

## Literary Dependence in the Book of Mormon: Two Studies

The Book of Mormon<sup>1</sup> contains fifteen books (one called Words of Mormon) that tell the religious and social history of the people it describes. The work is an abridgement of previous records. The main story takes place in Jerusalem near 600 B.C.E. and ends in America about 421 C.E.<sup>2</sup> It explains that God called Lehi to be a prophet; the family, led primarily by his son Nephi, came by ship to the promised land. Two groups of the house of Israel are chiefly mentioned, the Lamanites and the Nephites. The record tells of their rulers, wars, and religious experiences covering to the time of Christ. A unique part of the book is the appearance of Jesus Christ among the natives after his crucifixion. The book 3 Nephi contains the teachings of Jesus including the establishment of his church.

The downfall of the Nephites is described with the records being written by Mormon and his son Moroni. The survivors are the Lamanites, ancestors to the Native Americans. A short book is the Book of Ether telling about an earlier trip to America by ship (eight barges) shortly after the building of the biblical tower mentioned in Genesis. This other group is known as the Jaredites. The last writing is the Book of Moroni giving a pattern to follow for church ordinances. The Book of Mormon is written in biblical style as a prophetic work to make things clearer than the Bible but in an American setting.

The abridgement was written to the descendants of the Lamanites, and also to Jew and Gentile. It was in essence a Native American book containing historical and religious writings of their ancestors. The title page tells its purpose—"to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD."

Whether the Book of Mormon is an ancient record or a modern creation, it demands serious examination, since it is represented to be Judeo-Christian scripture produced in the New World in pre-Columbian times. One such task is determining the extent to which the Bible, especially the New Testament, was used as a source in its production, and if so, what this may mean regarding the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Another task is weighing the evidence of nineteenth-century events reflected in the Book of Mormon and, again, considering its significance for the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

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<sup>1</sup> Since a number of churches use and publish the Book of Mormon, the edition used in this chapter is the 1981 edition published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 1982 it was renamed and the title is now *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. The versification is the same as the 1879 Salt Lake edition and as used by the Church of Jesus Christ in Monongahela, Pennsylvania, and called "The Record of the Nephites" by the Church of Christ (with the Elijah Message) in Independence, Missouri. The edition of Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) also headquartered in Independence, Missouri, has different versification but the chapters numbers are the same as the 1830 first edition. The Church of Christ (Temple Lot) and other Latter Day Saint churches and groups use this latter versification.

<sup>2</sup> C.E. (Common Era) and B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) are alternate designations corresponding to A.D. and B.C. and are often used in scholarly literature.

## LITERARY DEPENDENCE ON THE BIBLE

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament were originally written between about 50-100 C.E. Yet numerous phrases from the New Testament appear in sections of the Book of Mormon ostensibly dating to hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. This suggests that those sections are of much later composition. Consider a few of these New Testament phrases (written after 30 C.E.) which appear in 1 Nephi-Helaman (recorded 600 B.C.E.-1 C.E.): "ye must pray always, and not faint" (2 Ne. 32:9/Luke 18:1); some will go "into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mosiah 26:27/Matt. 25:41); but "then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God" (Alma 40:25/Matt. 13:43). Believers should be "steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works" (Mosiah 5:15/1 Cor. 15:58); ultimately this "mortal shall put on immortality" (Enos 27/1 Cor. 15:53), but until that day they need to grow "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Enos 1/Eph. 6:4). Notice also that "Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female" (2 Ne. 10:16/Gal. 3:28), who fight against Zion shall perish. God is "the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (2 Ne. 2:4/Heb. 13:8); while believers "endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame" (2 Ne. 9:18/Heb. 12:2). Finally, "if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy" (1 Ne. 15:33/Rev. 22:11).

The Book of Mormon asserts that ancient New World peoples possessed most of the Old Testament. However, Book of Mormon peoples would not have had access to the New Testament. Those who believe in the book's antiquity try to reconcile the presence of New Testament phrases by suggesting that in translating the book Joseph Smith was given an understanding of ideas on the golden plates but had to choose the words to express them. Consequently, where a thought was sufficiently close to biblical wording he adopted or adapted the biblical phrase. This does not sufficiently explain why he implemented the King James style throughout and not a more original style. It also ignores the fact that the adaptation of biblical texts is deeper than mere use of phrases from the New Testament in the Old Testament time period. The Book of Mormon does not simply introduce random New Testament phrases. It reflects on and expands New Testament meanings in an Old Testament context and creates Old Testament events that flow from these New Testament interpretations.

Alma 12 and 13 provide a good example of this dependence in their use of the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews employs Genesis 14:18-20 together with Psalm 2:7 and 110:4 to establish that the Messiah holds a priesthood higher than that of the Levitical priesthood, and that this priesthood "after the order of Melchisedec" superseded and abolished the Levitical one (Heb. 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-12). ("Melchizedek" is the spelling in Old Testament and contemporary LDS usage.) The Book of Mormon builds on this New Testament interpretation and adds its own misinterpretation to create an entire order of priests "after the order of the Son" (Alma 13:9), "being a type of his order" (v. 16), of whom Melchizedek is but the leading example (v. 19). Furthermore, Hebrew's interpretation of Melchizedek's name and title ("King of righteousness . . . King of peace") is expanded into an imaginary historical situation in which Melchizedek successfully calls his people to repentance and thus to righteousness and peace. This material is then worked together into a systematic doctrinal exposition that utilizes other New Testament phrases from such sources as the Gospels, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation. (Compare Alma 13:9, 13, 22 with parallel phrases in John 1:14; Matt. 3:8; Luke 2:10; and Alma 12:20; 13:28 with 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 10:13; also Alma 12:14, 16, 17, and 13:11 with Rev. 6:16; 20:5-6, 14-15; 19:20; 14:10-11; 20:10, and 7:14.)

The Book of Mormon's own theological statements, therefore, are drawn from, depend on, expand, and explain interpretations already present in the New Testament. In using New Testament interpretations and material as a basis for building such theological statements and exposition throughout the book, New Testament quotations become a part of the fabric of the Book of Mormon text and cannot be regarded as mere figures of speech employed in translating.

A second feature of the Book of Mormon's use of the Bible is how it presents prophecies about the New Testament time period. In 1 and 2 Nephi (600-545 B.C.E.) are prophecies of the coming of Jesus Christ. The prophecies in these two books use the language recorded in the New Testament, even the phasing of the King James Version. These events in the life and ministry of Jesus were recorded in the New Testament and written by the men then involved. Since the Book of Mormon did not appear until 1830, it is easy for the book to prophesy of events that had already occurred. Indeed, material in the Old Testament part of the Book of Mormon reads like a late Christian document, written after the New Testament was compiled.

Furthermore, the Book of Mormon preaches the "doctrine of Christ" nearly 600 years before Jesus initiated his ministry in Palestine. Notice the use of Christian terms and doctrine of "the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God" (2 Ne. 31:21) which comes from Matthew 28:19. This formula also occurs in Alma 11:44 (about 82 B.C.E.), but nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is anything of this type mentioned. The Book of Mormon throughout its Old Testament period material uses ideas and doctrines that come from the New Testament.

The Book of Mormon teaches that "many plain and precious things" were "taken away" from the Bible: "they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious" (1 Ne. 13:26, 28). The claim that writings were taken "from the gospel of the Lamb" is problematic. In fact, when one examines the New Testament manuscript material, which reaches back to the second century C.E., evidence that material was taken away is lacking.

There are, however, some places where material was added. One such example is Mark 16:9-20. This passage was probably added to Mark during the second century. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both written in the fourth century, along with a few other New Testament Greek manuscripts, do not contain this addition. Most New Testament scholars, after examining early manuscripts that contain Mark 16, find that the early writings of the church fathers support the view that verses 9-20 were originally not part of Mark.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, passages in the King James Version of Mark 16:9-20 appear in three separate places in the Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 11:33-34; Mormon 9:22-24 and Ether 4:18.

The Book of Mormon justifies this use of the Bible, and especially New Testament words and ideas, by suggesting that Christianity existed in Old Testament times: "Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another" (2 Ne. 29:8). Were these same words spoken to ancient Hebrew prophets? By examining Old Testament documents, we can see that the Book of Mormon has a gospel that was not taught and practiced in the Old Testament period. Rather, it was taught when Jesus and his apostles preached it as recorded only in the New Testament.

When Joseph Smith was in the process of dictating the religious text of the Book of Mormon, he would at times read longer passages from the Old Testament to his scribe. A close examination indicates that chapters from Old Testament books were incorporated into the Book of Mormon. In these places, Smith was dependent upon the Bible with the meaning essentially

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 72-74.

the same. An exception is the verses from Isaiah 29 added to 2 Nephi—it was expanded to make it fit Martin Harris's visit with the learned Professor Charles Anthon. The following chart contains examples of passages used:

| <u>Book of Mormon</u> | <u>Old Testament</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Nephi 20-21         | Isaiah 48-49         |
| 2 Nephi 7             | Isaiah 50            |
| 2 Nephi 8:1-23        | Isaiah 51            |
| 2 Nephi 12-24         | Isaiah 2-14          |
| 2 Nephi 20:24-34      | Isaiah 10:24-34      |
| 2 Nephi 26:14-19      | Isaiah 29:3-5        |
| 2 Nephi 27:1-35       | Isaiah 29:6-24       |
| 2 Nephi 30:11-15      | Isaiah 11:5-9        |
| Mosiah 12:21-24       | Isaiah 52:7-10       |
| Mosiah 13:12-24       | Exodus 20:4-17       |
| Mosiah 14             | Isaiah 53            |
| 3 Nephi 20:41-45      | Isaiah 52:11-15      |
| 3 Nephi 21:12-18, 21  | Micah 5:8-14, 15     |
| 3 Nephi 22            | Isaiah 54            |
| 3 Nephi 24-25         | Malachi 3-4          |

The majority of the chapters originate from the book of Isaiah. Since the printing of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon an earlier Hebrew text of Isaiah was discovered in 1947. Fragments and a large scroll of Isaiah (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>; copied circa 125 B.C.E.) were found in the Judean Desert caves near the Dead Sea and are part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The variants in these manuscripts help clarify the textual tradition when they were made. A basic comparison with the Isaiah in the Book of Mormon indicates that the King James Bible became the standard text when dictating the above texts for the Book of Mormon.<sup>4</sup>

The Book of Mormon is part modern and part ancient, the ancient part coming from the Bible itself. Many familiar themes that are pre-Christian and contained in the earlier portion of the Book of Mormon are found in the Old Testament. Book of Mormon writers reportedly possessed these writings, and it would be natural for Israelite ideas to be in a book of Semitic origin.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See David P. Wright, "Joseph Smith's Interpretation of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Winter 1998):181-206. See also *Scrolls from Qumrân Cave I: The Great Isaiah Scroll, The Order of the Community, The Pesher to Habakkuk*, From photographs by John C. Trever (Jerusalem: The Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and the Shrine of the Book, 1972); and Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, translated and with commentary, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> For a theory that the Book of Mormon is part ancient and part modern with expansive commentary by Joseph Smith see Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 (Spring 1987):66-123. This article contains numerous references to material in the Book of Mormon

During the ministry of Jesus in Palestine, his disciples did not understand much of what he said to them. After his resurrection, they began to know what he meant, and a few wrote down accounts as they remembered them. A passage from John 12:16 emphasizes: "These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him" (see also Mark 9:32; Luke 9:45, 18:34).

By contrast, the Book of Mormon states that Nephite prophets already understood Jesus's mission, including the date of his birth, the name of his mother, and his baptism, death, resurrection, and miracles. In relating these events, it uses later knowledge (written and recorded in the New Testament) and retroactively places them in a historical situation that predates Jesus's birth. These anachronisms mark the Book of Mormon as a work produced after Jesus was resurrected and the Christian church established.

The central book in the Book of Mormon is the book of Third Nephi.<sup>6</sup> It is represented as having been recorded upon plates of gold and abridged by the hand of a historian named Mormon. This book purports to give an account of Jesus Christ appearing in ancient America soon after His resurrection. This section will demonstrate that many passages from the New Testament were used for the Third Nephi account. What is being examined is the authenticity of the record of Third Nephi (i.e., its ancient character) and not the expression of Christ-like teaching.<sup>7</sup>

This reported visit is the climatic and central story in the Book of Mormon. Just prior to that supposed visitation, Third Nephi depicts vast destruction occurring on the American continent over a period of three hours, simultaneous with Jesus's crucifixion (3 Ne. 8:19). Following this, thick darkness came upon the face of the land for the space of three days. The surviving American inhabitants heard a voice speaking words that in part were derived directly from the King James New Testament, and which are found exclusively in the Gospel of John.

Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. ... *I am in the Father, and the Father in me* ... *I came unto my own, and my own received me not.* ... And *as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God* . . . as many as shall *believe on my name* ... in me is the law of Moses fulfilled (3 Ne. 9:15-17; italics added for similar words in John for parallel passages in this discussion; John 14:11, 1:11-12).

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which has a close relationship to the biblical text. Ostler states, "The presence of the KJV [King James Version] in the book is, it seems to me, indisputable" (102).

<sup>6</sup> This book was first named "III Nephi" in the 1879 Salt Lake edition.

<sup>7</sup> The question of the wording of the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Third Nephi is explored in Stan Larson, "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," in Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 115-63. For the Third Nephi account, Nephi supposedly recorded the text soon after the reported visit of Jesus, and this record was later abridged by Mormon, after whom the Book of Mormon is named (see 3 Ne. 16:4, 23:4, 26:7, 11). See Ronald V. Huggins, "Did the Author of 3 Nephi Know the Gospel of Matthew?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30 (Fall 1997):137-48.

Most of these words attributed to Jesus in this Third Nephi passage are found in John's Gospel, and they are actually John's words rather than the words spoken by Jesus himself. The account in Third Nephi has them spoken in America long before John penned them in the Old World circa 90 C.E. The voice continued with further words from John's Gospel as well as from the Book of Revelation.

I am the light and the life of the world (3 Ne. 9:18; John 8:12).

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (3 Ne. 9:19; Rev. 21:6, 22:13).

*Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Third Nephi opens with this Johannine-derived material and depicts the purported post-resurrection visit of Christ to the Israelites of America. The account reports that a voice "as if it came out of heaven" (11:3) was soon heard in "the land Bountiful" (11:1). The voice echoed the words that opened Jesus's ministry in Palestine: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (11:7, italics added for parallelisms; cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; see also Matt. 17:5).<sup>8</sup>

The Gospel according to John records a time after Christ's resurrection when Thomas, one of Jesus's twelve apostles, expressed unbelief and wished to thrust his hand into the wounded side of the resurrected Jesus to verify the resurrection. Jesus then appeared to the apostles with Thomas present and told him, "reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." Thomas, now convinced, answered "My Lord and my God" (John 20:24-29). Third Nephi expands upon this event from John's Gospel, reporting that some twenty-five hundred people (3 Ne. 17:25) filed by "one by one" and touched the crucifixion wounds of Jesus's side, hands, and feet, and exclaimed, "Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!" (3 Ne. 11:17; see also 19:18).

Jesus gave power to baptize to the twelve disciples whom he commissioned on that day. Because Third Nephi presents Jesus as commanding that there should be no more disputation among the people, a baptismal prayer was given which reflects the words of Matthew's gospel: "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen*" (11:25, emphasis added; compare Matt. 28:19). After clarifying that such baptism should be by immersion ("And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water," 11:26), Jesus again utters the words of John 14:11: "I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (11:27).

The doctrines that are reported to have been taught by Jesus to his twelve disciples in the New World are couched in the language of the New Testament, which had not as yet been written. They include the following:

1. Jesus "commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent" (11:32; compare Acts 17:30).
2. Repent and believe in Jesus, "And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; ... And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned" (11:33-34; compare Mark 16:16). Here Third Nephi uses words from

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<sup>8</sup> Other ideas from the New Testament appear earlier in Third Nephi, such as the "star" in the heavens (3 Ne. 1:21), which was a sign of the birth of Christ (Hel. 14:5) to the people in the New World (see Matt. 2:2, 7, 9-10). And the day before Jesus was born it was claimed that Jesus said, "I come unto my own" (3 Ne. 1:14; cf. John 1:11).

the ending of Mark that according to scholarly consensus, do not belong in the original biblical text.

3. Whoever believes in Jesus believes in the Father and he will be visited "with fire and with the Holy Ghost" (11:35; compare Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).
4. Jesus declares: "The Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one" (11:36, 27; compare John 10:30).
5. A person must "become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God" (11:38; compare Luke 18:16-17; Mark 10:14-15; Matt. 18:3; 19:14).

In reporting the words of Jesus's commissioning of the disciples, the Book of Mormon again draws upon the wording of the as-yet-unwritten New Testament:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is *my doctrine*, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth *upon my rock*, and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against them*. And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for *my doctrine*, the same cometh of evil, and is not built *upon my rock*; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and *the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them* (11:39-40, emphasis added; compare John 7:16-17; Matt. 7:24-27; 16:18; parallel text in Luke 6:47-49).

Jesus, after promising the multitude that he would baptize them "with fire and with the Holy Ghost" (12:1) says to the twelve disciples:

Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be *baptized*, for they shall be visited *with fire and with the Holy Ghost*, and shall receive a *remission of their sins* (12:2, emphasis added; compare Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 2:38).

The Third Nephi text next moves to an even heavier dependence upon the New Testament material, attributing to Jesus a retelling of the discourse known as "The Sermon on the Mount" (as recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew). However, these words, which in Matthew belong in a pre-resurrection Jewish/Palestinian setting, are cast into a post-resurrection Nephite context in which the Law of Moses is considered already fulfilled. The sermon in Third Nephi has textual material in it (starting with Matt. 5:3) which makes sense if Jesus is speaking to first-century Jewish religious leaders in Palestine but which is incongruous when directed to a people who have a different culture and speak another language. Nevertheless, the material is presented with the same concepts and vocabulary as recorded in Matthew. Only the most obvious disparities were eliminated from the Third Nephi text, such as the deletion of the reference in Matthew 5:20 (3 Ne. 12:20) concerning scribes and Pharisees.<sup>9</sup> The time frame has

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<sup>9</sup> The Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew was used in Third Nephi to document the teachings reportedly spoken by Jesus in America. See Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1969), 98; (2nd edition, 1995), 84. Krister Stendahl's analysis of "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi" published in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism*:

also been altered to make the material fit into the period after the resurrection of Jesus. Otherwise the text of Matthew has remained mostly unchanged.

In keeping with this shift, Third Nephi presents Jesus as adding: "the law is fulfilled," "come unto me and be ye saved," and "except ye shall keep my commandments ... ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (12:19-20). To the text of Matthew 5:21, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time," is added "and it is also written before you" (12:21). The added words shift the meaning of Jesus's words away from the original sense they have in Matthew's gospel.

The next verse presents a similar problem of making words that have a distinctive Palestinian setting have any significant meaning to New World people. That verse, taken almost verbatim from the King James Version of Matthew except for the deletion of the words "without a cause," reads:

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (3 Ne. 12:22)

The use of the Aramaic word Raca (rēqa' or rēqâ), a term of opprobrium, would be meaningless to New World people who are depicted as speaking either Hebrew or reformed Egyptian. A further disparity lies in the phrase "shall be in danger of the council." In the Gospel account the reference is to the Jewish governing body, the Sanhedrin, but has no apparent point of reference in a New World context.

Finally, it is significant that the three words deleted from this verse in Third Nephi ("without a cause") are the same words that the commentaries of Joseph Smith's day had noted were lacking in some early Greek manuscripts. The questionable status of this phrase was therefore well known before work on the Book of Mormon had begun and may have influenced its deletion.<sup>10</sup> It is also possible that the deletion of the three words may have occurred since people normally would be angry with a cause.

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*Judaean-Christian Parallels* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 139-54, argues that the Book of Mormon text of the Sermon on the Mount is not a genuine translation from an ancient language but is Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century targumic expansion of the English King James text. Stendahl's study has been reprinted in Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 99-113.

<sup>10</sup> In the commentary on Matthew by Adam Clarke, published as early as 1818 (1825 edition used), comes the following regarding the words "without a cause" in Matt. 5:22: "without a cause, is wanting in the famous Vatican MS. and two others, the Ethiopic, latter Arabic, Saxon, Vulgate, two copies of the old Itala, J. Martyr, Ptolomeus, Origen, Tertullian, and by all the ancient copies quoted by St. Jerom[e]. It was probably a marginal gloss originally, which in process of time crept into the text." *Clarke's Commentary* 1:71. The phrase is also deleted in Joseph Smith's revision of Matthew in 1831. See New Testament MS 1, p. 10, CCLA, in *The Holy Scriptures* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1991), published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ), Matthew 5:24. This revision is referred to variously as the Inspired Version (IV) and the Joseph Smith Translation (cited hereafter as JST).

The words of Matthew 5:27, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery," is rendered in Third Nephi as "Behold, it is written by them of old time, that thou shalt not commit adultery" (12:27). The oldest Greek text of Matthew does not contain the words "by them of old time." New Testament papyrus fragment number 64, which includes this portion of the Sermon on the Mount and is dated about 200 C.E., contains no such words. Including these words in Third Nephi shows its dependence on the rendering of this text in the King James Bible rather than being an independent testament of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

The deletion of "neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" from the following text removes it from its New Testament setting. This change suggests an effort to make the Gospel text appear appropriate for a New World context.

But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. (Matt. 5:34-35)

The revised text reads:

But verily, verily, I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; Nor by the earth, for it is his footstool. (3 Ne. 12:34-25)

For Third Nephi to have included the reference in Matthew 5:35 to Jerusalem, "the city of the great King" (wording derived apparently from Ps. 48:2), would have revealed the Old World setting of the passage.<sup>12</sup> After these departures from Matthew, the text in Third Nephi closely follows Matthew's wording in 5:39-42, 44, with but a few words different (compare 3 Ne. 12:39-42, 44). There is an omission of the words "and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" in verse 45, while Paul's words from 2 Corinthians, "Old things are done away, and all things have become new" are placed on Jesus's lips (12:47; compare 2 Cor. 5:17).

The main body of this material in Third Nephi is derived directly from the Gospel of Matthew, since parallel texts in Mark or Luke are ignored for Matthew's wording. While it is true that, except for the words "should be cast into hell" (12:30), Matthew 5:29-30 is omitted from the Third Nephi account without any obvious reason, nevertheless the sequence found in Matthew is closely followed. These teachings of Jesus are found in the Gospels of Mark and Luke but are scattered throughout the narratives rather than grouped topically as Matthew records them. Several textual problems contained in this chapter makes these words out of place in a New World setting.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In the manuscript of Joseph Smith's revision, New Testament MS 1, p. 10, the words "them of old time" were written and then crossed out in the manuscript and the text as printed in 3 Nephi 12:27 is written out. The Book of Mormon follows the King James Version and in his revision of the New Testament Joseph Smith used both the KJV and Third Nephi.

<sup>12</sup> In 3 Nephi 12:23 the wording in Matthew 5:23 about bringing "thy gift to the altar" was also removed from the text of Matthew when placed in the Third Nephi record, possibly also to eliminate any Palestinian context.

<sup>13</sup> As has been stated, many of the changes made in Third Nephi from the King James Matthew are also retained by Joseph Smith when he produced his Bible revision. The following verses in both texts are basically the same: 3 Nephi 12:3-13; compare with Matthew 5:5-15 (JST). When

Third Nephi 13 continues the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount taken from Matthew 6 but places it on the lips of Jesus as his teaching to the Nephites. This chapter is copied into Third Nephi with very few textual differences from its printing in the King James Bible. Compare the following: 3 Nephi 13:3-9 with Matthew 6:3-9; 3 Nephi 13:11-24 with Matthew 6:12-24; 3 Nephi 13:25(part)-29 with Matthew 6:25-29 and 3 Nephi 13:33 with Matthew 6:33.

In this section, the familiar version of what is known as "The Lord's Prayer" is quoted from Matthew with two phrases deleted in the Third Nephi version. The phrases omitted are (1) "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10), and (2) "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). The first phrase is also found in Luke 11:2 and the second phrase appears as "Give us day by day our daily bread" in Luke 11:3. It is not apparent on the surface just why these phrases were omitted since Joseph Smith later included them in his Bible revision.<sup>14</sup>

While the deletion of the two phrases may have no significance, it is of great importance to note that the closing of Matthew 6:13 (King James Version) – "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen"—is included in the Third Nephi text. This closing is widely recognized as an addition to the Matthean text, since the doxology is missing from the most reliable Greek manuscripts, such as the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus (both transcribed during the fourth century). Other manuscripts of Matthew give a variant form of doxology, indicating that this ending was an addition to the Lord's Prayer. Biblical scholars have concluded that the evidence indicates that the doxology became attached to the Matthean text from a liturgical use of the prayer in the early worship services of the Christian churches.<sup>15</sup> Various endings were added to the Lord's Prayer perhaps as early as the second century, and even where the doxology occurs it does so with several variations. It was not until the fourth century that this doxology became fixed and standard in manuscripts of Matthew.<sup>16</sup>

Since this doxology was added to some New Testament manuscripts in the Old World in the fourth century, it is highly improbable that this identical wording was spoken by Christ in America shortly after His resurrection. A more plausible explanation is that Joseph Smith copied these words from the King James Bible, in ignorance of the textual history, rather than having been spoken by Jesus in the New World. This then would be but another example of the late textual material anachronistically placed into an earlier time-frame in Third Nephi.

One Latter-day Saint scholar has attempted to account for the obvious borrowing of the Third Nephi sermon from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew:

We recognize the fact that no two independent translators would be likely to translate a large portion of the Sermon word for word the same. That Joseph

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material was added which was not in the Matthew account to the Third Nephi version, these words were used in the Bible revision. See for example: 3 Nephi 12:2 with Matthew 5:4 (JST) and 3 Nephi 12:29-30 with Matthew 5:31 (JST).

<sup>14</sup> The omission of the first phrase cannot be attributed to the theological terminology implied in "Thy kingdom come" for the exhortation of Jesus "But seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33; compare Luke 12:31) is found in 3 Nephi 13:33.

<sup>15</sup> See Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 103.

<sup>16</sup> In Joseph Smith's revision for the parallel text of the Lord's prayer recorded in Luke 11:4 (JST) he added (after "but deliver us from evil") a part of the doxology added to Matthew—namely, "for thine is the kingdom and power. Amen."

Smith used the King James version when he came to familiar scripture on the Gold Plates we shall not deny. As long as the Sermon in the familiar rendering of Matthew 5-7 agreed substantially with the Nephite version the prophet used it word for word; otherwise he corrected it to conform with the text before him on the metal plates. In this respect Joseph Smith did only what many translators would have done.<sup>17</sup>

However, this suggestion that the likeness of the text in Third Nephi was because the King James rendering of Matthew was used when it "agreed substantially with the Nephite version" will not stand. There is no evidence to support including this late fourth-century doxology in the Third Nephi. To hold such a conclusion would mean that Jesus taught to the first-century Nephites a doxology that would incorrectly be added in the fourth century to his words in Matthew.

In chapter 14 of Third Nephi the text again follows almost verbatim what is found in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 7:1-17 is here quoted from the King James New Testament (some of which had been previously paraphrased by Jesus in Third Nephi).

If there is still doubt that the author of Third Nephi has borrowed the text of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount, it should be dispelled when even words clearly composed by Matthew, and not attributable to Jesus, are brought over into the Third Nephi account. The Third Nephi text follows Matthew so closely that it even borrows Matthew's transitional phrase: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings" (Matt. 7:28; compare 3 Ne. 15:1). The Third Nephi text claims to have been written long before Matthew composed his account. The Third Nephi writings clearly are based upon a text written years after Jesus's resurrection.

Chapter 15 of Third Nephi presents Jesus as acknowledging that he was teaching the same material he had taught in Palestine, for it reports him saying, "Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father" (15:1). However, the text understandably does not mention that this material was derived from the Gospel of Matthew before Matthew had ever recorded it.

The Gospel of Matthew was not the only source for the words of Jesus in Third Nephi. Jesus opens chapter 15 explaining in Paul's words from 2 Corinthians that "old things had passed away, and that all things had become new," (a statement borrowed from 2 Corinthians 5:17; compare 3 Nephi 12:47). He adds, "The law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me. Behold I am the law, and the light" (15:8-9). Next, Jesus tells the twelve American disciples that they are to be a light to these American Israelites "who are a remnant of the house of Joseph" (15:12), that America is to be the land of their inheritance (v. 13) and that their Jewish brothers at Jerusalem do not know of their existence (v. 14).

Furthermore, Jesus declares that he has not made known to the Jews in the Holy Land the existence of "the other tribes of the house of Israel, whom the Father hath led away out of the

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<sup>17</sup> Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 112. The evidence does indicate that the sermons in Third Nephi are in part based upon the KJV New Testament. For a view of one who maintains that the King James Version was not used, see John W. Welch in *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990), 148-63.

land" of Palestine (v. 15). Thus all ten tribes, including the segment descended from Joseph through Manasseh and Lehi (the original leader of the American colony, Alma 10:3), are depicted as completely lost and unknown to the Jews of Jesus' day.

At this point the Gospel of John provided another fruitful source for the words and prayers that are written in Third Nephi. Jesus is represented as uttering words found in John's Gospel:

That other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd (15:17; also 15:21; compare with John 10:16).

The Third Nephi passage depends upon the King James Version of John. Third Nephi proceeds to give its own unique explanation of what Jesus meant by "other sheep," namely the Nephites and the lost tribes. It has Jesus saying that he hinted of the continued existence of this lost group of Israelites by telling the Jews in Palestine that he had "other sheep ... which are not of this fold," but the Jews thought he meant the Gentiles (vv. 21-22). However, he explains that the Gentiles will never personally "hear my voice" but will learn of Christ only "by the Holy Ghost" (v. 23). Rather than referring to the Israelites of America, this verse does not refer to any specific group other than non-Jews or Gentiles.

In the next chapter (chapter 16), Jesus adds that he is leaving to visit these "other sheep, which are not of this land [America], neither of the land of Jerusalem" so they may hear his voice, be numbered among his sheep and thus produce "one fold and one shepherd" (vv. 1-3). These American Israelites are told that they are to record this information Jesus has shared with them just in case the Jews fail to inquire by the Holy Ghost about their existence and the existence of "the other tribes whom they know not of" (v. 4).

The knowledge given here is supposedly important since the Gentiles will later use it to reach the remnant of the American Hebrews who have been scattered over the continent because of their unbelief. Through this effort and knowledge, they may "be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer" (v. 4). However, the Gentiles themselves should beware, or they will face rejection by God after they have scattered and mistreated these descendants of Israel so they have "become a hiss and a byword among them." If they fall into all kinds of sins and reject "the fulness of my gospel" (contained in the Book of Mormon), then the Lord will take that fulness from them and bring it to the house of Israel (Native Americans) and the Gentiles will no longer have power over them (vv. 6-12). However, if the Gentiles repent, they will be numbered among the house of Israel. But if they remain stubborn, then the Native Americans will "tread them down," for "this land" (America) is divinely marked to be the inheritance of these sons of Israel (verses 13-16).

After expounding this unique eschatological interpretation of John 10:16, Jesus's discourse continues to incorporate phrases from John's Gospel. In chapter 17, Jesus declares that he would "go unto the Father" (compare John 14:28) and also show himself "unto the lost tribes of Israel" (v. 4). The multitude "did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them" (v. 5). Then "the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him" (v. 9). They did "bow down at his feet, and did worship him [Jesus]; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their

tears" (v. 10). Their little children were brought to Jesus, reported Third Nephi, and "Jesus groaned within himself" (v. 14; compare John 11:33) and prayed great and marvelous things. Then he beheld the multitude and said: "Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full" (v. 20) then "he wept" (v. 21; compare John 11:35). Jesus next "took their little children, one by one, and blessed them" (v. 21) and prayed for them (see also Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16, and Luke 18:15-17).

The disciples in chapter 18 were then commanded to bring the sacramental bread and wine to be blessed. For the bread, Jesus is reported to have said: "This shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you" (v. 7) and for the wine, "ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you" (v. 11; compare Luke 22:19-20; Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24, and 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Third Nephi then continues by presenting Jesus as uttering the following words:

And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock. But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall, and the gates of hell are ready open to receive them (vv. 12-13; compare Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49; Matt. 16:18).

According to Third Nephi, Jesus reportedly said concerning prayer: "Ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (v. 18; compare Luke 22:31). To the disciples he further is reported to have said that they should "not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it" (v. 28). Jesus here is basically following the instructions which Paul some twenty years later would issue in his first Epistle to the Corinthians:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:27-29; compare 3 Ne. 18:28-29).

After further instructions, Jesus "touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one" (v. 36) and gave them power to give the Holy Ghost (v. 37).

Chapter 19 of Third Nephi explains that Jesus ascended into heaven after His supposed first visit. Echoing the appointment of the twelve apostles in Palestine, the names of the twelve Nephite disciples are recorded in the Book of Mormon in the following manner:

And it came to pass that on the morrow, when the multitude was gathered together, behold, Nephi and his brother whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was Timothy, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Mathoni, and Mathonihah, his brother, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah—now these were the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen (19:4)

The twelve disciples of Third Nephi, like the New Testament twelve apostles, were listed with two sets of brothers and with two disciples that have the same name, e.g., in Third Nephi, "Jonas" (see Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16, and Acts 1:13).

Nephi, one of the twelve disciples, then "went down into the water and was baptized. And he came up out of the water and began to baptize. And he baptized all those whom Jesus had chosen" (vv. 11-12). This, and other passages emphasizing immersion as the proper mode of baptism, seems to assume the existence of some conflicting mode such as pouring or sprinkling. The Nephite doctrinal disputes thus resemble those in Joseph Smith's day.

On Jesus's second visit, the multitude knelt down and the disciples "did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God" (19:18; compare John 20:28). Jesus departed and went to pray by himself. The prayer recorded is very similar to the high-priestly prayer of Jesus in the Holy Land, recorded only in the Gospel of John. Compare the prayer in Third Nephi (19:20, 23, 28-29) and the one written in John's Gospel (17:1, 6, 9-10, 20-21). Even the ending is identical with the words written by John: "And *when Jesus had spoken these words*" (19:30, emphasis added)—"When Jesus had spoken these words" (John 18:1).

These prayers of Jesus in Third Nephi seem clearly to be based upon the Gospel of John. The Jesus presented in Third Nephi is not unique to the Third Nephi text but is taken right out of the New Testament, even down to borrowing the gospel writers' words and phrases. This use of John evidences still another example of textual borrowing in the Third Nephi account.

Chapter 20 of Third Nephi relates that Jesus gave all those assembled to hear him both bread and wine, but "there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude" (v. 6), a story that seems close to that of the feeding of the five thousand when there was a need for the sharing of food (Matt. 14:14-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:11-17, and John 6:5-14). That this is sacramental bread and wine is indicated in verse 8.

It is explained, as Jesus's discourse continues in chapter 21, that the Gentiles shall assist the Native Americans ("the remnant of Jacob") and any other Israelites that might be willing to join in ("as many of the house of Israel as shall come") to "build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem" (21:23). These Gentiles will also assist Native Americans scattered across the face of the land in coming to this "New Jerusalem" (v. 24). Then the power of heaven and Jesus himself will come down among them (v. 25). Earlier, the land of America itself was to be "a New Jerusalem" (20:22), but it was now to be a specific city. Third Nephi, however, had this New Jerusalem not "coming down from God out of the heaven" as predicted in the book of Revelation (Rev. 21:2; see also Rev. 3:12), but simply that "the power of heaven come down" and Jesus promises to "be in the midst" (3 Ne. 21:25).

In chapter 23 Jesus adds to the Nephite record textual material from the New Testament about the graves opening at the time of Christ's resurrection—material that is otherwise found only in the Gospel according to Matthew. These words were reported to have been spoken years earlier by an American prophet named Samuel as a prediction of what would happen at the time of Christ's death. This resurrection event is supposed to have taken place in America, but it is like what is recorded in Matthew, even to the wording used (compare Hel. 14:25; 3 Ne. 23:9, 11 with Matt. 27:52-53).

As Jesus continued his discourse, other New Testament phrases appear. Reflecting Peter's words, Third Nephi related that Jesus "did expound all things ... yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the *elements* should *melt with fervent heat*" (26:3, emphasis added; compare 2 Pet. 3:10, 12). In a paraphrase of John 5:29 the writer has

Jesus saying: "If they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of damnation" (26:5; see also Mosiah 16:11 and Hel. 12:26).

Like the New Testament words of Jesus, the Third Nephi multitude even saw that their children "yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things" (26:16; compare Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21). Furthermore, the response to Jesus' discourse was impressive, for many were baptized and "they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ" (v. 21).

During the third visit of Jesus in Third Nephi, the record claims that Christ came to settle a dispute among the people concerning the name of the church.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing? Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day. Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name (27:4-7)

This concern regarding the proper name of the church was an issue during the 1820s. This may have influenced its inclusion as words Christ would have said.

The remainder of Jesus's discourse during his third visit reflects the same dependence upon the language and thought of the New Testament. Jesus taught that he "had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me" (27:14; compare John 12:32). After assuring them that "whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you" (v. 28; compare John 15:16), Jesus then exhorts them, drawing ideas and wording from Matthew chapter 7 (compare 3 Ne. 27:29 with Matt. 7:7-8 [identical wording also in Luke 11:9-10] and 27:33 with Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus finally asked the twelve disciples, "What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?" (28:1; compare John 21:20-23). Nine of the American disciples desired that they live "unto the age of man" (v. 2) and Jesus said to them "after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom" (v. 3). To the remaining three disciples he said, borrowing language from 1 Corinthians:

Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me. Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death . . . but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality (vv. 6-8; compare 1 Cor. 15:51-53).

The three disciples were to "bring the souls of men unto" Jesus "while the world shall stand" (v. 9). Then Jesus "touched every one of them with his finger save it were the three who were to tarry, and then he departed" from his third and final visit among the American Israelites (v. 12). Third Nephi records the following regarding the three disciples who were to tarry on the earth:

Behold, I was about to write the names of those who were never to taste of death, but the Lord forbade; therefore I write them not, for they are hid from the world (28:25).<sup>18</sup>

And they are as the angels of God, and if they shall pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus they can show themselves unto whatsoever man it seemeth them good (28:30).<sup>19</sup>

The clear conclusion of this examination is that the King James Version of the New Testament text was used extensively in the composition of Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon. The Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus during his ministry in the Old World was used to flesh out the idea that Christ had appeared to the ancient inhabitants of America. Other teachings of Jesus were adapted from different texts in the New Testament to provide content for an appearance of Jesus during the three-day period that Third Nephi claims for the visitation of the resurrected Jesus.

This documentation of extensive textual borrowing from the New Testament writings indicates a serious problem in accepting Third Nephi as an accurate account. If Jesus appeared in the New World as the Book of Mormon would have us believe, then the textual problems it contains would lead to the conclusion that it is not an accurate record of that event.

## **LITERARY DEPENDENCE ON NINETEENTH CENTURY EVENTS**

Once one sees how the Book of Mormon draws on the King James Bible, it is not difficult to detect other contemporary material. For example, the Book of Mormon is clearly familiar with American history, particularly events that had occurred prior to 1830 such as the voyage of Columbus and the European settling of America. Anachronisms are present in the text, since for example the Revolutionary War had already occurred prior to the dictation of the Book of Mormon text. First Nephi 13 is represented as containing a prophetic vision of events in American history. Known historical happenings from the past are written as prophecy to make it appear that they were known in vision two thousand years earlier. This is evident from the following extracts, with interpretation in brackets:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Oliver B. Huntington recorded the names of those three Nephites in his journal: "February 16—1895 I am willing to state that the names of the 3 Nephites who do not sleep in the earth are Jeremiah, Zedekiah and Kumenonhi." Oliver B. Huntington Journal, Book 17:173, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>19</sup> This later led to an extensive body of Mormon folklore about the sighting of these three immortal messengers in various Mormon communities. See Hector Lee, *The Three Nephites: The Substance and Significance of the Legend in Folklore* (New York: Arno Press, 1977) and William A. Wilson, "Freeways, Parking Lots, and Ice Cream Stands: The Three Nephites in Contemporary Society," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 (Autumn 1988):13-26.

<sup>20</sup> Some of these identifications are contained in the footnotes of the 1879 Salt Lake edition of the Book of Mormon. Orson Pratt, apostle and official LDS church historian, prepared the references for that edition.

I looked and beheld many waters [Atlantic Ocean]; and they divided the Gentiles [in Europe] from the seed of my brethren [Native Americans]. (1 Ne. 13:10)

And I looked and beheld a man [Columbus] among the Gentiles [in Europe] . . . and he went forth upon the many waters [Atlantic Ocean], even to the seed of my brethren [Native Americans], who were in the promised land [America]. (1 Ne. 13:12)

And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles [Pilgrim fathers]; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters [Atlantic Ocean]. . . . I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles [Pilgrim fathers] upon the land of promise [America]; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren [the Indians (Native Americans)]; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten [judgment on Native Americans]. . . . And I beheld their mother Gentiles [the British] were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them [Thirteen Colonies] . . . the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle [the Revolutionary War, 1776-1781]. (1 Ne. 13:13-14, 17-18)

the Gentiles [the United States] that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations [probably the War of 1812]. (1 Ne. 13:19)

The Book of Mormon also refers to the Bible being brought to America:

I beheld a book [Bible], and it was carried forth among them [Native Americans]. (1 Ne. 13:20)

Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles [United States] shall destroy the seed of thy brethren [the Indians (Native Americans)]. (1 Ne. 13:31)

And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren [bringing the Bible and doing missionary work among Native Americans<sup>21</sup>]. (1 Ne. 13:38)

The Book of Mormon's religious and historical setting takes place not in the Old World but in the New and reflects the popular pride that most citizens of the day felt for their new

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<sup>21</sup> In 1663 the Bible was printed in the Algonquin Indian language in Massachusetts. It had been translated into their language by John Eliot. The first English New Testament was published in America in 1777 and the Holy Bible in 1782.

nation.<sup>22</sup> The following are some major themes relating to the place of America as developed in the Book of Mormon making the book unique.

### A Choice Land

that after the waters had receded from off the face of this land it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord. (Ether 13:2)

we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands. (2 Ne. 1:5)

### Hid from Knowledge of Other Nations

And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance. (2 Ne. 1:8)

### A Land of Promise

be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. (1 Ne. 2:20)

### Land of Liberty

he named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, yea, and in fine, all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land, and the land of liberty. (Alma 46:17)

### Free from Bondage

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven. (Ether 2:12)

### No Kings on the Land

And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. (2 Ne. 10:11)

### America Is Zion

And I will fortify this land against all other nations. And he that figheth against Zion shall perish, saith God. (2 Ne. 10:12-13)

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<sup>22</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Collier Books, 1969), 269-70.

And all the nations that fight against Zion, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision . . . even so shall the multitude of all nations be that fight against Mount Zion. (2 Ne. 27:3)

### Visits of Christ to America after His Crucifixion

3 Nephi 11-28 (three days)

### New Jerusalem to Be Built in America

And that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord. . . . And that a New Jerusalem should be built upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type. (Ether 13:3, 6)

The third decade of the nineteenth century when the Book of Mormon appeared was also a period of theological controversy. The book takes sides on various issues under discussion, as the following extracts demonstrate. The Book of Mormon's position is quoted and a contemporary adherent of the same point of view is given:

### Baptism by Immersion

On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you. . . . Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. . . . And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. . . . And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been. (3 Ne. 11:22, 23, 26, 28)

We baptize by immersion, because we think from all the evidence we can obtain upon this subject, it was the way or mode by which the ordinance was administered when first administered when first instituted, and afterwards practiced by the ancient christians. (David Millard, ed., *Gospel Luminary* 1 [October 1825]:221, West Bloomfield, Ontario County, New York)

But I am now to show that *christian immersion*, as instituted by Jesus Christ, (not as corrupted by men,) is the gospel in *water*. (*The Christian Baptist*, 1955 reprint; 5 [Feb. 5, 1828]:165, Bethany, Virginia, emphasis retained)

### Name of the Church

And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ. . . . And they said unto him: Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter. And the Lord said unto them: Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this

thing? . . . [Y]e must take upon you the name of Christ . . . [T]herefore ye shall call the church in my name . . . And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel. (3 Ne. 26:21; 27:3-5, 7-8)

When we give a *name* and a *creed* to a church, other than the name of *Christ*, or *Christian*, and the *New Testament*, or the *Gospel*, that church acquires in our *imaginings and feelings*, and in *fact*, a character altogether different from what the *Church of Christ* really possesses in the light of the New Testament. (*The Christian Baptist* 2 [July 4, 1825]:237, emphasis retained)

We, however, choose to be known by the name of Christian to the exclusion of all other names not found in the scriptures, this bring the most significant appellation of the followers of Christ, and agreeably to our views, given by divine appointment. (*Gospel Luminary* 3 [August 1827]:188, West Bloomfield, Ontario County, New York)

### Baptism of Children

. . . for it grieveth me that there should disputation rise among you. For, if I have learned the truth, there have been disputation among you concerning the baptism of your little children . . . I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children. . . . For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism. (Moro. 8:4-5, 9, 15)

The question of *infant baptism* is now generally discussed all over the land, and immense has been the result. (*The Christian Baptist* 5 [January 7, 1828]:138, emphasis retained)

### Freemasonry: A Topic of Discussion

The abduction and probable murder of William Morgan in September 1826 caused many Americans to view Freemasonry as a dangerous threat. George Washington's warning about "all combinations and associations" in his Farewell Address became the anti-Masonic motto, "Beware of Secret Combinations." Masons were regarded as shedding innocent blood, binding themselves with oaths, and bent on preventing just punishment from coming upon a fellow Mason. Whether this violent reaction to Masonry was justified, the controversy is reflected in the Book of Mormon.

According to the Book of Mormon, at the time the book was to appear there would be "secret combinations." The words "secret combinations" did not always refer to Masons. But the following quotations, from the many that are in the Book of Mormon, illustrate this unmistakable anti-Masonic influence.

Secret Combinations

And it shall come in a day when the blood of saints shall cry unto the Lord, because of secret combinations and the works of darkness. (Morm. 8:27)

"BEWARE OF SECRET COMBINATIONS." These are the dying words of General George Washington. . . . Do not these words . . . point with an index that cannot be mistaken, to the Society of Freemasons? (*The Morgan Investigator* 1 [March 29, 1827]:1, Batavia, New York)

Masonic Rites

And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever. (2 Ne. 26:22)

The candidate is then blindfolded, his left foot bare, his right in a slipper, his left breast and arm naked, and a rope called a Cable-tow round his neck . . . (William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry by One of the Fraternity Who Has Devoted Thirty Years to the Subject* [Batavia, New York: Printed for the Author, 1826], 18)

I fancy those men are fastening a "Cable Tow" about their necks, which will have a more uncomfortable set than those they have worn in the lodge and which they will in all probability wear to their graves. (*The Morgan Investigator* 1 [March 29, 1827]:2).

The principles of masonry are confessedly ancient. They can be traced back to the time when the first deceiver said, "Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be as God's knowing good and evil." . . . Freemasonry, without controversy, is the very master-piece of pandemonium. By means of these hidden mysteries, Satan has strangely outdone himself. (*Republican Monitor* 6 [November 23, 1828]:1, Cazenovia, New York)

Secret Signs and Words

And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band, who had taken this covenant. (Hel. 6:22)

As the signs, due-guards, grips, words, pass-words, and their several names comprise pretty much all the secrets of Masonry. (William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 55)

. . . to protect their brethren from the lash of the civil laws . . . whether guilty or not guilty, treason and murder not excepted; and although they may be obliged to swear falsely to clear the guilty brother, they must do it, or incur the penalty of secret death. (William W. Phelps, ed., *The Ontario Phoenix* 1 [September 17, 1828]:2, Canandaigua, New York)

Masonic oaths were intended to screen criminal masons and enable them to elude public justice. The expectations of escaping the strong arm of the law, emboldens them to the commission of the most daring deeds of iniquity. The life of every Freemason is awfully pledged in defence of the brotherhood and the mysteries of the order. Hence it is extremely difficult to bring criminal masons to justice. (*Republican Monitor* 6 [November 23, 1828]:1)

### Contrary to the Laws of God and Country

And thus they might murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God. (Hel. 6:23)

Masonry is a murderous institution. It is based on laws which require murder. Those laws which support the system, demand and take the life of a fellow creature, without any reference to the laws of God or the land. . . . Who then does not see, that the very principles, spirit, and essence, of this ancient fraternity, are murderous! (John G. Stearns, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Tendency of Speculative Free-Masonry*, 1829 ed., 76)

. . . that dark and treasonable plot, formed against the lives of our citizens and the laws of our country. (*The Morgan Investigator* 1 [March 29, 1827]:2)

### Native Americans of Hebrew Origin

The Book of Mormon asserts that Native Americans are of Hebrew descent, specifically from one of the lost tribes (Joseph), and uses the Old Testament to support this.<sup>23</sup> However, the

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<sup>23</sup> Those scholars who have studied the Solomon Spalding manuscript have noticed similarities in style and wording on some religious issues and sections relating to wars in that manuscript and in the Book of Mormon. See Vernal Holley, *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look* 2nd ed. (Roy, Utah: author, 1989), which utilizes this material. Though of a different nature, Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* includes topics that occur in the Book of Mormon. We should not be surprised that similar ideas are contained in a written document produced about the same time. At the time these writings were recorded it was widely believed that Indians were of the stock of Israel. Over the years we have learned that there is no solid evidence of Hebrew origin of Native Americans. The writings of B. H. Roberts are included in Brigham D. Madsen, ed., *Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). See also David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of The Book of Mormon* 2nd ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2000).

idea that the American Indians were descendants of the Hebrews was a common one in early America before the Book of Mormon was published.

Since the discovery of America, many people had published various theories about the origins of the native Indians. The idea that their ancestors were of Hebrew origin was widely published in both Europe and America. This theory was not universally held, but it was popular among religious leaders. The following works were among the most popular expressing the Hebrew origin of the Indians at the period before the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830:

Thomas Thorowgood. *Jews in America, or, Probabilities that the Americans are of that Race*. London, 1650.

James Adair. *The History of the American Indians*. London, 1775.

Charles Crawford. *An Essay upon the Propagation of the Gospel, in which there are facts to prove that many of the Indians in America are descended from the Ten Tribes*. Philadelphia, PA, 1799.

Elias Boudinot. *A Star in the West; or, a Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Tribes of Israel*. Trenton, NJ: Published by D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson, and J. Dunham, 1816.

Ethan Smith. *View of the Hebrews*. Poultney, VT: Printed and Published by Smith & Shute, 1823.

\_\_\_\_\_. *View of the Hebrews; or, the Tribes of Israel in America*, 2nd ed. Poultney, VT: Published and Printed by Smith & Shute, 1825, 2d ed.

Josiah Priest. *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed*. Albany, NY, 1825.

Some writers argued that Native Americans descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel because of similarities between customs and languages. Others saw Christian ideas among the American Indians and believed that Christianity had been taught to them since the first century of the Christian era.<sup>24</sup> The idea was so important that writers of that period published lengthy books on the topic. Indeed, it was one of the most popular views at the time the Book of Mormon came off the press.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In 1816 Elias Boudinot claimed that the ancestors of the Native Americans had at least part of the Bible, "that the book which the white people have was once theirs." Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West*, 110. In this same year Boudinot founded the American Bible Society.

<sup>25</sup> On books published prior to 1830 on the origin of Native Americans, see George Weiner, "America's Jewish Braves," *Mankind* 4 (October 1974):56-64; David A. Palmer, "A Survey of Pre-1830 Historical Sources Relating to the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 (Autumn 1976):101-7; and Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

### Events in life of Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith wrote the following about his youth: "by searching the scriptures I found that <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament."<sup>26</sup> This view finds expression in the Book of Mormon.

And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor. And there are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice. (2 Ne. 26:20-21)

For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord's; and the others shall say: I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance. . . . Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted. Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up. (2 Ne. 28:3-4, 11-12)

Joseph Smith was personally familiar with such religious controversies from his own active participation in his youth. His early history mentions his quest for religious knowledge and "my intimate acquaintance with those different denominations."<sup>27</sup>

Also Joseph Smith believed in, and was a leading participant in, treasure seeking. His examination before Justice Albert Neely showed that this activity had been part of his early development in life. Jonathan Thompson testified in 1826 that Smith helped find a trunk full of treasure, but it kept "settling away" and they never could get it: "the board which he struck his spade upon was probably the chest, but on account of an enchantment the trunk kept settling away from under them while digging; that notwithstanding they continued constantly removing the dirt, yet the trunk kept about the same distance from them."<sup>28</sup> This idea of treasures slipping into the earth is reflected in the Book of Mormon.

Whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more, because of the great curse of the land, save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto

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<sup>26</sup> Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:5. See Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," *New York History* 61 (October 1980):359-86.

<sup>27</sup> Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:5.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Marshall, "The Original Prophet. By a Visitor to Salt Lake City," *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):230. According to the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was instructed to hide up the book unto the Lord (2 Ne. 27:22, 30:3-5).

the Lord. For I will, saith the Lord, that they shall hide up their treasures unto me; and cursed be they who hide not up their treasures unto me; for none hideth up their treasures unto me save it be the righteous. (Hel. 13:18-19)

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. . . . Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land. 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. Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. (Hel. 13:31, 35-37)

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. (Morm. 1:18)

Not only is Joseph Smith's treasure digging reflected in the Book of Mormon, but other events in which Joseph was involved show up there, after the events had already taken place. As discussed in Chapter 7, Martin Harris reportedly told Joseph Smith about his visit to Charles Anthon of New York City. This trip occurred about February 1828. In the Book of Mormon, this incident is mentioned but some of its features are different. 2 Nephi 27:15-20 contains an expanded commentary on Isaiah 29:11-12 in relation to this specific event:

But behold, it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall say unto him to whom he shall deliver the book: Take these words which are not sealed and deliver them to another, that he may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee. And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them. . . . And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed. Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that the Lord God will deliver again the book and the words thereof to him that is not learned; and the man that is not learned shall say: I am not learned. (2 Ne. 27:15, 17-19)

These changes in Isaiah 29 prophesy of an event that had already occurred to Martin Harris. There is no ancient text of Isaiah, either Hebrew (including the Dead Sea Scrolls) or in any ancient translation that supports Joseph Smith's changes that make the passage fit the incident that occurred early in 1828.<sup>29</sup> The above example shows Martin Harris's adventure being described in prophecy and being included in the Book of Mormon text. Professor Anthon wrote

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<sup>29</sup> For an examination of Isaiah 29 in the Book of Mormon, see Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), 75-88. For a study on the use of Ezekiel 37, see Brian E. Keck, "Ezekiel 37, Sticks, and Babylonian Writing Boards: A Critical Reappraisal," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23 (Spring 1990):126-38.

that he did not promise "to decipher the piece of writing in question—if the original records were brought to me."<sup>30</sup>

In March 1829, while working on the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith stated that there would be three special witnesses to the book. In a revelation for Joseph and Martin Harris received in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Smith was told:

This Generation they shall have my word yea & the testimony of three of my servants shall go forth with my word unto this Generation yea three shall know of a surety that those things are true for I will give them power that they may Behold & view those things as they are & to none else will I grant this power among this Generation & the testimony of three Witnesses will I send forth.<sup>31</sup>

When Joseph Smith recommenced his dictation, he included in the text references to three witnesses who would testify of the Book of Mormon.

Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken, the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered; and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein. And there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God. (2 Ne. 27:12-13)

In one place instructions in the text inform him that he may "show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work."

And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work; And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true. And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day. (Ether 5:2-4)

The three witnesses chosen to view the gold plates were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. Cowdery had seen the plates in a vision before meeting Joseph Smith.<sup>32</sup> In June 1829 they were told that by faith they would see them, even as Joseph Smith

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<sup>30</sup> Anthon to "Rev. and Dear Sir," August 12, 1844, in *New-York Observer* 23 (May 3, 1845):69, New York.

<sup>31</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 27-28; BC 4:4; LDS D&C 5:11-15; RLDS D&C 5:3. Joseph Smith was further instructed, "When thou hast translated a few more pages, thou shalt stop for a season, even until I command thee again: then thou mayest translate again."

<sup>32</sup> Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:10.

had seen them.<sup>33</sup> The testimony of the three witnesses, as published in the Book of Mormon, said that they saw an angel and engravings on the plates.

Martin Harris, the oldest witness, emphasized that his experience of seeing the plates was through the eye of faith as the 1829 revelation stated. John H. Gilbert recorded: "Martin was in the office when I finished setting up the testimony of the three witnesses,—(Harris—Cowdery and Whitmer) I said to him,—'Martin, did you see those plates with your naked eyes?' Martin looked down for an instant, raised his eyes up, and said, 'No, I saw them with a spiritual eye.'"<sup>34</sup>

David Whitmer wrote, "Of course we were in the spirit when we had the view, for no man can behold the face of an angel, except in a spiritual view, but we were in the body also, and everything was as natural to us, as it is at any time."<sup>35</sup> Oliver Cowdery reportedly handled the plates, "I beheld with my eyes. And handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated."<sup>36</sup>

Besides the three witnesses, eight other witnesses said Joseph Smith showed them the plates. Their statement records that they handled and lifted the plates. John Whitmer, for instance, wrote, "I have most assuredly seen the plates from whence the book of Mormon is translated, and that I have handled these plates."<sup>37</sup> Three years later he was reported as saying, "I handled those plates there was fine engravings on both sides. I handled them . . . they were shown to me by a supernatural power."<sup>38</sup> The testimonies of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon said that they saw an angel and viewed or handled the plates by faith.

The March 1829 revelation to Harris said of Joseph Smith, "He has a gift to translate the book, and I have commanded him that he shall pretend to no other gift, for I will grant him no other gift."<sup>39</sup> Smith's only gift was to translate the Book of Mormon. Like the previous examples, this restriction was made part of the Book of Mormon text:

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<sup>33</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 49; LDS D&C 17; RLDS D&C 15. This revelation, given previously to the three witnesses "having a view of the plates &c," was not included in the Book of Commandments but was published as section 42 in the 1835 D&C. The "Manuscript History of Joseph Smith" mentions the circumstances of two visions relating to the three witnesses viewing the plates. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:236-37, 295-97.

<sup>34</sup> Memorandum of John H. Gilbert, September 8, 1892, introductory pages of *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press for Wilford C. Wood, 1958). In 1838 Martin Harris stated that he "never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination." Qtd. in Stephen Burnett, Letter to Lyman E. Johnson, April 15, 1838, Joseph Smith Letterbook 2:64, CHL.

<sup>35</sup> David Whitmer to Anthony Metcalf, April 2, 1887, in A. Metcalf, *Ten Years before the Mast* (Malad City, ID, 1888), 74; also in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 247.

<sup>36</sup> Reuben Miller, Journal, October 21, 1848, CHL.

<sup>37</sup> *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (March 1836):286-87, Kirtland, Ohio.

<sup>38</sup> Theodore Turley's memoranda, under date of April 4, 1839, handwriting of Thomas Bullock (1845), CHL; copied into Manuscript History Book C-1, 913, under date of April 5, 1839. See *History of the Church* 3:307.

<sup>39</sup> BC 4:2; LDS D&C 5:4; RLDS D&C 5:1. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 29-31, for commentary on this revelation.

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. (2 Ne. 3:8)

Smith was to "do none other work" but produce the Book of Mormon. After the publication of the Book of Mormon, the young prophet commenced revising the Bible. This would be considered a gift going beyond his initial commandment.

Joseph Smith was named after his father and included his own name in the text of the Book of Mormon. In a prophecy attributed to the biblical Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, it reports that a choice seer would be called in the last days:

And thus prophesied Joseph, saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded. . . . And his name shall be called after me [Joseph of Egypt]; and it shall be after the name of his father [Joseph Smith Sr.]. (2 Ne. 3:14-15)

Lucius Fenn of Covert, Seneca County, New York, wrote a letter in February 1830 and told what he had heard about the Book of Mormon and that its finder would be named Joseph. Fenn stated:

[T]hey are a printing it in Palmyra it is expected that it <will> come out soon so that we can see it it speaks of the Millennium [sic] day and tells when it is going to take place and it tells that the man that is to find this bible his name as [is] Joseph and his father['s] name is Joseph.<sup>40</sup>

The story of the gold plates was the vehicle that Joseph Smith used as a minister to preach his new emphasis on Jesus. Smith taught that at one time he had in his possession an ancient record of peoples who lived on the American continent more than fifteenth hundred years earlier. Believers had faith that Smith was able to recover a record or set of gold plates. The purpose of Smith's story was to make men and women believe as strongly as gold in his role as God's minister of salvation. Whether Smith had visions about the gold plates, whether he at one time had them in his possession, or whether anyone saw the physical plates was not important in what he was trying to accomplish. The message of the Book of Mormon, through the use of metal plates, was for others to believe in the Jesus who spoke to Native Americans and who was speaking at the time to Joseph Smith.

The Book of Mormon reflects events that had already occurred before the time of its publication, some of which Joseph Smith was directly involved in. Its stand on theological controversies of the 1820s made it appealing as a revelation illuminating the Bible.<sup>41</sup> However, it

<sup>40</sup> Lucius Fenn to Birdseye Bronson, February 12, 1830, William Robertson Coe Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. See William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 28.

<sup>41</sup> See Timothy L. Smith, "The Book of Mormon in a Biblical Culture," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980):3-21; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 113-22; and Alan Taylor, "The Free Seekers:

also contains ideas on America, Masonry, the proper name of the Christian church, and events connected with Joseph Smith's life. These and other contemporary events and ideas prevalent at the time of its production are found in its pages.<sup>42</sup> The Book of Mormon evidences a nineteenth-century origin and can be identified as an example of early American religious fiction.

One of the ideas relating to the text of the Book of Mormon is saying that it is impossible for Joseph Smith to have written the book since he was unlearned at the time. This is not an accurate assessment of the education of the young prophet. Learning in the Smith home included Bible reading in addition to family and individual prayer. Lucy Mack Smith was an important influence on her family as they conducted family worship. Joseph Sr. led the family in singing and prayer as the head of the household. His experience as a school teacher would help as he instructed especially the male children in transacting farm business.

It should be remembered that Joseph Smith received additional schooling when he was twenty years old. The narratives in the Book of Mormon are based upon how religion was reportedly practiced in ancient America. What is taught in the record is an indication of how Smith as a religious seer perceived the way the ancestors of Native Americans preached and battled. With the KJV Bible as his standard source text, Joseph Smith projected his own religious beliefs into the Book of Mormon. This is an important clue to its authenticity as a nineteenth-century work. It is what would be expected in a new book.

The Bible was an influential book in American life when Joseph Smith commenced his work. Joseph's gift was to incorporate his theological understanding into the material he was writing. He did not need the plates of gold to produce the Book of Mormon. He used Isaiah and Matthew to supplement his writing about the origin of Native Americans ending with two battles of heretofore unknown civilizations in Manchester, Ontario County, New York.

The published Book of Mormon projected Smith into a world that was skeptical of strange ideas and newly founded religions. The majority of reviews about the Book of Mormon were negative. With religious freedom being one of the cornerstones of American democracy, individuals could believe a new book as history even though it is a fictional book. What became important was not the book itself but the belief that Joseph Smith was a modern seer and prophet.

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Religious Culture in Upstate New York, 1790-1835," *Journal of Mormon History* 27 (Spring 2001):42-66.

<sup>42</sup> For additional pre-1830 published and contemporary ideas that are a background to the religious thoughts of this period, see Rick Grunder, *Mormon Parallels* (Ithaca, NY: Rick Grunder Books, 1987). See also Rick Grunder, *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source* (LaFayette, NY: Rick Grunder Books, 2008). First edition issued in digital form only and limited to 400 copies on CD-ROM.