodist church in Palmyra, and made some active demonstrations of engagedness, though his assumed convictions were insufficiently grounded or abiding to carry him along to the saving point of conversion, and he soon withdrew from the class.*”
8. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 3, page 50: Orsamus Turner, another Palmyra resident, recounted that Joseph Smith stayed in the Methodist membership class long enough to become a lay preacher, saying “*After catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road... [Joseph Smith became] a very passable exhorter in evening meetings.*” See also Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham’s Purchase* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1852), page 214.
9. For contemporary descriptions of Methodist services, see *The Beauties of Methodism* (London: J. Fielding, n.d., early 1780s), xi; Robert Adam, *The Religious World Displayed* (Philadelphia: Moses Thomas, 1818), 3:127; *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, with Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (1798), pages 120-21, 132-45.
10. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, with Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (1798), page 67: “*3. Out of these are chosen, from time to time, the leasers of classes, who should*

*not only be deeply experienced in divine things, but have a measure of the gift of preaching, so as to feed the flock of Christ under their care, in due season. 4. Out of these, when they discover in public prayer-meetings an extraordinary gift of prayer and some gift for exhortation, are chosen **the exhorters**. 5. Out of the exhorters, who are employed in the places of least consequence, or to fill up the place of a preacher, in cases of necessity, are chosen **the local preachers.**"*

11. **Martin Harris, 1859:** *"There was a company there in that neighborhood, who were digging for money supposed to have been hidden by the ancients... They dug for money in Palmyra, Manchester, also in Pennsylvania, and other places. When Joseph found this stone, there was a company digging in Harmony, PA., and they took Joseph to look in the stone for them, and he did so for a while, and then he told them the enchantment was so strong that he could not see, and they gave it up."* (Joel Tiffany, "Interview with Martin Harris," Tiffany's Monthly, August 1859).
12. **Joseph Capron, 1833** (Joseph Smith would conduct a dig on Joseph Capron's farm in 1827): *"I, Joseph Capron, became acquainted with Joseph Smith Sen. in the year of our Lord, 1827... The family of Smiths held Joseph Jr. in high estimation on account of some supernatural power, which he was supposed to possess. **This power he pretended to have received through the medium of a stone of peculiar quality. The stone was placed in a hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light, except that which emanated from the stone itself. This light of the stone, he pretended, enabled him to see any thing he wished.** → I will mention one circumstance, by which the uninitiated may know how the company dug for treasures. **The sapient Joseph discovered, north west of my house, a chest of gold watches; but, as they were in the possession of the evil spirit, it required skill and stratagem to obtain them.** Accordingly, orders were given to stick a parcel of large stakes in the ground, several rods around, in a circular form. This was to be done directly over the spot where the treasures were deposited. A messenger was then sent to Palmyra to procure a polished sword: after which, Samuel F Lawrence, with*

*a drawn sword in his hand, marched around to guard any assault which his Satanic majesty might be disposed to make. Meantime, the rest of the company were busily employed in digging for the watches. **They worked as usual till quite exhausted. But, in spite of their brave defender, Lawrence, and their bulwark of stakes, the devil came off victorious, and carried away the watches.***" (Mormonism Unveiled, E. D. Howe, pages 258-260).

13. **William Stafford, 1833** (Joseph Smith conducted digs on Joshua Stafford's farm between 1822-1835): "*I first became acquainted with Joseph, Sen., and his family in the year 1820. They lived, at that time, in Palmyra, about one mile and a half from my residence. A great part of their time was devoted to digging for money; especially in the night time, when they said the money could be most easily obtained. I have heard them tell marvellous tales, respecting the discoveries they had made in their peculiar occupation of money digging. They would say, for instance, that in such a place, in such a hill, on a certain man's farm, there were deposited keys, barrels and hogsheads of coined silver and gold - bars of gold, golden images, brass kettles filled with gold and silver - gold candlesticks, swords, &c. &c. They would say, also, that nearly all the hills in this part of New York, were thrown up by human hands, and in them were large caves, **which Joseph, Jr., could see, by placing a stone of singular appearance in his hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light; at which time they pretended he could see all things within and under the earth,** - that he could see within the above mentioned caves, large gold bars and silver plates - that he could also discover the spirits in whose charge these treasures were, clothed in ancient dress.*" (Mormonism Unveiled, E. D. Howe, pages 237-239).
14. Hiel Lewis, a cousin of Joseph Smith's first wife Emma Smith, spoke in 1879 of Joseph Smith sacrificing dogs during treasure digs: "*The facts are that the sacrifice of white dogs, black sluts, black cats, and such like was an indispensable part or appendage of the art which Smith, the embryo prophet, was then practicing. He claimed to possess the supernatural power of second*

sight, or to see things at a distance, and deep under ground, and his frequent references to 'the enchantment,' proves that he was a conjurer, a sorcerer, which Webster defines an 'an enchanter,' and sorcery as witchcraft, or intercourse with the devil. → So we have no reason to doubt the truth of the statement about the white dog, and the black slut, and that something of the kind took place each time the enchantment removed the treasure. It is hard to believe that men of common intelligence could believe that Smith could thus see, and believe in his conjuration; be so foolish as to spend thousands of dollars in such a way; but Smith translated his book of Mormon, mostly with this same peep stone and hat. → and it is just as hard to believe in this inspired translation as to believe in the fact and efficacy of his dog sacrifices. → **Smith translated the book of Mormon by means of the same peep stone, and under the same inspiration that directed his enchantments and dog sacrifices; it was all by the same spirit.**" (Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 4, pages 308-309).

15. Emily M. Austin, a convert to the church in 1830, recalled Joseph Smith sacrificing a dog during a treasure dig on Joseph Knight's farm: "*For in the time of their digging for money and not finding it attainable, Joe Smith told them there was a charm on the pots of money, and if some animal was killed and the blood sprinkled around the place, then they could get it. **So they killed a dog and tried this method of obtaining the precious metal; but again money was scarce in those diggings.** Still, they dug and dug, but never came to the precious treasure. Alas! **how vivid was the expectation when the blood of poor Tray was used to take off the charm, and after all to find their mistake,** that it did not speak better things than that of Abel. And now they were obliged to give up in despair, and Joseph went home again to his father's, in Palmyra.*" (Life Among the Mormons, Emily M. Austin, 1882).
16. Justice Joel King Noble, who tried Smith in an 1830 trial in Colesville, N.Y., wrote the following in 1842: "*An [anecdote]: Jo. (Joseph Smith) and others were digging for a chest of money in night could not obtain it. **They***

*procured one thing and another together with [a] black bitch (dog). The bitch was offered a Sac[rifise], [blo]od Sprinkled, prayer made at the time (no money obtained). The above sworn to on trial.”* (Letter of Justice Noble, dated March 8, 1842).

17. Mark Elwood has compiled a timeline and list of documented treasure digs that Joseph Smith took part in: <https://theglasslooker.com/treasure-digs/>.
18. The 1826 trial of New York vs. Joseph held on account of Joseph Smith's treasure digging has been documented in numerous places, including Fraser's Magazine (February 1873, pp. 229-30) and this wikisource page: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_v.\\_Joseph\\_Smith\\_\(1826\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/New_York_v._Joseph_Smith_(1826)).



## Chapter 2

# Surrounding Influences

The Book of Mormon presents a narrative with numerous theological and historical references that were especially relevant during the time and place that Joseph Smith lived. One might argue that that's simply God's own divine providence by providing a book that's more relevant to us today, and especially to the people in the time when the Gospel would be restored, and that can be an enticing loophole to explain away some of the content in the Book of Mormon. However, in this chapter I will counter that point with the assertion that the Book of Mormon reflects both the folklore of Joseph Smith's time period and also his own personal life experiences on such a profound level that the simpler explanation is that Joseph was pulling ideas from things in his environment that were familiar to him and expanding on them when creating the Book of Mormon.

The book conveniently addresses every major theological issue that was highly contested during Joseph Smith's time, as well as many of the historical perceptions and superstitions that were uniquely prevalent during that time. The book even included names copied from people that Joseph Smith knew personally, as well as a dream reported by his father. All of these surrounding influences suggest that the Book of Mormon could reasonably have been man-made, that it's evidently a 19th-century document, and that only Joseph Smith could have been the one to come up with it.

## Notable Theological Debates

One of the intended selling points of the Book of Mormon is that it gives clarification on various theological issues that are hotly debated among different factions of Christianity. While churches are still debating some of these issues today, many churches have reached an equilibrium with inter-denominational relations on these issues, and some of the topics addressed in the book have altogether faded into obscurity since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This specific set of highly contested issues was most comprehensively pointed out by Alexander Campbell, who wrote the following:

*This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in this book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decided all the great controversies;— infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of free masonry, republican government, and the rights of man. All these topics are repeatedly alluded to.*

(Alexander Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 2:93)

It's important to know that Campbell isn't some recent author reflecting on the past, this is someone that Oliver Cowdery knew who is a contemporary of Joseph Smith, pointing out that the Book of Mormon reads like a time capsule of the 1820s. He's saying that the book reads as if someone living in his period wrote it with the explicit intent of trying to resolve all of the problems during this specific decade. To re-emphasize an earlier point, it is true that some of those theological issues, such as infant baptism, are still contested

among churches, but the debate isn't as fiery and divisive now as it was then. The laundry list that Alexander Campbell provides there is much more closely tailored to the 1820s than any other period in history. If you want to, you can certainly view this through a faithful lens by contending that the Book of Mormon was given to us by God to better fit our time (and especially Joseph Smith's time) to give more doctrinal clarification and resolve the contentious issues at the time. But if you are going to make that argument, then you also have to acknowledge that Joseph Smith knew about all of these issues, knew that they were on the minds of people in his time, and would have known what topics to address in order to appeal to the people in his time period.

### **The Mound Builder Myth**

The Nephite and Lamanite story that is embedded in the Book of Mormon may seem alien and weird to people in our day, but it basically embodies what everyone believed in Joseph Smith's time about pre-Columbian America; the book simply provides details, characters, and story line to bring it to life. During Joseph Smith's time, there was a common belief that there were two different races of people in the ancient Americas: There was the superior, more intelligent, and more civilized race of people, which was white, and there was also the savage and unintelligent race of people, which was dark-skinned. According to legend, the dark-skinned savages slaughtered all of the white people, which was why only dark-skinned native Americans were found when the European settlers came. This now-abandoned belief is known as the Mound Builder Myth.

The myth originated when European settlers first came to the Americas, and came upon these peculiar, ostensibly man-made mounds. Here is one such mound that still remains in Georgia:



When the European settlers came upon these mounds, they presumed that the dark-skinned natives they saw in the land were incapable of building them. Instead, they assumed that these mounds could only have possibly been built by an advanced, civilized people, which would have most likely been white. Inside of these mounds were the remains of buried dead Indians, but by the time they were unearthed, it was mostly just bones. Horrified by their findings, the settlers came up with the theory that these were the remains of the advanced white race which had been slaughtered by the savage natives. This whimsical theory soon became a widely adopted narrative throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and held a tremendous amount of influence in various religious and political circles.

The influence of the Mound Builder Myth was so pervasive that it was even talked about by US presidents in the 1800s as if it was historical. Both Andrew Jackson<sup>[1]</sup> and William Henry Harrison<sup>[2]</sup> are documented as referencing the Mound Builder Myth as if it's a widely accepted fact. In addition, there

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was a poem written by William Cullen Bryant called “The Prairies” which summarized the folklore behind the Mound Builder Myth:

*Let the mighty mounds  
That overlook the rivers, or that rise  
In the dim forest crowded with old oaks,  
Answer. A race, that long has passed away,  
Built them;—a disciplined and populous race...*

*In a forgotten language, and old tunes,  
From instruments of unremembered form,  
Gave the soft winds a voice. The red man came—  
The roaming hunter tribes, warlike and fierce,  
And the mound-builders vanished from the earth....*

*All is gone;  
All—save the piles of earth that hold their bones,  
The platforms where they worshipped unknown gods,  
The barriers which they builded from the soil  
To keep the foe at bay—till o’er the walls  
The wild beleaguers broke, and, one by one,  
The strongholds of the plain were forced, and heaped  
With corpses. The brown vultures of the wood  
Flocked to those vast uncovered sepulchres,  
And sat unscared and silent at their feast.  
Haply some solitary fugitive,  
Lurking in marsh and forest, till the sense  
Of desolation and of fear became  
Bitterer than death, yielded himself to die.*

This poem summarizes the belief held by the European settlers that the mounds were built by a superior white race which was killed off by dark skinned Indians. It discusses wars, and in an uncanny parallel with Moroni at the end of the Book of Mormon, it describes a “solitary fugitive” surviving the bloodbath and eventually dying alone. This poem was written shortly after the Book of Mormon was published, but it’s highly unlikely that this author was directly connected to Joseph Smith. Otherwise, he probably wouldn’t have described the pseudo-Nephites as worshipping “unknown gods.”

Joseph Smith would have undoubtedly been influenced by the Mound Builder Myth, and would have had an obvious incentive to use it in crafting a compelling story, because it’s confirming one of the major myths that was being perpetuated at the time. It’s answering one of the big questions on people’s minds at the time, which is, “Where did these Native Americans come from?” People gravitated toward the story of the Book of Mormon because it fit with their existing worldview.

Some Book of Mormon critics will try to draw parallels with *View of the Hebrews*, which is a book that was around during Joseph Smith’s time that he would have had access to. While it’s possible that Joseph Smith was influenced on some level by *View of the Hebrews* when coming up with the Book of Mormon, I think it’s more likely that both books were most heavily influenced by the Mound Builder Myth. To provide a more contemporary example of this phenomenon, it’s quite possible that J. R. Tolkein’s character Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings* ended up influencing J. K. Rowling when she created Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* books. But more than anything, both of those “old wizard mentor” tropes undoubtedly drew from the common source material of Merlin’s mentoring relationship with King Arthur in the ancient tales of Camelot. Similarly, with both the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews* being products of the 19th century, they most likely drew from the common source material of the Mound Builder Myth.

## Lehi's Vision

One of the most iconic, poetic, and lore-rich parts of the Book of Mormon is a vision written about in 1 Nephi 8 where Lehi partakes of the Tree of Life and invites his family to do the same. The vision is a thought-provoking allegory of God's grace, the hardness of man's heart, the paths that will be taken by the faithful vs. the unfaithful, and the many obstacles that Satan will put in our way to lead us astray. The vision is referenced in conference talks, Sunday school classes, and everyday conversations among Latter-day Saints more so than any other part of the Book of Mormon. The parable is also a weapon of choice for many LDS members (including Boyd K. Packer) seeking to make the case that the Book of Mormon is such an amazing book that only God could have written it. Here's an overview of the key verses from 1 Nephi 8:

*5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.*

*9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.*

*10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.*

*11 And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.*

*12 And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.*

*13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.*

*19 And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.*

*20 And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron,*

*26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.*

*27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.*

Putting aside Joseph Smith's aptitude as a theologian and storyteller as discussed in the previous chapter, we actually have a pretty naturalistic explanation for where the content of this vision came from, which is that Joseph Smith's father had a very similar dream which inspired it. Around 1811 (almost 20 years before the BOM was first published), Joseph Smith Sr. had a dream that was remarkably similar to Lehi's vision. Here is that dream as told by his wife, Lucy Mack Smith:

*I thought, I was traveling in an open, desolate field, which appeared to be very barren. As I was thus traveling, the thought suddenly came into my mind that I had better stop and reflect upon what I was doing, before I went any further. So I asked myself, 'What motive can I have in traveling here, and what place can this be?' My guide, who was by my side, as before, said, 'This is the desolate world; but travel on.' The road was so broad and barren that I wondered why I should travel in it; for, said I to myself, 'Broad is the road, and wide is the gate that leads to death, and many there be that walk therein; but narrow is the way, and straight is the gate that leads to everlasting' life, and few there be that go in thereat.*

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*Traveling a short distance farther, I came to a narrow path. This path I entered, and, when I had traveled a little way in it, I beheld a beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west. Of this stream I could see neither the source nor yet the termination; but as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach, and beyond me was a low, but very pleasant valley, in which stood a tree such as I had never seen before. It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as white as snow, or, if possible whiter. I gazed upon the same with considerable interest, and as I was doing so the burs or shells commenced opening and shedding their particles, or the fruit which they contained, which was of dazzling whiteness. I drew near and began to eat of it, and I found it delicious beyond description. As I was eating, I said in my heart, 'I can not eat this alone, I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me.' Accordingly, I went and brought my family, which consisted of a wife and seven children, and we all commenced eating, and praising God for this blessing. We were exceedingly happy, insomuch that our joy could not easily be expressed.*

*While thus engaged, I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley which we were in, and it appeared to reach to the very heavens. It was full of doors and windows, and they were filled with people, who were very finely dressed. When these people observed us in the low valley, under the tree, they pointed the finger of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt. But their contumely we utterly disregarded. I presently turned to my guide, and inquired of him the meaning of the fruit that was so delicious. He told me it was the pure love of God, shed abroad in the hearts of all those who love him, and keep his commandments. He then commanded me to go and bring the rest of my*

*children. I told him that we were all there. 'No,' he replied, 'look yonder, you have two more, and you must bring them also.' Upon raising my eyes, I saw two small children, standing some distance off. I immediately went to them, and brought them to the tree; upon which they commenced eating with the rest, and we all rejoiced together. The more we ate, the more we seemed to desire, until we even got down upon our knees, and scooped it up, eating it by double handfuls. After feasting in this manner a short time, I asked my guide what was the meaning of the spacious building, which I saw. He replied, 'It is Babylon, it is Babylon, and it must fall. The people in the doors and windows are the inhabitants thereof, who scorn and despise the Saints of God because of their humility.' I soon awoke, clapping my hands together for joy.*

(Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet)

Here is a table outlining many of the notable similarities between the two accounts:

<b>Joseph Smith Sr., 1811 Dream</b>	<b>Book of Mormon, 1830</b>
I was traveling in an open, <b>desolate field...</b>	I beheld a large and <b>spacious field...</b>
The <b>road was so broad</b> and barren...	...leadeth them away into <b>broad roads...</b>
I came to a <b>narrow path...</b>	...I also beheld a strait and <b>narrow path...</b>
I beheld a beautiful <b>stream of water...</b>	I beheld a <b>river of water...</b>
<b>I could see a rope</b> , running <b>along the bank of it...</b>	<b>I beheld a rod of iron</b> , and it extended along the <b>bank of the river...</b>

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...in which stood a tree such as I, had never seen before. It was <b>exceedingly handsome...</b>	And I looked and beheld a <b>tree</b> ... and the <b>beauty</b> thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all <b>beauty</b> ;
...it bore a kind of <b>fruit</b> , in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as <b>white as snow</b> , or, if possible, <b>whiter...</b>	I beheld that the <b>fruit</b> thereof was <b>white, to exceed all the whiteness</b> that I had ever seen.
I drew near, and <b>began to eat of it</b> , and I found it <b>delicious beyond description</b> .	I did go forth and <b>partake of the fruit</b> thereof; and I beheld that <b>it was most sweet</b> , above all that I ever before tasted.
As I was eating, I said in my heart, 'I cannot eat this alone, <b>I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me</b> .	I began to be <b>desirous that my family should partake</b> of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.
<b>I beheld a spacious building</b> standing opposite the valley which we were in, and it appeared to <b>reach to the very heavens</b> .	...and <b>beheld</b> , on the other side of the river of water, a great and <b>spacious building</b> ; and <b>it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth</b> .
...they were all <b>filled with people</b> , who were <b>very finely dressed</b> .	And it was <b>filled with people</b> ... and their manner of <b>dress was exceedingly fine</b> ;
...they <b>pointed the finger</b> of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt.	...they were in the attitude of mocking and <b>pointing their fingers...</b>
...what was the meaning of the <b>spacious building</b> which I saw. He replies, ' <b>It is Babylon, it is Babylon, and it must fall</b> .	And the large and <b>spacious building</b> , which they father saw, is <b>vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men</b> .

The staggering level of similarities between these two visions is undeniable. Granted, some LDS members are aware of this dream, and will interpret this through a faithful lens by inferring that God gave Joseph Smith Sr. this vision

in preparation for the Book of Mormon. In addition, some LDS members will point out that the account of the dream that we have is from 1845, after the Book of Mormon was produced, and suggest that Lucy was incorporating the Book of Mormon into her account of the dream. However, if she was taking this dream from mostly the Book of Mormon and not the original account from her husband, it's unlikely that she would have changed the part about the water and retold the dream with a rope instead of an iron rod.

Not only are there plenty of parallels between the two visions, but Joseph Smith Jr.'s fingerprints can be found in the way that he modifies and reinterprets his father's dream, and then has Nephi do the same in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith Sr. was a universalist; he believed that everyone would automatically be saved, and this caused some tension with his wife Lucy who preferred the Presbyterian church which taught differently. Joseph Sr.'s idea of salvation was reflected through his dream in the way that everyone in his family feasted on the fruit, and none were led astray. Joseph Jr., however, would change this dream in the BOM version such that two of the sons (Laman and Lemuel) would refuse to eat the fruit, and many people would lose their grip on the iron rod and fall astray.

What's even more striking is how this father/son universalist correction dynamic plays out in the way that Nephi corrects the vision of Lehi in 1 Nephi 15, verses 26-29:

*26 And they said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw? 27 And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water. 28 And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God. 29 And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.*

In Lehi's vision in 1 Nephi 8, he describes a river that ran parallel to the iron rod, but he doesn't give in-depth details on the river, which leads the reader to assume at first that the river is a good and beautiful thing, like in Joseph Smith Sr.'s dream. But in the BOM passage quoted just above, it is revealed that the river is actually quite filthy, and verse 27 outright states that Lehi's mind was too swallowed up by other things to notice the filthiness of the river, which represents Hell. Joseph Smith Jr. is changing the nature of the river in order to show that not all are saved, and then Nephi does something strikingly similar with the way he expands on the filthy details of the river that his father missed. This narrative parallel points further to Joseph Smith writing the Book of Mormon based on his own personal life experiences.

### **Laying Down Heads**

In Joseph Smith's time, there was a common style of delivering and structuring sermons known as "laying down heads," which would be directly referenced in the Book of Mormon. This preaching technique involved writing down a few bullet points, and expanding on each of those points over the course of the sermon. While the general concept of writing an outline and expanding on each point may be ubiquitous across many cultures and a large time span, it was not until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that the systematic approach would be widely institutionalized with specific terminology known as "laying down heads."

This compositional technique of "laying down heads" gained widespread popularity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century for writing sermons, public speeches, essays, narrations, and school lessons. This practice originated from John Walker's highly influential book, *The Teacher's Assistant*, which was published in 1801. Walker's book quickly spread like wildfire in its popularity, earning Walker the nickname "Elocution Walker." His work paved the way for numerous educators

to publish books teaching similar techniques of written and oral composition, which used the same terminology of “heads.” By the time that Joseph Smith would have started attending school, getting tutored by his brother, and learning preaching techniques, the practice of “laying down heads” would have become widely adopted in all of those arenas.

This pedagogical trend involved creating a skeletal outline consisting of key phrases that encapsulated each of the main points that would be addressed in the speech or essay that someone was looking to compose. Each of these key phrases, known as “heads,” would briefly, but clearly, summarize each of the main topics that would be discussed. In the case of a sermon or speech, the speaker would often have the outline with him, and occasionally glance at it to stay on track and remind himself which points to expand on while talking. In the case of writing, the author would use it as a reference for ideas to expand on and translate to larger portions of text.

Joseph Smith would have undoubtedly been familiar with this composition technique, as it was ubiquitous throughout schools, churches, and news organizations in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and we have traces of him even using and referencing this technique. Joseph created the initial draft of *History of the Church* in a style nearly identical to that which was instructed by John Walker, which shows how much influence this practice had on the Latter-day prophet.<sup>[3]</sup> This practice of “laying down heads” would have also undoubtedly been utilized when Joseph Smith did his brief stint as a lay exhorter with the Methodists, as discussed in the previous chapter.

What makes this such a notable surrounding influence in the authorship of the Book of Mormon is how this practice of “laying down heads” would make its way into the text of the book itself. Given the number of nuances and specific terms that were exclusive to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seems oddly anachronistic to see such similar language show up in the Book of Mormon in Jacob 1:4:

*And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible...*

Nephi, when instructing Jacob before his death, is saying that he would write on the plates the “heads” of what he sought to preach on. Then, after having the heads engraved on the plates, he would “touch on them as much as it were possible” which means that he would reference those heads and expand on each of those points as he’s speaking. This particular terminology isn’t going to mean much to readers today, but in Joseph Smith’s time, this would have been well-understood, as it is describing that same preaching technique that was common in Joseph Smith’s time, and using the same language as people during Joseph Smith’s time, sans the usage of “plates” instead of paper.

### **Treasure Digging and the Book of Mormon**

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the folklore of treasure digging would not only play a significant role in Joseph Smith’s personal life, but also various aspects of the Book of Mormon translation. First off, the process of acquiring the golden plates leaves numerous traces of treasure digging influence, both conceptually and based off of the accounts from Joseph Smith’s contemporaries. Moreover, the content of the Book of Mormon itself is clearly influenced by this once common folk magic practice in how it describes how treasures buried in the ground “slip away.” Familiarity with this folk magic unveils the plain influences they had on the Book of Mormon, which can be easily missed if one is not acquainted with them.

The very concept of journeying out to Hill Cumorah to dig up golden plates as revealed by an angel already gives off vibes of “buried treasure and guardian spirits” similar to Joseph Smith’s past treasure digs, but there’s more

to it than just that. What's commonly taught in church is that on each of Joseph Smith's visits to Hill Cumorah, he was shown the plates by Moroni and not allowed to take them, but this telling is misleading at best. Martin Harris,<sup>[4]</sup> along with numerous other men who knew and interacted with Joseph Smith,<sup>[5][6][7]</sup> describe him finding the plates by looking at his seer stone in a hat just like he did in treasure digging, while references to an angelic messenger are scarce. Willard Chase even insisted that "he would not have obtained the book."<sup>[8]</sup> if it weren't for the seer stone guiding Joseph Smith.

It is also worthy of note that there are numerous people connected to Joseph Smith's treasure digging activities who have names that are strikingly similar to the names of key characters at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. In these endeavors, Joseph worked with a man named Luman (sometimes spelled Lumen) Walters, who sometimes went by the name Laman. Not only that, but this Luman/Lumen/Laman guy had an uncle named Lemuel Walters who founded Burke, Vermont. This Lemuel also had a son named Samuel. Laman, Lemuel, and Samuel. It's hard to ignore the fact that there were three people in Joseph's treasure digging milieu who had the same names as the three older brothers of Nephi in the Book of Mormon. This isn't just one person, and it isn't some spouse of a friend of a cousin, these are people that Joseph Smith knew personally and directly interacted with in his treasure digging activities. While this doesn't prove that Joseph Smith took these names from real life, this example shows us that the names of some of the key characters from the beginning of the Book of Mormon were in his immediate worldview, not just found in some ancient text.

What's most interesting on this topic, though, is that there are numerous passages from the Book of Mormon that clearly reference this 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century superstition of buried treasure "slipping away." If you need a refresher, look back at the "Treasure Digging" section of the previous chapter, specifically

about how the digs would always fail because of the treasure becoming “slippery.” Then look at these passages from the Book of Mormon:

**Helaman 13:31,34-36: 31** *And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them: and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them.... 34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone, and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. 35 Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land. 36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.*

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

If you aren't paying close attention, it's easy to misinterpret these verses as saying that God has cursed these swords and other valuables such that they will slip out of your hands whenever you try to pick them up and use them. But if you read the passage from Helaman carefully, you can tell this is definitely not what's going on, as chapter 13 verses 34 and 35 make this clear when they describe how they hid up their treasures, and then they were gone, because of the curse of the land. Once you put the puzzle pieces together, the connection with Joseph Smith's practice of treasure digging becomes much clearer, as it describes valuables sinking into the earth, and uses that same language of "slippery" treasure. If the Book of Mormon is true, then this means that buried treasure can slip into the ground, and that people in the ancient Americas were experiencing this in the same way that Joseph Smith claimed to be in

the 1820s. Alternatively, this is an example of Joseph Smith incorporating the folk magic of his time period into the Book of Mormon. There are no treasure digging references like this anywhere in the Bible.

## Citations from Chapter 2

1. Andrew Jackson is documented as referencing and being influenced by the Mound Builder Myth in his presidency. He was known for his territorial expansion as president, which involved displacing indigenous people and using the Mound Builder Myth as justification. He also referenced the Mound Builder Myth during his time in the southern army in 1818: *“General Jackson himself, who, as commander-in-chief of the southern army, was on the ground in 1818, and the following year, is said to have encouraged the idea of the Asiatic origin of the works, and even to have given countenance to the notion that they were the work of the Israelites.”* (Schoolcraft, *The Mound-Builders*, 1847).
2. William Henry Harrison, who was only president for 30 days, wrote the following, when commenting on what a traveler going down the Ohio River valley might see prior to white settlement: *His eye might have rested on some stupendous mound, or lengthened line of ramparts... which proved that the country had once been possessed by a numerous and laborious people. But he would've seen, also, indubitable evidences that centuries had passed away since these remains had been occupied by those for whose use they had been reared... He would not fail to arrive at the conclusion that their departure... must have been a matter of necessity. For no people at any state of civilization, would have willingly abandoned such a country...*

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*We learn first, from the extensive country covered by their remains, that they were a numerous people. Secondly, that they were congregated in considerable cities... confirm the fact that they had a national religion; in the celebration of which, all that was pompous, gorgeous, and imposing, that a semi-barbarous nation could devise was brought into occasional display. That there were a numerous priesthood, and altars often smoking with hecatombs of victims... This much do these ancient remains furnish us, as to the condition and character of the people who erected them...*

*We refer again to the works they have left us, to gain what knowledge we can of the cause and manner of their leaving the Ohio valley. For the reasons formerly stated, I assume the fact that they were compelled to fly from a more numerous or a more gallant people. No doubt the contest was long and bloody, and that the country, so long their residence, was not abandoned to their rivals until their numbers were too much reduced to continue the contest. Taking into consideration all the circumstances, ... I have come to the conclusion that these people were assailed both from their northern and their southern frontier; made to recede from both directions, and that their last effort at resistance was made on the banks of the Ohio.*

(The mound-builders: a reconstruction of the life of a prehistoric American race, through exploration and interpretation of their earth mounds, their burials, and their cultural remains.)

3. William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, pages 14-16. Joseph Smith wrote an initial draft for *History of the Church* that ended up being scrapped, but the manuscript for this first draft is extremely enlightening in how it shows that he followed John Walker's iconic playbook of composition nearly to the letter.
4. Martin Harris said the following about Joseph Smith retrieving the golden plates: "*He found them[the gold plates] by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing... It was*

*by means of this stone he first discovered the plates.*” (Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 2, pp. 309).

5. Henry Harris, a contemporary of Joseph Smith’s, said the following about Joseph Smith’s retrieval of the golden plates: “*said he had a revelation from God that told him they were hid in a certain hill and he looked in his stone and saw them in the place of deposit.*” (Affidavit of Henry Harris, no date [circa 1833], in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 252; see also Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 2, page 76).
6. Orsamus Turner, a Palmyra resident, recalled the following: “*It was by looking at this stone in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph discovered the plates.*” (John J. Hammond, *The Creation of Mormonism: Joseph Smith Jr. in the 1820s*, 64).
7. John Gilbert, who typeset the Book of Mormon, recalled Joseph Smith telling him that “*by the aid of his wonderful stone he found gold plates on which were inscribed the writings in hieroglyphics.*” (John H. Gilbert interview, *The Detroit Post and Tribune*, Dec 3, 1877).
8. Willard Chase said that in 1827, Joseph Smith, Sr. told him: “*that some years ago, a spirit had appeared to Joseph his son, in a vision, and informed him that in a certain place there was a record on plates of gold; and that he was the person that must obtain them. He [Joseph Smith] then observed that if it had not been for that stone, he would not have obtained the book.*” (Willard Chase Statement, 11 Dec 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, reprinted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* Vol 2, pp. 71–72).

## Chapter 3

# The Lost 116 Pages

Perhaps no event in the history of the Book of Mormon sheds more light on Joseph Smith's creative process than the loss of the 116 pages. It provides us with a rare and illuminating window into Joseph Smith's mindset, as well as showcases what happens when he loses control of the situation.

Once those pages were lost, he couldn't replicate them, which alone is highly suspect. What's more, after taking a break for several months, he came up with an excuse of being provided a replacement text that has the same basic story but told a little bit differently. Despite Joseph's admirable efforts at creating the filler text for the lost portion, he inadvertently revealed a series of striking clues that point more to the Book of Mormon being his own creative work than to it being a revelation from God.

The first oddly convenient claim Joseph makes is that there was another set of plates that were set aside for the specific purpose of re-telling the book of Lehi, and that God would provide the translated text from those plates as a replacement. As careful as Joseph may have been in trying not to contradict the content of the lost pages, his narrative patchwork left some of his unique fingerprints that showcased some continuity errors and jarring plot points that shouldn't be there if God was guiding this process. What stands out the most, however, is the way in which Joseph Smith inserts himself into the narrative of

the Book of Mormon at a critical moment when he is attempting to re-establish his authority in the wake of losing the 116 pages.

## **Joseph Smith's Predicament**

Eager to convince his wife of the merit of their endeavors, Martin Harris brought home the manuscript that had been dictated after eventually convincing Joseph Smith to let him take it.

Unfortunately, some time after Harris brought the manuscript home and showed it around, the manuscript went missing, and he dreadfully had to break the bad news to Joseph Smith. While any reasonable person in Joseph Smith's shoes would at least be frustrated, his exclamation upon finding out that the pages were lost was much more dire than what you'd expect. Joseph Smith cried out "*Oh, my God! All is lost! All is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned.*" (Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, 1853).

If you were assembling a piece of IKEA furniture, and realized half way through that you accidentally put a piece on backwards, you probably wouldn't exclaim "All is lost!" Instead, you'd probably groan and say "Great, now I have to do this all over again, and do it right this time." Joseph Smith's reaction should have been more along these lines if he was being given the text by God. But exclaiming "all is lost" gives away the fact that he knew he would not be able to replicate those lost pages, and was having a moment of crisis when he was informed that those pages were taken. It's possible to view this event through a faithful lens by considering the possibility of prior revelations from God that warned Joseph Smith about the consequences of failing to keep the manuscript safe, but that is highly speculative.

The traditional narrative is that Martin's wife, Lucy Harris, snatched the pages away and hid them somewhere that Martin wouldn't know, and insisted that if Joseph Smith was truly receiving revelation from God, then he should

be able to reproduce the same exact words again. However, recent scholarship (most notably that of Don Bradley) has challenged this narrative and proposed that other detractors of Joseph Smith may have stolen the manuscript. Astute LDS members may also be eager to point out that the lost manuscript wasn't exactly 116 pages, but since the colloquial term of "lost 116 pages" is so widely recognized, I will continue referring to the manuscript as such. Ultimately, it's not important who stole the manuscript and how many pages it contained; the main point to focus on is that Joseph Smith lost the original manuscript, marking a tremendous setback in the dictation process.

In response to this setback, Joseph Smith claimed that his gift of revelation was taken from him "for a season," and needed to take some time to re-group before continuing dictating the Book of Mormon. This is also very suspicious, as he conveniently claims to lose his power as a seer the moment he loses control of the situation. Throughout Joseph Smith's time as a prophet, his charisma and power only work when he's in control of the situation. Losing that manuscript took that control away from Joseph, and it immediately shows in the way that he can no longer use the seer stone for a season.

The theft of those pages occurred when Joseph Smith and Martin Harris were near the beginning of Mosiah in the dictation process. After losing those pages, Harris was no longer Smith's scribe, and that was when Oliver Cowdery came into the picture and became his scribe about 9 months later. When linking up with Cowdery, Joseph Smith decided to simply continue right from where he left off in Mosiah, and continue on through the end of the story instead of starting over.<sup>[1]</sup> After wrapping up the story of the Book of Mormon, it was time for Joseph Smith to figure out what he was going to do to replace the lost manuscript, now that it was abundantly clear that he wouldn't be seeing it again.

In order to complete the creation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith needed to make an excuse for how he was going to replace the book of Lehi without replicating the text exactly; the playbook for this plan is outlined

in Doctrine and Covenants 10. The main claim that Joseph Smith makes is that Lucy or others may attempt to alter the text of the manuscript such that it would not match the dictation even if Joseph Smith could reproduce it, and this would be used to discredit the translation. This alone seems like a very odd excuse to make for not being willing to reproduce the text, as forgery techniques were not very advanced back then. If someone attempted to come up with an altered text, then the handwriting and ink would have been noticeably different, and the forgery would not have been hard to detect.

Creating an alternate filler text is a far more roundabout, far more laborious, and far more dubious endeavor than simply reproducing the lost 116 pages. The latter approach would have been far more intuitive and advantageous in proving Joseph Smith as a prophet. If the manuscript thief produced an altered copy of the manuscript, it would not have been hard to tell because photoshop and master forgery skills weren't around back then. Moreover, if these people were going to produce an altered text to embarrass Joseph Smith, they probably would have done it regardless of what he was going to do for the replacement text. Not only would reproducing the lost pages have been more straightforward, but also the obstacles and pain points of that scenario would have been far less burdensome and numerous than that of the alternative that Joseph Smith ended up coming up with for the replacement text, as we'll examine in the remainder of this chapter.

## **The Small Plates**

When creating this alternate filler text for the lost 116 pages, Joseph Smith procured the narrative that there just so happened to be another set of plates that were set aside specifically for this purpose. These plates allegedly filled the need for a replacement text that told the same basic story, but was more brief, and told the story with more emphasis on theology than on history like the

lost pages presumably did. These plates consist of the content of 1 Nephi up through Omni in the Book of Mormon as we know it today. The problem with the extra set of plates is that they stick out like a sore thumb in the way that they seem like a sloppy and convenient late addition in the Book of Mormon that was only put there out of necessity.

When dictating the replacement text, Joseph Smith didn't know whether or not the manuscript thief still had the original text and was looking to compare it with the replacement text that he would come up with. Given that the 116 pages were said to have contained significantly more names, places, and events in the history of the Nephite heritage,<sup>[2]</sup> he would have been very likely to make a mistake if he tried to reproduce all of those names. So Joseph Smith's approach was to tell the story more briefly with fewer details and names in order to avoid running the risk of contradicting the manuscript that was lost. He had to make his replacement text much more vague in the details so that if the thief does still have it, then his ruse can't be exposed.

And so, Joseph Smith makes this plan known in Doctrine and Covenants chapter 10 where he claims that God has given a revelation informing him that Lucy Harris or others intend to alter the text to discredit him, and so a replacement text will be provided from a different set of plates. These replacement plates would make their official debut in 1 Nephi 9 where Nephi declares that he's making two separate sets of plates, both of which are called the plates of Nephi (very confusing). Of the two sets of plates of Nephi, one of them was a more in-depth history providing "an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people," (1 Nephi 9:4) which would become known as the large plates. And the other set of plates would be less detailed, and be "for the more part of the ministry," (1 Nephi 9:4) and become known as the small plates. These small plates were the plates that Joseph Smith claimed to be getting revelation from when translating 1 Nephi up through Omni. The phrase "for the more part of the ministry" is a bit unclear, but more clarification would be provided later on in 1 Nephi 19, especially in verse 3:

*And after I had made these plates [the large plates] by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates [the small plates]; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, **and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.***

Nephi is once again drawing a distinction between two different sets of plates, emphasizing that the second set of plates is less detailed, and even giving a wink and nod at the reader by saying that these plates were being made for some other purpose. At this point, Joseph Smith is trying to recover from the loss of the 116 pages by canonizing the whole concept that God knew roughly 2,400 years in advance that those pages would be lost, and prepared a separate set of plates for that specific purpose. This explanation sticks out very obviously as a late addition made out of necessity to explain away how Joseph Smith got the content that wasn't part of the golden plates that he claimed to be translating from, and why exactly that separate set of plates was less detailed (in order to avoid getting called out for inconsistencies).

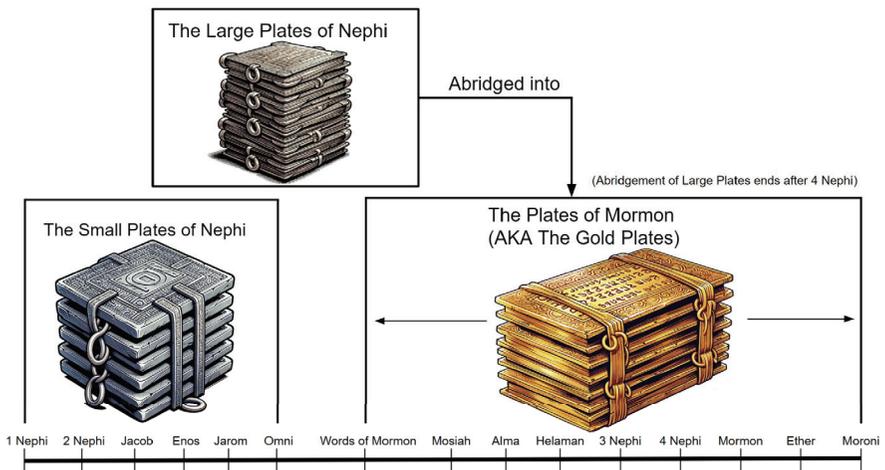
The more time you spend examining minor sub-plots in movies and books that are out of place in order to fill plot holes or fulfill certain marketing agendas, the more skilled you become in spotting it in other works moving forward. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, there is a scene where Thor goes into a magical pond of water in order to see a vision that he had caught a glimpse of earlier, and fans unanimously agreed that the scene felt jarring and out of place. And indeed, the scene was very out of place, as director Joss Whedon would confirm when he publicly commented on how the studio twisted his arm to include that scene in order to tease the overarching plot thread of the Infinity Stones that would come full circle in the next Avengers movie.<sup>[3]</sup> These sections of the Book of Mormon talking about the extra set of plates being created “for

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a wise purpose” carry a very similar scent of feeling jarring and out of place, and being created for a very obvious purpose that exists outside of the BOM itself. In the next section, we’ll expand on just how confusing these different sets of plates can get, as well as how this narrative evolved over time.

### Plates Galore

The Book of Mormon describes a needlessly complicated array of different sets of plates that would end up making up the content of the book of Mormon. Even devout LDS members who’ve read the Book of Mormon more than 8 times will admit that they’re still confused about which set of plates is which, and which ones exactly correlate to which parts of the Book of Mormon as we know it today. In order to understand the plate-to-book mapping, I’ve put together a diagram:

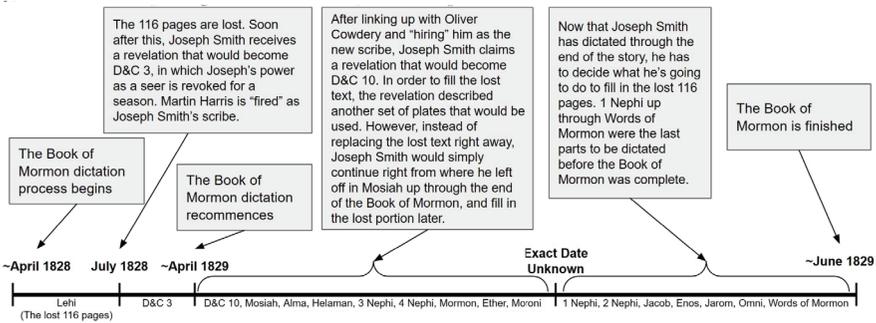


This figure is simplified in a few areas, since the main intent is to show how the plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon fit into the Book of Mormon

as we know it today. There are some more detailed diagrams out there that incorporate the brass plates and the plates of Ether, as well as the sealed portion of the gold plates, but that's not relevant to the main point of this chapter.

When asked about why the different sets of plates had to be so complicated, most LDS members will say that they don't know why it's so confusing, and that it's just something they don't think about very much. When diving deeper into the details behind this, however, we'll find that Joseph Smith's original plan was to keep things relatively simple and straightforward with only one set of plates of Nephi. But in order to adapt to the loss of the 116 pages, he ended up constructing this convoluted plate set narrative in order to explain where he was getting this extra scripture to replace the lost text. And the more time that went on, the more complicated it would become with the small plates being a late addition.

Before getting into the weeds of how Joseph Smith made his plates narrative progressively more complicated as time went on, it's important to know the chronological order in which the different books were dictated, and how that correlates with key events in the timeline of the Book of Mormon's construction. I've put together another diagram to help visualize this:



As far as Joseph Smith's revelations and dictations go, the very first allusion to another set of plates is in D&C 3:19, although it's extremely vague in the details. The first clear mention of a set of plates separate from the golden plates

was in D&C 10, which was given several months later, right as Joseph was getting ready to recommence dictation of the Book of Mormon. Here's the relevant passage:

*38 And now, verily I say unto you, that an account of those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands, is engraven upon the plates of Nephi; 39 Yea, and you remember it was said in those writings that **a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi.** 40 And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi is more particular concerning the things which, in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account— 41 Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, **down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained;** 42 And behold, you shall publish it as the record of Nephi... 44 Behold, they [the golden plates] **have only got a part, or an abridgment of the account of Nephi.** 45 Behold, there are many things engraven upon the plates of Nephi which do throw greater views upon my gospel; therefore, it is wisdom in me that you should **translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi,** and send forth in this work.*

It's important to read this passage carefully, because there are a few notable discrepancies between the way that the plates of Nephi are framed in D&C 10 vs. the way that Joseph Smith described them in the final leg of the dictation process (1 Nephi through Words of Mormon). First and foremost, this D&C passage only mentions one set of plates of Nephi, unlike 1 Nephi chapters 9 and 19 which very clearly make a distinction between two different sets of Nephi plates. What's more, the passage quoted above from D&C 10 even says that Joseph Smith will translate from the large plates of Nephi. This is a big deal

because Joseph would end up changing the narrative such that there became two sets of plates of Nephi, and that the smaller set would be used instead to fill in the lost portion.

There are a few statements in D&C 10 which confirm that God was commanding Joseph Smith to translate from the large plates of Nephi instead of the small plates. The first is that in verse 41, God tells Joseph Smith to stop translating from the plates of Nephi once he reaches the reign of King Benjamin or the portion that he has retained. This gives away the fact that it's referring to the large plates, as they go up through the end of 4 Nephi, whereas there would be no need to tell Joseph Smith to stop at that point if it were the small plates, because the small plates conveniently end right as King Benjamin is about to take over.<sup>[4]</sup> What's even more clear, though, is that verses 39 and 40 refer to these plates of Nephi containing a "more particular" account than the abridgment that Mormon had inserted into the golden plates. We also know from Words of Mormon that Mormon didn't even know about the small plates until after he had abridged the content of the large plates that would become the lost book of Lehi. This point is re-emphasized again in verses 44 and 45 where it states that the golden plates only have an abridgment of the plates of Nephi, and that Joseph should only translate "this first part of the engravings of Nephi."

In this initial scenario, Joseph Smith is setting himself up to eventually translate the replacement text from a set of plates that are more detailed than the golden plates that he originally claimed to be translating from when he dictated the portion that got lost. This is not a desirable situation, as dictating a much more elaborate story raises even more risk of Joseph Smith incorrectly remembering something and developing inconsistencies with the original manuscript. Many people speculate (and I think it's plausible) that Joseph Smith was holding out hope that he'd get those lost pages back at some point, which is part of why he continued right from where he left off in the story instead of immediately starting over again. Once he finished dictating Moroni,

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that's when reality started to set in, he was likely reaching the acceptance stage about those pages being gone for good, and he needed to figure out a way to replace the lost portion in a way that would be practical.

In the portion that Joseph Smith resumed dictating after losing the 116 pages (Mosiah through Moroni), there is no mention made whatsoever about the small plates of Nephi, or about there being two sets of plates. The only references made are simply to “the plates of Nephi” as if there is only one set of plates of Nephi. This points further to the small plates of Nephi being a late addition, as they did not show up at all in Joseph Smith's dictation until 1 Nephi 9. It was at this point that Joseph Smith was shifting the narrative such that the replacement text would actually be more brief than the original, and would have more focus on doctrinal things, as opposed to the lost book of Lehi, which was presumably more history-heavy. This adjustment into a more brief story was Joseph Smith's way of evading the manuscript thief's potential trap, so that he would lower the risk of any contradictions with the lost text by creating it with less detail. The addition of the small plates is even more convenient, as they just so happen to end right when the reign of King Benjamin is about to begin. Then, to bridge the gap between the stories of the different plate sets and alleviate any dissonance that readers might feel with the abrupt change in writing styles, he adds Words of Mormon in the middle to try to explain it all away. In the “Vagueness in the Small Plates” section of this chapter, we'll examine just how detailed the events are in Mosiah through Moroni vs. the filler text in 1 Nephi through Omni, and how that lends further credence to the fact that Joseph Smith was being intentionally vague to cover his tracks.

As was touched upon in the previous section, the entire narrative behind the small plates of Nephi is very contrived, out of place, confusing, and shows to have been added late in the game out of necessity. It's inconsistent with the revelation Joseph Smith claimed in D&C 10, and was used as an obvious

excuse to get around the trap that he suspected Lucy Harris or others may have set for him.

Even though he might have avoided the most obvious trap, another problem arose from the fact that 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon were dictated after the rest of the Book of Mormon. That problem being that the characters at the beginning of the book know how the story is going to end, while the characters in the middle seem pretty clueless about these details. This issue will be the main point of focus in the next two sections of this chapter.

### **The Time of Jesus' Arrival Prophesied, then Forgotten**

When Joseph Smith filled in the lost portion that makes up the beginning of the Book of Mormon, he made a lot of references to events that would take place near the end of the book, presumably to make the different parts of the book feel “interconnected.” One of the important points to address on this topic is that this is an evident symptom of the events from the end of the Book of Mormon still being fresh on Joseph Smith’s mind when dictating the beginning, which points to it being a product of his own creative process. But more importantly, this created a new problem whereby the characters early in the book know what’s going to happen at the end, but this information is somehow forgotten by the characters in the middle of the book. The most obvious example of this phenomenon is when Nephi is told the exact time that Jesus is coming, but Alma and King Benjamin are none the wiser.

In 1 Nephi 19:8, Nephi mentions a prophecy that was given to him saying that Jesus would be coming 600 years exactly from the time that he and his family left Jerusalem:

*And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem.*

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This is a very specific timeframe that Nephi is receiving from this angel. Not only is this a very important prophecy, but given that he wrote this on the small plates, this would have likely been written on the large plates as well. This prophecy would have been codified in scripture and passed down and taught from generation to generation. And yet, key characters later on in the BOM, who should have known about such an important piece of doctrine, aren't aware of it. The most clear example of this disconnect is in Alma 13:25, where the titular character is giving a sermon on the eventual coming of Jesus, leading into this statement:

*And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, **we know not how soon**. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice.*

This statement here from Alma is chronologically later in the Book of Mormon, but was dictated by Joseph Smith before he dictated the specific prophecy about Jesus coming 600 years from the time Lehi and his kin left Jerusalem. This was several years after Alma the Younger was appointed as the chief judge (Mosiah 29:42), and was given “the charge concerning all the affairs of the church.” He had no excuse for being unaware of such a crucial detail written about in his people's scriptures and taught through the generations. This is the type of narrative mistake that would arise if someone was dictating the second half of a story before dictating the first half.

Alma wasn't the only one out of the loop on when exactly Jesus was coming; King Benjamin, who also would have had access to these plates and should have known about this, preached a sermon about the coming of Jesus, but was vague about the details on when that would be happening. The main verse to focus on is Mosiah 3:5:

*For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.*

In this verse here, King Benjamin doesn't show any signs of knowing exactly when Jesus would be coming, he just says "the time cometh, and is not far distant." What exactly King Benjamin meant by "not far distant" is up for interpretation, but what's odd is that this sermon was given about 124 years before Jesus coming, which wouldn't exactly be soon for the people listening, since it would be after they've all died. It seems unlikely that Benjamin would talk in such vague or misleading terms about when Jesus was coming if he had scripture telling him exactly how many years away that event was.

When Joseph Smith started dictating Mosiah, he may have had some of the rest of the story mapped out in his head, but he wouldn't have had it all fleshed out into a tangible story until he finished dictating the later part when Jesus comes. So, while he was dictating, prophets like King Benjamin also wouldn't have known how he was going to end the book. But then, once Joseph Smith starts making the replacement text for the beginning of the story, he knows everything in great detail that happens at the end, and makes all these prophecies. This causes the characters at the beginning to know how the story ends with much greater specificity than the characters later on, even though it's codified in scripture.

This is exactly the kind of mistake that a man would make when having to dictate a story and not be able to go back and make corrections, and to dictate the events in the order that Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon.

Some people would try to reconcile this discrepancy with the argument that the prophets in the days of Benjamin and Alma had so many things to worry about that this would have gotten lost in the shuffle. But this doctrinal detail is not a minor thing. The coming of Jesus, and knowing exactly when he was going to come, was the most important detail of all that would have been passionately taught from generation to generation. You wouldn't just forget something like this.

### **Jesus' Visit to the Nephites Prophesied, then Forgotten**

Continuing further on the topic of Jesus coming, the dictation order also reveals a pattern that shows that Joseph Smith was still working out the details of the savior's visit to the Nephites early on in the dictation process. This is shown through how key characters in Mosiah and Alma know very many granular details of Jesus' life on earth before he even comes, but make no mention of, and seemingly aren't even aware of, the fact that he would end up visiting the Nephites. And yet, Nephi is made aware of this detail back in 1 Nephi, and records it on the small plates, and presumably the large plates as well, which should have been scripture that would have been passed down from generation to generation. This is another area where the dictation order of the books shows a linear pattern, but the chronological order does not.

King Benjamin receives a prophecy from an angel about the coming of Jesus Christ, which he details in Mosiah chapters 3-5. Chapter 3 in particular gives very specific details about how Jesus will have a physical body, work miracles, heal the sick and disabled, cast out demons, suffer and die for all the sins of the world, and rise again on the third day. After those details are provided up through the end of verse 10, Benjamin's proclamation transitions into talking about the atonement, and requiring people to believe in Jesus to be saved. No details are given about Jesus appearing to the Nephites. In

Mosiah chapter 15, Abinadi gives a similar prophecy, talking about Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection with a similar level of detail; and yet again, no mention is made of his eventual visit to the Nephites.

Later on, Alma the Younger retreads a lot of this same water in Alma chapters 4-7, once again describing the coming of Jesus in great minute detail, without any revelation about him coming to the Americas. In fact, in Alma 7:8, he even outright states that he doesn't have any reason to believe that Jesus will come to their place of dwelling during his time on earth:

*Behold, I do not say that he will come among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle; for behold, the Spirit hath not said unto me that this should be the case. Now as to this thing I do not know; but this much I do know, that the Lord God hath power to do all things which are according to his word.*

Alma is saying outright that you shouldn't get your hopes up about Jesus coming to the Americas, because no scripture or revelation has been given to him about it.

It isn't until some years after the passage quoted above that Alma is teaching the Nephites once again in Alma 16:20, and the eventual coming of Jesus to the land of Nephi is talked about as if it's new information:

*And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness.*

In this verse, they're learning that Jesus will come visit their nation, and their reaction of "great joy and gladness" strongly implies that no one there knew about it until that moment when it was preached.

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Subsequent verses make no mention whatsoever of this being knowledge that was previously had but lost through the generations. This information should have been well-known among the Nephites, because it would have been part of their scriptural canon, which Nephi would have recorded centuries earlier.

After Joseph Smith dictated Mosiah up through Jesus' ministry to the Nephites and up through Moroni, he'd start over at the beginning. When he was dictating the beginning, he had the events near the end of the Book of Mormon fresh on his mind, and it shows through the seemingly compulsive manner in which those events are prophesied in 1 Nephi. The main point of interest for this issue is in 1 Nephi 12 where he sees a vision of his people centuries down the road, and sees the iconic events of 3 Nephi playing out where Jesus appears to his people. This was understood by Nephi to be a prophecy of his people, and this would have been recorded on the plates which were the scriptures studied from generation to generation. The fact that this would be new information to the Nephites in Alma 16:20 simply doesn't make sense.

This shows that Joseph Smith was evolving the story to some extent as he dictated it. And then when he started back at the beginning, he knew the story more solidly, and made all kinds of references to the end. At times, he was even quite flashy with how frequently he threw around the details of the end of the story in a seeming attempt to try and make the replacement text fit the ending. But in the process, he left the middle of the story out to dry, making it look disconnected. This inconsistency points to the Book of Mormon being a man-made document due to Joseph Smith having to write the beginning at the end.

## Vagueness in the Small Plates

As has been discussed earlier in the chapter, Joseph Smith tried to evade criticism of his filler content of the lost 116 pages by making the replacement text more vague in the details. And indeed the text from 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon is much more vague in the details of the history than Mosiah through Moroni. The filler text gives very few names and places that aren't pre-existing in the Bible, and even sometimes goes out of its way to avoid giving names of certain characters. But once Mosiah starts, it provides a detailed history of the events, and of the names of the characters in the story. In these instances, there are noticeably different writing styles, but these differences point less to the prospect of multiple authors and more to Joseph Smith trying to cover his tracks when replacing the lost book of Lehi.

First and foremost, only 11 new characters are introduced in the first book of Nephi, most of which are introduced in the first few chapters. After that, no new characters are introduced in 2 Nephi, although plenty of Old Testament characters are referred to by name, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Adam, Eve, Zedekiah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Joseph. We then only get two new names in the book of Jacob (Sherem and Enos), and two more in Jarom (Jarom, Omni). Jarom states that 238 years passed, which means we only get four new names in that extensive time span.

What's really interesting, though, is just how far the book goes to avoid giving names for a lot of the characters in this part of the book. Examples of this practice include:

- **Lehi avoids naming any of his in-laws or grandchildren when giving his final blessing.** In 2 Nephi 4, Lehi brings each of his sons before him, along with their wives and children, but doesn't name any of them. The wording of these statements is oddly round about: "...my father... called the children of Laman, his sons, and his daughters, and

said unto them: Behold, my sons, and my daughters of my first-born... after my father had made an end of speaking... he caused the sons and daughters of Lemuel to be brought before him... he spake unto them, saying: Behold, my sons and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my second son..." (2 Nephi 4:3, 8,9)

- **Nephi married one of Ishmael's daughters, but we're never told her name.** "...I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also, my brethren took of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also Zoram took the eldest daughter of Ishmael to wife." (1 Nephi 16:7)
- **The names of kings are not specified.** "Now Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings." (Jacob 1:9) Later in that same chapter, Jacob continues without naming kings "the people of Nephi, under the reign of the **second king**, began to grow hard in their hearts."

As soon as we get out of the 116 pages, the text tells us the names of all of the kings, characters, and places in great detail. This kicks off immediately with Mosiah 1:1 where it says "... king Benjamin... had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman." It also starts going into greater details about wars and contentions than it did before. As will be touched upon in the next chapter, some proponents of the Book of Mormon will insist that different writing styles in different books is reflective of the possibility of different authors; however, in this case, we can clearly see that this disparity in writing style is brought on by Joseph Smith trying to avoid the possibility of being exposed by Lucy Harris or whoever stole the original manuscript. When hearing about all of the different names that are given in Mosiah onward, some readers may have a knee-jerk reaction of insisting that this shows complexity of the book and that this whole thing is still a really

impressive feat beyond Joseph Smith's capability. I will address this point in chapter 5.

## Joseph Smith Writing Himself into the Book of Mormon

In a blatantly self-aggrandizing move, Joseph Smith wrote himself into the Book of Mormon when dictating the filler text in a seeming attempt to further cement his authority. Nearly the entire third chapter of 2 Nephi is dedicated to prophesying about Joseph Smith and talking him up as if he's one of God's greatest gifts to ever grace the earth. In the context of this chapter, Lehi is speaking to his last-born son, Joseph, and telling him about Joseph of Egypt receiving a prophecy foretelling Joseph Smith. The main verses of interest are 2 Nephi 3:7-12:

*7 Yea, Joseph [of Egypt] truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers. 8 And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work. 9 And he shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel. 10 And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt. 11 But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins—and not to the bringing forth my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them. 12*

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*Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.*

This is obviously referencing Joseph Smith, since it's referring to a "choice seer" in verse 7, and again in verse 11. Then in verse 12, it describes how this seer will eliminate confusion in the church and bring about deeper knowledge of covenants, which is one of the intended selling points of the Book of Mormon. This passage is really self-serving in the way verse 8 says that "I will make him great in mine eyes" and verse 9 where it says "he shall be great like unto Moses."

Another point worth calling out here is the repeated use of the phrase "fruit of my/thy loins" throughout this chapter. That phrase refers to one's descendants who are greatly beloved, although it has a special significance in the King James Bible, which would have probably been the only Bible available to Joseph Smith during his time. The phrase "fruit of my loins" is only ever used once in the KJV Bible, which is in Acts 2:30 where it refers to Jesus being the fruit of God The Father's loins. This phrase, however, is used almost 20 times in the Book of Mormon, all but one of which are in this chapter that goes on about how wonderful Joseph Smith is. This phrase "fruit of my loins" would also be inserted into the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. This may not have been on purpose, but given the cultural context of the KJV Bible in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and given this flagrant use of that phrase, this chapter almost comes across as putting Joseph Smith on the same level as Jesus.

If verses 7-12 weren't clear enough, verse 15 is really on the nose in the way that it lets us know who this seer is:

And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord *shall bring my people unto salvation.*

This is Joseph of Egypt giving this prophecy, talking about Joseph Smith, who was named after his father, Joseph Smith Sr. This was part of the content that was created to fill in the void left by the lost 116 pages, which raised a lot of questions about Joseph Smith's credibility as a prophet. As has been discussed in previous sections, the filler text leaves all kinds of traces of Joseph trying to run damage control and re-establish his authority as the voice of God. This section of the Book of Mormon serves as yet another example, as the fervent manner in which it talks up Joseph Smith almost comes across as desperate and insecure.

If you want to view this through a faithful lens by insisting that God wrote this and not Joseph Smith, you can do that, but you also have to admit that Joseph would have been perfectly capable of coming up with the content of this chapter. You also have to consider just how absurdly self-serving this passage comes across to outsiders, as well as the historical context of this chapter in the dictation process. At the October 2016 General Conference, Craig C. Christensen of the Presidency of the Seventy gave a talk titled "A Choice Seer Will I Raise Up," in which he made the following remarks:

Perhaps the most stunning passage in the Book of Mormon to young Joseph may have been the third chapter of 2 Nephi. This chapter contains an ancient prophecy about a "choice seer" whom the Lord would raise up in the latter days—a seer named Joseph, named after his father. This future prophet would be "esteemed highly" and would

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do a work “of great worth” unto his people. He would “be great like unto Moses” and would be given “power to bring forth [God’s] *word*.” *Consider how Joseph Smith must have felt as he realized that this prophecy was about him!*

This open acknowledgment of Joseph Smith’s prophecy about himself is especially dubious to outsiders, as Elder Christensen doesn’t bother to address the elephant in the room—that this kind of back-dated prophecy is a very easy trick to pull off, and that it’s a tactic commonly used by fraudsters to manipulate people and gain power. It’s especially hard not to cringe at the last part of the excerpt where Elder Christensen says “Consider how Joseph Smith must have felt as he realized that this prophecy was about him!” To give a slightly cheeky response to his rhetorical question, I hypothesize that this is how Joseph Smith felt as he was dictating that passage.



### Citations from Chapter 3

1. For a summary of the dictation order, see Historical Introduction to “Book of Mormon Manuscript Excerpt, circa June 1829 [1 Nephi 2:2b–3:18a],” in *Joseph Smith Papers*, D1:59–60. See also the translation order and dating analysis in Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984).
2. While we don’t know for sure, there’s a consensus among both members and non-members of the LDS church that the content of the lost 116 pages provided a more detailed history of wars, kings, and other events than that of the small plates. The content of the 116 pages, being part of the plates of Mormon, would still have been an abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, but the assumption made by most is that it was still more detailed than the small plates of Nephi. There aren’t any clear historical records that I know of backing this up, but these BOM verses are commonly cited to support this theory by talking about just how detailed the large plates are:
  - **1 Nephi 9:4** – *Upon the other plates [the large plates] should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people...*
  - **1 Nephi 19:1,4** – *...wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those plates... I, Nephi, did make a record upon the other plates, which gives an account, or which gives a greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions of my people.*
  - **2 Nephi 4:14** – *For I, Nephi... had spoken many things... and also my father... many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates.*
  - **2 Nephi 5:33** – *And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates.*

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3. Some time around the release of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, director Joss Whedon made the following remarks when commenting on the behind-the-scenes drama with the studio that resulted in the contrived magic pool scene in the cave that made the final cut: “*With the cave, it really turned into, you know, they pointed a gun at the farm’s head and said, ‘Give us the cave, or we’ll take out the farm.’ In this civilized way. I respect these guys. They’re artists. But, that’s when it got really, really unpleasant. There was a point at which there was no cave, and Thor was just going to leave and come back and say, ‘Oh yeah, I figured something out!’ I was so beaten down at that point, I was like ‘Sure. OK. What movie is this?’*”
4. Words of Mormon 1:3-7 describes how Mormon discovered the small plates, and makes it pretty clear that the small plates end right at the reign of King Benjamin.



## Chapter 4

# Writing Style

Proponents of the Book of Mormon will insist that a close examination of the writing style precludes Joseph Smith as one of the plausible authors. Putting aside the perceived doctrinal depth of the book (which will be examined at length in the next chapter), members and apologists will point to the sentence structure and over all composition as evidence of antiquity and joint authorship. Apologists will insist the book bears the mark of an ancient Hebraic literary form that would have purportedly been outside of Joseph Smith's milieu. They also contend that the different books of the Book of Mormon reflect a variety of different linguistic patterns and narrative techniques, strongly suggesting that there must be multiple authors, and that Joseph Smith can't possibly be one of them.

These lines of argumentation are misguided in their portrayal of the scarcity of Hebraic writing styles in 19th-century literature, their characterization of Joseph Smith's lack of familiarity with these styles, and their assessment of the implications arising from the diverse writing styles found within the Book of Mormon. The Hebraic writing style of the Bible would have been embedded into the culture of Biblical scholarship, even if subconsciously at times, and could have easily influenced the way Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon, especially given his background. Without a doubt, different parts of the Book of Mormon reflect different writing styles, but pointing that out

does nothing to prove that Joseph Smith couldn't have been the sole author. In fact, there are numerous instances, tying back to the fallout surrounding the lost 116 pages, which clearly point to Joseph Smith deliberately changing writing styles to cover his tracks. Despite the attempt at different writing styles, there are other overarching linear patterns throughout the Book of Mormon we can observe which point to Joseph Smith as the sole author, as well as patterns in the original manuscript that reflect mistakes made in the dictation process that shouldn't show up if God was guiding it.

## **Chiasmus**

Chiasmus is a literary or rhetorical style characterized by the arrangement of words, phrases, or ideas in a mirrored or inverted structure. In chiasmus, the order of elements in the first half of a sentence or passage is reversed in the second half in order to create a symmetrical pattern, often enhancing the impact or emphasis of the message. Chiasmus is most well-known as a Hebraic writing style used in the Bible to make memorization and recitation of scripture feel more fluid back when most people couldn't easily write everything down or look things up on their phones. This poetic structure is also found in the Book of Mormon, and some apologists will insist that this strongly points to the book being both an ancient document, and beyond the capability of Joseph Smith.

Many people insisting that chiasmus was outside of Joseph Smith's capability will firstly predicate this assertion on the previously debunked claim that he was an ignorant farm boy. In chapter 1, we discussed how Joseph Smith not only had a decent education, but was very knowledgeable about the Bible and thoroughly immersed himself in Christian culture. His studies and personal instruction from Methodist preachers would have made him fluent in rhetorical styles that would have easily conditioned him to speak chiastically,

whether consciously or subconsciously. Many known works in Joseph Smith's milieu also had chiasmus, including Gilbert Hunt's *The Late War*.

The most crucial point to make, though, is just how remarkably easy it is to compose a chiasm subconsciously or even accidentally due to how loose the criteria are for identifying the matching phrases. Most readers today, when hearing phrases like "poetic style" or "Hebraisms," will assume that a chiasm needs to meet a rigorous set of standards that you'd seldom produce accidentally, like lyrics to a song that rhyme and match syllables. But chiasmus is far more loose in its nature such that it's not bound by the phrases being exactly the same, not bound by the number of words per phrase, and there are no hard and fast rules about how much text there can be in between said phrases. In order to understand this concept of what chiasmus is and how loose it is, a visual example is warranted:

- A We keep **the law** of Moses
- B Look forward unto **Christ** when **law** will be **fulfilled**
- C For this end was the **law given**
- D Wherefore the **law hath become dead** unto us
- E Made alive in **Christ**
- E' Talk, rejoice, preach, and prophecy of **Christ**
- D' Our children may know the **deadness of the law**
- C' Know what end the **law was given**
- B' After the **law** is **fulfilled** in **Christ**
- A' When **the law** ought to be done away

This chiasm above shows the matching phrases or similar ideas presented and repeated in reverse order from 2 Nephi 25:24-27. This exact representation of this chiasm was taken from Dennis Newton's article he wrote for the Interpreter Foundation, which was titled *Nephi's Use of Inverted Parallels*.<sup>[1]</sup> In this article, he openly acknowledges that it's extremely easy to inadvertently create a chiasm

in writing, and that a large portion of the hundreds of chiasms that have been identified in the Book of Mormon could very easily have been coincidental. In light of this, he stipulates that bona fide chiasms must have “a clear literary purpose, have an interconnected beginning and ending, have a complex multi-level chiastic structure that is unlikely to have been generated by chance, and are centered on a climatic passage especially relevant to the author.” The chiasm shown above was one such example that he showcased as meeting these criteria that he set forth.

Even in that more rigorous case, it’s still quite easy to highlight chiastic structure wherever you’re looking to find it. Finding such structure just involves finding two matching parallel words in an expanse of text with no regard for how many words surround said phrase on either side. And in order for the phrase to match, it doesn’t even have to be the exact same phrase, and it can even be an arbitrary set of words, like how in the example above, item B combined the phrases Christ, law, and fulfilled into one idea, and matching it with a similar assortment of phrases later on in the passage. What’s really not being emphasized by most proponents of chiasmus, though, is that in order to make these chiasms look neat and symmetric, they’re cutting out a lot of words from the original text. If you open up your Book of Mormon to 2 Nephi 25:24-27, you’ll find that there are a lot of words left out of the chiasm shown above. If you were to include all of the content of that passage, it wouldn’t look nearly as convincing that Nephi had chiasmus in mind when writing that part, as it would look more like this:

A we keep **the law** of Moses, and  
 B look forward with steadfastness unto **Christ**, until the **law** shall  
 be **fulfilled**.  
 C For, for this end was the **law given**;  
 D wherefore the **law hath become dead** unto us,

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E and we are made alive in **Christ** because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments.

E' And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of **Christ**, and we write according to our prophecies, that

D' our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know **the deadness of the law**; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and

C' know for what end the **law** was **given**.

B' And after the **law** is **fulfilled** in **Christ**,

A' that they need not harden their hearts against him when **the law** ought to be done away.

When you look at the text in its fullness, this supposed chiasm looks less like an intentional pattern by the original author and more like an attempt by modern interpreters to shove a square peg into a round hole. By including the full text, it raises questions about why you would only pick out chiastic structure from the highlighted parts of the text and not any of the omitted parts of the text. The full text showcases the arbitrary and open-ended nature of these chiasms. This practice that Dennis Newton makes in his article of omitting parts of the text to make the chiasm look more neat is not an isolated instance. Alma 36 is often touted as the gold standard for chiasmus, containing 17 ideas presented and then given in reverse order. Once again, large chunks of text are skipped over in order to form this structure, showing how if you really want to find this structure in some writing, you can find it. This is the following passage, with grayed out text to show how much is being ignored:

1 [A] My son, give ear to my **words**; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall [B] **keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.** 2 I would that ye should [C] **do as I have done**, in [D] **remembering the captivity** of our fathers; for [E] they were in **bondage**, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and [F] he surely did **deliver** them in their afflictions. 3 And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that whosoever shall put their [G] **trust** in God shall be [H] **supported** in their **trials**, and their **troubles**, and their **afflictions**, and shall be [I] **lifted up at the last day.** 4 And I would not that ye think that [J] **I know** of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but **of God.** 5 Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been [K] **born of God** I should not have known these things; but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me, not of any worthiness of myself; 6 For [L] I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way. 7 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us. 8 But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel. 9 And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God. 10 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, [M] **neither had I the use of my limbs.** 11 And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and

amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more. **12** But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. **13** Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments. **14** Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that **[N]** the very thought of coming into **the presence of my God** did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. **15** Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds. **16** And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the **[O] pains** of a damned soul. **17** And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was **[P] harrowed up by the memory of my many sins**, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one **[Q] Jesus Christ, a Son of God**, to atone for the sins of the world. **18** Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, **[Q']** I cried within my heart: **O Jesus, thou Son of God**, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. **19** And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was **[P'] harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more**. **20** And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with **[O']** joy as exceeding as was my **pain!** **21** Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy. **22** Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, **[N'] God** sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless

concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and **my soul did long to be there.** **23** But behold, [M'] my **limbs** did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God. **24** Yea, and from that time even until now, [L'] I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. **25** Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors; **26** For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been [K'] **born of God**, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and [J'] **the knowledge which I have is of God.** **27** [I'] **And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions;** yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and [H'] I do put my **trust** in him, and [G'] he will still **deliver** me. **28** And I know that [F'] **he will raise me up at the last day,** to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, [E'] for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of **bondage** and captivity from time to time. **29** Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and [D'] I have always retained in **remembrance their captivity;** yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity. **30** But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to [C'] **know as I do know,** that inasmuch as ye shall [B'] **keep the commandments of God ye shall**

**prosper in the land;** and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. [A'] Now this is according to his **word.**

Similar as in other chiasms, if you glance at the images on the internet people have made showing these isolated or summarized phrases in a symmetrical pattern, it can look really impressive, but when you examine the source material, it raises a whole host of questions as to why some people insist that this exact chiastic structure was intended when writing this passage. The first question arises from looking at all of the text that has been grayed out, noticing just how much is being skipped over, at which point you'd ask, why not form some chiastic structure from all of this text that's being ignored? There are plenty of notable phrases and ideas being conveyed in this grayed out text that could easily be formed into their own chiasms that aren't mentioned here. The phrase "born of God" is used several times in this chapter, why specifically choose those two instances as the intended ideas in the chiasm? The fact that some of these phrases are used so frequently makes it that much easier to form this structure from the text wherever it's most convenient.

What's even more crucial, though, is that when you reconstruct this chiasm from the original text, you may notice a problem arises, which is that not all of these ideas are actually repeated back in perfect reverse order. The phrase [I] "lifted up at the last day" doesn't actually line up with its corresponding phrase. The corresponding phrase later on in the passage is "he will raise me up at the last day" which occurs in [F'], an offset of 3 units. This particular model of Alma 36 was constructed by John Welch, the founder of Book of Mormon Central, and also the man credited as "discovering" chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. This erroneous model of Alma 36 is spread throughout various images put out by Book of Mormon Central where it re-words these phrases into summarized form and re-organizes the structure to make everything look neatly symmetrical. While these images usually provide appropriate indentation

or some type of notation to show that the phrase “raise me up at the last day” is out of chiasmic order, it’s not very conspicuous, and the way that these images from Book of Mormon Central and other sources rearrange the order of these phrases to make it all blend in is very misleading. To the LDS church’s own credit, Book of Mormon Central is not an official church source; the main official church source mentioning chiasmus in Alma 36 is the Book of Mormon Student Manual, in which it avoided this mistake by trimming this phrase out of its purported chiasmic structure and reducing it to 16 supposed phrases instead of 17.<sup>[2]</sup>

Even when being charitable and ignoring the “raise me up at the last day” mistake, many of the phrases claimed as parallels in Alma 36 are very far-reaching. A couple of these phrases warrant special attention:

- L: “I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God” → “I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance.” These statements don’t share any meaningful common words or phrases; the closest thing to a parallelism here is the generic idea that Alma is trying hard to either tear down the church or build it up. While the idea being conveyed here is a potential inverse, this is still very much a stretch as the two thoughts are expressed with very different wording that don’t really jump out as matching.
- N: “the very thought of coming into **the presence of my God** did rack my soul with in expressible horror.” → “**God** sitting upon his throne, surrounded with number less concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and **my soul did long to be there.**” Similar to the previous one, there aren’t any clear common phrases here (unless you count “God,” which is just too generic), so it’s once again trying to loosely connect the ideas being presented, which is very open-ended.

When you operate with criteria this loose for chiasmus, then you can find it just about anywhere. The Book of Mormon contains about 273,725 words, so it's not unlikely that you're going to be able to find some passages in there that you can manipulate to look like it's formed some huge chiasm. Chiasmus is the most frequently referenced Hebraism within Book of Mormon discourse, but apologists may also bring up other types of Hebraisms that they will assert as evidence of the book's Hebrew origin. These Hebraisms may include synonymous parallelisms, gradation, duplication, repetitive conjunctions, if/and conditionals, repetitive resumption, simile curses, and various other literary styles which are frequently found in the Bible. When you hear these fancy terms for other Hebraic writing styles, you might think to yourself "Well golly, that sounds like there was a lot of intentional Hebrew writing style in the Book of Mormon that reflects ancient culture." But look up any one of these aforementioned patterns, and when you examine individual instances of these Hebraic patterns, you will then say to yourself "Oh, well yeah, that's just common Biblical writing style that you'd naturally pick up if you memorize and meditate on those passages, I didn't know there was a specific term for that particular writing pattern."

Back in Joseph Smith's time, it was very common to use King James Bible English when speaking or writing in order to sound sacred and authoritative, so the appearance of these Hebraisms should come as no surprise, and do nothing to prove the Book of Mormon as an ancient text. To re-iterate the point from earlier, it was mentioned in chapter 1 that Joseph Smith received instruction as a lay exhorter in the Methodist church. Among other things, this instruction would have involved memorization of large portions of the Bible, as well as learning to mimic the literary style of the Bible while speaking. These pseudo-chiastic patterns that we've examined in the Book of Mormon don't offer any concrete proof that the text was anything too profound, nor does it give any strong indication that composing such passages would have been beyond Joseph Smith's capability.

## Stylometric Analysis

A variety of studies have been performed over the years examining the linguistic patterns of the Book of Mormon and attempting to identify a variety of different writing styles. This method of textual analysis is known as stylometry, or stylometric analysis. These studies have been used in an attempt to insist that neither Joseph Smith nor any of his associates could possibly be authors of the Book of Mormon, and that it had to be numerous different authors that contributed to the book. Both of these lines of argumentation are deeply flawed in both the premises used to assert these conclusions, as well as the inconclusive nature of stylometry as a scientific discipline.

The first main assertion made in these studies is that the writing style of the Book of Mormon does not match with that of Joseph Smith or any of his associates, based off of the extant letters and journal entries written by Joseph and others. This argument is based off of the faulty assumption that Joseph Smith would have used the same writing style for his letters and journal entries as he would use when composing a Bible fan fiction. When penning a letter to someone or journaling his own personal thoughts, he'd obviously project his own personality and natural style, because that's the whole idea.

But when composing a document that he seeks to assert as scripture from God, it's no wonder that Joseph would change his compositional style to make it sound like it wasn't originally written by him. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, it was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to mimic the writing style of the King James Bible when you wanted to make your document sound sacred or authoritative, and following this trope in the dictation process of the Book of Mormon would have been a no-brainer for Joseph Smith.

The other overarching assertion throughout these studies is that the Book of Mormon reflects a variety of different writing styles which point to numerous different authors. This argument is a bit more palpable with its accurate premise that the writing style varies throughout different parts of the

book, but the oft-proposed corollary that there couldn't have possibly been one sole author is a highly fallacious one. It is not at all beyond human capability to mimic different writing styles when writing or dictating a book, especially for a talented storyteller like Joseph Smith who spent the evenings around the fire telling his family stories with unique places and characters. At best, the stylometric analyses conducted over the years have potentially identified different writing styles between different parts of the Book of Mormon that faithful members attribute to different authors. Even being as charitable as possible to the findings of the studies that favor this conclusion, this does not preclude the possibility that Joseph Smith purposefully adjusted his dictatorial style as the story moved into different purported authors, thus producing these stylistic discrepancies. In the previous chapter, we examined how Joseph Smith purposefully adjusted his writing style when filling in the lost 116 pages, so it should come as no surprise that the writing style isn't consistent.

In 2012, Matthew Roper and others published a journal article by the title of *Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon: A Short History*, which summarized the findings of the five most notable studies published between 1980 and 2011. While the article was written by faithful members of the LDS church with the tone of the article reflecting such, it also included a disclaimer of sorts in a section near the beginning which was titled "Limitations of Stylometry." In this section, the authors admit that writing style is not immutable and clearly distinct to individual people like fingerprints and DNA, that the results of these studies can at times be inconsistent, and that these studies are ultimately just dealing with probabilities and not anything conclusive.<sup>[3]</sup>

Moreover, it's important to remember that stylometry is an ever evolving scientific discipline, just like archaeology, DNA analysis, and other scientific disciplines that critics often use to try to discredit the Book of Mormon. Not only that, but the study of stylometry by its very nature is far less reliable than other scientific disciplines when it comes to proving anything of significance.

Given the loose nature of stylometry, these word-print studies give no strong indication that coming up with the Book of Mormon would have been beyond Joseph Smith's capability.

## **Original Manuscript**

It is not uncommon knowledge that the original manuscript underwent some revisions before the Book of Mormon would be published, although the depth of these revisions is often understated, and the ramifications thereof are paid little attention. The original manuscript contained a lot of mistakes, sloppy wording, and folksy language that greatly reflects Joseph Smith's time period. The supposed smoothness of the Book of Mormon's wording is often used as one of the selling points for its divinity, but examination of the raw source material reveals that Joseph Smith's dictation is not nearly as impressive as the final print of the book would lead you to believe.

In some instances, the original manuscript from Joseph Smith's dictation looks nothing like the Book of Mormon as we know it today due to how much has been changed. Here are some instances in which the original manuscript reflects the backcountry way of talking in Joseph Smith's time:

- "therefore I have wrote this epistle" (3 Nephi 3:5)
- "Adam and Eve, which was our first parents" (1 Nephi 5:11)
- "and this he done that he might subject them to him" (Alma 2:10)
- "that they did not fight against God no more" (Alma 23:7)
- "they done all these things" (Ether 9:29)
- "when they had arriven to the promised land" (Mosiah 10:15)
- "and also much horses" (Enos 1:21)
- "as I was a going thither" (Alma 10:8)
- "and this shall be your language in them days" (Helaman 13:37)

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- “they were not sufficeentle strong to meet them” (Alma 56:23)
- “whosoever will com may come & partak of the waters of life” (Alma 42:27)
- “their yuarrelings & their plunders there idoleti and their whoardoms” (Alma 50:21)
- “i also beheld a Strait and mrrrough path which came” (1 Nephi 8:20)
- “after that I had truededor the space for menny hours” (1 Nephi 8:8)

(R. Skousen, Grammatical-variation, [interpreterfoundation.org](http://interpreterfoundation.org), R. Skousen Skousen, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text*, FARMS).

The refinement of these passages was among the roughly 100,000 revisions that were made during the editing process before the Book of Mormon was published. Proponents of the Book of Mormon will emphasize that most of the changes made from the original manuscript were to add punctuation and correct spelling mistakes, which is true, and could potentially be attributed to mistakes made by Oliver Cowdery instead of Joseph Smith. But much of the folksy language is pretty hard to pin on Cowdery, and is most likely his best attempt at reflecting the words spoken by Smith during the dictation process. This needs to be taken into consideration when asking the question of whether or not Joseph Smith could have come up with the Book of Mormon, because using the final print text of the book is a misrepresentation of what actually went on in the dictation process.

It’s also worth noting that of the five main stylometric studies referenced in the previous section, only two of them gave any clear indication that they were using the original manuscript text available for their analysis. Those two being the study by David Holmes in 1985<sup>[4]</sup> and the study by John Hilton in 1990.<sup>[5]</sup> The Holmes study concluded it was likely that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon.

The other studies didn't give any clear indication on if they were using the original manuscript text, or the more polished printed text that would have been farther removed from Joseph Smith's original dictation. It goes without saying, if you're using the final printed text of the Book of Mormon instead of the original manuscript where applicable, that's going to make your test results less reliable.

On a minor tangent from the main point of trying to answer the question of "Could Joseph Smith have written it?" it's worth pointing out that some of the prominent eyewitness accounts about the dictation process that have been cited by prophets are incompatible with this concept of such spelling and grammar mistakes being in the manuscript, let alone such folksy language. David Whitmer claimed that God showed Joseph Smith the exact words when looking into his hat, and that those same words wouldn't disappear until Oliver Cowdery had correctly written down the words he spoke. This very account would then be referenced by Russel M. Nelson in a talk he gave in 1993.<sup>[6]</sup> In a second-hand account, Oliver B. Huntington talked about meeting and talking with Joseph F. Smith at a quarterly stake conference in 1881, in which he stated in no uncertain terms that every single word of the Book of Mormon was given by God, and that Joseph Smith did not alter the words to reflect his own style when dictating.<sup>[7]</sup> Some LDS members are aware of these types of accounts which point strongly to a "tight" translation of the Book of Mormon instead of a "loose" translation, but it's worth mentioning at this juncture for those reading who may be unaware.

## **Mistakes During Dictation**

While most of the overt syntactical errors in the original manuscript were fixed before printing the Book of Mormon, there are a variety of oddly worded statements in the final text that reflect mistakes made by Joseph Smith during

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dictation. There are numerous passages which showcase that Joseph misspoke while dictating, and then corrected himself by clarifying that he meant to say something else. Here are some of the most notable instances of this phenomenon:

- **Mosiah 16:6** And now if Christ had not come into the world [Mistake], speaking of things to come as though they had already come [Correction], there could have been no redemption.
- **Helaman 12:15** And thus, according to his word the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still [Mistake]; yea, and behold, this is so; for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun.
- **Mosiah 7:8** And it came to pass when they had been in prison two days they were again brought before the king, and their bands were loosed; and they stood before the king, and were permitted [Mistake], or rather commanded [Correction], that they should answer the questions which he should ask them.
- **Alma 43:38** ...they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body [Mistake], or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites [Correction]...
- **Alma 24:19** ...and thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace [Mistake], or they buried the weapons of war, for peace. [Correction]

If most of these verses don't immediately jump out at you as reflecting mistakes during dictation, then just slow down, take some time to examine each of these passages one at a time, and re-read them a few times in their original context, and the mid-sentence corrections will become easier to see. If the Book of Mormon is true, then it seems highly unlikely that Mormon would have written his abridgment with such roundabout phraseology. And it seems even more unlikely that God would provide an English translation

with these on-the-fly verbal corrections. This style is highly reflective of the kinds of mistakes that one can make while speaking, which points to Joseph Smith dictating the content of the Book of Mormon extemporaneously, and making occasional mistakes as he does so.

Oliver Cowdery had the expectation that Joseph Smith was getting the words directly from God, so it would have given the act away if he said anything like “Whoops, that’s not what I meant to say. Cross that out, Oliver, let me restart that part.” Instead, he had to roll with what he said, and act like his on-the-fly corrections are a part of the original text.

## **Wherefore and Therefore**

In the previous sections, I’ve addressed claims about patterns that allegedly point to numerous different authors of the Book of Mormon, and countered with noticeable patterns in the manuscript and final text that point away from this. But in this final section of this chapter, I’d like to point out a clear linear pattern present throughout the entire Book of Mormon which points directly to one single author. And that is the overarching pattern of the words “therefore” and “wherefore” as transitional words in the text. When Joseph Smith began the dictation process of the Book of Mormon, he primarily used the word “therefore” as a transitional phrase, but over time, evolved his style to use the phrase “wherefore” in its place. This linear pattern can be seen by looking at the dictation order of the books (as discussed in the previous chapter) and looking at the rate of usage of each of these words. This is further bolstered by lining it up with the D&C revelations that Joseph Smith was receiving during that same time. Here’s a table showing the usages of these phrases in the books of the Book of Mormon, as well as the D&C revelations that were given during that time frame:

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BOM	“Therefore”	“Wherefore”		D&C	“Therefore”	“Wherefore”
Mosiah	123	1		Section 3	2	0
Alma	286	3		Section 4	2	0
Helaman	63	0		Section 5	0	0
3 Nephi	98	3		Section 6	8	0
4 Nephi	5	0		Section 7	1	0
Mormon	22	0		Section 8	4	0
Ether	24	63		Section 9	2	0
Title Page	0	2		Section 10	11	0
Moroni	0	38		Section 11	4	0
1 Nephi	13	98		Section 12	4	0
2 Nephi	28	138		Section 14	3	1
Jacob	1	52		Section 15	0	0
Enos	0	6		Section 16	0	0
Jarom	0	3		Section 17	0	1
Omni	0	6		Section 18	0	12
W of M	0	4		Section 19	1	7

We don't know for sure when each of these books were dictated, but we know that the dictation began for Mosiah very soon after D&C 10 was written, and that Words of Mormon was dictated around the time that D&C 19 was given. In the first several books that were dictated, we see that Joseph Smith used the phrase “therefore” as a transitional phrase, and then changes his style part way through Ether, and then continuing this up through Moroni. Then, when he starts back again at 1 Nephi, he continues with this style of mostly using “wherefore” instead of “therefore.” Even more interestingly, a similar pattern emerges when looking at the trends in D&C, where Joseph Smith makes a similar transition when dictating D&C 17. This all points to Joseph Smith having a certain style of using words that carried over into both the

text of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. This information was originally discovered and presented by Brent Metcalfe, who was a faithful member of the church when he published this information in his book *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*. However, as a result of publishing this information, he got excommunicated.

You wouldn't notice this pattern if you just read the Book of Mormon in the order in which the books are arranged in its publication, but looking at this when arranging the books into the order in which they were dictated, we see Joseph Smith's fingerprints in the writing style. 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon are supposedly written on a different set of plates by a different author, and should theoretically have a different writing style. And yet, we see this writing habit, which developed in Ether, carry over into books which were said to be written by different people.

There is some debate within LDS scholarly circles on whether Joseph Smith received all of the words directly from God, or if he was a co-author of the Book of Mormon by projecting his own style into the text at times. This is known as the debate over a "tight" vs. "loose" translation of the Book of Mormon. It's important to note that taking a stance one way or the other creates a different set of problems in each scenario. If you're going to insist upon a "tight" translation of the BOM, then this raises a whole host of issues when looking at the many revisions made from the original manuscript, the evident mistakes made during dictation which show up in the final text, and the clear linear pattern in Joseph Smith's usage of the terms "therefore" and "wherefore." On the other hand, if you're going to lean into the idea of a "loose" translation of the Book of Mormon wherein Joseph Smith himself influenced the text in some capacity, then, first and foremost, you're contradicting numerous prophets, as was mentioned in the "Original Manuscript" section.<sup>[6][7]</sup> But in addition, this muddies the waters at best if you want to try to make the case that Hebraisms and stylometry point away from Joseph Smith being a plausible author of the Book of Mormon. Either way, a close examination of

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the writing style of the Book of Mormon gives no clear indication that Joseph Smith couldn't have written it; on the contrary, a deep dive shows traces of a text that was more likely man-made than God-delivered.

## Citations from Chapter 4

1. Dennis Newton, *Nephi's Use of Inverted Parallels*, Interpreter Foundation, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-use-of-inverted-parallels/>
2. *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Chapter 31, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-31-alma-36-39?lang=eng>
3. Roper, Matthew, et al. "Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon: A Short History." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* Vol. 21, 2012, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol21/iss1/4/>, in the section "Limitations of Stylometry," the following summary is given on the limited utility of stylometry in trying to prove authorship:

*Stylometry is a useful tool in authorship attribution, but several limitations are important to keep in mind when interpreting the results of a stylometric analysis. Although stylometry is sometimes referred to as wordprint analysis (implying that it is a linguistic equivalent to fingerprint analysis), it does not have the same identifying capability. The description of stylometry as verbal DNA is an even less applicable overstatement. With stylometrics there is no way to perform population studies to determine the general prevalence of word-use patterns. Consequently, all probability assessments in stylometrics are relative only to the specific authors and the texts included in the study.*

*Although a person's fingerprint and DNA are unchangeably unique to that person, a writer is at liberty to adapt his or her style to a particular topic, audience, and genre; to use artistic license to try new styles or even imitate others' styles; and to modify his or her own style over time as writing skills increase or falter. Shakespeare, for example, was famously diverse in his writing style—an ability that is one of the hallmarks of a great author*

*and also one of the things that makes stylometry a challenging methodology to apply successfully.*

*Further, writing style is not singularly specific to a person. Stylometry can assess the similarity of writing styles among authors, but it cannot prove personal identification of an author. Not only is there variation in an author's word-use patterns, but authors can write sufficiently unlike themselves and sufficiently like each other at times that there are not clear boundaries between them, leaving fuzzy areas where their styles can overlap. So even though an author's style may be distinctive, it is not distinct enough to be considered unique to that author to the exclusion of all other authors in the world.*

*Stylometric characteristics can provide a general comparative description of an author's style, but the writing style exhibited in a text is an indirect and uncertain measure of an author's identity. Authorial style is indistinct enough that one can say only, "Based on these style characteristics, this text could have been written by author X, and it was more likely written by author X than by author Y." Thus, stylometry can assess the probability of similar writing styles among texts, but that is not the same as the probability of authorship of those texts. Stylometry is only one source of evidence to support a claim of possible authorship. Other evidence—such as historical and biographical evidence—becomes essential. In the context of what stylometry is and what it is not, let us now consider the applications of the stylometric analyses that have been made regarding the question of authorship of the Book of Mormon.*

4. See David I. Holmes, "A Stylometric Analysis of Mormon Scripture and Related Texts," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A (Statistics in Society)* 155, no. 1 (1992): 91–120.
5. See John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 225–253.
6. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, Richmond, MO.: n.p., 1887, p. 12. *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.***

This quote was even cited by Russel M. Nelson in a talk he gave, which would appear in the July 1993 edition of *Ensign* magazine in a section titled “A Treasured Testament.” While the *Ensign* magazine issue is still available on the church’s website, it appears to have yanked this particular section from its website, as clicking the link to that section doesn’t work anymore. Anecdotally, I remember being able to access that part of the website some time around October or November 2022, but as of the time of writing this chapter in July 2023, the link doesn’t work anymore.

7. Journal of Oliver B. Huntington, p. 168 of typed copy at Utah State Historical Society: *Saturday, Feb. 25, 1881, I went to Provo to a quarterly Stake Conference. Heard Joseph F Smith describe the manner of translating the Book of Mormon. [...] Joseph did not render the writing on the gold plates into the English language in his own style of language as many people believe, but every word and every letter was given to him by the gift and power of God. [...] The Lord caused each word spelled as it is in the book to appear on the stones in short sentences or words, and when Joseph had uttered the sentence or word before him and the scribe had written it properly, that sentence would disappear as usual.*

## Chapter 5

# Complexity

Some of the most common approaches LDS members will take when making a case for the Book of Mormon are to assert its divinity by claiming: complexity of its narrative, timeless truths and poetic imagery in its doctrinal teachings, and an inspiring and uplifting testament to Jesus Christ embedded in every single page. Composing all of the names, places, and events in the history of the book are such an impressive feat to accomplish that it's just unreasonable to assume Joseph Smith could have done it, members will assert. Moreover, members will insist that the sheer level of wisdom and thought-provoking imagery in the doctrines that it teaches are so profound in their substance that it's not only absurd to attribute Joseph Smith as the mastermind, but it's utterly preposterous to even suggest that anyone other than God could have written it.

My first counter-argument is that most of these talking points lean heavily into the false narrative that Joseph Smith was an ignorant farmboy who could barely even write a sentence. With an awareness of the topics discussed in the first two chapters—Joseph Smith's education, proclivity for story-telling, in-depth Bible knowledge, and surrounding influences—these arguments significantly diminish in force. Nonetheless, it is worth delving further into this specific topic by more deeply analyzing what it really was that Joseph Smith dictated, and demonstrating that it's not nearly as impressive or implausible as LDS members will frame it.

Joseph Smith didn't need to keep track of very many names or places like some people suggest; in the course of his dictation, he rarely made any references back to most of these names, which enabled him to just rattle off a lot of names and then forget about them. As we looked at in chapter 2, Lehi's vision was very heavily influenced by a dream that Joseph Smith Sr. had when Joseph Jr. was a small child, which he then re-purposed into the Book of Mormon. Most of the other highly revered passages of doctrinal teachings in the Book of Mormon follow a somewhat tangential pattern, whereby they're simply Bible teachings re-imagined with Joseph Smith's own distinct creative touch. By exploring this re-imagining of Biblical teachings, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Joseph Smith shaped the book, and challenge the notion that the Book of Mormon is beyond human authorship.

## **Names Galore**

When asserting the complexity of the Book of Mormon, one of the first talking points LDS members will use is that the book contains such an abundance of unique names and places that Joseph Smith simply couldn't have come up with them and kept track of it all. First off, this talking point significantly diminishes in force when you consider Joseph Smith's creative story-telling ability that was discussed in the first chapter. But more importantly, using the total quantity of names in the book as an argument for complexity is very misleading, as most of these names are scarcely ever referenced at any time later in the book. Not only that, but a large portion of these names aren't unique to the Book of Mormon, and many more of them are very similar to names already created before the book was dictated.

To illustrate the scarcity of names that extend through any sizable portion of the Book of Mormon in their usage, here's a list of names and their frequency of use:

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- Nephi 2,788
- Helaman 594
- Teancum 43
- Gadianton 30
- Jarom 20 (only mentioned in Jarom and Omni 1:1)
- Anti-nephi-lehi 11 (only mentioned in Alma 24, 25, 27, and 43)
- Gidgiddoni 10 (all 10 mentions between 3 Nephi chapters 3-6)
- Lehi-nephi 7 (all mentions in Mosiah 7 and 9)
- Amnigaddah 4 (only mentioned in Ether 1 and Ether 10)
- Muloki 2 (mentioned in Alma 20 and 21)
- Moriancumer 1
- Mathonihah 1
- Ishmaelitish 1
- Isabel 1
- Gadiomnah 1
- Gadiandi 1
- Hagoth 1
- Cumenihah 1
- Ammonihahites 1
- Abish 1

These numbers were taken from a page that gives a frequency count of all of the words in the Book of Mormon,<sup>[1]</sup> and this particular section of names is taken from the LDS Discussions article, *How it was Composed*.<sup>[2]</sup> This list is not comprehensive, but it is a representative snapshot of the fact that only a handful of names are referenced later on in the book in any sizable capacity. As a result, Joseph Smith could just forget about most of these names as the narrative progressed, move onto new characters, and just focus on a small set of names and places at any given time. Notable works like *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* call back later to secondary and tertiary characters that

have been established, but the Book of Mormon instead follows a pattern whereby unique names are briefly used and then forgotten.

In addition to the minimal amount of memorization work involved in these names, many of them weren't even original. Many of the names in the Book of Mormon already existed in the Bible (albeit, sometimes lesser-known Bible characters), and some of them (such as Nephi) were pre-existing in the Apocrypha.<sup>[3]</sup> Many of them may also have been derived from ancient names that were known in Joseph Smith's time. In 1827 (just a few years before the BOM was dictated), Charles Anthon compiled a list of ancient names, many of which bear a striking resemblance to the names in the Book of Mormon:

- Morini → Moroni
- Gaditanum → Gadianton
- Marmarion → Morianton
- Zamora → Zarahemla
- Nephrites → Nephites
- Egyptus → Egyptus (Book of Abraham)
- Corinthium → Coriantumr
- Teanum → Teancum (Surrounded by 'c' names 'Sidicinum' and 'Campania')
- Memnon → Mormon (Memnon was a war hero who led 10,000 men to battle in the Trojan war and won, died in a subsequent war, and was known as a writer and inventor of the alphabet)

It's important to note that Anthon was someone Joseph Smith knew, so much so that he sent Martin Harris to consult with him due to his expertise on ancient languages. While this explanation doesn't prove exactly where Joseph Smith got all of these names, it does show that many of these names were already in circulation and known by people in his time. Most importantly, it dispels the

myth perpetuated by many LDS members that these were unique and original names that had otherwise been lost to time.

The first chapter in the book of Ether contains a genealogical list of 30 different kings who are then referenced in reverse order over the course of the rest of Ether. I'll grant that this is impressive, but most things like this aren't all that difficult to pull off when you have sufficient time to prepare in advance with notes or memorization. Some LDS members really like to fling this passage around like it's some amazing feat that Joseph Smith probably wouldn't have been able to do without God's direct guidance, but it's really not all that unlikely when you consider how much time Joseph Smith had to plan this story in advance, and the variety of oration techniques he developed during his lay preaching and family home evening story telling. Some members will also try to rule out any possibility that Joseph Smith referenced any notes or books during the dictation process, but the evidence does not support this assertion, as we'll examine in the next chapter. Just to name another possibility, Joseph could have simply written those names all down and memorized them ahead of time, or possibly even glanced at them while dictating. We know that he did a lot of planning of this story ahead of time, so planning this list in advance isn't very far-fetched.

While we're on the topic of names, it's worth briefly mentioning the whole controversy surrounding the name Alma. In the far reaches of antiquated anti-Mormon literature, some people criticize the Book of Mormon for attributing the name Alma to a man, which runs contrary to modern western culture in which that is a female name. I've read plenty of anti-Mormon literature, and I can't say I've come across anything recent that makes this criticism. Anecdotally, the only times I've ever heard this point brought up is in LDS apologetics where it's implied that critics are still making this accusation. In any case, the apologist will correctly point to a discovery which revealed that Alma was indeed a name given to men in ancient Semitic culture, consistent with the Book of Mormon.

Apologists will likely insist that this vindicates Joseph Smith, as he would have normally made the same assumption most of us would about Alma being a woman's name, so doing the opposite serves as evidence of the Book of Mormon's antiquity. What apologists will usually neglect to mention, though, is that Alma was sometimes known as a man's name in Joseph Smith's time,<sup>[4]</sup> which would have made him naturally operate with that mindset when dictating the Book of Mormon. This undercuts the entire premise behind the defense over the name Alma serving as proof of the book being an ancient text.

## **Consistent Geography**

Some LDS members have been known to bring up the complex and ostensibly consistent geography of the Book of Mormon as evidence for it being a legitimate document. Moreover, what can seem really convincing on the surface is that some apologists have pointed out that cities and landmarks all stay where they are supposed to be in relation to each other, within the Book of Mormon narrative. Some scholars have attempted to spin this as a huge deal by showing how all of these locations can be mapped to certain geographical areas on the earth. What's so misleading about this argument, though, is that this model of "landmarks relative to each other" is very open-ended and can easily be stretched to fit a variety of different locations on the earth. In fact, there isn't even consistent agreement among LDS apologists on where the events of the Book of Mormon took place.

Some LDS members hold to "the Mesoamerican model," also sometimes called "the limited geography theory," which puts the events of the Book of Mormon mostly in Central America.

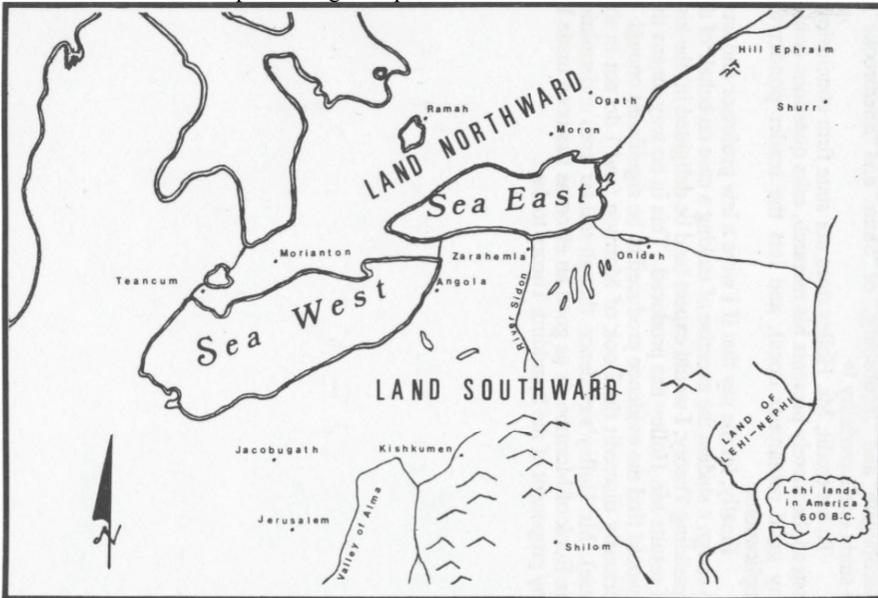
Organizations supporting this theory include FairLatterDaySaints, The Maxwell Institute, and Book of Mormon Central. On the other hand, many LDS members believe that the events of the Book of Mormon took place in

North America. This theory is known as “the Heartland Model,” and is taught by Book of Mormon Evidence and TruthSeekers Foundation. The church officially takes no stance on the geography of the Book of Mormon, and for good reason, because it’s highly speculative, and members of the church who care about this issue are pretty heavily divided.

To further illustrate just how open-ended these landmarks are, Vernal Holly constructed a model with these same BOM landmarks that fit the New York area where Joseph Smith grew up. Here’s a map showing the general New York area as we know it today:



And here’s Vernal Holley’s proposed model for how the Book of Mormon could have taken place in the New York area where Joseph Smith grew up:



Trying to assert landmark consistency and geographical realism is a very flimsy argument when the details provided are so vague in nature that they can be stretched to a plethora of different scenarios.

### **Narrative Consistencies**

Some Book of Mormon proponents are eager to bring up the numerous timelines and story threads Joseph Smith would have had to keep track of, and cast light on the consistencies in order to assert complexity. Once again, this is not outside of the capability of a talented storyteller like Joseph Smith, especially when we have reason to believe that he had been planning this story for years. Many novelists have accomplished similar or even more impressive feats with their own creative world-building; apologists will often talk like Joseph Smith is the only person who's ever done something like this, but this is far from the reality.

## HOW THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS WRITTEN

You're likely to hear apologists point out that Joseph Smith managed to keep multiple timelines from three different migrations consistent, keep the dates consistent with the ages of the characters, and include numerous flashbacks that are all consistent with each other and the main story-line. On numerous occasions, Book of Mormon prophets will make promises or mention details that are fulfilled or consistently referenced later on in the text. One example is in Alma 35:13 where a commencing war is described between the Nephites and Lamanites in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the judges, but the author holds off on this narrative for a time, then picks back up on it 17 pages later in Alma 43:3. In Mosiah 11:12, a tower is described as being near a temple and overlooking the land of Shemlon, which was possessed by the Lamanites. 15 pages later in Mosiah 19:5-6, this same tower is referenced, once again mentioning the nearby temple and Lamanite-possessed Shemlon.

Some apologists will acknowledge that similar world-building and story-telling has been done by novelists throughout the years, but insist that there are certain factors that make Joseph Smith's execution uniquely impressive. Given that Joseph had direct access to his manuscripts, he could easily reference back to any portion that had already been dictated (sans the lost 116 pages) in order to refresh his memory when the time came to revisit an earlier story thread. Some LDS members will insist that Joseph Smith didn't reference back at the manuscripts during the dictation process, which we will address in the next chapter. Suffice to say, Joseph Smith had all the same tools and techniques at his disposal that any other storyteller would.

My main problem with all of these talking points about names, places, narrative complexity, and consistency, is that they all amount to a nebulous non-argument. One major point that usually isn't stated explicitly but is often implied here is that the Book of Mormon contains no narrative inconsistencies. If you're going to make or at least imply such a bold claim as the Book of Mormon being internally consistent, then pointing out these cherry-picked

consistencies is not very useful when it only takes one counterexample elsewhere for your whole premise to fall apart. Recall from chapter 3 that numerous plot holes arose in the Book of Mormon as a result of Joseph Smith trying to maneuver around the loss of the 116 pages. Acknowledging those narrative disconnects pretty much renders this whole point moot.

### **Joseph Smith's Bible Knowledge, Revisited**

In chapter 1, I went over Joseph Smith's education, which included in-depth study and instruction on the Bible, which prepared him on many levels for his future in founding the LDS church. As I transition into the second half of this chapter which focuses on some of the most noteworthy sections of the Book of Mormon credited for providing members with spiritual enlightenment and instruction, it's worth revisiting Joseph's Biblical education in order to showcase how he could have come up with these beloved passages. Many of the Book of Mormon's doctrinal morsels are noticeably derived from sermons, parables, and patterns scattered throughout the Bible that would have been incorporated into the teachings to which Joseph Smith was exposed.

The most obvious catalyst for Joseph Smith's in-depth study was his time spent in the probationary 6-month membership class with the Methodist church where he received personal training on being a lay exhorter. In this training, Joseph Smith, along with all preachers in that time period and beyond, was taught to treasure up the word of God through study and preparation, in order to fill his mind with material from which the Holy Spirit may draw. This theme remained constant throughout all of the denominations that Joseph Smith visited, but the Methodist approach to this concept in particular sheds light on the extent to which Joseph Smith would have learned to live and breathe the scriptures in a way that would equip him to come up with his own similar material.

## HOW THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS WRITTEN

These lay preaching internships took many of their cues from the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, who strongly advocated for a rigorous regimen of study, meditation, and preparation for developing and maintaining one's oratorical skills and sharpness of mind. Wesley himself even edited and published a 50-volume series titled *Christian Library*, which he intended for preachers to read through in order to gain a comprehensive background in Christian history and theology.<sup>[6]</sup> While not every preacher read every single volume all the way through, the prevalence of regular in-depth scripture study, meditation, and prayer was extensively pronounced among Methodist preachers.<sup>[7]</sup>

Apart from John Wesley's personal advocacy for in-depth reading, another prevalent source of instruction for Methodist preachers was *A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (1787). This manual instructed preachers to create a diverse catalog of knowledge on things both sacred and secular, so that they would be able to readily adapt to the needs of their audiences. This manual's stance on reading was very clear when it said "Read the most useful Books, and that regularly and constantly." It insisted that preachers spend an hour each morning and evening reading, and on days when they weren't working or traveling, to spend large chunks of their day reading and studying the scriptures and other instructional books.<sup>[8]</sup> If Joseph Smith wasn't already in such a habit, his membership class and instruction as a lay preacher would have immersed him in this dedicated culture of rigorous scripture study and systematic self-improvement.

Obviously, the Methodists were not the only ones strongly encouraging in-depth scripture study, but their training material gives the clearest snapshot of the training that Joseph Smith would have underwent as a lay preacher. Along with various other denominations that trained up their preachers, Joseph Smith's training would have involved continuous systematic study of the scriptures, note-taking, and memorization. Building upon this, young Methodist preachers were instructed to read through the Bible and make note

of certain areas they felt they had sufficient light and knowledge on which they could preach.<sup>[9]</sup> After identifying these possible sermon texts, they would consider their own ability to address these texts sufficiently, and create a list of relevant scriptures and topics to reference in the future.

We can't know for sure which exact resources and practices Joseph Smith followed in his scriptural studies, but we can reasonably infer that he had a well-rounded knowledge base of the Bible and commendable oratorical skills which he applied in speeches and sermons that resonated with the audience of his day. It may not be immediately obvious at a glance, but nearly all of the beloved story lines, teachings, sermons, and parables from the Book of Mormon draw heavily from the source material of the Bible. With an understanding of that source material, and Joseph Smith's fluency in it, it's not far-fetched at all to conclude that the Latter-day prophet could have come up with these passages in the Book of Mormon. To a believing member of the LDS church, this may seem like a bold claim, but as we closely examine individual instances of this phenomenon, it will become more evident how this "additional testament of Jesus Christ" is simply Bible content re-dressed with Joseph Smith's own unique creative flavoring.

### **Parable of the Olive Tree**

The Book of Mormon contains imagery of an olive tree in 1 Nephi 15:7-18 and a lengthy parable about olive trees in a vineyard in Jacob 5. These passages are greatly beloved among LDS members for their allegorical portrayal of the people of Israel, and how the Gentiles can be "grafted in" like branches of an olive tree. The parable of the vineyard in Jacob 5 expands on this idea by portraying how people can fall away and become corrupt branches, and God's mercy in giving his children ample time to find their way back to him. If you're a believing LDS member, you're probably inclined to think that this

parable is too rich in its flavorful content for Joseph Smith to have possibly made this up, even with a Biblical education. In which case, I'd actually have to agree with your assessment that this is not Joseph Smith's original creative work at all— this is simply an expansion on the parables of the olive tree from Romans 11:16-24 and the vineyard from Isaiah 5:1-7, blended together into Joseph Smith's own personal mix tape.

The concepts of an olive tree, branches being grafted in, and an allegory of the Jews and Gentiles, all find their roots in Romans 11. Verses 1-15 give the background about many of the Jews, who were originally God's people, falling away from him as the new covenant arises, and making way for the Gentiles in their place. Verses 16-24 then illustrate this with an olive tree, describing how some of the natural branches (the Jews) get cut off due to unbelief. And the Gentiles, represented as branches taken from a "wild" olive tree, were grafted into the good olive tree because of their belief. This forms the basis for the imagery of the olive tree, described in very similar terms in 1 Nephi 15:7-18, especially starting at verse 12.

Isaiah 5:1-7 consists of the Parable of the Vineyard, which describes the trees of a vineyard producing bad fruit, which results in the master destroying it in disgust. This passage is another use of the term "wild" to refer to bad fruit, which would be utilized in the Book of Mormon. Moreover, the vineyard owner makes a noteworthy lament in verse 4, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" It's also important to note that Joseph Smith already had an affinity for this parable of the vineyard from Isaiah by the time he would dictate the book of Jacob, because not long before this, he copied all of Isaiah 5 when dictating 2 Nephi 15.

Jacob 5 contains a lengthy parable, consisting of an olive tree whose branches are being grafted in and out, combined with the broader narrative of the vineyard and the Lord of the vineyard continuously who is trying to make it bear good fruit. The parable is intended as an allegory of the corrupt and fallen state of humanity, and how it is washed clean by the redeeming power of the

atonement. This parable evidently combines elements from the aforementioned passage in Romans about the olive tree with that of the vineyard from Isaiah. The concept of the olive tree, the language of referring to its fruit or branches as “wild,” and being grafted in and out, are obviously lifted from Romans 11. In addition, the idea of a vineyard bearing bad fruit described as “wild” and the Lord threatening to destroy it is obviously influenced by Isaiah 5. We even have the Lord of the vineyard lamenting over the bad fruit numerous times (Jacob 5:41, 47, 49), which is directly quoting Isaiah 5:4 nearly verbatim where he says “What could I have done more for my vineyard?”

Interestingly enough, once the parable quotes that verse from Isaiah for the first time, there’s a noticeable shift in focus away from the individual olive tree and onto the entire vineyard. It almost feels as if the parable is shifting focus mid-stream, right when Joseph Smith would have been shifting in his mind from drawing heavily from the Romans parable of the olive tree, and more heavily onto the parable of the vineyard from Isaiah. The parable doesn’t even reference back very much to the first olive tree and the efforts of cross-grafting branches, it just seems to lose its sense of direction and finish off with something only remotely related to the original topic. This is not a very clean way of delivering a parable, and deviates from the structure of many of the parables in the Bible which are much easier to follow. Anecdotally, I’ve heard former LDS members describe how when they were faithful members studying this chapter of Jacob, they found that aspect of the parable to be confusing, but brushed it aside by saying to themselves “Wow, I’m so confused by this parable, probably because it’s just so complex that my feeble and unsophisticated mind simply can’t comprehend its profound doctrinal depth.” Looking at the sources that Joseph Smith was pulling from, however, we can attribute this to his imperfect patchwork in trying to blend two different parables from the Bible together.

While Romans 11 and Isaiah 5 form the backbone of the parable of the olive tree in Jacob 5, there are a number of shorter passages from the Bible that provided secondary ideas. The concept of the Lord of the Vineyard and

his servant can be found in one of Jesus' parables in Luke 13:6-9. This passage encompasses the parable of the fruitless fig tree, in which the servant pleads with the master to give the tree more time to bear good fruit, much like what is repeated in the parable in Jacob 5. He also gets from that the phrase "digging and dunging" which is also repeated numerous times throughout Jacob 5. The idea of bad branches being cut off and burnt is found in Matthew 3:10 and John 15:6.

Joseph Smith even has a history of quoting Matthew 3:10, as he quoted this verse with slightly different wording in Alma 5:52 (which was dictated before Jacob, reference back to the diagram in chapter 3).

While Joseph Smith would have had to perform a bit of creative legwork to assemble all of these pieces together into the form of Jacob 5 as we know it today, we can clearly see that the source material was already there for him. Coming up with this parable isn't anything too extraordinary or beyond explanation when you account for the pre-existing content in the Bible, Joseph Smith's evident familiarity with it, and his oratorical skills which he used to aggregate this content into his own customized creation.

## **Psalm of Nephi**

2 Nephi 4:15-35 consists of a sermon known as the "Psalm of Nephi," which follows a very similar structure as many of the psalms of David. The text of the Book of Mormon itself even gives the reader a wink and nod that this is heavily influenced by the psalms in the Bible when it mentions the brass plates. LDS members who view this passage as divinely inspired are likely in the habit of focusing on Nephi's emphatic praises to God and relatable outpouring of the soul. However, these emotionally-driven details only serve as distractions when answering the question of whether or not Joseph Smith could have cooked this up. The Psalm of Nephi borrows extensively from the psalms of

David written in the Bible, which would have been well within the purview of Joseph Smith in his scriptural study, memorization, and meditation activities described earlier in this chapter.

The Psalm of Nephi opens in verse 15 when it says:

*And upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.*

Nephi is giving an obvious hint here that what he's about to say is either copied from or heavily derived from the plates of brass, which was said to contain the five books of Moses, a history of the Jews, and many of the Psalms, among other things. We can also glean from this passage that memorization and meditation on the Psalms was likely to have been a part of Joseph Smith's Bible study regimen, as he projects this characteristic onto Nephi when the verse says "For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them..." This wouldn't be the only time that Joseph Smith would lean into the Psalms to inform the content of the Book of Mormon, as both 2 Nephi 25:16 and Alma 5:19 reference Psalm 24,<sup>[10]</sup> and the book of Jacob borrows extensively from the Psalms.<sup>[11]</sup>

LDS scholars, while attempting to view the Psalm of Nephi through a faithful lens by indulging in the spiritually succulent aspects of it, will also implicitly admit that the source material for Joseph Smith to draw from would have already been in the Bible. Sidney B. Sperry implied as much when he pointed out just how much the pre-existing scriptural canon influenced this Psalm:

*This is a true psalm in both form and ideas. Its rhythm is comparable to the notable cadence of David's poems. It not only praises God but lays bare*

*to us the very depths of Nephi's soul. A study of this psalm reveals how the scriptures delighted Nephi. The influence upon him of the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and the Psalms is very apparent to the student of scripture.*

(Sperry, Sidney B., Book of Mormon Compendium, Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1970, pp. 152-53)

There is nothing wrong with delighting in the truths that can be found when reading the Psalm of Nephi, or any part of the Book of Mormon, for that matter. However, to insist that Joseph Smith couldn't have come up with it is to ignore the wealth of source material provided in the Bible, which he clearly re-purposed for his own use.

## **The Sermon at the Temple**

One of the most notable moments in Jesus' iconic appearance to the Nephites is the sermon he gives them at the temple, which, interestingly, is just the Sermon on the Mount from the New Testament with a few tweaks. Right off the bat, we can explain where Joseph Smith got the content for this sermon, as the differences between the Book of Mormon text and the Gospel of Matthew are minimal. And what changes were made are not only unimpressive, but highly reflective of the story Joseph Smith was looking to tell.

Jesus' address to the Nephites in 3 Nephi chapters 12-14 directly correlates with the content of Matthew chapters 5-7. The headings that were later added to summarize the chapters of the Book of Mormon don't even try to hide this, as they will outright say things like "Compare Matthew 5." At an immediate glance, the first question that arises is why Jesus would recycle the sermon he gave to the Jews in the ancient world, and say almost the same exact thing to this new audience that has already been baptizing in his name and conferring

the holy priesthood for centuries. You'd think that Jesus would come up with some new material for his Nephite audience. This lack of originality seems very out of character for Jesus, but well within the patterns of a fan fictional writer.

With the changes that Joseph Smith makes in his own version of the sermon, he makes subtle changes in a superficial attempt to cater to the audience that Jesus was speaking to, but nothing of significance is added. When he came across the phrase in Matthew 5:26 "thou hast paid the uttermost farthing," he knew this was the KJV referring to a British currency that wouldn't have been known by people living in the ancient Americas. For that reason, the corresponding verse in 3 Nephi 12:26 instead says "until thou hast paid the uttermost senine." Senine was the Nephite coinage mentioned in Alma.

Another obvious change to make was in Matthew 5:18, where Jesus pointed toward a coming fulfillment of the law, whereas in the equivalent 3 Nephi 12:18, he declared the law as fulfilled because he had already been crucified and resurrected by that point.

In Joseph Smith's attempts to change phrases to give more meaning to the people in the ancient Americas, he unwittingly left in plenty of phrases that would have had no meaning to them at all. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to the Roman law of going a mile in Matthew 5:41 "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." This is referencing the practice where Roman soldiers were legally allowed to spontaneously grab any Jewish citizen off the streets and make him carry luggage or other items for a mile. This would have had no meaning to the Nephites, but nonetheless, this analogy is unchanged and appears exactly in 3 Nephi 12:41 as it did in the original KJV Bible that Joseph Smith would have been referencing. The farthing would have been more obvious to Joseph Smith up front, but the reference to Roman law wouldn't have been as obvious to him without knowing the history and cultural context behind it.

Another culturally specific item that found its way into the Book of Mormon was Jesus' use of the word "Raca" from Matthew 5:22:

*But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire.*

The word “Raca” means “fool” in Aramaic, which is the language that Jesus spoke when He walked the earth. This would have been understood by His audience when he delivered this Sermon on the Mount, but this reference would have been lost on his audience when he spoke those same words in 3 Nephi 12:22. This is like if someone were to come to the United States and use the term “lure” which means “fool” in Norwegian, which wouldn’t be understood by the vast majority of Americans.

From these changes, we can see how Joseph Smith is using the King James Bible as a template, and making changes as he sees fit for the Book of Mormon. In the cases where it was obvious that Jesus was referencing something culturally specific, Joseph made a change to try to cater it to the Nephites. But where it wasn’t so obvious, he just kept the text the same, unaware of the ramifications. Some people try to view this re-dressed Sermon on the Mount through a faithful lens by pointing out how it was adjusted to account for a post-resurrection Jesus, but will ignore just how remarkably easy this would be for any normal person to pull off. Ultimately, Jesus’ Sermon at the Temple is yet another clear sign of Joseph Smith’s fingerprints, and the process by which he took existing ideas and content from his surrounding environment and rearranged it when dictating the Book of Mormon.

## **Lehi and Moses**

The story of Lehi and his kin departing Jerusalem is not an original concept. There are many commonalities between Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem and

Moses' departure from Egypt, which many faithful LDS members will eagerly point out. 2 Nephi 1 in particular describes Lehi going on about how they've all arrived in "a land of promise." John W. Welch even comments on this part of the Book of Mormon and takes the opportunity to outline the following parallels between the two prophets:

- Both of them left a civilization—a place of wickedness—and crossed a wilderness to a Promised Land.
- Both suffered afflictions.
- Both had their people enter into covenants with the Lord.
- Some in their company wanted to go return to that place, while some were faithful.
- Both prophets had great visions: Lehi saw a pillar of fire, and Moses saw the burning bush. In each case, both saw God and were called to be prophets through these visions.
- They both had the law of the Lord. Lehi ensured that he had the brass plates which contained the five books of Moses. Moses received the law from on high.
- Moses and Lehi both crossed a sea by the power of God. (Welch, John, *John W. Welch Notes*)

LDS members will usually leverage these parallels as faith-promoting, but on the flip side, this can also be used to show where Joseph Smith got some of his ideas when coming up with the Book of Mormon. Many of the stories and parables of the Book of Mormon that have been examined thus far are commonly utilized as tools for spiritual enlightenment by LDS members. But when answering the question of whether or not Joseph Smith could have come up with it, those points are irrelevant. The main point is to demonstrate that this material was so heavily derived from the Bible that anyone with a decent Biblical education and a creative mind could conceivably come up with it.

## Citations from Chapter 5

1. David, *Word Frequency in the Book of Mormon*, Gospel Cougar, December 23, 2007 <https://gospelcougar.blogspot.com/2007/12/word-frequency-in-book-of-mormon.html>
2. “Mike,” *Book of Mormon Overview: How It Was Composed*, LDS Discussions <https://www.ldsdiscussions.com/authorship>
3. Some versions of the King James Bible, such as that which would have been widely circulated during Joseph Smith’s time, contained the Apocrypha. The passage of interest is 2 Maccabees 1:36: “And Neemias called this thing Naphthar, which is as much as to say, a cleansing; but many men call it Nephi.”
4. The clearest discussion I was able to find on men named Alma in Joseph Smith’s time was in the comments section of Daniel Peterson’s blog post, “Alma,” *Deception, and I*, on the Patheos blog in July 2019: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/danpeterson/2019/07/alma-deception-and-i.html>

Most worthy of note are the comments left on the blog post by Dr. Detroit, who listed a multitude of men named Alma who were born in the United States during Joseph Smith’s time. These names were found on familysearch.org. When pressed further on this, he listed several men named Alma who were born in the Palmyra, NY, area around Joseph Smith’s time. In my own searching on familysearch.org, I was able to verify the following men were born in New York:

- Alma Waters, 1827
  - Alma Snyder, 1822
  - Alma C. Messinger, 1826
  - Alma Wilson, 1807
  - Alma Warren, 1806
5. Holley, Vernal, *Book of Mormon Authorship*

6. Burton, *Spiritual Literacy*, 111
7. Sprague, William Buell, *Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergyman of Various Denominations*, vol 7 (1861), 69-70, 77, 88, 115, 139, 251-52, 270, 273, 291, 300, 327- 28, 359, 367, 388, 395, 405, 431, 477, 493, 508, 525, 566, 571, 585, 604, 606, 625, 693-94, 725, 730, 735, 757, 785.
8. Methodist Episcopal Church, Form of Discipline, 27, contained these instructions on how preachers are to set aside time for scripture study each day:  
“from four to five in the Morning, and from five to six in the Evening, to meditate, pray, and read,” and on days where they aren’t busy working or traveling, they were told “from six in the Morning till twelve (allowing an Hour for Breakfast) read in Order, with much Prayer, the Christian Library, and other pious Books.”
9. Clarke, Letter to a Methodist Preacher, 3rd ed., 22. Clarke’s writings in this area were tailored specifically to young aspiring preachers. This passage in particular provides instructions on identifying potential sermon material: “Read the book of God. Read it regularly through, at least once in a year; and take down in order, every text [scripture] you think you have light [knowledge] sufficient to preach from.”
10. 2 Nephi 25:16 contains the phrase “with pure hearts and clean hands,” and Alma 5:19 contains a nearly identical phrase. These are both likely references to Psalm 24:4 where David calls upon “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart...”
11. The book of Jacob borrows extensively from the Psalms. This table shows many such similarities:

HOW THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS WRITTEN

Jacob	Psalms
<p><b>Jacob 1:7:</b> that they might <b>enter into his rest</b>, lest by any means he should <b>swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation</b> while the children of Israel were <b>in the wilderness</b></p>	<p><b>Psalm 95:8,11:</b> as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness ... Unto whom I <b>sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.</b></p>
<p><b>Jacob 4:10:</b> in great mercy, over all his works</p>	<p><b>Psalm 145:8-9:</b> of great mercy ... and his tender mercies are <b>over all his works.</b></p>
<p><b>Jacob 4:15-17:</b> they will <b>reject the stone</b> upon which they might build ... how is it possible that these, after having <b>rejected</b> the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the <b>head of their corner?</b></p>	<p><b>Psalm 118:22:</b> The stone which the builders refused is become the <b>head stone of the corner.</b></p>
<p><b>Jacob 6:6:</b> Yea, <b>today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts</b></p>	<p><b>Psalm 95:7-8:</b> To day if ye will hear his voice, <b>Harden not your heart</b></p>



## Chapter 6

# Dictation Process

As we enter the last chapter of this document, there is one last major topic that needs to be addressed. That is the issue of the timespan and process by which Joseph Smith orally dictated the content of the Book of Mormon, and whether or not those circumstances point to anything miraculous that would have been beyond Joseph Smith's capability. Many LDS members have been instructed to point out that the Book of Mormon was orally dictated over a period of 85 days, which would be an insanely difficult time frame for anyone to dictate a document as long as the Book of Mormon. Members will also downplay or even at times mistakenly deny that Joseph Smith did any preparation work in advance of his BOM dictation, suggesting that these 85 days simply existed in a vacuum. They will also insist that Joseph Smith didn't look at any notes or have any books open, but rather spent every moment of the dictation process either looking into his hat or through the Urim and Thummim.

If you do the math on how many words can be spoken per minute, and look at how much time Joseph and Oliver had per day, the 85 day time frame is actually quite realistic, leaving them with a lot of breathing room. In addition, the accounts which indicate that Joseph Smith used no notes are only isolated instances in which he operated that way, and it's unreasonable to assume that they all represent the entire dictation process. As I bring this whole topic of Book of Mormon dictation full-circle, hopefully it will be clear why I saved

this sub-topic for last, because these talking points about timeline and dictation process are best refuted when the premises of the five previous chapters have already been established.

## **Thinking Through the Story**

LDS Members will try to frame the whole Book of Mormon production timeline in a way that suggests that if Joseph Smith did make it all up, then he wouldn't have had much time to think through the story. The fact that he just suddenly popped out of nowhere with this story and rattled it all off all at once is a miracle in and of itself, so therefore it's just unreasonable to suggest Joseph Smith made it up, members will assert. This framing is factually wrong on many levels, as we have historical accounts which point to Joseph Smith telling similar stories to that of the BOM years before the official dictation process began, and we also have accounts of him taking breaks in between sessions and engaging in activities that provided leisure time to work out the story.

I will mention, one last time, the account of Lucy Mack Smith (Joseph Smith's mother) that I quoted in chapter 1, which describes how Joseph used to tell detailed stories to his family about the ancient inhabitants of the Americas. These stories talked about their dress, travel, and religious worship, "as though he had spent his life with them." This was from 1823, at least a solid 6 years before the official dictation process began, so Joseph Smith had quite a long time to prepare this story in advance.

There are also accounts of Joseph Smith taking breaks in between dictation sessions, and spending the afternoons walking, and skipping rocks.<sup>[1]</sup> These times in solitude could have easily been spent working through some of the finer details of the story in his head as the time came to dictate them. It's also important to note that when the "official 85 days" of dictation began,

Joseph Smith was just coming out of a roughly 9-month sabbatical from having previously dictated the lost 116 pages.

That prior period of dictation served as a crucial “dress rehearsal” before beginning the production of the Book of Mormon as we know it today. If there was anything he didn’t like from before, he could fix it. If there was some process he developed in that first leg of dictation, but figured out a better way to do it, he could switch to that new process when starting fresh with Oliver Cowdery. In the interim period between losing those pages and beginning the dictation process of the real BOM content, he would have had all of that time to continue thinking through the story, work out some of the details, and perhaps even refine or improve a few details in his head for what would eventually become the filler text from the small plates of Nephi.

### **Math on the 85-Day Time Frame**

LDS Members will often point to the 85-day time frame in which the Book of Mormon was dictated, and insist that such a short period of time is unrealistic for Joseph Smith to have dictated such an elaborate story unless he had God guiding him. Some scholars estimate that the number of actual working days for Joseph Smith’s dictation may have even been lower than that, possibly between 57-75 working days.<sup>[2]</sup> However, when you do the math, even with the most conservative estimate of 57 working days, we find that this is quite realistic for the book’s dictation.

The Book of Mormon consists of 273,725 words. Dividing that by 57, Joseph Smith would need to dictate about 4,800 words on average per day. This may seem like a lot, until you realize that the average human rate of dictation is 1,200 words per hour where the transcription can still remain clean and legible.<sup>[3]</sup> This would mean that Joseph only needed to spend about 4 hours on average dictating on each working day. Not only is this quite realistic, but

it would have left a lot of free time open for breaks, time to go take walks, and gather his thoughts in between sections. If we go with a less conservative estimate of 75 working days, then Joseph Smith could get by with only putting in an average of slightly over 3 hours of dictation per working day.

It's also important to note that these "273,725 words" mentioned above includes the portions of the Book of Mormon that are copied from Isaiah, as well as the parts that are copied nearly verbatim from the New Testament. With a King James Bible handy, Joseph Smith could have simply read off of that KJV Bible, and saved time. The Isaiah-copied portions of the Book of Mormon consist of 14,767 words, taken from a total of 21 chapters of Isaiah. 1,709 more words in the Book of Mormon are close paraphrases of Isaiah. Moreover, the phrase "And it came to pass" makes up 5,904 words in the book. If you combine these numbers, that makes up 22,380 words of dictation where Joseph Smith was basically gliding without even having to think through it very much, which consists of about 8% of the content of the Book of Mormon. And this isn't even counting other portions that are either copied or closely paraphrased from the New Testament, such as Jesus' Sermon at the Temple which is a close copy of the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7, as discussed in the previous chapter.

## **Impossibly Smooth Start and Stop**

LDS Members frame this whole dictation process as if it was some miraculous and unexplainable feat that was an enormous aberration from Joseph Smith's normal behavior and ability, but an examination of the history and a bit of inference can quickly pull back the veil to show just how mundane this whole process really was. The common narrative involves Joseph Smith demonstrating an uncanny ability to remember where he left off from without even glancing at the manuscript, and resume his dictation in an orderly, inhumanly smooth

fashion which resulted in this amazing book. The primary account members are likely to cite for this assertion is the following from Emma Smith:

*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 manuscripts unless he was inspired; for, when acting as his scribe, [Joseph] 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. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.*

(Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289–90)

This statement was made in that same interview referenced in chapter 1 where Emma is being interviewed by her son, Joseph Smith III, with the specific agenda of propping up the RLDS church. Not only was this interview near the end of Emma’s life when she was trying to defend her late husband’s legacy, but this interview is especially unreliable given that this was the same interview where she patently lied about polygamy (see chapter 1 footnote #1). In the quote I just cited, Emma also leans very heavily into the “ignorant farm boy” trope some members use, which was also debunked in chapter 1.

Even being charitable and assuming that Emma’s account of Joseph’s ability to pause and resume dictation later is accurate, this isn’t all that impressive. As we talked about in the “Storytelling” section of chapter 1, it is common for storytellers to be able to have a mental map of their created worlds in their heads, tell the story as it unfolds, pause on the story, and then pick back up on the story later. In a vacuum, this account from Emma may make Joseph’s dictation sound really impressive, but piecing this together with the known

history of his education and talent for story-telling, this isn't shocking or supernatural in any way.

It's also important to realize that this account is only describing the times when Emma was serving as Joseph Smith's scribe. This account is often misused to assert that Joseph Smith didn't glance at the manuscripts or brush up on any details of the story throughout the entire Book of Mormon dictation process, but this is a highly fallacious application of this account. This already dubious account from Emma's relatively brief time as Joseph's scribe doesn't give us much insight on whether or not the same principle applied when Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery would serve as scribes.

Presumably, Emma wasn't watching her husband during every moment of the dictation process once she passed the torch on to later scribes that would spend much lengthier periods of time writing down the words of the Book of Mormon. To make such an assertion would be over-generalizing specific claims and contexts. Because of this, it's unreasonable to make the assertion that Joseph Smith never referenced back to the existing manuscripts as he progressed through the story of the Book of Mormon when Oliver Cowdery served as his scribe.

Some Book of Mormon proponents will set up a straw man argument by suggesting that in order for Joseph Smith to have made up the Book of Mormon, he would have had to memorize the whole thing nearly word-for-word and dictate all 531 pages right from memory, but this is not the case. Extemporaneous speech and dictation was a common skill in that age, which we know Joseph Smith utilized in both his training as a lay exhorter and family home evening story telling.

In a similar vein, a lot of LDS members will harp on the profound, smooth, and refined content that Joseph Smith dictated, seemingly unaware of the fact that the manuscript resulting from this oration received a significant face-lift before publishing. For a refresher on this point, go back to the "Original Manuscript" and "Mistakes During Dictation" sections from chapter 4 to see

how the 85-day dictation wasn't nearly as smooth as many LDS members will suggest. Not only do portions of the manuscript look almost nothing like the final product of the Book of Mormon, but even the final product itself shows signs of clumsy mistakes made during dictation.

### **No Notes or Books**

In addition to the debate over reviewing his manuscript, the traditional narrative has long been that Joseph Smith did not reference any notes or books during the dictation process. Once again referencing that same interview that Emma Smith gave to her son, Joseph Smith III, the following quote is often used to try to preclude any books or notes being used by the Latter-day prophet:

[Emma] A[nswer]. → *In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.*

[Joseph III] Q[uestion]. *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 anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me.*

(Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289–90)

Putting aside the likely unreliability of this account mentioned in the previous section, the same principle about dictation process applies; Emma's knowledge of exactly what Joseph Smith did and didn't do during later sessions when

Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery served as his scribes is limited, and it's unreasonable to project all of her accounts onto those sessions. On the contrary, many scholars, both LDS and non-LDS, believe it is very likely that Joseph Smith consulted a King James Bible during some parts of the dictation process.<sup>[4]</sup>

It's also worth noting that in the context of that particular quote, Joseph Smith III wasn't overly concerned about dispelling rumors of his father referencing a Bible or writing down his own notes ahead of time for rattling off tricky lists of names. He was much more focused on debunking one of the widely circulating theories at the time that someone else came up with the Book of Mormon for Joseph Smith and slipped notes to him. This theory is known as the Spalding-Rigdon theory, also sometimes called the Spalding Manuscript theory. The theory was that a man named Solomon Spalding (sometimes spelled Spaulding) wrote a manuscript that made up the content of the Book of Mormon, which was acquired by Sidney Rigdon and potentially modified, which was passed onto Joseph Smith in the form of notes that he read from when dictating the Book of Mormon. This theory was widely circulated by critics of the Book of Mormon shortly following its publication, but has not stood the test of time very well. Most scholars and enthusiasts, both LDS and non-LDS, don't take the Spalding-Rigdon theory very seriously due to the unreliable and conflicting accounts that are used to try to prop up the theory.

We can tell that the Spalding-Rigdon theory is the impetus for most of these questions related to the Book of Mormon dictation, as that interview began earlier on with this exchange between Joseph Smith III and his mother:

*[Joseph Smith III] Q: When did you first know Sidney Rigdon? Where?*

*[Emma] A: I was residing at father Whitmer's, when I first saw Sidney Rigdon. I think he came there.*

*Q: Was this before or after the publication of the Book of Mormon?*

## HOW THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS WRITTEN

*A: The Book of Mormon had been translated and published some time before.*

This question is used to establish the premise that Sidney Rigdon couldn't have possibly given Joseph Smith the content of the Book of Mormon, as Rigdon didn't come into the Smiths' lives until after the book was published. Later questions in that interview about the Book of Mormon build upon this ultimate goal of refuting the Spalding-Rigdon theory. This is further evidenced by a letter Joseph Smith III wrote 2 weeks later:

*...during no part [of the dictation process] did Joseph Smith have any Mss. [manuscript] or Book of any kind from which to read, or dictate, except the metallic plates, which she [Emma] knew he had. Every argument advanced by you in support of the theory, that Sidney Rigdon was the responsible 'Black Pope' behind the throne moving upon the pliant mind of Joseph Smith, it seems to me, is defeated by this plain statement.*

(Letter to James T. Cobb, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:544)

As you can see even more plainly in this letter, these statements about Joseph Smith not looking at any notes or script are heavily couched within the context of anything written by Sidney Rigdon. To extrapolate these statements as precluding any Bible or notes whatsoever being involved in the dictation process is a shaky inference. Similar statements are made by David Whitmer to try to preclude the usage of any notes. Even being as charitable as possible and assuming these statements are accurate and can be applied more broadly to refer to any notes whatsoever, the problem still remains that neither Emma Smith nor David Whitmer were present during all of the translation process; they only witnessed parts of it.<sup>[5]</sup> Ergo, trying to assert that Emma and David's experiences during some parts of the dictation process account for every moment of the dictation process is a fundamentally flawed over generalization.

The accounts claiming that Joseph Smith would have normally been unable to dictate the Book of Mormon are unreliable when placed in their proper historical context, and fail to account for the theological and oratorical toolbox that he developed in the years leading up to this event. It's also worth reiterating that any faithful Latter-day Saint insisting that Joseph Smith looked at no books or notes will have to contend with the likes of Hugh Nibley, Sidney B. Sperry, and B. H. Roberts, all of whom believed that he did.<sup>[4]</sup> Considering these multiple perspectives and contextual factors, it becomes evident that the narrative of Joseph Smith's dictation process is far from the miraculous account often presented by many LDS members.

## Citations from Chapter 6

1. I've heard a lot of people talk about Joseph Smith taking breaks and skipping rocks. Citable source not found.
2. Credit goes to William Davis for doing the research to aggregate different sources on these estimates in his book, *Visions in a Seer Stone*. For simplicity sake, I will simply copy the content of his footnote, specifically, footnote #3 on the introduction:

Time estimates vary. In 1984 W. Cleon Skousen suggested “approximately 65 working days.” *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times* (Salt Lake City UT: Ensign Publishing, 1984), 102n66. In 1986 John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone proposed “a span of no more than sixty-five to seventy-five total days.” “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992),

  3. Using the same research, John W. Welch revised his estimate to “only about sixty-five working days.” “How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?” *Ensign* 20, no. 1 (January 1988), <https://www.lds.org/study/ensign/1988/01/i-have-a-question/how-long-did-it-take-joseph-smith-to-translate-the-book-of-mormon?lang-eng>. Later, Welch and Tim Rathbone lowered their figure lowered their figure to “less than sixty working days.” “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 210. Most recently, Welch estimates “a total of only 57 to 63 available full-time working days.” “Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 34.
3. Average speakers dictate between 7,500 and 9,000 words per hour. But slowing that rate of speech down enough for a scribe to write legibly, the rate of speech would be 1,200 words per hour for an un-trained scribe. So

in the case of 1,200 words per hour, Joseph Smith would be slowing down quite a bit in order to make sure Oliver Cowdery can keep up.

4. Borrowing another aggregated footnote from William Davis' book, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, this time from chapter 1, footnote#4:

See Stan Larson, "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), 116. Larson counts LDS scholars Hugh Nibley, Sidney B. Sperry, and B. H. Roberts among those who believe that Smith consulted a King James Bible. See also David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2002), 157-234; H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005), 141.

5. In an interview published on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1881 in the Kansas City Journal, Whitmer is reported as saying "I, as well as all of my father's family, Smith's wife, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris were present during the translation." Shortly following the publication of this article, Whitmer wrote a letter to the editor on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1881, which clarified this detail: "I did not wish to be understood as saying that those referred to as being present [the Whitmer family, Emma, Oliver, and Martin] were all of the time in the immediate presence of the translator, but were at the place and saw how the translation was conducted." (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 5:81)

## Conclusion

The narrative of Book of Mormon authorship as described by most LDS members today is a widely distorted one, as it tries to set up a false premise whereby composing the book through naturalistic means would have been impossible for Joseph Smith. But by examining the history behind Joseph Smith's early life, surrounding influences, events in the dictation, and the text of the Book of Mormon itself, the evidence points less to divine origin and more to it being a man-made product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Joseph Smith was far from being just an ignorant farm boy who could barely write a sentence or come up with an elaborate story. He was a passionate, creative, and highly charismatic visionary with tremendous charm and social ambition. He was not only perfectly capable of writing his own letters and notes as needed, but he was a very talented storyteller, and we even have reason to believe that he was planning out and even rehearsing some version of the story of the Book of Mormon years in advance. On a darker note, he even had a well-documented penchant for participating in widely-known scams that involved falsely claiming to wield the power of a seer stone, often resulting in the gratuitous physical and emotional exhaustion and financial ruin of others.

Much of the content of the Book of Mormon can be tied back to known superstitions, hotly debated theological issues, and personal life experiences in Joseph Smith's milieu. These morsels of 19<sup>th</sup> century American culture and Smith family dynamics show up in the Book of Mormon text in profound ways that make the claims about it being an ancient text highly dubious. The content, compositional style, and flow of the book give no clear indication that

it was implausible for one person to come up with it, nor that Joseph Smith's oratorical skills and education were insufficient to produce it. On the contrary, the original manuscript showcases folksy language from Joseph Smith's time period, as well as mistakes made during dictation that wouldn't show up in the text if it was being meticulously etched onto gold plates by ancient people and then translated into English by God.

Probably the most infamous event in the Book of Mormon's production is the loss of the 116 pages with the revealing light it shines on Joseph Smith's evasive manner of responding to criticism and the fingerprints he left when running damage control. What's immediately suspect is that he couldn't just have God give him all of the text again, but instead opted for a much more roundabout way of replacing the lost text with the same basic story but told more briefly with fewer names and places. It was in that filler text that his fingerprints were most obvious with the dubious late addition of the small plates, as well as the compulsive, sometimes even flashy references to the end of the story to make it feel interconnected. Numerous plot holes ended up arising in the middle of the book as a result of this patchwork, which shows how Joseph Smith didn't think it all through, and in some instances, was even scrambling.

Countless LDS members stake their entire testimony on the supposed profound and uplifting testament that the Book of Mormon bears of Jesus Christ in its doctrinal teachings and parables. What most people don't realize is just how much of this content is lifted from the Bible and re-dressed with Joseph Smith's own unique creative flavoring. Given Joseph's Biblical education that has been pretty thoroughly documented, his ability to re-work these Bible parables, sermons, and psalms into a seemingly fresh form is far from unrealistic. Moreover, the overall timeline and circumstances surrounding the dictation process don't lend credence to anything too unexplainable, once you bring the details back down to reality and take a deeper look at the historical context behind the accounts that describe this process.

## HOW THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS WRITTEN

This document certainly doesn't prove the Book of Mormon as a fraudulent work, but it does showcase how the faithful position requires a greater level of conjecture and inference than a naturalistic one. My goal in writing this document was to counter a common line of argumentation made by LDS missionaries whereby they attempt to create a vacuum in the authorship of the Book of Mormon, and insist that divine intervention from God is the only reasonable way to fill that vacuum. In this document, I have made my best attempt to concisely and comprehensively fill that vacuum instead with the relevant history of Joseph Smith's life, surrounding influences, and an in-depth analysis of various aspects of the text of the Book of Mormon that are often overlooked by faithful members.

Thus, it is my hope that faithful LDS members will discontinue with this fallacious line of argumentation for the Book of Mormon's divinity, and that the church will move further away from teaching members and investigators in a manner that is so unrealistic and historically inaccurate.