

The Book of Mormon

In our discussion of the history of the Book of Mormon, we covered the nature of its composition. While it is clear that Joseph Smith invented the entire text, as confirmed by LDS Historian B.H. Roberts, we have not dealt with the content of the book. We will now do so very briefly, after a quote from the official LDS Historian. While this quote begins with a specific compositional point, his conclusion reaches the entire work.

“There were other Anti-Christes among the Nephites, but they were more military leaders than religious innovators, yet much of the same kidney in spirit with these dissenters here passed in review; but I shall hold that what is here presented illustrates sufficiently the matter taken in hand by referring to them, namely that *they are all of one breed and brand; so nearly alike that one mind is the author of them*, and that a young and undeveloped, but piously inclined mind. *The evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator*. It is difficult to believe that they are the products of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America.” (Studies in the Book of Mormon, p.271, emphasis added)

Unlike the Bible, the BOM is organized chronologically. Its basic premise is, as was popularly (and incorrectly) thought in the early 19th century, that the original inhabitants of the New World were descendants of Jews who emigrated from Palestine. After Christ completed His ministry in Palestine, He visited these people to preach the gospel to them.

The story begins with a pious Jew named Lehi who lived in Jerusalem around the time of Daniel. About 600 BC, he left Jerusalem with his sons Nephi and Laman. They travel to the “wilderness”, come to “large waters”, build a ship, and travel to the new world. Once the group lands (presumably on the west coast of South America), the two sons become enemies. The Nephites are generally righteous, while the Lamanites are generally wicked. They are frequently at war with each other.

Many prophets are described in the next 600 years. These prophets know the exact name of the Messiah (!?!). They parallel many Biblical stories, including the life of Paul.

“And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood; And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them. Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.” Mosiah 27:11-13 (See Acts 9:3-5; 22:6-9)

As can be seen above, they frequently quote New Testament passages (from the KJV, the only Bible available to Smith at the time of the composition of the BOM).

When Christ comes to visit, He sets up a church with twelve apostles. He preaches the Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 12) almost verbatim from the King James. He quotes from Peter's sermon in Acts 3:22-26 (not yet written) in 3 Nephi 20:23-26. He offers the apostles whatever they desire. Nine desire to “speedily enter the kingdom” (3 Nephi 28:2-3) and three have a different request.

“And he said unto them: Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me. Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven. And ye shall never endure the pains of death; but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; and then shall ye be blessed in the kingdom of my Father.” 3 Nephi 28:6-8 (See 1 Cor 15:52, 54)

According to the BOM, the apostle John and three Nephite apostles are still alive on earth, each approaching his 2,000th birthday.

After Christ's visit to the new world, there were about 200 years of peace. Then the old feuds

resurfaced, and wars resumed. Beginning about 322AD, Mormon becomes leader of the Nephite armies. In 385AD, Mormon (now approaching 90 years old) sends an epistle to the Lamanites demanding that they meet "in the land of Cumorah" for one final battle. This battle takes place on the hill of Cumorah in New York, several thousand miles from Central America where the Nephites and Lamanites lived. Only a few Nephites survive. The Lamanites become the native American peoples, meaning that the Indians are Semitic in origin.

By 401AD, only Moroni, Mormon's son is alive (Mormon 8:6-8). In 421AD Moroni "hides up" the plates in the hill of Cumorah. These plates, which become the BOM, are supposedly written in "Reformed Egyptian". Of course, according to JSH, in 1823 Moroni returned to tell Smith about the plates, and thus the whole story becomes known again.

There are numerous theological reasons to question the validity of the BOM. We will discuss those in our sections on Mormon doctrine. At this time we will consider the direct evidences (other than that already noted by LDS Historian B.H. Roberts) which indicate that the BOM is not the word of God. Our general standard is that since God is the maker of the universe, and is all-knowing, He will not make errors of fact. Perhaps the best example of this is Job 26:7 where Job says that God "hangs the earth on nothing". This statement is literally true, but millenia beyond the scientific knowledge of Job's time.

Reason #1: Historical Inaccuracy

There can be no doubt that the entire premise of the BOM is incorrect. While Ethan Smith's "View of the Hebrews" concept, from which Joseph Smith plagiarized most of his plot, was popular in the early 19th century, we now know that the native American peoples are of Mongol heritage, not Semitic. While the specifics of their migration to the western hemisphere are unknown, modern genetic analysis is conclusive that their forebears are from eastern Asia, not Palestine.

Biblical archeology has been an unqualified confirmation of the Biblical account. In every case where Middle Eastern artifacts have been uncovered, they have agreed with the Bible. Not one time has an archeological find contradicted the Bible. In many cases, when certain elements of stories been thought to be very unlikely, later finds confirm the stories.

We should contrast this with the BOM. Lehi brought with him a literate iron age culture. Iron age cultures always leave artifacts which can be found. Given the vast numbers of battles with iron weapons, archeologists should have found massive amounts of confirming material. Yet there has never been a single New World archeological find which a non-LDS researcher would consider as confirming the BOM. In fact, the pre-Columbian New World was an illiterate stone age world. This is not a case of just a few pieces of evidence, but rather of mountains. Anyone who has seen the pyramids at Teotihuacan in Mexico or the lost city of Macchu Picchu in Peru will realize that there can be no denying this truth. Mormon apologies fall flat.

"The geography of the Book of Mormon has intrigued some readers of that volume since its publication. But why worry about it?

"Efforts to pinpoint certain places from what is written in the book are fruitless because the record does not give evidence of such locations in terms of modern geography.

"Attempts to designate certain areas as the Land Bountiful or the site of Zarahemla or the place where the Nephite city of Jerusalem sank into the sea 'and waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof' can bring no definitive results. So why speculate? ...

"Our position is to build faith, not to weaken it, and theories concerning the geography of the Book of Mormon can most certainly undermine faith if allowed to run rampant." *Deseret News*, Church Section, July 29, 1978

The BOM describes not only weaponry of iron, but complex coinage of gold and silver. No such coins have ever been found. In fact, gold was so common that the native peoples disregarded it as coinage and used jade and cocoa beans in commerce. No evidence of these forms of money are found in the BOM. Horse-drawn chariots are referenced, but horses did not exist in the New World until the Spanish explorers brought them. Agriculture of the Nephites and Lamanites included corn, barley, cows, oxen, asses, sheep and swine. Yet none of these existed in the New World during the BOM period. Weather was a key feature of pre-Columbian America, with drought and flood causing the extinction of whole cultures. Yet the BOM mentions only two droughts.

Perhaps the most striking historical error is religion. Pre-Columbian peoples had pagan religions which featured human sacrifices to appease malevolent gods. Their religions bear no resemblance to BOM

religions, which are strikingly similar to New Testament Christianity.

Reason #2: Outright Scriptural Error

“Now it came to pass that I, Nephi. . . did read many things to them which were written in the books of Moses. . . “ 1 Nephi 19:22-23 (partial)

“And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses.” Mosiah 2:3

Lehi is supposed to have taken with him the books of Moses when he fled from Palestine. Numerous mentions are made of them in the BOM. Unfortunately, the firstlings of the flock were not to be used for a burnt offering. They were used for a tithe for the Levites for the maintenance and support of those engaged in the temple service. (See Ex 29:38-42, Num 3:41, Deut 12:6, 17; 14:23)

A related problem is the absence of sanctuary services and festivals of the Jewish year. Lehi was a holy man. He is reported in the very first chapter of the BOM as having a vision of God. Yet, his descendants, who are supposed to be following the law of Moses carefully, are never described as participating in any of the Mosaic festivals. There is no mention of Passover, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Tabernacles or the Day of Atonement. It simply is not possible for a Jewish population, even one which was substantially apostate, to never participate in any of these feasts. In fact, the quote above is the only sacrifice mentioned in the entire BOM!

Other uniquely Jewish elements **missing** from the BOM:

- Circumcision
- Unleavened Bread
- Brazen altar of sacrifice & Golden altar of incense
- Trespass, meat, drink, wave, & peace offerings
- Ceremonial cleanliness & purification
- Sabbaths
- Sabbatical years & Jubilees

All this is particularly damning since we find this quote in Alma 30:3.

“the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled.”

Reason #3: Grave Textual Anomalies

The BOM contains a number of textual elements which presuppose knowledge which the Nephites and Lamanites could not have. These anachronisms exist because Joseph Smith did not have sufficient knowledge of the people he was using as a basis for his invention to avoid including modern elements which were common to Smith, but foreign to them. We have already mentioned one such anachronism: horses.

Others include:

- 1 Nephi 11:33 (and others) mentions a cross before Jesus comes to the New World. Crucifixion originated in Persia, and was adopted by the Romans five centuries after Lehi left Palestine. The word would have been meaningless.
- 1 Nephi 18:12 refers to a “compass” which was used to guide Nephi on the trip to the “promised land”. While it can be argued that it appeared as a miracle, why did the descendants never again use a compass? Compasses were not invented until centuries after Lehi had left Palestine.
- The golden plates were supposedly written in “Reformed Egyptian”. Why would Jews from Jerusalem even consider a language other than Hebrew? Why would they know Egyptian?
- Joseph Smith adamantly denied that there was any Greek or Latin on the plates (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 299). The Greek language did not come to Palestine until about 250 years after Lehi left. Yet there are several Greek terms in the BOM.

Alma 16:13 refers to “synagogues”. The word comes from the Greek *sunagoge*. The concept of

synagogues did not develop until after the Babylonian exile. Lehi left before the exile.

2 Nephi 29:3 talks about a “Bible”. This word comes from the Greek “*biblios*”, and did not come into use until after Christ.

3 Nephi 9:18 states “I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” (See Rev 22:13) Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Such a statement would be gibberish to the Nephites.

- Smith was not content with Greek anachronisms. Jacob 7:27 states “Brethren, adieu.” Since the French language did not develop until at least 1,000 years after Lehi left Palestine (after the last word of the BOM was supposedly written), it seems unlikely that any of Jacob’s readers would understand his words.
- 3 Nephi 12:22 quotes Matt 5:22, including the word “Raca”. How were people speaking reformed Egyptian (or reformed Hebrew) supposed to understand the Aramaic “Raca”?
- In 3 Nephi 20:23-26, we find Jesus quoting Peter’s sermon in Acts 3:22-26. Are we to believe that Peter was actually quoting the BOM?
- In Mosiah 6:5, we find that, in the 1830 edition of the BOM, King Benjamin lives three more years. In Mosiah 21, we find King Benjamin alive and well, long after the three years is up. In the modern edition King Benjamin in chapter 21 has been changed to King Mosiah! Which brings us to our next reason.

Reason #4: Translation changes

Joseph Smith claimed that he translated the BOM from the golden plates with the Urim and Thummim. This is confirmed in the witness testimonies in the beginning of the BOM and a host of contemporary statements. JSH 1:55 states: “These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.” Yet the “Brief Explanation about the Book of Mormon” (in the introductory pages) contains this statement.

“About this edition: Some minor errors in the text have been perpetuated in past editions of the Book of Mormon. This edition contains corrections that seem appropriate to bring the material into conformity with prepublication manuscripts and early editions edited by the Prophet Joseph Smith.”

Mormon President Joseph Fielding Smith made the following statement.

“In the case of the Book of Mormon, your attention is called to the fact that the publisher of it was unfriendly to the Church. . . (With regard to corrections that this required) Changes have been made in punctuation and a few other minor matters that needed correction, but never has any alteration or addition changed a single original thought.” (Emphasis added)

Gerald and Sandra Tanner (Utah Lighthouse Ministries) have documented over 3,000 changes from the original “divinely translated” BOM to the current edition. We will examine a few samples. The changed sections are italicized.

	1830 Book of Mormon	Current Edition Book of Mormon
1 Nephi 11:18	And he said unto me: Behold the virgin which thou seest, is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh.	And he said unto me: Behold the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of <i>the Son of God</i> , after the manner of the flesh.
1 Nephi 11:21	And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea even the Eternal Father! . . .	And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even <i>the Son of the Eternal Father!</i> . . .
1 Nephi 11:32	. . . and I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea the Everlasting God and I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, <i>the Son of the Everlasting God</i> . . .

These passages will take on more meaning when we discuss the doctrine of Progression. They are only a sampling of the deliberate, purposeful editing which has taken place in the BOM to bring it into conformity with doctrines of the LDS church which changed after the original version was published. Obviously, such changes are not the work of a church which worships the unchanging God of the Bible.

Perhaps the single most suspicious modern edit is found in 2 Nephi 30:6. The 1830 and 1979 editions are the same.

“And then they shall rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a *white and delightsome people*.”

A bit of background is necessary to gain the full impact of this example. Joseph Smith taught that the dark skin of the Negro was a curse from God for Cain's evil. This curse was carried past the flood by Ham's wife (supposedly a Negro), so that Ham's descendants were "cursed". Negroes were excluded from the LDS priesthood, and therefore from progression, since the priesthood was necessary for entry into the celestial kingdom. This doctrine was taught by all of the LDS General Authorities, using this text as one authority until on June 8, 1978 Spencer W. Kimball, President and Prophet of the LDS church made what is now "Declaration 2" of the D&C (LDS Scriptures). It states in part, ". . . the Lord . . . by revelation has confirmed that the day has come when . . . all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color." When the BOM was republished in 1981, the 2 Nephi 30:6 read:

“And then they shall rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a *pure and delightsome people*.”

It is difficult to believe that the politics of modern race relations played no part in the Declaration. Further, there can be no doubt that the change in this text was purposeful editing which substantially alters the meaning of the text to bring it in line with modern political sensitivities.

All of the alterations cited cause substantial changes in the meaning of the texts. It is simply impossible for divinely directed translations to have been in error sufficiently to require this degree of editing. If the printer had made such errors, why didn't the LDS General Authorities catch them very early on? And why did the LDS General Authorities teach from them in their original state? Only one conclusion is possible. The BOM is NOT the word of God.

Acknowledgment: Without the work of James R. White in "Letters to a Mormon Elder", this lesson would not have been possible.